

## ARISING ISSUES AMONG WOMEN FISHERMAN REGARDING THE PRODUCTION WORKSHOP AID

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### Article history

**Received date** : 5-2-2024  
**Revised date** : 5-3-2024  
**Accepted date** : 21-3-2024  
**Published date** : 31-3-2024

### To cite this document:

Musa, M. S., Md Pauzi, S. F., Rahman, S., Yaacob, Z., Mustapha, R., & Zainal, M. A. (2024). Arising issues among women fisherman regarding the production workshop aid. *Journal of Islamic, Social, Economics and Development (JISED)*, 9 (61), 197 – 206.

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**Abstract:** *The Women's Fisherman Group (KUNITA) Programme was officially inaugurated in 1983 under the supervision of The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM). Women have a high potential of generating supplement income for their families, and LKIM has assisted them by providing manufacturing workshops. The purpose of this paper is to explore the concerns that have arisen among members of the Women Fisherman Group (KUNITA) regarding production workshop aid from The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM). The qualitative method was adopted in discussing the issue. In-depth interviews were conducted with twenty-seven people. This study discovered three emerging challenges related to LKIM decision making, workshop aid application, and workshop maintenance. This study also recommends two solutions i.e. to strengthen the practise of backyard workshop and to provide the KUNITA workshop permanent property status.*

**Keywords:** *Women's Fisherman, production workshop aid, The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia, supplement income.*

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## Introduction

Women's roles in the home and other sectors have grown, but women's status as housewives appears to be insufficient in modern society. Furthermore, women's participation in household decision-making is now considered. Their willingness to help their husbands support the family economy has an impact on the extent to which they are expected to help their husbands beyond their daily house chores (Salaa, 2015; Mutimukuru-Maravanyika, Mills, Asare, & Asiedu, 2017). The government has therefore implemented the National Women's Policy (DWN) since 1989 in recognition of the crucial role that women play in the family, society, national economy, and politics. It intends to make it easier for women to participate in the process of national development (Zaman et al., 2021; Shamsiah Abd. Kadir, 2018).

In Malaysia, since 1983, the Women's Fishing Group (KUNITA) Programme has been formally launched. Fisherwomen whose spouses are Area Fishermen's Association (PNK) members, a fisherman's daughter or sister who is at least 18 years old, and a single mother whose husband died and whose husband is a fisherman are all eligible to join. Majority of the members are coming from Malay fisherman family. Economic ventures in KUNITA often involve the processing of goods based on fish, confections, handicrafts, sewing, home stays, frozen cakes, field-grilled fish, fish markets, catering, laundrettes, and so on. Most of these activities have been made in the KUNITA workshop, which is provided or aided by The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM). RM 0.5 million has been set aside in 2015 to support workshop assistance and KUNITA economic initiatives (LKIM Annual Report, 2015). Until 2020, there are still 4,220 members of KUNITA actively doing their economic projects, as reported by LKIM (LKIM Annual Report, 2020).

## Problem Statement

From 2010 to 2023, the number of KUNITA members fell dramatically. There were 153 KUNITAs with 6275 members in 2010 (LKIM Annual Report, 2010). By 2023, however, there will be only 66 KUNITAs with 4220 members (LKIM Website, 2023). Given the declining trend in membership, there is a need to look into issues with the help of LKIM in terms of production workshop assistance. This study would look into the practises of applying for workshop assistance, providing workshop support, and the contemporary consequences of workshop utilisation. The findings of the study are expected to assist the authorities, especially LKIM and the government, in gaining a better understanding of evolving concerns and revitalising the KUNITA Programme in the future.

Among the initiatives by The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia (LKIM) is organising workshops for each Fishermen's Female Group (KUNITA) to engage in economic projects and aiming to ensure that every KUNITA has their own production workshops by 2015. LKIM last provided assistance in the form of a production workshop in 2015, at a cost of RM 0.5 million. The assistance included premises, equipment, and courses for 15 KUNITA groups. It provided advantages to a total of 5,947 members (LKIM Annual Report, 2015). KUNITA groups were on the increase as of 2020. There were 66 KUNITA groups in operation, with a total membership of 4,220 people (LKIM Annual Report, 2020).

## Literature Review

Several development projects that promote women's innovation in fishing families and communities have been identified. According to Frocklin et al. (2018), small-scale innovations such as selling shell handicrafts to tourists improved women's access to resources, self-confidence, and decision-making authority within the household for some women in fishing

communities in Zanzibar, Tanzania. The women who participated in the handicraft program created a new market for fishing families to profit from (Gustavsson, 2020).

In Japan, beginning in the 1950s, the first activities of women's fishing community groups were focused on cutting costs and caring for families and communities. Hokkaido women pioneered a strategy to reduce the costs of traditional ceremonies such as birthdays, marriages, funerals, and ancestral worship (Soejima & Frangoudes, 2019). A number of other Japanese cities adopted this strategy because it was very effective. As a result, there are now more women's fishing community groups. In 2010, Japan had 364 women's entrepreneurial groups, the vast majority of which were independent, with only a few affiliated with Fisheries Cooperative Associations (FCAs) (Tokyo Fisheries Promotion Foundation; Umi Hito Kurashi Forum; Co., Ltd. Fishing Communities Planning, 2011). These fishermen's wives have worked tirelessly to find new markets for their wares, including Tokyo department stores. Laver seaweed simmered in a soy sauce and other ingredient paste is their current flagship product. This type of seaweed is typically served with rice. These women have suggested a variety of other ways to eat their products, such as with pasta, to broaden its appeal. They are currently shifting their focus away from the domestic market and towards international export markets. Their products are well-known, and their business skills are among the best among Japanese fishing women's groups. In addition, the women's fishing community group runs restaurants and prepares meals with locally caught fish. They reasoned that processing and selling low-value fish caught by local fishermen would help fishers' incomes. They could help the community by preparing and selling lunch boxes made from the same fish and delivering them directly to the homes of the elderly (Soejima, Kumi, and Makino, Mitsutaku, 2018).

Likewise, in Barru District, South Sulawesi Province, women work in the small-scale fisheries sector. They engage in fishing activities such as reproduction, postharvest handling, preservation, processing, marketing of seafood products, marketing of dried fish, and food security, all of which have important implications for management, rural poverty alleviation policies, and fisheries economic development. Changes in household income, the number of children born in the household, and residential area differences all contribute to an upward trend in the economy of female fishermen's households on Barru District's West Coast (Rahim, Malik, Retno Dwi Hastuti, & Suryadi, 2018).

Nevertheless, according to the Philippine Department of Labour and Employment, women have enormous value in the Philippine fisheries sector, and they play an important role in its healthy operation. Gleaning, i.e., the collection of benthic macroinvertebrates in intertidal areas, and nearshore fishing, which includes spear fishing in rivers and reef fishing with scoop nets, traps, and fish baskets, are common activities for women who fish (Kleiber, Harris, & Vincent, 2018; Yap et al., 2017). Women fishermen sell their catch to small-scale retailers in their neighbourhoods and markets (Prieto Carolino et al., 2016). As factoradors (wholesale sellers of shrimp and first-class species) and beneficiadors (who deal with lower-value species), women also dominate wholesale trading in the Visayan Sea (Torell, Castro, Lazarte, & Bilecki, 2021).

In Iceland, Skaptadottir (2000) discovered that after studying women's adaptive strategies in a fishing community, some women had turned to handicraft production to supplement their incomes. Handicrafts were made from locally sourced materials such as fish skin, woodcarvings, and quilts and then sold as such. While men were busy building production facilities and cooperatives, women organised themselves to protect and improve the daily lives of families. However, their contribution to the family economy is frequently overlooked. In

fact, they assisted fishermen in harvesting; they also acted as retailers and wholesalers and handled every aspect of the fishery product consumption cycle (Baruadi & Paramata, 2016; Ratri, 2018).

All this literature reveals that women undeniably make significant contributions to fisheries and marine-based activities, though the extent and type of participation differ depending on local cultural conditions. Indeed, the primary goal of women's groups in fishing communities is to improve the well-being of families and communities.

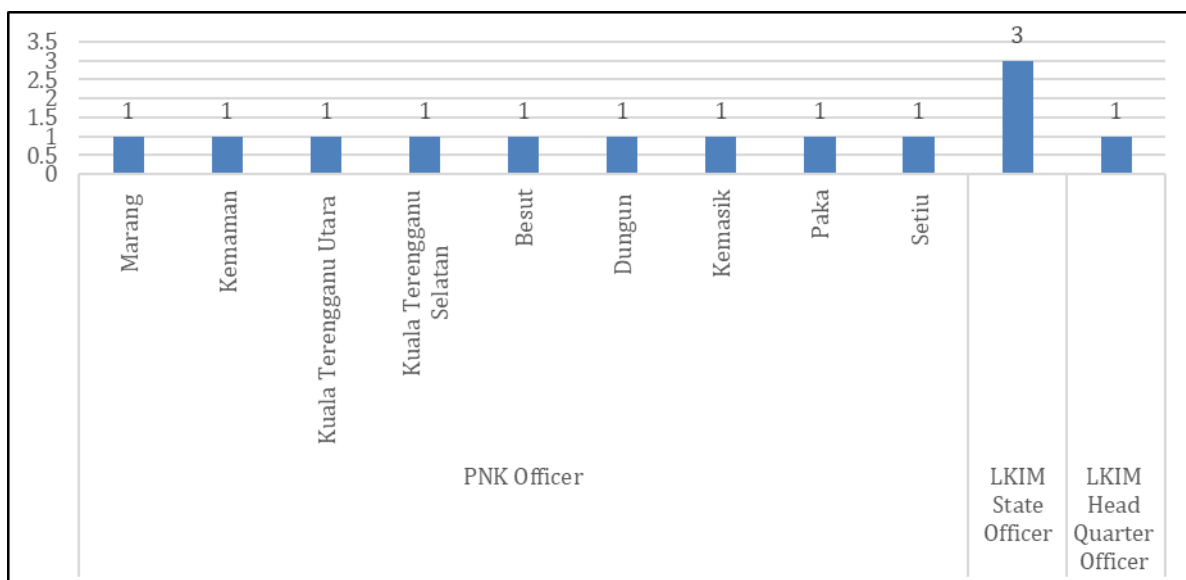
### Methodology and Sample

For methodology, this study employed an in-depth interview approach. An in-depth interview is a qualitative research technique that is used to conduct detailed interviews with a small number of participants. Interview questions are primarily open-ended and lead to a discovery-oriented approach. The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to get detailed information that sheds light on an individual's perspective, experiences, feelings and the derived meaning about a particular topic or issue (Rutledge & Jerri, 2020). The interview involved a respondent from LKIM and a KUNITA member.

#### Interview Protocol

Interview protocol is the key to obtaining good-quality interview data. The interview method is used in the study to collect research results (Yeong et al., 2023). This study selected 27 respondents for interviews. The study began with questions about the respondent's background. In the findings and analysis section, the researcher inquired about the factors influencing the performance of government assistance. On the other hand, for the Open-Ended Analysis section, the questions were about suggestions for improving the KUNITA Program in Terengganu.

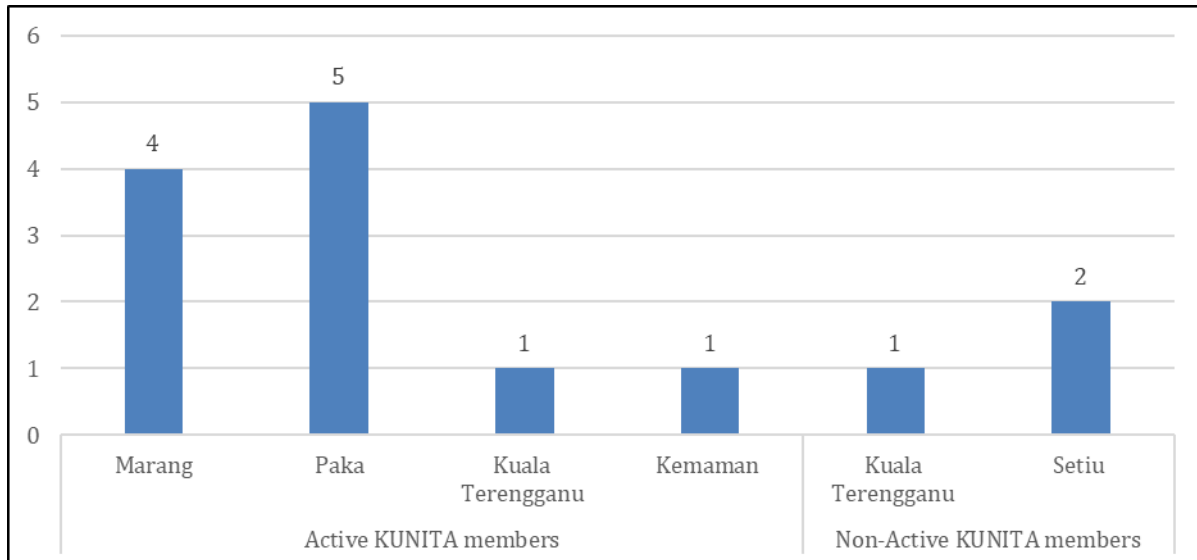
#### Sample of an In-depth Interview



**Figure 1: Number of Respondents among Officers (n=13)**

Source: PhD. Thesis, Mohamad Sahizam Musa (2018) *Keberkesanan Pelaksanaan Program Kumpulan Nelayan Wanita (Kunita): Satu Kajian Kes Di Terengganu.*

In this study, 13 LKIM officers were interviewed. Each LKIM branch (Marang, Kemaman, Kuala Terengganu Selatan, Kuala Terengganu Utara, Besut, Dungun, Kemasik, Paka, and Setiu) and the LKIM Headquarter in Puchong, Selangor each had one respondent.



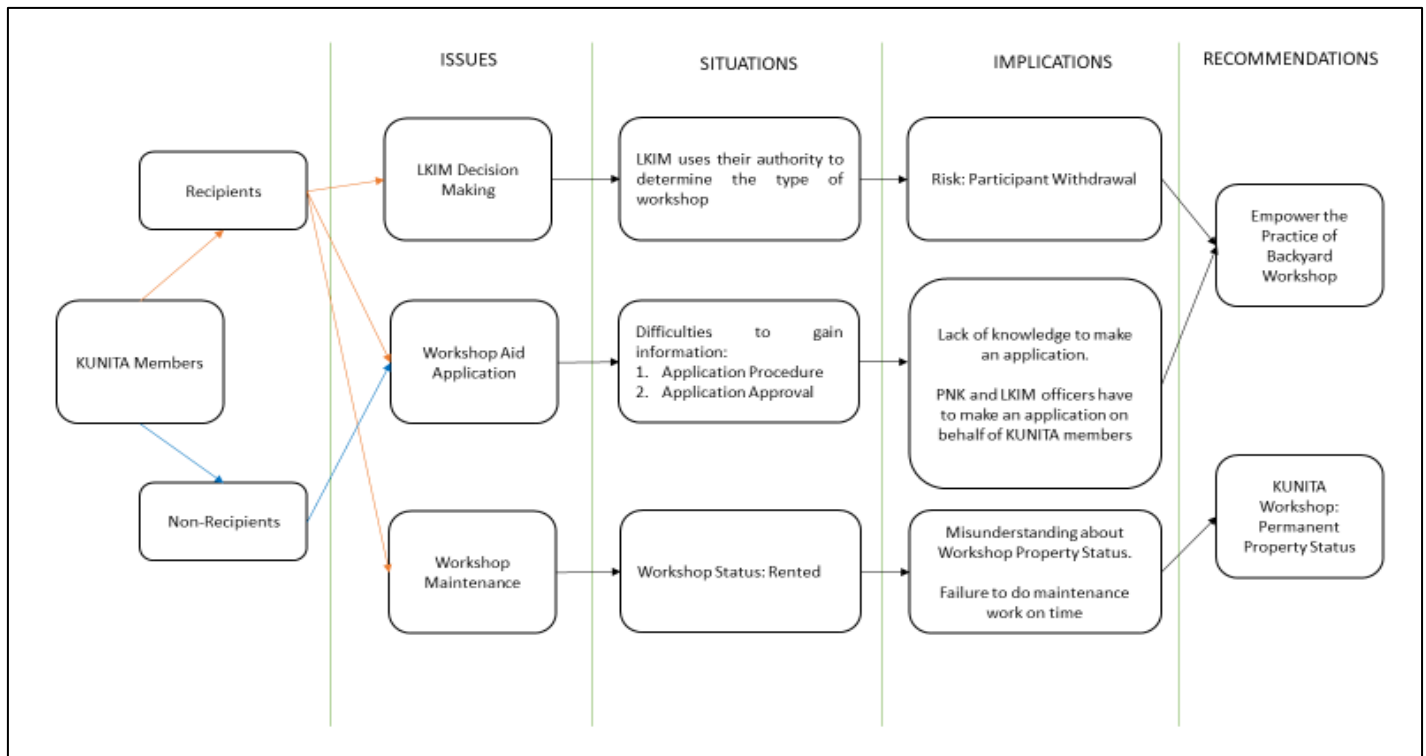
**Figure 2: Number of Respondents among KUNITA members (n=14)**

Source: PhD. Thesis, Mohamad Sahizam Musa (2018) *Keberkesanan Pelaksanaan Program Kumpulan Nelayan Wanita (Kunita): Satu Kajian Kes Di Terengganu.*

This study also interviewed 14 KUNITA members, 11 of whom were active members of KUNITA: four members from KUNITA Marang, five members from KUNITA Paka, one member from KUNITA Kemaman, and one member from KUNITA Kuala Terengganu. Meanwhile, three inactive members were chosen as respondents: one from KUNITA Kuala Terengganu and two from KUNITA Setiu.

### Result and Discussion

Based on the findings from the respondent's interview session, this study identified three arising issues regarding production workshop aid from LKIM to KUNITA members.



**Figure 3: Issues, Situations, Implications and Recommendations regarding the Production Workshop Aid from The Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia to KUNITA members.**

Source: PhD. Thesis, Mohamad Sahizam Musa (2018) *Keberkesanan Pelaksanaan Program Kumpulan Nelayan Wanita (Kunita): Satu Kajian Kes Di Terengganu.*

### LKIM Decision-Making

The workshop aid recipients said LKIM decision-making became a main issue in the implementation of production workshop aid from LKIM to KUNITA members. In terms of decision-making, the respondents had seen LKIM officers tend to use their authority to determine what type of workshop to be provided to the KUNITA entrepreneurship programme. Usually, the decision depends on the potential of the economic project suggested—whether it will guarantee a high profit or not. Three LKIM officers made statements:

*"...To determine the type of economic project and provide a suitable type of workshop is becoming our practise because it will involve a huge investment of money from the government. We need to carefully decide on the best decision that ensures a lot of benefit to many KUNITA members..."*

Otherwise, four PNK officers said the LKIM practise in decision-making will pose a risk in terms of commitment and participation from KUNITA members.

*"...There is a risk if too many decisions are made by LKIM in the name of authority because it will bring a negative perception, especially to KUNITA members." We have witnessed many cases of KUNITA members withdrawing from projects right after a few months of the workshop being set up because they are not truly interested in certain economic projects suggested by LKIM..."*

In general, decision-making among LKIM officers based on their authority was a good practise but also brought a risk of participant withdrawal among KUNITA members due to a lack of commitment regarding the project suggested by LKIM.

### **Workshop Aid Application**

The issue of workshop aid application is also stated as one of the main issues evolving according to eight respondents, half of whom are recipients and non-recipients. The issue is divided into two situations: the difficulties in gaining information about the workshop application procedure and the difficulties in getting an update about the approval of the workshop application.

Regarding the issue of the difficulties in gaining information about the workshop application procedure, respondents mentioned that the information they gained was insufficient. The situation led to a lack of knowledge in preparing a good proposal as part of the workshop application requirement afterward. Some of them took the initiative to inform either the PNK or LKIM officers about their intention to have a workshop during the LKIM monitoring routine. Some PNK and LKIM officers said:

*“...Usually, any KUNITA member who has the intention to apply for a workshop from LKIM will inform the PNK officer of their intention, and the PNK officer will proceed the application to the next stage. Most of the applications were made by PNK officers due to the insufficient knowledge among KUNITA members...”*

Another aspect of the problem is the difficulty in receiving an update on the workshop application's approval. Respondents also said that they are in a state of uncertainty while waiting for the outcome of the workshop application. Three LKIM officers made the following statements:

*“...Any approval for a workshop application normally takes more than one year, and more depends on the headquarters budget. Some lucky applicants received approval within six months. Any update will be informed after approval has been given by the higher-ups...”*

In general, the lack of information regarding workshop application procedures, as well as the lengthy approval process for workshop applications, made workshop aid application one of the concerns that needed to be addressed.

### **Workshop Maintenance**

The recipient of workshop aid mentioned that the issue of workshop maintenance became an issue after the said aid was implemented. The effort to maintain the existing workshop by LKIMs found some constraints. The following statement was made by two KUNITA members:

*“...Our workshop found some of its walls damaged. The application to do the maintenance was approved, but another constraint evolved. The premise was rented, and miscommunication between the heir and owner became a great constraint in the process of performing the maintenance work...”*

In fact, executing maintenance work late will disrupt the operation of their economic project productivity. Due to structural damage that is known to jeopardise KUNITA members, the use of workshop space has been limited.

In general, attempts to maintain the KUNITA workshop will be hampered by property status and a lack of understanding between the heir of the premise owner and the KUNITA member as a renter.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

In conclusion, the production workshop aid from LKIM is necessary to accelerate the productivity process of the KUNITA economy project. Thus, it will contribute to the generation of additional income among KUNITA members. The KUNITA members found some issues with workshop aid from LKIM regarding LKIM's decision-making, workshop aid application, and workshop maintenance. There are two prior recommendations needed to improve the workshop aid from LKIM to KUNITA members.

Besides, from the aspect of women's empowerment indicators, improvement in terms of decision-making in the case of households and increasing the ability to control assets among women should be encouraged. What is more interesting is that women can feel changes in terms of mobility and autonomy due to their involvement in entrepreneurial activities. In addition, empowerment is also an important indicator of the effectiveness of entrepreneurial activities in the lives of the women of the fishing community because of the high level of empowerment that results from that involvement, which is important to improving socio-economic status in families.

In order to give the freedom to make their own decisions with complete confidence, women's empowerment can also be established through education, ideas, awareness, and mobility. Future research must be done on women's participation in entrepreneurship in fishing communities in other states, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak on the west coast. This is significant given the high level of empowerment among women as a result of their contribution to the growth of the fishing community's economy as well as the self-potential of the female entrepreneurs.

### **Empower the Practice of Backyard Workshop**

The practise of using backyard workshops as production workshops was a Terengganu fisherman community heritage culture. This study recommends that the LKIM encourage KUNITA members to follow their forefathers' custom of establishing a backyard workshop. The backyard workshop will reduce the cost of money, time, and distance required to manage it throughout productivity operations. To run the economic project, the backyard workshop should be equipped with cutting-edge equipment. Most crucially, rather than being picked by the authority, KUNITA members are free to choose whatever economic activity to participate in, and their participation in the chosen economic activity will persist for a long period. Furthermore, the notion of backyard workshops will lessen KUNITA members' reliance on LKIM production workshop assistance.

### **KUNITA Workshop: Permanent Property Status**

This study suggests that the LKIM support KUNITA members to own a production workshop with permanent property status in order to eliminate problems such as delay of workshop maintenance work, premise property status, and communication failure between the premise owner and KUNITA member as a renter. Due to its permanent property status, the process of workshop maintenance will be simplified for LKIM or another government body. The KUNITA member who owns the workshop will be free to make any decision to increase their production.



These recommendations will soon be able to address the highlighted concerns, such as LKIM's decision-making, workshop aid application, and workshop maintenance. This research will be taken to the next phase, adding a new dimension to the issue of women fisherman.

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