

ENHANCING WOMEN'S ROLE IN FISHING COMMUNITIES IN MALAYSIA: A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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Malaysia aims to become a developed and high income nation by 2020. Industrialization and focus on the k economy resulted in a decline in the proportion of the labor force entering the agriculture sector, especially the fishing sector. Though the number of employed people in the fishing sector declined from 127,500 in 2004 to 117,400 in 2008, the number of female labor force in this sector increased from 3,000 to 4,700. Labor force survey conducted by the Department of Statistics in 2008 also revealed that there were 1,400 women age 35-39 and 1,900 women age 45 – 64 in the fishing sector. Meanwhile the fisherman socio economics and household census data collected by the Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia in 2007/08 reported that there were 21,020 households headed by men compared to only 137 headed by women. Fishing sector in Malaysia is predominantly a male sector as reflected by the number of women in the labor force as well as the data from the household census. Much is being done to eradicate poverty through increasing productivity in the fishing sector and the efforts are mainly focused on increasing the catch which is mainly done by men. The role of women in the fishing community is mainly confined to the fishing women association group (KUNITA). Study conducted revealed that women are regarded as 'wives of fishermen' and are thus marginalized rather than assisted to enter the fishing industry. Using secondary data, this paper will explore gender challenges in efforts to enhance women's role in the development of fishing communities in Malaysia. This paper will put forward recommendations to address the gender challenges and to further enhance women's involvement in the development of the fishing communities.

Key words: women's role, gender perspectives, Malaysia