A GENDER RELATIONS STUDY
OF DIFFERENT OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS
IN SAMBIR VILLAGE, ASAJAYA

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIM  Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia
DOA  Department of Agriculture
IADP  Integrated Agriculture Development Plan
JKKK  Jawatankuasa Keselamatan dan Kerjasama Kampung
KEMAS  Ministry of National and Rural Development
MARA  Majlis Amanah Rakyat
MCS  The Ministry of Culture and Sports
NAP  National Agricultural Policy
NGO  Non-Governmental Organization
UITM  Universiti Teknologi MARA
UN  United Nations

This study aimed to identify the factors that could enhance participation and decision-making. In this study, a random sample of women were interviewed.

It is found that empowerment of women and their household decision-making is reflected in their participation and decision-making. In terms of empowerment of women, amongst women...
This study aims to compare the gender relation of different occupational groups in Sambir, Asajaya. Factors that are included in this study are division of labour, access to and control over resources and participation in decision-making. Selected literature reviews from previous studies are revealed to further enhance the understanding of researcher.

In this study, a qualitative approach is used to obtain feedback and relevant data. A total of 30 households randomly chosen based on their occupational groups (coconut farmers, fishermen and labourers) were interviewed.

It is found that different occupational groups of their households do not divide the women. However, it is their household gender relations that make women different from one group to the other. Differences are reflected in their division of labor, access to and control over finance and participation in decision-making. In terms of division amongst women, self-employed women are the best amongst women followed by older unemployed housewives. Younger unemployed housewives are ranked last in terms of division amongst women.
ABSTRAK


Dalam kajian ini, pendekatan secara kualitatif telah digunakan untuk mendapatkan maklum balas dan data yang relevan. Seramai 30 isirumah telah dipilih secara rawak berdasarkan kegiatan aktiviti yang mereka jalankan (penanam kelapa, nelayan dan buruh).

Hasil kajian mendapati perbezaan di kalangan wanita adalah disebabkan oleh perhubungan golongan jantina seperti faktor pembahagian buruh di kalangan jantina, hak untuk mendapatkan dan mengawal sumber serta penglibatan dalam pembuatan keputusan. Kategori wanita yang bekerja sambilan adalah golongan wanita yang menduduki tempat terbaik dalam senarai perbandingan perbezaan di kalangan wanita. Ini diikuti oleh golongan wanita yang tua dan tidak bekerja, manakala golongan wanita yang muda dan tidak bekerja menduduki tempat terbawah dalam senarai perbandingan perbezaan di kalangan wanita.

1.1 Introduction

Learning all more gender mainstreaming. Gender analysis of “stumbling blocks” scarcity of contribution of women disregarded. This study is a rural Mala-

The participants' contribution to constraints activities' (economic development, 1985), and government Women and concern for Sixth Malay a clear step

The Nation acquisition development their ability ignorance a 1991-1995' environment towards the efforts will ensure thei with skills knowledge
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Learning about gender was part of a set of inquiries looking both at men and women to seek more gender-sensitive information such as the question of women's roles that was mainstreamed into the overall plan of inquiry. This only can be done through gender analysis. Gender analysis is vital because attitudes, prejudices and assumptions about women's roles are stumbling blocks to the promotion of equality between men and women. These are caused by scarcity of gender disaggregated data and ignorance of women's actual roles, work and contribution to development which have been difficult to assess and measure, and therefore, disregarded. Visibility is the starting point for integrating women into the development process. This study is done in order to investigate the gender relations of different occupational groups in a rural Malay village.

The participation of women is strongly encouraged as an important human resource contribution. Efforts are presently being made by the government to 'reduce existing constraints and to facilitate the assimilation of women into mainstream of social and economic activities' (Sixth Malaysia Plan, 1991). National development plan previously treated the economic participation of women as negligible. There was a brief mention of women in development in Third Malaysia Plan (1976-1980), none in the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981-1985), and another brief paragraph in the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986-1990). These earlier government statements seem to have been in response to the United Nations (UN) decade for Women and other international conferences in which Malaysia participated. Due to genuine concern for women's status in the country, National Women's Policy was incorporated into the Sixth Malaysian Plan (1991-1996). This policy is seen as a major development and constitutes a clear step forward towards advancement of the status of women in Malaysia.

The National Policy for Women has two objectives: "to ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and information as well as access to opportunities and benefits of development, as well as to integrate women in all sectors of national development in line with their abilities and needs in order to improve the quality of life, eradicate poverty, abolish ignorance and illiteracy and ensure a peaceful and prosperous nation" (Sixth Malaysian Plan, 1991-1995). Through continuous efforts of the government in providing an enabling environment during the Seventh Plan period, women continued to participate in and contribute towards the social and economic development of the country. During the Eighth Plan period, efforts will continue to be undertaken to enhance the role, position and status of women to ensure their participation as equal partners in national development. Women will be provided with skills and knowledge to cope with the challenges of globalisation and fulfil needs of the knowledge-based economy (Eight Malaysian Plan, 2001-2005).
Several key strategies that were identified under the Sixth Malaysia Plan to help integrate women into development especially in the areas of labour force participation and employment, education and training, legal status and family development were extended further under the Eight Malaysia Plan. A wide range of development projects and programs involving rural development have been implemented in recent decades such as programmes executed by various government agencies such as the Department of Agriculture (DOA) and the Farmers Organisation Authority. The main objective is to modernise both the small peasant farm and smallholding settlement systems likewise to improve their standard of living. At the same time, various efforts were undertaken by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to reduce the incidence of poverty among women. These includes the provision of micro-credit facilities to about 22,850 women through Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) to facilitate their involvement in small businesses and training programmes to assist single mothers to obtain employment (Maimunah Ismail, 2000).

Development refers to the process of improving the quality of people’s lives by raising their standards of living, increasing their choices in employment opportunities and enhancing their capacity towards access to resources and services. Rural development has been generally defined as efforts made by government and the people to provide resources and make meaningful use of the resources in the rural areas towards improving their quality of life in the community (Maimunah Ismail, 2000). According to Henderson and Hansen (1995), in any definition of development, gender is a critical component that should be incorporated to ensure a balance in terms of who are the actors and beneficiaries of development since ‘gender relations’ is a pervasive phenomenon. It cuts across family, community, organisation and society.

If projects are to improve quality of people’s lives, it is essential to take into account different needs and interest of women and men and the power relations between them. Development projects may have either positive or negative consequences on gender division of labour and their access to and control over allocation of resources, benefits and decision making in society. Gianotten et al. (1994) stated that different groups of women (farmers and non-farmers, rich and poor, and so forth) have different needs and interests. The different needs and interests must be recognised in the project to achieve the intended results.

Will development projects undertaken by government have the effects intended? Who will benefit, and who will not? These are the kinds of questions behind a gender assessment study that serve as planning instruments that can help to achieve the intended effects for women, leading to improvement in their position and prospects in life. Many studies have been made on women’s situation and position in society. Research on Malaysian women has grown moderately since the seventies. The steady increase in research has been supported by the various government initiatives. This is evident as there have been growing numbers of academic programmes in women and gender studies run by Malaysian institutions of higher learning (Maimunah Ismail, 1994).

1.2 Back

Based on the majority of the contributions made by the community. By the year 2000, the contribution of the community to the agricultural and industrial sectors will increase.

Agricultural, and industrial sectors include the following: The present government has planned to make agricultural and commercial activities in the rural areas to provide more jobs for the local involved.

Government has taken action to incorporate the existing agricultural activities in the rural areas. For example, vegetables, flowers, fruits and crops have contributed to the local economy, which has been supported by Land and Agricultural Development Fund, devoted to beneficiaries.

a) 

b) 

c) 
d)

A study done by the Ministry of Agriculture and Agro-industry, the potential for tiger prawns and other fish is high. For this industry, the following factors have been identified:

- The Peninsular Malaysia, which is a major producer, has a large potential for tiger prawns, as well as other marine products. The potential for this industry is high, as there are many fish species available in the Peninsula. Moreover, the proximity to the coastal areas is a major factor in the local economy.
- The government has encouraged entrepreneurship in the fish farming industry by providing substantial new facilities and incentives.

This study is based on the fact that the village is located near the sea, and is served by a road that dissects the terrain. The village is accessible by a spur road, located near the estuary mouth, which is a major factor in the local economy. The villagers are drawn to the sea and the potential for fishing is high.

At present, fishing is the main source of income for the villagers, and water supply is a major concern for the primary school.

2
1.2 Background Of Study Area

Based on the report of Services Centre for Asajaya Peninsula by Land and Survey (1994), majority of the villagers at Asajaya Peninsula are involved in agriculture, livestock and fishing. By the year 2010, agriculture sector is projected to be the main employment generator, contributing 40 per cent of total employment in Asajaya Peninsula. The land area under agricultural uses still constitutes more than 50 per cent of Asajaya Peninsula.

Agricultural, fishing and wage labouring are the primary jobs at Asajaya Peninsula. Economic sectors include commerce and industry was in the past of minor importance. However with the present government policies aimed at promoting downstream processing industries and commercial activities, these economic sectors were expected to grow for example a few cottage industries projects has been implemented in the Asajaya Peninsula by DOA. The cottage industry involves the making of banana chips, keropok, fish satay and fish products.

Government agricultural plan in Asajaya Peninsula is geared towards both intensifying the existing agricultural production and promoting crop switches to high-value crops like vegetables, fruits and quality rice. This sectors would in future play a more significant role in the local economy. The project proposed in the report of Services Centre for Asajaya Peninsula by Land and Survey (1994) is as follows:

a) Intensification of coconut cultivation
b) Revival of citrus growing
c) Promoting crop switches to group farming of vegetables, annual crops like sweet and baby corns and fruits like water melon, star fruit, pineapple, Cavendish banana, papaya, guava
d) Promotion of aquaculture

A study done by DOA in 1991 showed that Asajaya Peninsula area is suitable for rearing of tiger prawns, red tilapia and siakap. Under the Eight Malaysia Plan, aquaculture is also one of the potential economic activities. In addition, Sarawak government also foresees bright future for this industry and at the same time encourages villagers to invest in rearing prawn. All these factors have triggered the development of commercial activities of prawn rearing in Asajaya Peninsula. Many local residents have expressed strong interest in aquaculture. However, none of the locals are venturing into the aquaculture business due to lack of financial support and entrepreneurial skills. Currently, all the shrimp prawn developers are outsiders mainly Chinese businessman from Sibu. Development has taken place in this area during the recent years but substantial numbers of villagers are still engaged in their traditional activities.

This study is done in Sambir village. The location of study area is shown in Figure 1. Sambir village is located on the east bank at Batang Samarahan, close to estuary of the river. It is served by a tar-sealed spur road, 3.2 kilometre length and linked to Sadong Jaya. The spur road dissect the township. The western sector is hemmed in between the Batang Samarahan and the spur road, limiting the amount of developable land on this side. The panoramic view of the estuary made Sambir already an attraction although to a limited extent, for weekend visitors who are drawn by its coast natural environment and fishing grounds.

At present, a fairly wide range of community facilities are provided at Sambir such as electricity and water supply, telephone, surau, mosque, community hall, mini library, kindergarten, primary school, and health clinic. The map of Sambir village is shown in Figure 2.
Figure 1: Location of Sambir Village
The village is divided into three main divisions that are Darat Sambir, Tengah Sambir and Ulu/Laut Sambir. Villagers staying in Ulu/Laut Sambir are primarily engaged with fishing activities because of their location near the jetty and estuary. For villagers staying in Darat and Tengah Sambir, with their location further away from the jetty, is engaged in coconut farming and doing wage labouring.

According to the 2002 census done by the Jawatankuasa Keselamatan dan Kerjasama Kampung (JKKK) its population is 1013 with 187 households. The distribution of male to female ratio is 45 per cent to 55 per cent. Table 1 below shows the information of the number of household and distribution of population in Sambir village.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
<th>Distribution of Population by Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td></td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td></td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the population in Sambir village are Malay. They have stayed in the village for generations. According to the Temenggung (the head of the JKKK), the village has a history dated 400 years back. He added that previously before there was a road connecting Kota Samarahan to Kuching, Sambir jetty used to be a transit place. However, with good road networks now, the jetty only served as means of fishing spots and marketing place for fishermen.

Agricultural and fishing are both the primary jobs at Sambir for generation. However, some of the villagers are also doing labouring jobs in Asajaya area. Substantial numbers of the younger working generation are self-employed as lorry drivers, van drivers, doing small business, government officers and factory workers. All of them are working outside Sambir village mainly in Kota Samarahan and Kuching division. On the other hand, students that are excellent in studying are pursuing higher education in institution such as Politeknik Kuching Sarawak and Universiti Teknologi MARA (UITM).

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1) Compare gender relations of different occupational groups in
   - division of labour
   - access to and control over resources (such as land ownership and finance)
   - participation in decision-making (such as in productive and reproductive activities)
2) Identify the division amongst women in the village
3) Acquire insight of villagers views and expectation of their present livelihood and their children future

Recommendations suggested for this dissertation could serve as a guideline to ameliorate rural women development programme in the future.

2.1 A History of Division of Labour

It is inevitable for any society particularly in developing countries to provide a historical discussion with reference to the present under study.

a) The Past

Before the coming of Western influence, particularly in the early 19th century, women of women played a crucial role in the household. There are a lot of women working in the fields, taking care of their family members, and being active in religious and social activities. Besides their agricultural work, women were actively involved in taking care of their family members, reproduction, and processing of agricultural produce. Commodities such as rice, which could be traded in the market, and other local commodities produced in the household sector, men processed and mended fishing nets.

"As in most parts of South East Asia, women spent their time taking care of the household and handicrafts. Commodities such as rice, for example, were produced on Kelantan and women spen
2.1 A Historical Perspective Of The Changing Role Of Malay Women

It is inevitable that the role of women has undergone changes with the nation development particularly in its impact on the role and status of women in various spheres. This section aimed to provide a historical perspective of the changing role of Malay women in Malaysia. The brief discussion will focus how women’s situation has changed from the pre-colonial era to the present under the impact of colonialism and subsequent development influenced by capitalism.

a) The pre-colonial period

Before the colonial period, the roles of women are defined through classes to which they were born. There are two major classes of women mainly the aristocrats and the peasants. Both sets of women played different roles in the economy sector. Majority of the aristocratic women did not take part in the economic sector and were mainly confined to social reproduction such as taking care of children and maintenance of the household. Contrary, peasant women were the ones who took the more active part in the economic activities outside the home despite of their prescribed roles as housewives and mothers. Jamilah Ariffin (1992) reason out that their active participation is because they had right to own land under customary laws or adat in the Islamic religion.

Besides their vital role within the domestic domain, majority of the peasant women were also actively involved in subsistence agriculture. In other words, they are not involved only in reproduction but in production as well. Both men and women laboured in the fields together to produce agricultural products. Food crops like paddy was produced for self-consumption and to be traded in exchange for other necessities like salt and cloth. According to Stivens et al. (1994), allocation of tasks by gender has already existed then. In paddy planting, for example, women did most of the transplanting, weeding, winnowing and harvesting whereas men did the ploughing and preparation of the fields, threshing and transporting of the rice. As for the fishing sector, men would go out to sea while women undertook related tasks such as drying and processing the catch for home consumption and sale. Some women are also involved in mending fishing nets.

"As in most societies, women bore the main responsibility for reproductive activities such as taking care of the young. They were also involved in vegetable gardening, animal husbandry and handicraft–making. Peasant men and women were both involved in subsistence and petty commodity production. Both men and women are each specialized in certain tasks, for example, women in mat and handloom weaving while the men in fishing net making. Reports on Kelantan and Terengganu prior to British intervention pointed out the long hours peasant women spent on textile weaving” (Stivens et al., 1994). Jamilah Ariffin (1992) said that
generally the division of tasks was clear. Women's position in relation to men was therefore often a complementary rather than a subordinate one. Many peasant women were also involved in trading activities. Older women would travel from place to another place selling cloth or handicrafts. These are some example of self-employed women.

Jamilah Ariffin (1992) also pointed out those women especially peasant women in the pre-colonial period played an active part in the economic sector. She added that women have to be actively involved in the economic sector because of two main reasons. The first reason was women having more access to land during their husband absence from home. The second reason was for survival where they have to learn how to produce subsistence necessities. Both reasons were caused with the existence of the *kerah* system where commoners had to perform manual tasks for the ruling class. Once summoned, there would be times where their menfolk had to be away from home and the women would have to step in and take over their chores and responsibilities. At this particular time, women became recognised economic producers. Consequently, the process of production as well as reproduction was recognised as a unified activity.

Women's apparent advantages in pre-colonial Malays society may have been limited to the economic sphere. Women's position in relation to men was therefore often a complementary rather than a subordinate one. According to Stivens et al. (1994) women's reproductive role has restricted their economic, social and political power and thus contributed to their subordination to men. She elaborated that contemporary Malays ideology holds that women gain in status after bearing children but in terms of other social relations, particularly the political and ideological, women are still subordinated to their menfolk both in their respective households and within the community.

**b) During the colonial period**

"In the eyes of the male-dominated bureaucracy, women's role was secondary in the collection of revenues, in signing title deeds and in the joint registration of family land. The higher rate of female illiteracy further weakened women's status in relation to the colonial state. Similarly, agricultural extension services were channelled mainly through male officials to male heads of households" (Stivens et al., 1994). In others words, women's role has changed in the colonial period with the encroachment of the capitalist society and commercialisation agriculture.

The Malay community was still actively involved in the rural-based subsistence agricultural sector and were at first reluctant to participate as labourers in commercialised agriculture. However, with the growth of monetary economy, they were soon drawn into the capitalist oriented market. Peasant men no longer afford to remain in the subsistence agricultural sector but had to sell their labour to the capitalists in exchanged for cash in order to sustain their family's livelihood (Stivens et al., 1994). This also involved some degree of out-migration from their respective villages. Consequently, women had to play a greater role in subsistence production as well as managing the household.

Jamilah Ariffin (1992) revealed that in a capitalist society, the term "production" is reserved only for economic activities that can be quantified through monetary exchanged in the markets, as in the form of wages. With these, men activities brought in cash incomes while women work did not. Thus, a woman's work, which was not regarded in monetary terms, was not valued though it was indispensable for maintaining the survival of the households. Furthermore, she added that this is the root caused of the downgrading of women's contribution to the economy.

c) Postcolonial society

Stivens et al. (1994) suggested that the problems of the problems of the pre-colonial society in a modern world.

Currently, many problems and problematic issues are presumed to be solved, for example the role of women in a capitalist society and the role of the men. Overall both women and men are still subject to commoditization (Jamilah Ariffin, 1992).

In this section, the role of women in Malaysia is considered. The Malay peasant woman especially the peasantry are the main focus.

### 2.2 Gender in Malaysia

"The last two decades have seen many problems in the rural Malays society. Many problems and shortcomings that were once significant and subject in modern society to women's role and to problematic. The women's role in today's society implies a main role in the family when they have been given ill-defined landholdings (Malay peasantry). This statement was made by researcher do not regard women's contribution.

Nevertheless, gender in Malaysia today is a very important issue. Two classic agendas for research are economic and political women's rights. She added that this is the root caused of the downgrading of women's contribution to the economy.
c) Post colonial period

Stivens et al. (1994) pointed that the colonial legacy has continued into the present, producing problems of ‘backwardness’ and low productivity in the rural economy. While alleviating some of the problems, measures to counter this seems to have undermined women’s situation in rural society in a number ways, both directly and indirectly.

Currently, most of the rural development programs have been primarily directed at males, presumed to be the heads of peasant households. However, there have been several efforts aimed at involving women, especially in the last decade. These, generally seek to strengthen peasant women’s supportive and supplementary roles, without attempt to put them on a par with male peasants or trying to redistribute economic access to more equitable between sexes. Overall both the interventionist stance of the colonial and postcolonial states and the commoditization of peasant agriculture have brought a sense of disadvantages to Malay women (Jamilah Ariffin, 1992).

In this section, discussion about a historical perspective of the changing role of Malay peasant women in Malaysia is made. However, there have been problems of doing gender studies of Malay peasantry. In the next section, some problems of doing gender studies of Malay peasantry are highlighted.

2.2 Gender Studies Of Malay Peasantry

“The last two decades of resurgent feminism have brought a new focus on women in studies of rural Malays. But this interest by feminist scholar in Malaysia has found itself confronting many problems posed by an androcentric scholarly heritage. There have been severe shortcomings in the basic conceptual categories used in such studies, which tend to obscure the significance of gender relation in the social structure of these societies. The use of the male subject in most theoretical discussions of the past and present of the Malay peasantry had been problematic. Power relations within the household have been almost totally ignored, equally problematic has been the use of the central term ‘the Malay farmer’, which unquestionably implies a male head of household who does all the work and makes all the decisions. Even when they have addressed gender previous studies of a range of Malay peasant societies have given ill-defined and inexact accounts of the relative situation of the sexes in terms of landholdings, labour inputs and control over agricultural production” (Stivens et al., 1994). This statement shows that shortcomings in gender studies of Malay peasantry are an obstacle to researcher doing studies in this particular field. At the same time, women’s position and their contribution in relation to gender and development is not well addressed in previous studies.

Nevertheless, there are few and small discussion built on pre-existing work of women and gender in Malaysia, mainly by anthropologists, dating back to Rosemary Firth’s pre-World War Two classic (1966). The inherited discourse about women has been important in setting recent agendas for research in this area, especially for arguing for a greater autonomy for Malay women. She suggested that women in fishing village in Kelantan had considerable economic importance and control over the purse strings, playing an extremely important role in the economic organization of peasant society (Firth, 1966). A study of a Terengganu village done by Strange (1981) argues considerable parity of the sexes within the so-called domestic domain, but not outside it. There is, however, no clear explanation of the sources of this ‘external’ subordination, although she hinted at the power of religion in denying women certain important rights.
Stivens et al. (1994) mentioned that gender never appeared in studies because it was hidden within the concepts that while implicitly including it, in reality excluded any real consideration of its workings. Studies of the Malay peasantry have proceeded as if gender difference was not an integral part of the system and have until recently, almost failed to take into account of Malay women’s position and rights. For example there are hardly any published accounts of Malaysian rural society actually counted the number of female as well as male owners of land before Stivens et al. (1994) study that focus exclusively on Malay peasant women and their land.

There is also a crucial need to analyse peasant women’s situation in terms of their productive and reproductive activities in relation to the wider structures and processes in society, as well as the ideological forces influencing women’s situation (Stivens et al., 1994). In other words, what are the mechanisms of gender subordination? What are the ideological and material bases of gender inequality? How is the status of women linked to the state in peasant women’s lives? How does one account for the nature of socially constituted men-women relations for example gender relations in rural society? Previous studies on peasant women have tried to answer some of these concerns for example Maznah (1984) and Stivens (1985).

This particular section mainly focuses on the present position of peasants and women, and land, as well as peasant participation and women in Sarawak (Stivens et al., 1994). There is also a crucial need to analyse peasant women’s situation in terms of their productive and reproductive activities in relation to the wider structures and processes in society, as well as the ideological forces influencing women’s situation (Stivens et al., 1994). In other words, what are the mechanisms of gender subordination? What are the ideological and material bases of gender inequality? How is the status of women linked to the state in peasant women’s lives?

2.3 Agriculture

The agricultural sector in Malaysia has been the backbone of the economy, contributing over 15% of GDP. However, in recent years, there has been a decline in the importance of agriculture, particularly in the rural areas.

A striking finding is that women have been the primary producers or in relation to the agricultural sector rather than men and family resources significantly differentiated (Ismail, 1998).

Agriculture is vital for the development of rural areas, especially in the context of coffee and coconut industries.
This particular study will focus exclusively on Malay rural women and their gender relations. Its objective therefore is quite specific, to document the extent of Malay rural women in the present period in different occupation. The central concern is thus with relations between men and women in particularly in terms of women’s rights and access to ownership of and control of land, as well as agricultural production and resources, gender division of labour and participation in decision making. The Malay constitutes 22.3 per cent of Sarawak’s population (Sarawak, 2000). It must be pointed out that there has been no previous study at the Malay rural women in Sarawak looking at gender relations.³

2.3 Agriculture Development

This section will discuss on the emphasis of agriculture development by government. Development planners usually regard women would benefit from the imposed improvement to men. As this particular study is done in an agricultural based village, it is vital to grasp some similarities of the condition of women in the village.

The agriculture is still important in providing employment to the rural production of this country, with its contribution to the economy accounted for about 30 per cent. In terms of total employment the agriculture sector contributes 13.1 per cent in 2000, declining from 18.0 per cent in 1995 and 26.0 per cent in 1990. Since the 1990’s, a trend has been observed on the decline in the proportion of working in the primary industry and secondary sectors such as agriculture, forestry, livestock and fishing and mining (Malaysia, 1996).

A striking feature of the research results on the participation of Malaysian women in agriculture have been the sharp declining rate if women labour force in agriculture whether in absolute rate or in relation to men (Maimunah Ismail, 2000). Changing emphasis of employment from agricultural to industrial sector has also created a situation where women have been the equal partners of men in agricultural production, but women labour tend to be displaced at a faster rate than men as modern technologies penetrated into the rural systems. Differential in access of resources such as land, capital and training according to gender and in many instances differentiation by gender goes according to the production of various commodities (Maimunah Ismail, 1992; Stivens et al., 1994).

Agriculture is vital to Malaysia, being the focus of past, present and most probably future development efforts (Ahmad Rusli Joharie, 1994). For example, the coconut industry ranks fifth in importance in Malaysia. Since 1980, the industry has seen a downturn in production with areas under coconuts decreasing from 354,000 hectares to 280,000 hectare. This has been due to the switch to oil palm and cocoa that are considered comparatively more remunerative. Under the National Agriculture Policy (NAP), coconut cultivation will be aimed at fulfilling domestic requirements for young nuts as well as providing raw materials for downstream activities including handicrafts. Present intensive use of coconut holdings for intercropping with coffee, cocoa other crops (salak, rattan) and for livestock rearing are also pursued. Its usage is therefore diversified and through these values added activities it is hoped that the coconut industry can be sustained at a profitable level (Eng, 1994).
The Malaysian aquaculture industry is still in its early stages of development compared with other socio-economics activities such as agriculture and captures fisheries. With declining fisheries catch, limited arable land and growing population pressures, the development of aquaculture is one solution to increase fisheries food supply and has considerable potential for further development and growth in Malaysia. Coastal aquaculture is now completing for land and water resources, which sometimes results in conflicts with other resource users, human activities and land uses in the coastal and estuarine area. This activity has positive and negative impacts. Positive impacts are related to the socio-economics benefits that include income and employment. However, it can result in the degradation of the surrounding environment that in turn adversely affects socio-economic activities and the livelihoods of the local communities of the coastal and estuarine area (Muhamad Nasir Abd. Salam, 1999).

A study done by Agriculture Livestock and Fisheries Sector, the Sarawak Fisheries Masters Plan (1992/1993) has identified development in five key areas:

1. Commercial deep sea fisheries programme
2. Coastal fisheries programme
3. Coastal aquaculture programme
4. Integrated coastal community development programme
5. Institutional strengthening programme

The present coastal areas that are developed include the Samarahan Integrated Agriculture Development Plan (IADP), the Asajaya Drainage Scheme and the Kabong-Nyabor Drainage scheme within the Kalaka-Saribas IADP.

Bailey (1983) stated that despite efforts by the government, majority of Malaysia’s Malay population would continue to live in rural areas. As agriculturalists and fishermen the majority of whom live at or near subsistence level, their primarily day-to-day concerns is earning a living for themselves and tempting to ensure a decent standard of living for their family. In other words, agriculture and poverty are inextricably linked.

Agricultural development programmes organised by the government are meant to increase rural income and to alleviate rural poverty. The emphasis had been on developing cash crops for exports, instead of the domestic markets. These were usually geared towards large scale agricultural farming needing a large capital outlay. Given the orientation and thrust of these programmes, it is often men rather than women who could avail themselves of these schemes, mainly because most women do not have capital or access to large-land holding. All these agrarian reform schemes, therefore seldom benefited poor rural women who accounted for a large proportion of the agricultural labour force as employees or unpaid workers.

Planners usually used a practical standpoint by assuming that any improvements in poor men’s productivities and income would be able to ‘trickle down’ benefits to poor women as well. Thus, by increasing the household’s income through men’s participation, this is expected to relieve wives from doing market work. However, according to Jamilah Ariffin (1994), the idealistic approach is based on unrealistic assumptions that often do not provide a solution for poor women’s actual problems and social realities. The ‘trickle down’ theories of the 1950’s and the 1960’s and the planning process associated with them have brought new opportunities for some beneficiaries, but they have failed to improve living standards of the majority of poor people.
The emerging development literature on women revealed substantial proportion of households among the poor in fact depends on women’s economic earnings. It further suggests that there are specific features to women’s economic productivity and social realities that place them among the poorest. This call for gender specific interventions in the programme planning. “Furthermore, poverty is very much a gender issue, at least in part, because of the poor women’s dual-burden that inhibits their full participation in high productivity work outside the home. Poor women have different needs and also make economic contributions that needed different approaches and solutions. Their problems require qualitatively different approaches and solutions” (Jamilah Ariffin, 1994).

Economic development process has had a differential impact on men and women, even to the point of downgrading the traditional economic status of women. In some cases, these programmes have displaced women from full participation in the mainstream of development, as in the area of agricultural mechanisation. World Bank (1991) reported that early efforts ‘to integrate women in development’ were to indirectly help reduce population growth, improve family health and welfare rather that to actually bring in these women as equal participants and beneficiaries of the development process.

2.4 Division Of Labour And Participation In Decision Making

As mentioned in the literature review later, division of labour is a simple effective way to capture the basic division of labour between sexes. Therefore it is vital to understand factors that have contributed to the division of labour and participation in decision-making that works in a community. Factors like gender roles, division of labour and participation in decision-making are found to be interrelated. In this study, focus will be given whether gender role that women played does contribute to their division of labour and participation in decision-making in the village.

Mair (1984) indicated that there are several basic questions that have to be asked about ‘women in rural life’. For example, what are the patterns of the household division of labour between men and women? What are the characteristics, scheduling and time allocation of women’s daily work? If women work for cash, for example as domestic handicraft producers, wage workers, cash-croppers or petty traders, do they control and dispose of the income or part of it? What has been the impact of wider socio-economic and cultural changes on the roles and statuses of women? What roles do women play in household and wider decision-making processes? What rights if any, do women have over land and other household property?

A major issue which is at least now being more thoroughly addressed in development circles is that women usually have a vital role in agriculture, rather than simply involving in the domestic or welfare matters such as child care, nutrition and hygiene. According to Gianotten et. al. (1994) assessment in gender division of labour is a simple and effective way of gaining insight into internal organization of peasant households. It also reveals significant local differences, which must be taken into account when development interventions are formulated.
In traditional subsistence economies such as the Malay society, the division of labour within the family was a very basic division based in differences between the sexes. Men and women were food producers but their activities in production were differentiated. Besides labour, land comprised the most important means of production. In a study done by Hong (1983) on the Orang Ulu society, women often decided on how the land was to be used and they also determined the distribution of crops to be grown on the land. In many of these societies women had important control of land used. She added that their role should be investigated in conjunction with the wider economic and sociological forces for land use changes, interactions between these and the structures of household division of labour.

An increasing body of research on the processes and consequences for women of agricultural modernization and the availability of off-farm employment show how complex these phenomena are in the impact. Generally it is the younger women who are more physically mobile, and leave the village in search of paid work, older married women usually remain in the community and are more fully engaged in agriculture.

Multiple roles that both men and women played within the household and the community are very much related to their division of labour. According to Moser (1993) gender roles are learned behaviours in a given society or other social group that condition which activities, tasks and responsibilities are perceived as male or female. Gender roles vary considerably across settings and also change over time. The following factors can shape and change gender roles such as age, class, race, ethnicity, religion and other ideologies. Below are some description of the roles played by women and men in the household and community.

- **Reproductive role**: Child bearing/rearing responsibilities, and domestic tasks done by women, required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force, it includes not only biological reproduction but also the care and maintenance of the workforce (male partner and working children) and the future workforce (infants and school-going children).

- **Productive role**: Work done by both women and men for pay in cash or kind, it includes both market production with an exchange-valued and subsistence/home production with actual use-value and also potential exchange-value. For women in agricultural production this includes work as independent farmers, peasant wives and wage workers.

- **Community managing role**: Activities undertaken primarily by women at the community level as an extension of their reproductive role, to ensure the provision and maintenance of scarce resources of collective consumption, such as water, health care and education. This is voluntary unpaid work, undertaken in 'free' time.

- **Community politics role**: Activities undertaken primarily by men at the community level, organizing at the formal political level, often within the framework of national politics. This is usually paid work, either directly or indirectly, through status or power.

Both men and women play multiple roles. The major difference, however, is that men typically play their roles sequentially, focusing on a single productive role while women must usually play their roles simultaneously, balancing the demands of each within their limited time constraints.
Gender roles and division of labour are factors that contribute to the participation of decision making within the household and community. Power and responsibilities within the family are clearly defined according to tasks. Both man and women have a certain amount of freedom to organize their own work. However, they are always subject to the household head’s authority over all family members living on the same premises, or working within the family farming system (Gianotten et al., 1994).

In an interesting case study of households in South Sulawesi, MacPhail makes the point that in this region, there is not a sharp division between male and female spheres of economic decision-making. Men and women are involved in both production and consumption decisions sometimes these are jointly made, sometimes a man or woman will take decisions individually within each of these spheres (MacPhail, 1991). In other words there are not distinct and separate areas of competence in households, which coincide with males on the one hand and females on the other.

According to Firth (1966) in a fishing village in Kelantan, women have greater authority than is commonly supposed. Women’s decision-making power is equal to men’s regarding agriculture and livestock. However, women traditionally have greater control over financial matters.

2.5 Access To And Control Over Resources

The review will mention that women’s access to and control over resources particularly to land ownership is mainly associated with the customary factors that determine the rights of women to inherit land. In this study, besides landownership, factors that contribute to the access to and control over resources such as finance and land ownership will be investigated.

Land is important to both women and men. With land, a community can continue their way of life, get food, shelter and protection from poverty, credit and financing. Without it, one’s being and access to these benefits will severely curtailed. Unfortunately, various factors such as the assumption that men are the natural heads of the households and that land should therefore be granted to them have resulted in women having less access to it, increased access to and ownership of land for women will result in an improvement in women’s lives in particular and a more equitable society for us all in general.

Women, especially those belonging to marginalized communities face specifics problems related to their gender. Women’s access to land in various ways, for example through inheritance, joint family ownership, usufructory (for example legal right to the use and profit of a property which is not one’s own, so long as no damage waste is done) rights to communal land, marriage.

“Developments such as the authorities insistence on official documents to prove ownership of and, have resulted in women’s access to land being badly affected. Women therefore are faced with a situation where their rights and access to land are being curtailed or eroded. One consequence is the increased risk of poverty for women, especially those in rural areas. Many women in marginalized groups such as the rural and indigenous communities are highly dependent on the land for their subsistence. The unwillingness to grant women land titles increases their vulnerability to poverty, and women who do not fit conventional head of the family unit such as female household heads, single mothers and unmarried women are even more vulnerable” (Women’s Agenda for Change, 1999).