



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**PERCEPTION OF RURAL MALAYSIAN WOMEN LEADERS ON
THEIR INPUT INTO THE PROCESS OF DECISION MAKING
IN FARMERS ORGANIZATIONS**

MOHAMED KHALED

FEM 1997 1

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IN FARMERS ORGANIZATIONS**

BY

Mohamed Khaled

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Science in the Faculty of Human Ecology
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November 1997



To Azza

in appreciation of her persistent struggle for the cause of Sudanese women, and her sacrifice and love without which this work would have not been possible.

To Sarah, Alia and Khalda

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Abstract of thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

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November 1997

Supervisor : Husna Sulaiman (Ph.D)

Faculty : Human Ecology

The major objective of this study was to explore the involvement of rural Malaysian women in the process of decision making in rural farmers organizations. The major objective of the study was to examine the participation of rural Malaysian leaders in decision making in relation to their empowerment and share of power at societal level. The specific objectives were: (a) to examine the socio-demographic, economic, and leadership characteristics of rural women leaders in rural/farmers organizations, (b) to examine the levels of participation of rural women as members and leaders in rural/farmers organizations, (c) to examine rural women leaders' perception on decision making inputs in rural farmers organizations, (d) to determine the factors that contribute to rural women leaders perception on decision making inputs and, to (e) to identify the gender based inequalities, institutional and organizational constraints that hinder women's participation in decision making.



Farmers Organizations' Authority (FOA) a nation wide farmers organization was selected as the case study. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used to encompass the objectives of the study.

The secondary data showed that even though women constitute 21 percent of the membership of the organization, but their representation as leaders consist only 6 percent. A combination of personal, characteristics gender and institutional/organizational factors were found to be behind their low representation as leaders. The study hypothesised nine predictor variables of the personal characteristics to affect women's perception on their decision making inputs. Only age was found to have a significant effect at $p \leq 0.05$.

The study suggested the gender factors as deep rooted within the cultural set up of the society and their transcendence is a long term process related to changes of the value systems of the society. Hence the organizational and institutional factors are seen to be the potential subject of short term actions to overcome the reality of women's low representation in rural farmers' organizations. Among other recommendations, gender sensitization of policy makers was suggested as a priority to effect institutional and organizational change.

It was concluded that the coalition of market/business oriented policies together with the patriarchal mode of production have contributed to further subordination of rural Malaysian women in the aftermath of traditional agricultural production.

Abstrak tesis diserahkan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi syarat untuk mendapat Ijazah Sarjana Sains

**Input Wanita Malaysia Luarbandar dalam Proses Membuat Keputusan dalam
Persatuan-persatuan Peladang**

Oleh

Mohamed Khaled

November 1997

Penasihat: Husna Sulaiman (Ph. D.)

Fakulti: Ekologi Manusia

Objectif utama kajian ini adalah untuk mengkaji penglibatan wanita luarbandar dalam proses membuat keputusan dalam persatuan-persatuan peladang. Secara khususnya kajian ini bertujian untuk: a). memeriksa ciri-ciri sosio demografi, ekonomi dan kepimpinan ketua wanita luar bandar yang terlibat dalam persatuan-persatuan peladang, b). memeriksa tahap penglibatan ketua wanita luarbandar dalam persatuan-persatuan peladang, c). memeriksa persepsi ketua wanita luarbandar terhadap input mereka dalam persatuan-persatuan peladang, d). memeriksa faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada persepsi ketua wanita luarbandar terhadap input mereka dalam persatuan-persatuan peladang, dan e). memeriksa faktor-faktor perbezaan gender dan institusi/organisasi yang menghalang penglibatan wanita dalam membuat keputusan.

Kajian kes telah dijalankan keatas Lembaga Pertubuhan Peladang (LPP) dan data dikumpul secara kuantitatif dan kualitatif.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan daripada 21% wanita yang menjadi ahli persatuan hanya 6% sahaja yang terlibat sebagai ketua. Kedua-dua faktor gender dan institusi

merupakan faktor yang menyumbang kepada kurangnya penglibatan wanita sebagai ketua. Bagi meningkatkan penglibatan wanita luar bandar dalam persatuan adalah dicadangkan sesuatu tindakan diambil keatas kedua-dua faktor. Faktor gender merupakan isu yang berkait rapat dengan nilai sistem budaya, organisasi dan institusi masih boleh diatasi segera bagi mempertingkatkan penglibatan wanita luar bandar dalam persatuan.

Oleh yang demikian, faktor-faktor organisasi dan institusi dilihat sebagai berpotensi untuk mengatasi masalah penglibatan yang rendah di kalangan wanita dalam pertubuhan-pertubuhan peladang.

Sembilan ciri personal telah digunakan sebagai pembolehubah yang mempengaruhi persepsi wanita dalam membuat keputusan. Namun begitu, faktor umur menunjukkan kesan yang signifikan. “Gender sensitization” di kalangan pembuat dasar turut disarankan dalam proses melaksanakan perubahan institusi dan organisasi.

Kajian tersebut merumuskan bahawa penyatuan dasar-dasar yang berorientasikan pasaran dengan pengeluaran berasaskan “patriarchal mode” telah meletakkan kedudukan wanita lebih rendah meskipun selepas era pengeluaran pertanian tradisi.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

The growing body of literature on rural women provided evidence that most development programmes tend to increase rural women's workload and responsibilities, limit their access to and control over resources and further entrenching them to subordinated status.

Despite their principal role as agents of economic development, rural women have been treated as the target group of social welfare programmes. This approach has undermined that role described by IFAD (1992) as the vital link between the present and the future, between production and consumption, between savings and investment, and between poverty alleviation and environmentally sustainable growth.

However, rural women will proportionally gain more if investment allocations and development efforts are directed to their favour to pull them from a situation of being triply disadvantaged to one in which they will have a multiplier effect in the household, in the community, nationally, and, in the future generation.

Active involvement of women in the process of decision making responsibilities, access to and control over resources is called for in order to reduce the burden of women's reproductive role and promote the efficiency and output of their productive work. This will contribute to the overall growth of productivity, income and quality of life of the rural poor, and in turn, enhance participatory and environmentally sustainable economic growth. The Beijing Platform of Action (1995) identified inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision making at all levels as one of the critical areas of concern for advancement of women and the achievement of equality as a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice. The Platform further elaborated women's equal participation in decision making as not only a simple demand for social justice or democracy, but as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account.

Women's lack of access to the arenas in which decisions about development are made is identified by Q'tergaard (1992) as the reason why their needs and wishes are not communicated to the relevant organs of local government and administration.

The wide range of activities undertaken by women at community and household levels do little to address the broader context of women's needs without being translated into organizational power. Such power can be achieved through active involvement in different organizations as both

members and leaders to facilitate actual participation in both policy and decision making.

As cited by Kabeer (1994), organization and mobilization are a key route by which women can link up with the broader struggle for a more accountable development and start to challenge the allocation of resources at the policy level. Hence the longer term sustainability of empowerment strategies will depend on the extent to which they can empower themselves to challenge and reverse the existing priorities.

However, this process can not gain momentum unless participation of rural women goes beyond the boundaries of the household and the local community level to intervening in the broader policy making agenda that their strategic interests can become an enduring influence on the course of development.

Statement of the Problem

Under the current situations in Malaysia, rural development programmes, expansion of rural industry and diversification of rural economy has had a substantial impact on the patterns of rural women's employment and their economic identity. They have benefited in terms of increase of income, more job opportunities, and more directly profitable off-farm activities. Thereby, enhanced their status and decision making capacity within the household. The relative higher voice of women in the domestic

domain combined with increased participation in the labour force at the national level may give sometimes a misleading perception about their position in both the household and society. In turn, it raises the issue of distinction between the conditions and the position, as well as the distinction between the role and the issue of emancipation.

Despite the measurable results on their increased authority at individual capacity inside the family, they lack access to and control of production resources at the society level. As well, they are discriminated against and subordinated in the society, and a dichotomy between women's position at home and outside exists and manifests itself in different forms. This dichotomy can be delineated through examining the extent of involvement of rural women as leaders and managers in decisions relating to production policies and operations of rural/farmers cooperatives and formal organizations. Several studies have cited the little scope of rural Malaysian women leaders to make important decisions that can affect their livelihood (Rokiah 1984, Hapsah 1989, Cecilia and Carol 1991, Jariah and Husna 1996). Accordingly, the major question of the study was why does the contribution of rural Malaysian women to the process of decision making at the society level is low? To examine their involvement in the process of decision making in these organizations, the study poses the following questions:

a) Do they contribute effective input in the decision making process in these organizations?

- b) What are the socio-demographic, economic, leadership and personal characteristics that affect their contribution to decision making?
- c) What are the gender, institutional and organizational constraints that limit their participation and full involvement?

Objectives of the Study

General Objective:

To examine the participation of rural Malaysian women leaders in decision making positions in farmers' organizations in relation to their empowerment and share of power at societal level.

Specific Objectives:

- 1- To examine the socio-demographic, economic, and leadership characteristics of rural women leaders in rural/farmers organizations.
- 2- To examine the levels of participation of rural women as members and leaders in farmers organizations.
- 3- To examine rural women leaders' perception on their decision making inputs in farmers organizations.
- 4- To determine the factors that contribute to rural women leaders perception on decision making inputs.

- 5- To identify the gender based inequalities, institutional and organizational constraints that hinder women's participation in decision making.

Significance of the Study

It is not enough to design a development project and expect that rural women would benefit automatically because they constitute half of the target group. Further positive, interventionist approach is necessary if disadvantaged rural women are to benefit directly from project activities. However, the content of such programmes can not be determined without in depth knowledge of the status of women, in order to decide on the most suitable strategy. Within this context, the study has focused on the empowerment of Malaysian rural women with regard to their perception on decision making at the society level.

The limited number of gender oriented studies of rural development in Malaysia was cited by most researchers (Ariffin 1994, Berma and Shahadan, 1994). Despite the fair amount of literature and research reports on the coincidence of poverty and economic growth in Malaysia, very few have focused on the gender dimension of poverty and explored the interlinkages between gender, poverty, and economic development.

As well, for development problems which governments face, there is a range of known, well formulated steps which can be taken and choices

which can be made consistent with the ideology of that particular government. In this respect, Sundaram and Leng (1985) argue in the case of Malaysian women, all that exists so far is a mass of information. There are no tools devised by which needs can be adequately identified, policies formulated and implemented. The most fundamental drawback, however, is the lack of political will to treat the problems as an urgent and critical issue since women remain weak and disorganized as a political force.

More research is needed to explore more about rural women's participation in decision making and to identify the problems that exist currently and are seen to be behind the low quality of their decision making and their projects.

Accordingly, this study aimed at highlighting the present level of rural women leaders in relation to the degree and quality of their decision making. On reviewing literature and research on women and development in Malaysia, it was found that there is no precedent of using instruments for measuring gender inequalities and women's decision making in organizations. In this study such instruments were developed for measuring these variables and were tested among a sample of rural women leaders.

In light of these facts, the study may contribute to the gender oriented rural development studies through development of new instruments to be used by researchers in the future.

It may also provide clues to researchers in formulating specific hypothesis for the research to be undertaken in similar areas.

Limitations of the Study

A lot more ground need to be covered before the obstacles to active involvement of rural women in decision making can be assessed and overcome. A complex of factors interact together to yield the subordinated status of women. These factors vary from one society to another with further interlinks with class, ethnicity and caste. In this sense, the study may not cover all these factors and examine their influence on the dynamics of decision making. Also some of them are rather impossible to detect and evaluate in depth.

As the issue of rural women and decision making in farmers organizations is still underrepresented in the literature, instruments for measuring some of the variables (awareness of gender inequalities and decision making) were developed specially for this study. Since these instruments need more refining and testing, the results of the statistical analysis may encounter some of the weaknesses of the newly developed instruments.

As the research has confined itself to a case study for a certain rural farmers organization, in a certain country, the findings of the study may not