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**Gender and Village Governance Transformation in Indonesia:**

**An Initial Assessment**

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**An Initial Assessment<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

Since the passing of the new Village Law in 2014, scholarly concern for village studies in Indonesia has grown. However, studies focusing on gender equality in the law's implementation are still uncommon. This article discusses how village governments address gender problems in their territory. Based on field research in two villages in Java, namely Panggunharjo and Lerep, this article recognizes that there has been greater attention on gender issues since the implementation of the Village Law. More women are recruited as members of village government administrations, and village governments also actively involve women in village decision making processes as well as the dissemination of information on policy. Issues related to women have also received greater financial support. However, village heads still dominate village policymaking, and though gender issues have gained some support they are still considered secondary among village development priorities. Furthermore, empowerment programs that directly improve gender equality have been lacking. Although maternal and children health and early child education programs are common in villages, little has been done to protect women against domestic violence or defend women (migrant) workers. There is thus a crucial need for the national government to issue regulations that will encourage the stronger assertion of gender equality in village law implementation.

**Keywords:** Gender Equality, Village Law, Village Governance Transformation

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Indonesia International Forum, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, 23–24 July 2017.

## Introduction

The passing of the new village law, namely Law No. 6/2014, has been important for village governance in Indonesia. The law has granted villages greater autonomy in governing their daily matters. There are three crucial aspects of the law that deal with village governance transformation: greater financial support for village governments in developing their local areas, clearer identification of policy and development areas where villages may exert their authority, and stronger assertion of citizen participation. Today, nearly three years after the law was implemented, it remains unclear how it benefits women. This has occurred even though the law has clearly asserted gender equality as one of the principles of village governance in Article 26 and 63 and linked it to women's representation in Article 58.

This research assesses the law's assertion of gender perspectives in the initial stages of its implementation at the village law. It uses two villages in Java, namely Panggungharjo, Bantul Regency, Special Province of Yogyakarta, and Lerep, Semarang Regency, Central Java Province, as case studies. According to Statistics Indonesia (2014), Panggungharjo has a population/27,683 (8,739 households). About 21.17% of the population live in poverty, with a further 44.49% living slightly above the poverty line.<sup>2</sup> It consists of 14 sub-villages (*dusun*), which are located in rural areas in the south and urban areas in the north. Most of its residents are farmers and farm laborers (16.97%), private sector employees, including small enterprises and home-industries (12.69%), and merchants (7.37%). It is led by Wahyudi Anggoro Hadi, a former Indonesian Islamic Student Movement (PMII) activist who graduated from Universitas Gadjah Mada.

As with Panggungharjo, Lerep is close to its province's capital city. In 2016, it had a population of 13,500 (4,148 households). The southern area of the village is characterized by its rural culture, with most of the population known as *penduduk asli* (native residents) and living in *kampung* settlements, while the north is urban, with a population that consists mostly of newcomers who live in housing complexes. It covers an area of 682.32 hectares, with mountainous areas in the south and hilly ones in the north. It is divided into eight sub-villages. Lerep's enthusiastic and visionary

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<sup>2</sup> Source: <http://bkm.panggungharjo.net/profil-desa/potensi/>

village head is Sumariyadi, an engineer who graduated from Universitas Darul Islam (Undaris).

The two villages were chosen for case studies for wide successes in many aspects of village governance reform, including village bureaucracy, enterprises, and service provision. Panggunharjo is known to have been successful in promoting village bureaucracy reform, while Lerep has seen progress in its village tourism program. As both villages are situated in Java, which has been known to be prioritized in Indonesian development policy over other islands in the country, it is reasonable to choose these two villages as cases for this initial study.

Studies on gender in the context of village governance reform in Indonesia, such as this research, are motivated by the limited information on the issue despite the growing concern for village governance since the passing of Law No. 6/2014. Gender studies in the context of the implementation of Law No. 6/2014 have not been common, and gender's assertion and use as a perspective in framing village policy has not been clear.

Theoretically, reform in village governance should bring women new hopes and opportunities to strengthen policy recognition and gain access and representation. Referring to Kabeer, Magnus, and Stark (2007), historical trajectories, institutional arrangements, and resource constraints may yield differences in terms of gender equality in public policy. As Kabeer, Magnus and Stark (2007, p. 4) indicate, the level of development, signified by the level of income, partially influences gender equality, which in this case is measured through the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). GDI refers basic dimensions of gender equality such as earning, life expectancy, and education, while GEM refers to access to jobs, wages, positions in professional institutions, and parliamentary representation.

However, as Kabeer, Magnus and Stark (2007, p. 5) remind us, the level of development/income is not always linear with the GDI/GEM level or gender equality in general. Care should be taken when drawing a relational conclusion between the level of development and gender equality. Yet, for an initial assessment, the idea remains useful, including in smaller units of governance such as villages.

Kabeer, Magnus and Stark (2007, p. 2) also remind us that informal institutions such as family, kinship, and community should be considered important when

analyzing gender equality and public policy/governance. In some cases, these institutions are more influential in explaining gender equality in particular contexts than formal ones. This means formal institutions that produce policies and legislation should not be considered the sole factors in the explanation of and search for gender equality. As such, Kabeer, Magnus, and Stark encourage us to understand the idea of governance more broadly in analyzing gender equality; researchers should not only focus on formal organizations and indicators, but also carefully examine the informal ones, which may not always present quantifiable measures of equality. This applies when assessment is conducted in smaller units of governance, such as districts or villages.

For that purpose, the fieldwork was conducted by observing and interviewing key actors in these two villages over a period of 6 months (from April to September 2017). Observations were conducted to see the daily services provided by village offices, as well as the meetings and activities of women. Interviews were conducted with village heads, village secretaries, village treasurers, village development division heads, village facilitators, and village women.

From the study, this paper identifies the gender issues that have gained the most attention in village policy and governance. Women enjoy more financial support for providing village services that promote maternal and children health (Posyandu), early child education (PAUD), micro-credit, and home industry training. However, in village governance women remain in supporting roles, rather than taking main ones together with men. Gender aspects of the law's implementation are still placed as secondary matters, rather than being mainstreamed in village policymaking. Gender equality is still identified as residual policy, with women's portions allocated only after all other policy areas are identified and budgeted.

In elaborating this argument, this paper is arranged as follows. First, it portrays the main features of the law and explains the mission of village governance transformation. Secondly, it highlights the assertion of gender equality in the law. Thirdly, it discusses the assertion of gender equality in village policymaking and governance through the implementation of Law No. 6/2014, drawing on the two selected villages as case studies. Finally, it reflects on the gender issues identified in the two villages and the lessons learned before providing some recommendations for the future.

## A Brief Conceptual Discussion of Gender Equality in Community Development

<sup>1</sup> One of the foundations for understanding gender equality is the World Bank's definition. The World Bank (2012) defines gender equality as equal access to education, health, and assets between men and women, equal opportunity to generate income and become agents in development and decision making, as well as equal access to welfare (p. 4). Gender equality therefore relates not only to processes, but also to results, with men and women being equally involved in the decision making and development processes to gain equal welfare benefits. It is an important perspective in development and policy, as, referring to Kabeer and Natali (2013, p. 6) gender equality is empirically proven to contribute to poverty reduction and welfare improvement.

A similarly crucial area for assessing gender perspectives, which closely relates to people in rural areas, is community development. As villages mostly involve local people in their development processes, including for infrastructure, village-owned enterprises, and political development, village development can be considered community driven development. The World Bank defines community driven development (CDD) as programs that "operate on the principles of local empowerment, participatory governance, demand-responsiveness, administrative autonomy, greater downward accountability, and enhanced local capacity."<sup>3</sup> This definition explains the processes of policy and development as being initiated and run at the village level, underlining the idea of local-based empowerment and governance, as well as local-based justification of development objectives, i.e. to enhance local capacity and fulfill local demand. In relation to this, it is critical to ask: why is assessing gender in village development important? What is the real problem? What about engendered poverty in villages? Referring to Chant (2010), engendered poverty does not only imply the widening of the income gap between men and women. Affirming the views of Johnsson-Latham (2004, pp. 26–27), Chant (2010, p. 3) emphasizes that engendered poverty is more importantly about the gap between men and women in terms of access to land, agency in decision making, legal rights within families, vulnerability to violence, and (self) respect and dignity.

<sup>5</sup> <sup>3</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/communitydrivendevelopment/overview>

Recognizing the importance of equality in gender relations, there has been strong concern for gender equality in government policy and in NGO advocacy in Indonesia. The government has asserted that its policy involves gender perspective and mainstreaming frameworks, although in practice many questions remained. Similarly, NGOs have also often been urged by donor agencies to integrate a gender approach with the approaches they use to run development projects, despite some technical weaknesses that still require improvement. However, such gender concerns have not been discussed intensely in the area of village governance, especially in the context of the implementation of the new village law in Indonesia. In current discussions on the village law's implementation, most scholars still focus on institutional village arrangements. This includes villages' capacity for managing village funds, operating ICT, planning and implementing development, governing assets, and building accountability and transparency. Meanwhile, gender issues in villages are wide and varied, thus requiring policy responses.

In many cases, women are constrained when attempting to maximally benefit from CDD programs. Based on Browne's findings (2014), CDD in villages is often not free from elite capture and male domination. Referring to Dutta (2009, p. 3) and Platteau (2008, p. 1), elite capture is kind of elite hijacking of social movements for the benefit of the elites rather than for the whole society. Meanwhile, male domination, as Browne (2014, p. 3) underlines, is identified as the relative lack of finances and education attributable to women having lower social status in villages than men.

Village governments often position women's empowerment last during development planning. Advocacy for women's fight against domestic violence, for instance, has never been seen as a strategic issue in village policymaking, and thus is rarely included in village programmatic activities, even though it is clear that cases are common at the village level.

Given the new situation village governments are now encountering through the implementation of new village law, it is crucial to assess how the law and its implementation may transform gender relations in villages into more equal ones. To do so, it is necessary to analyze gender equality in village governance and development practices, not only to scrutinize the processes and extent of women's inclusion in decision making and village development practices, but also to identify the outcomes of

policy and development strategies for women. In addition, as villages are the lowest tier of government (Eko and Antlov, 2012, p. 2), which also means the closest governance institution to the community, assessing the gender aspects of village governance reform requires us to deal with the daily modes of gender relations. This means that we will need a mixture of political and cultural approaches and perspectives.

### **Transformation of Village Governance through Law No. 6 of 2014**

Law No. 6/2014 regarding Villages, henceforth the Village Law, is a breakthrough in Indonesian governance. It recognizes villages as autonomous entities in the governance structure of Indonesia. As asserted in the Village Law, there are at least three areas that highlight village autonomy. First, it allocates financial support to village governments. Second, it deals with village authority in governing matters related to village residents lives. Third, it asserts more strongly the need for village citizens' political participation in village governance.

As such, the Village Law recognizes that villages have rights that the State must respect and fulfill. The General Director of Village Community Development and Empowerment at the Ministry of Villages, Development of Backward Areas, and Transmigration, Ahmad Erani Yustika metaphorically asserted that, through the Law, the State positions villages not merely as its backyard, but as its front yard (Kurniawan, 2015, p. 1). The below table shows the differences between the previous village law and Law No. 6 of 2014.

Table 1

Differences between Previous and Current Village Law

Aspects	Previous Law	Current Law
Laws	- Law No. 32/2004 - Government Decree 72/2005	- Law No. 6/2014 - Government Decree 43/2014 - Government Decree 60/2014

		- Government Decree 47/2015 - Government Decree 22/2015
Main Principle	Residual decentralization	Subsidiarity recognition
Position in government structure	Government organization under the authority of regency/city government	Community government that mixes "community self-government" and "local State government"
Position and role of regency/city government in relation to village	Regency/city government has broad and large authority to govern and control villages	Regency/city government has limited yet strategic authority in relation to the village government, including governing matters that do not require the direct handling of the central government.
Authority and program delivery mode	Village as target	Village as mandate
Politics of place in village	Village as location of projects regency/city, provincial and central government programs	Village as arena for village community to conduct governance, development, empowerment and social relations
Village position in development	Village as object of development	Village as subject of development

Source: Kurniawan, 2015

As Edi and Kusumawardani (2016) assert, unlike Law No. 32/2004, the previous law on decentralization, Law No. 6/2014 recognizes village-scale authorities (*kewenangan berskala desa*) and original village authorities (*kewenangan asal usul*). Having authority means villages are no longer seen as dependent entities in the Indonesian governance structure. Rather, they are no considered autonomous

government institution with authorities that upper government institutions, especially regency/city governments, should respect.

This is not only written in the Village Law and its supporting regulations. In practice, some villages have transformed into more democratic, service-oriented, and self-empowering governance institutions. Panggungharjo and Lerep are examples. Panggungharjo was named Best National Village in 2014, an award given to recognize Panggungharjo's perceived capability to encourage civic engagement in the village development processes (Edi and Kusumawardani, 2016). Panggungharjo is noted as having successfully built a health care system for its citizens, especially those who are not yet covered by the national health insurance program (BPJS) and live in severe poverty. It is also known to offer university scholarships for young village residents. Panggungharjo is considered to have rapidly transformed following the implementation of the Village Law compared to the other villages, many of which are still preparing to respond to the law.

Like Panggungharjo, Lerep is also seen as progressing in transforming its village governance. Lerep has been especially successful in improving sanitation, significantly reducing open defecation, which has become a serious concern for most village governments in Indonesia, including in Java. Lerep has also begun initiated enterprises to sell milk and promote village tourism and agriculture. At the regency level, it won an award as the cleanest village, and at the provincial level Lerep was recognized with an award for the best development of village-owned enterprises (BUMDesa) in 2017. It often hosts other village governments that seek to study village tourism (*desa wisata*). Compared to most villages, these innovations have been phenomenal. They have all occurred when many other villages have yet to make any adjustments and preparations for the implementation of the Village Law.

Of course, Panggungharjo and Lerep do not represent the situations in all villages in Indonesia. Far more villages still face difficulties in identifying the starting point of their village governance transformation. When this research project was started in May 2017, other villages and village heads in Central Java Province, for instance, have remained focused on determining the kinds and coverage of village authorities and ensuring that they do not overlap with those of the regency/city governments. However, Panggungharjo and Lerep's experiences indicate that progress in the

transformation of village governance should be considered a crucial step in the successful implementation of the Village Law.

### Gender Perspective in the New Village Law

Although the progress of village governance transformation in the context of the implementation of the Village Law has been a strong concern of scholars in Indonesia, little attention has been given to gender aspects. Vel (2016) is among the few to recognize the assertion of gender perspectives in the Village Law as important progress in Indonesian policy.

Formally, the Village Law clearly asserts gender equality as part of its approach. As Articles 26 and 63 mention, gender equality is asserted as a perspective in village governance. More explicitly, Article 58 mentions the involvement of women in village representative body, called the *Badan Musyawarah Desa* (Village Discussion Council, BMD), further affirming the Village Law's recognition of women's participation.

The Village Law is reaffirmed by Article 121, Points (1) and (2), of Government Regulation No. 43/2014, which asserts that gender equality is a significant consideration in village development. Article 72, Point (1), and Article 80, Point (2), of this law assert the need for women's representation in village decision making processes, either through the village representative body and/or the community. This is strengthened by Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Backward Areas, and Transmigration No. 22/2015 on Priorities in Allocating Village Funds, which clearly mentions women as a priority group for gaining access to village development and empowerment programs.

The above-mentioned emphasis on gender perspective indicates the government's awareness that it has attempted to highlight in the Village Law. However, we should recognize that quantitatively the words *gender* and *women* are rare in the Village Law and in subsequent relations. Likewise, no explicit assertion is made regarding the significance of improving gender equality in villages, where women face a strong patriarchy women and different opportunities in the economy, education, and policymaking. As such, although the law deserves appreciation for its assertion of gender equality in terms of political participation and access to village development,

empowerment, and welfare programs, further advocacy is still necessary for stronger emphasis on gender equality in the law.

### **Gender (In)Equality in Villages in Indonesia**

Despite the formal assertion of the Village Law, gender relations in villages have shown us that <sup>1</sup> complex problem of inequality remain. Despite continuous improvements in terms of access to politics, policy, and development, women still face a greater <sup>1</sup> risk of poverty than men. At the village level, the problem is exacerbated by <sup>1</sup> cultural barriers, limited education, as well as economic hardship (Browne, 2014). In many cases, women are most impacted, and many <sup>1</sup> tackle the problem by participating in migrant works. This happens not only in villages that have good resources and governance, but also those that lack resources.

<sup>1</sup> Referring to Browne (2014, p. 7) and learning from the case of National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM) in Indonesia, women do not always feel program benefits. Therefore, the impact of such programs for women are not always clear. Women remain trapped in poverty, with double work burdens, and bear the risk of becoming victims of domestic violence. This is because, <sup>1</sup> as Browne identifies, "women are more visible in decision-making processes (in PNPM programs), but the quality of their participation remains low". Women's <sup>1</sup> participation, therefore, is instrumental, meaning <sup>1</sup> that it is promoted merely to fulfill program objectives but does not underpin empowerment issues and strategies.

<sup>1</sup> Somehow, as Browne (2014) identifies, although donors' requirement that women be involved in development programs has been asserted very clearly, their involvement is often *pro forma*. Woman participants are found in attendance lists, but this is often not followed with inclusion. As such, despite participating women still lose opportunities to voice their ideas and contribute their thoughts. The PNPM program failed on this count, as it could not substantially transform the gender equality platform it promoted into more substantive changes of gender relations. It was too formalist, lacking the capability to tackle what <sup>10</sup> Haider (2012) terms "the remaining strong traditional power structure" that hinder <sup>10</sup> women's active participation in village decision making.

In addition to the villages' political culture, some scholars also relate the picture of engendered poverty with national and local policymakers' urban bias perspectives in setting policy and development priorities (see Brickell in Chant, 2010, p. 458). Prior the implementation of the PNPM program, there was limited policy to mainstream gender in village development. Moreover, at the time, villages were under the authority of regency/city governments. Therefore, sensitiveness to gender issues in villages was not strong. As such, with the new emphasis on village autonomy, gender equality depends strongly on the political structure in each respective village.

Dealing with this, in village development and governance there are at least two areas where women are often left behind that need attention. The first is decision making, including village planning and other decision making processes. The second is implementation and practice, including the development of village-owned enterprises, village asset building, and village infrastructure and public facilities, as well as in village service provision (in administrative and social protection areas). If we look at Stokke's criteria of citizenship (in Tornquist and Hiariej, 2017, p. 24), the first areas relate to the issue of women's recognition and representation, while the second relates to redistribution. Recognition refers to villages' assertion and reaffirmation that women and men are equal citizens. Representation refers to the authority to influence decision making. Redistribution refers to access to economic and non-economic resources to enjoy welfare and justice.

As widely known, decision making is a place where the priorities of village governance are identified, and as such, becomes the key area that will determine whether gender need is responded sufficiently or not. It makes sense, thus, that Moser (1993, p. 37) mentions women's participation among gender strategic needs because it influences gender relations so they can become more equal and just. Moser (1993) identifies gender practical needs as those related to women's survival in everyday life, including income, food, health, environment, water, and housing. Meanwhile, gender strategic needs are understood as those related to the transformation of power relations, as in terms of access to decision making, knowledge and information ownership, resources that influence gender relations, and participation in practice politics.

Meanwhile, village development practices are another critical sphere allowing women's empowerment. Development is considered a strategic area for promoting women's empowerment as it tells us about access, resources, and practical benefits, which may be critical for the stronger assertion of gender strategic needs (Moser, 1993). Development strategy, additionally, reflect the nature of gender relations in decision making, as it determines which village priority to respond to. In simple terms, Cornwall (2016, p. 342) identifies empowerment as, "Grassroots struggles to confront and transform unjust and unequal power relations". Cornwall (p. 344) highlights power and control as the keys to understanding empowerment. It must be underlined that power and control are not necessarily present in hard and formal forms; they can exist in soft and informal modes (Hertog, 2010, pp. 54–59) through familial and neighborhood relationships that change the circumstances of power relations in the village. Analysis of development and empowerment at the village level, thus, should also consider the informal institutions that may influence gender relations.

Based on the Village Law, decision making in villages involves the village government body, the village representative body, the village development planning dialogue assembly, and the village dialogue assembly. Meanwhile, in terms of village development strategy, this research will assess village-owned enterprises both in terms of establishment and of operations. Assessing these two areas could be an initial step to seeing how gender is mainstreamed in village policy and development, and, further, how the Village Law transforms gender inequality at the village level.

### **Gender in Village Governance Transformation: Between Hope and Criticism**

With the new transformation opportunities offered by the Village Law, it is urgent to clarify how gender equality improves in villages. This includes the scrutiny of areas where improvement is conducive or unconducive, and the challenges that may be useful to consider in future policy betterment.

Based on field studies in Panggungarjo and Lerep, this paper indicates gender issues have been given greater attention in village decision making and development since the implementation of the Law. Dealing with this, the village head of Lerep, for instance, asserts, "the law has allowed us to give more attention to women. Previously,

we had an idea, an intent, but we did not have the money. Now, with the significant support from the government, we can allocate some money for women's activities."<sup>4</sup>

First of all, there is an interesting fact we can find see in the two villages <sup>6</sup> in terms of women's inclusion in decision making. In both villages, the positions of treasurer and secretary are devoted to women. When the researcher asked why, the village head of Lerep answered, "Because women are usually better ordered and detailed than men (meanwhile, the village report needs detailed description, for which men usually do not have good skills)." As many scholars assert, one of the Village Law's concerns is its high demand for village accountability and its strict administrative requirement for annual reporting. The common assumption that women are more diligent than men seems to have influenced how village heads make decisions in choosing their treasurers and secretaries. Of course, this can be good news for women, but it can also be bad. On the one hand, women can gain wider access to policy information and policymaking. On the other hand, this also reaffirms the view that women function merely as secondary parts of village governance.

One thing that should be appreciated is that, in Lerep, the village head has appointed a woman as the director of his village's enterprise. This woman is one of the leading figures in the village and has experience as a government official. The village head has also created a policy to appoint two village men to take part in managing the PKK, a village-level women's organization that mostly focuses on issues such as children and maternal health, nutrition, and sanitation. As the village treasurer explained in an interview, "This is to let men know how difficult it is to manage domestic issues and to work with women. I think that this is an important breakthrough from the village head."

In both villages, there is also a female representative on the village representative body (BPD or *Badan Perwakilan Desa*), one of the body's 12 members. Although the BPD has not functioned optimally in both villages, and the number of women on the body is too small, the presence of woman is a sign of progress that should be appreciated. Indeed, encouragement is still needed to ensure that women's interests are well accommodated in village decision making.

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<sup>4</sup> Verbatim transcript and translation.

In both villages, women can generally be considered active participants in village decision making processes. Women representatives, usually from the PKK, are often invited to village dialogue assembly and village development planning dialogue assembly. They are also always asked to draft the budget proposed during the latter assembly. Based on interviews, it is apparent that village heads in both areas are also active in disseminating information about village policy to women's organizations, including PKK and the *pengajian* (periodical Islamic studies).

Although criticisms have been found, such as the tendency of the Panggunharjo village head to dominate the planning processes, including those proposed by PKK, and PKK's ideas are often filtered prior the drafting of legislation to suit the village head's own priorities,<sup>5</sup> generally village governance reform remains supported. Similarly, although the village head of Lerep's big idea of transforming his village's governance is seen as too ambitious, and generally he has gained the greatest support only from the residents that live around his house, his hard work is deeply appreciated by not only local residents<sup>6</sup> but also by the regency and provincial governments. A crucial factor that may be worth considering in both villages is the need to facilitate women in becoming equal partners in village decision making by providing them with venues and spaces to elaborate their ideas for village development.

In development issues, common areas where women's activities gain wider support include health, early children education, and home industry. In both villages, women enjoy greater financial support in their monthly village activities promoting maternal and children's health (Posyandu), early child education (PAUD) and home industry training. In Panggunharjo, the village head has even developed a system for village health and maternal care, in which women could directly benefit through free assistance with childbirth.<sup>7</sup> In Panggunharjo, the total annual village income in 2016 was Rp. 4,182,285,759.00; in Lerep, it is Rp. 2,225,053,000.00. That same year, the village funds for Panggunharjo reached Rp. 871,642,000.00, and in Lerep it reached Rp. 652,025,000.00 of the village's respective income. The annual budget allocated

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<sup>5</sup> Interview transcript of Ashari Cahyo Edi and Indah Kusumawardani, 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Sulistyowati, a female village social activist in Semarang, 23 July 2017.

<sup>7</sup> The critique which must be addressed is the policy only being used by women who live near the village center. Those who live in the north, closer to the Yogyakarta city center, rarely take benefits.

for the Posyandu in Panggunharjo was Rp. 131,600,000.00, with Rp. 70,700,000.00 allocated for PAUD. The village has also allocated Rp. 100,000,000.00 for improving the capital of village-owned enterprises. In Lerep in 2016, Posyandu received Rp. 5,500,000.00, PKK received Rp. 12,500,000.00, pregnant women received Rp. 3,000,000.00 and PAUD received Rp. 4,500,000.00. Compared to Panggunharjo, the amount allocated directly for women in Lerep is quite small.

Panggunharjo has at least four major areas of development in the implementation of the Village Law, namely village bureaucracy performance, health, education, and micro-economy. Referring to Edi and Kusumawardani (2016), village bureaucracy performance include administrative service reform, incentives and disincentives for the village government apparatus, permission administration reform, village asset administration, and village statistics administration. Among the programs of the Panggunharjo government are the simplification of birth certificate and family card registration procedures, the setting of village government working hours from 08:00 to 16:00, the provision of monthly awards for the village staff who work the best and warning those who work the worst, the listing and maintenance of village assets, and the management of village demographics and economic data.

Health reform includes the building of a village-scale health system handled by an auxiliary village institution called BapelJPS (the Body for Implementing Social Security Protection), which administers healthcare assistance for pregnant women, nursing women, the elderly, and the poor. To promote education, Panggunharjo has also implemented a program called *satu rumah satu sarjana* (one house one university graduate), through which the village government provides scholarships to residents based on their merits. In terms of micro-industry, Panggunharjo has assisted existing home industries owned by village residents in improving their marketing coverage; building partnerships with the tourism sector such as travel agencies, restaurants, and souvenir shops; and promoting eco-friendly small businesses by providing facilities for home industries that use waste as their main materials.<sup>8</sup>

As identified through observation, home industries are the economic backbone of most Panggunharjo residents. Furthermore, the women's organization PKK also operates a cooperative called Dewi Kunthi. This cooperative assists female residents

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Tutik "Bros" and Tyas "Tas" on 25 July 2017 in Bantul.

in overcoming their problems with village loan sharks, thereby lightening the debt burden born by female residents. Among the areas of reform mentioned above, health and micro-economy can be said to have had the most impact on women. Bureaucracy performance reform and education, meanwhile, are not specifically designed to empower women, but meant for all society.

In Panggungharjo, women appreciate the village head's policies that encourage female enterprises. One female business owner told me, "I have never felt as supported as currently. Previously, the village government did not provide significant support for developing our business." Another woman made the same assertion: "It is just now that I (as small business owner) have become involved in such a program (female small business development)." Still another said,

"I am a newcomer in this village. I ran a small business, focusing on traditional souvenir (production and distribution). Yet, I feel welcomed by the village head and my fellow female business owners. I am involved in village business development and my fellow business owners really help me improve. The business environment is conducive. We support and cooperate each other. We do not feel that we need to compete to make a profit."

Since the implementation of the Village Law, Lerep has prioritized sanitation, village-owned enterprises, housing improvements, micro-finance, and agriculture. Sanitation involves assisting community members in having their own toilets. It is considered to have successfully covered more than 90% of residents' sanitation needs, thereby significantly reducing open and unclean defecation. Village-owned enterprises are the next backbone for village development, seen as having great potential to support the village economy. There are five village-owned enterprise units: village tourism (a water dam), waste management, catering, home industry (soaps and snacks), and electronics payment services.

The village head of Lerep is serious in promoting this business, believing that village-owned enterprises will ultimately ensure the village's survival. He said,

"Receiving village funds is good news for the village government. However, I realize that it is political. It is from the national government, which means once they want to stop it, the village will not have any

choice but to say no. This is an opportunity, which may not come again in the future. Therefore, I utilized the money carefully. I would rather spend the money on some productive activities like village-owned enterprise development. I spent much on dam building, which is not only useful for farming, but also for tourism. When the village-owned enterprises earn a profit, then the village will no longer depend on the village fund. Whether the funds are given or not in the future, I hope that this will not be a problem anymore for the community"<sup>9</sup>

Housing improvement has also become a priority of the village head. He has covered more than two thirds of the homes of poor people in his area. Homes are now made with bricks and cement, rather than bamboo or wood. These homes are designed with safety in mind, and have healthy shapes with windows and ventilation. Micro-finance has also been used to finance the development of the village's dam, profit from which is shared annually based on the amount saved by the villagers. Considering the difficulty of controlling the rotation of money, the village government has chosen not to run a micro-credit program. In Lerep, the micro-finance program only covers community savings.

Finally, agriculture involves cattle production and farming. In cattle production, the village government supports the production of milk, while in farming, it focuses on chili peppers. It is presently trying to build a partnership with Indofood, a noodle company located in Semarang City, to supply raw materials for noodle production. The purpose of this partnership, according to village head, is to help farmers enjoy stable prices. He said, "We do not need high prices. We need reasonable, but stable ones. We are ready to supply as much as the (noodle) industry needs."<sup>10</sup>

Among these program, two areas have had the greatest direct impact on women, namely village-owned enterprises and agriculture. Village-owned enterprises involve significant numbers of women that run food processing micro-businesses, while agriculture involves female farmers groups (KWT or *Kelompok Wanita Tani*) as a motor for business. However, policy in these areas is not always implemented smoothly. Seneng, a KWT chief admits, "We love when we get training or business

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<sup>9</sup> Verbatim transcript

<sup>10</sup> Verbatim transcript

capital assistance. But, we are seldom active except when the village head comes to us and asks us to take part." Seneng realizes that it is not easy to develop business, and those businesses are mostly owned by the village rather than individual citizens. As Seneng explains, "Unless the business unit is profitable, women prefer not to take part." Currently, women have remained active in village farming and cattle production as they can earn additional income. In KWT, as Seneng says, "Last year, each (active) member of KWT (of about 18 in total) got Rp. 300,000.00 from profit sharing. We are happy. From this money we can run soft loans and savings for our members."

From the above written arguments, we can see that gender issues have gained increased attention in village policy and development. We can see that both villages have offered women more positions in their government structures. We can also see that development in areas that relate to women's interests has also gained significant support from both village governments. Most woman informants in interviews expressed appreciation for and showed gratitude towards the village heads for their willingness to develop small businesses run by female village residents. However, some aspects still need improvement. First, women remain in supporting parts in village governance, rather than main parts together with men. In both villages, village heads seek greater power in the village political arena. While in Panggunharjo the village head plays a dominating role in decision making, in Lerep the village head appears to be willing to run too fast. As a result, women tend to be placed and place themselves in secondary venues in village decision making. Meanwhile, there is a crucial need for stronger facilitation and wider deliberation processes from the village government, thereby allowing women to voice their ideas more freely in village decision making processes. For women, there is a crucial need to strengthen their political consciousness and recognize that becoming active in village decision making processes is a strategic right that can improve their well-being.

Meanwhile, the gender aspects of the implementation of the Village Law are still considered additional matters rather than mainstream perspectives in village policymaking. Compared to other areas of development, gender aspects are still considered residual policy, with their portion allocated only after all other policy areas are identified. Both village governments still prioritize areas where women are more likely to gain indirect benefits. While in Panggunharjo, the village head has focused deeply on improving the performance of the bureaucracy, in Lerep the village chief is

concerned with the dam and village infrastructure. Women's empowerment programs, which equips women residents with knowledge and skills that they can use to empower themselves, have yet to be designed in both villages. Protection from domestic violence, for instance, has yet to be included in the villages' periodical programmatic policy. A similar trend is found in the protection of women workers and women migrant workers.

Nevertheless, we should not put the responsibility for improving gender equality in village policy and development solely on the shoulders of the village governments, particularly the village head. The national government must assess the grand design of the Village Law and its implementation. As widely known, no regulations have been issued to improve gender equality in the implementation of the Village Law, and as such village governments lack precise guidelines for realizing gender perspectives in their policy and development. Apart from the urgent need to encourage village governments to improve the inclusion of gender perspectives in their village policies, there is also a crucial need to push the national government to pay greater attention to improving gender equality in the implementation of the Village Law.

## **Conclusion**

The Indonesian government has tried to assert gender equality in its policy products, including Law No. 6/2014. The Village Law has clearly identified gender equality as a principle for village recognition, representation, and redistribution. This should be recognized as good progress. However, stronger emphasis is needed. This relates especially to the fact that women in villages have long suffered from engendered poverty and double workloads in their daily lives. A strong formal assertion for improving gender equality through the implementation of the Village Law, for instance, may be a crucial breakthrough for promoting justice and welfare for village women.

In the implementation of the Village Law, we can see as from the two villages studied, namely Panggunharjo and Lerep, that women have been offered greater opportunities to participate in village decision making and development. However, there remains a tendency to place women in supporting roles rather than the core roles given to men. Women recruited in village government organization are more likely to

be assigned to administrative divisions than strategic ones. Progress has been made in Lerep, where the village head has appointed a woman as the director of village enterprises. However, in many other areas, women continue to play secondary roles. There is a crucial need for the village government to strengthen its deliberation processes and allow women to become more active in village decision making process. It is also necessary for women village residents to understand their rights in village decision making and development as well as their equal position as partners to village decision makers as well as other village residents.

In terms of development programs, few policies have directly improved gender equality, such as by preventing domestic violence and trafficking and by protecting woman workers and woman migrant workers. Most policies that directly affect women are related to health and the village economy. This is not to say that health and village enterprises are not important. Rather, it only means to encourage village governance that also prioritizes advocacy programs for women. Women, no matter what, are not burdens, but offer village governments the potential to improve their villages' state of being. Therefore, asserting gender equality in village development should be seen as strategic.

Given its coverage in only two villages, this article does not mean to claim to provide a comprehensive assessment of gender aspects of the implementation of the Village Law in Indonesia. Further studies a broader range of villages are needed. A strong statistics assessment that uses data on gender development index, gender education, and gender income would be an important start. A later study can thus be equipped with strong qualitative data gained from deeper observation in villages' daily governance and thereby gain a more detailed picture of gender equality in each village.

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