BAJAU WOMEN AS KEY WORKFORCE IN ARTISANAL FISHING HOUSEHOLDS IN KAMPUNG MENGKABONG, TUARAN, SABAH

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Abstract

Fishers are often being thought of as men who catch fish. Women, on the other hand, are often being thought of as a community that mainly involves in grading, packaging and processing fish and fishery products. This article will present Bajau women in Kampung Mengkabong, Tuaran, Sabah, who involve themselves in fishing activities in traditional ways. The women also play an important role as fishmongers selling fish and other fishery products. It is also interesting to note that these women are also responsible to manage and handle the finance of their families. How they engage fishery activities, fish selling and managing family finance will be explained in this paper. The Bajau fishing community is often being portrayed as poor fishers, and certain researches show that they are below the poverty line. However, our analysis shows that this is not the case. This article is based on researches conducted on 50 Bajau women involve in fishery activities from production to selling the catches in Tuaran, Sabah.

Keywords: Bajau, Women Workforce, Fishery Activity, Poverty, Mengkabong

Introduction

Every morning, nearby the Tuaran Fish Market, there are several women selling fish and other fishery products under umbrellas at the street-sides or at the market’s pavement. These are the Bajau women from Kampung Mengkabong, who participate in fishing and selling fishery products produced by their families.
Kampung Mengkabong area is located near the Kabong River, the whole area consists of seven villages, namely Kampung Tembiluk, Kampung Jembulang, Kampung Buansa, Kampung Mempelam, Kampung Pensurun, Kampung Gerinsing and Kampung Soang Krumuan. The population of Kampung Mengkabong is 2,499, of which 97% of them are Bajau. 66% of Bajau women, as noted above, are in between 30 to 50 years old, and 20% of them are in between 50 to 65 years old. Almost all of them (96%) are wives of fishermen and 4% of them are widows. These women need to support an average number of people, 60% of them need to support 3 - 6 people, while 16% of them need to support 7 - 8 people. 40% of the Bajau women never went to school, 20% of them completed primary school level, Lower Secondary Assessment and Malaysian Certificate of Education [1].

They fish in traditional ways at river mouths near their villages. They do this because they do not have other skills and have lower education level. Therefore they cannot do other works to help their husbands, at the same time doing traditional family work. They fish by using traditional equipments, like casting nets, drag nets, coconut shell scoops, crab traps and fish traps. They go out and return on the same day and most often than not spending 21 – 28 days in the sea. They live in villages above the water, located about 5 km from Pekan Tuaran.

**Bajau Women’s Daily Activities**

The Bajau women wake up at 5:00 in the morning. After the dawn prayer, they prepare breakfast for their husbands who come back from the sea and for their children who go to school. Their breakfast normally consists of tea or black coffee, and rice with heated leftover dishes. The women put the breakfast on the dining table, and cover the breakfast with a food cover. For the households that do not own a dining table, the food is left in the kitchen. Their husband eat the breakfast after returning from the sea, and their children, likewise, eat before going to school. This breakfast with rice is quite important, because most of the children do not bring lunch box to school, but rather they are given pocket money.

About 6:00 in the morning, their husbands return from the sea, usually bringing back their catches. The amount of the catch varies. The catch is put inside a tub or a big basket, later covered to keep the catches fresh and to avoid eaten by cats. The Bajau women descend on the boats with their fishing equipments, either casting net or drag net, at about 6:15 in the morning they sail to the river mouth. They either go alone or with their daughters. There are other Bajau women from the same village, doing the same work in the same river.

After paddling for half an hour, they reach the fishing destination. They start to cast the net, normally done in places near river banks or the mangrove
seaside. There are some Bajau women who use fish traps and coconut shell scoops to catch fish, and crab traps to catch crabs as well. The fish traps, coconut shell scoops and crab traps are left in the water the day before. The women go there to retrieve the catch and to put in new baits, then put the traps back to the water. This whole process takes about 1 – 2 hours. Then, they go home. The catches usually consist of shrimps, crabs and fish found in river mouth.

Upon reaching home, they take out their catches and mix with those brought back by their husbands. Part of the catches is separated and taken as their meal. If the catches obtained are not much, but exceed the amount of their meal requirement, the Bajau women give the rest of the catches to their friends who obtain larger amount of catches, to be sold at the Pekan Tuaran. The catches are given without graded or weighted. The catches are given to their friends just as it is to be sold. This trust and friendship are more important than monetary gain. Some of them request their relatives to sell their meager catch.

If they obtain satisfactory amount catches, once the Bajau women reach home they quickly have a shower, have their breakfast, then go to Tuaran to sell these catches. They bring their catches in one or two big plastic buckets. Plastic bags are prepared for the customers to put the purchased fishery products inside. The women display their catch on a rubber or plastic mat with the size of 3’x 4’. They also have a small plastic bench to sit down when selling the fish. A small bucket of water is also prepared. The water is sprinkled on the fish and shrimps, and also for the customers to wash their fingers. The catches and the equipments are loaded in a kereta sapu [2] or van owned by the local Bajaus. The distance between Kampung Mengkabong, where the Bajau women stay, to Pekan Tuaran is about 5 km, so the time needed for the journey is about 5 – 10 minutes.

Once they reached Pekan Tuaran, they get down on the side of the road, under the trees near Pekan Tuaran Fish Market, where they sell the fishery products. This means that they conduct their business outside the market. Other than selling at the roadside, some conduct their business at the pavements of the market. They do not have any license to conduct the business. Then, they go to the groceries where they often shop to take the umbrellas that they left there. Under these huge umbrellas, rubber or plastic mats are set up, and little by little the catches are taken out from the big bucket. The catches are graded according to the type and size of the shrimps, crabs and fish. After grading, the catches are piled up on the rubber or the plastic mat. The Bajau women do not use weighting scale, either because they think a weighing scale is expensive, or hard to be carried around, but also because they need to check the scale from time to time to ensure the accuracy. Whatever reason is given, it is more likely that they do not know how to do business with a scale. They also face difficulty in deciding the price when the scale does not point directly to the exact number. They might know the
price of their catches per kilogram, yet when the scale points to a number less than one kilo, say 850g, they would take a long time to calculate the price, and sometimes they are not be able to calculate at all.

Photo 1: Bajau women selling their catches in a market in Tuaran

The above statement is only valid when describing elder Bajau women. For the Bajau women in between 30 – 50 years old, they do use weighing scale and calculator. Although the weighing scale is used, they still sell the fish in piles. They weigh the fish or shrimps first, then put them in piles; each pile weighs a kilogram. These fishmongers are not only weighing their own fish, but also helping other fishmongers to weigh their fish and shrimps. In another word, the same weighting scale is shared.

The catches, like shrimps, are sold for RM8 to RM10 per pile, while crabs are tied and sold together in bundle. The number of the crabs in a bundle varies, and the price for each bundle is about RM8 to RM10. The small fishes are sold in piles, and the bigger ones are sold individually. The piles of fish and shrimps will be sprinkled with water to ensure the freshness. Other than shrimps, crabs and fish, some Bajau women also sell seaweeds, snails and oysters. They obtain the seaweeds from Semporna by ordering from seaweed cultivators, and also from the Bajau of Semporna District the day before. The seaweeds are bought in a few gunny sacks and sent through express buses that travel between Semporna and Kota Kinabalu. From Kota Kinabalu to Pekan Tuaran, these seaweeds are carried in a van, taxi or a kereta sapu.
A Bajau woman’s business usually starts at 8:30 in the morning and ends at 12:30 at noon. Within that duration of time, the Bajau women sit on a small bench behind the things they sell. For those who conduct their business at the market pavement, they sit on the pavement cement floor of the market. When it is early in the morning, the fish are slightly more expensive, because it would still be fresh, and there would be more customers. The customers prefer to buy fish from the Bajau women, because the price of the fish is lower compares with the market. The customers may also bargain, and usually they are entertained so long as the price requested to be lowered is not more than 20% of the selling price. As the sun rises and there are less and less customers, the price is lowered a bit. For instance, a pile of fish might cost RM10 in the morning; the price might be reduced to RM8. At the noon time, if a customer only buys a pile of fish, the price is not be reduced, yet the Bajau women are willing to reduce the price if the customer buys more than two piles. For instance, if a pile of fish is RM8, if two piles are bought, the price would be RM14, and three, RM18.

Although the fish and shrimps are in piles, the customers are still allowed to choose from different piles. This is one of the reasons why customers prefer to shop with the Bajau women, other than they sell in a cheaper price. This cannot be done in the market, because the fish and shrimps are sold according to their grades, and each grade has different price. The Bajau women replace the different piles of fish and shrimps selected by customers with new ones. Eager to go home, the Bajau women would sell the last two or three piles in a much lower price, which is half of the original price.
There are about 40 to 55 Bajau women working outside the market, at the street side or at the market pavement. They either conduct their business alone, or assisted by their daughters in turn. Though their number is not small, it is not as noisy as in the market, because they do not haggle and do not conduct any promotion that would influence the customers. They only slowly, gently and smilingly greet the customers or those who stand in front of their mats. They would say “buy fish, sir”, “shrimps, sir”, or “still new, still fresh, sir”. If the customer ignores and goes to the next seller, they just leave the customer and do not beg or try to gain the customer’s sympathy. Other than bargaining, they are always close with their customers. While packing the fish or shrimps, they greet the customers, asking why they came early or late, how they cook the fish or shrimps and so on. The Bajau women often give a few extra shrimps or fish to the customers, and this attracts the customers, as they think the Bajau women do not haggle over small matters in their business.

The other fishmongers in the market do not object to the Bajau women selling the fish in lower price. This is because they think the quantity of fish sold by the Bajau women is too little to threaten their own business, and the Bajau women only conduct their business for 4 hours a day - a very short time. The Bajau women only sell fish found in the river mouth, so the fishmongers in the market do not really feel threatened. The fishmongers of the market sell different varieties of pelagic and demersal fishes found from the coastal area to the deep sea. These different varieties of fishes enable them to have regular, fixed customers. In another word, the Bajau women are never really a competitor to the market’s fishmongers.

While conducting business, the Bajau women enjoy chatting among themselves. They speak in the Bajau language, and only use Malay when conversing with the customers or with those who are not of Bajau descent. To quench their thirst, they buy ice water in a plastic bag, or canned drinks from other Bajau women doing business there. They drink a little bit if there are not customers. If they are hungry, they buy one or two pieces **kuihs** from other Bajau women doing business there.

The sales on weekdays differ from those on weekends. During the weekends, they would have better business, because there will be more customers. Saturdays and Sundays are holidays for civil servants and for the staffs of some private companies, and it is on Sunday that Pekan Tuaran has its Sunday Market. Tuaran Sunday Market is well-known since the British colonial time. A lot of people, especially those from Kota Kinabalu, like to come to the Tuaran Sunday Market. The distance between Pekan Tuaran to Kota Kinabalu is about 34km. They come to Tuaran to buy cheaper goods, like vegetables, traditional **kuihs** and dishes and other things that are not easy to obtain in Kota Kinabalu. Pekan Tuaran is
crowded when the Sunday Market is held. On these two days the Bajau women can earn from RM100 to RM200, while during the weekdays, they can only earn from RM50 to RM100.

The Bajau women end their business at 1:00 pm in the afternoon. They clean up everything by putting the unsold fish or shrimps inside the bucket, roll the mat, close the umbrella and count how much they earned on that day. Then, they go to the groceries that they frequent. The umbrella is kept there, and they buy daily necessities like rice, sugar, coffee, tea, cooking oil and others. Other than daily necessities, they would buy a carton of two of cigarettes for their husbands.

If the fish and shrimps are easily sold out, they stop their business earlier. After packing, they go to the town’s gold shop to take a look. If there is any piece of jewelry they like, they agree on a price with the shop owner. Their way of transaction is rather unusual. The Bajau women pay by installments depending on their monthly income. They only take the piece of jewelry once the money is fully paid. In another word, they make the payment before taking the jewelry, a modern term for this transaction would be ‘pre-pay’. The jewelry buying ends before 2:00 pm after that time they have to take the kereta sapu or van to go back home.

Once they reached home, for the households that do not have daughters, the wives have to prepare the food. The lunch is usually served at 3:00 pm. Bajau food is rather simple, and cannot be considered as a balance diet. The dishes usually consist of rice, a fried dish, and a gravy dish. It is uncommon for a Bajau family to have vegetable dishes, and even if a vegetable dish is prepared, it would usually be seaweeds. The lunch is the same as the dinner. If there is any dinner leftover, it is reheated in the next morning as breakfast. Although they eat the same type of food throughout the whole day, they eat in large quantity. Their menu varies depending on the day and the catches. For Bajau women that have adolescent daughters, the responsibility of preparing food falls on their daughters. Even if their daughters are the ones who prepare the food, the lunch time is still around 3:00 pm.

From 3:00 pm to 6:30pm, the Bajau women take their time to rest. If there is nothing to do, they would take a nap. Normally they spend their afternoon doing laundry. Then, they hang the clothes on the clothes rack in the platform or the verandah of their house. They do not hang their clothes in the terrace, since their houses are built on the water surface. There are also Bajau women who spend their time to water their plants and flowers, cut the leaves and put fertilizers to the plants. They do not grow the plants on soil, but on vases or the buckets which were used to store fish. The vases will be arranged in lines or hanged on the verandah or on the bridge facing the sea.

For the Bajau women that do not sell all of their catches, they process the fish into salted fish, and the shrimps into dried shrimps. The fish are salted, then left sun dried on the bench or on the verandah roof. The making of salted fish and
dried shrimps are often done by the Bajau women, either alone or with their daughters. After a few days the slated fish and the dried shrimps are taken away and put into tin jars. These salted fish and dried shrimps are not for sale, but for their own consumption.

The Bajau women do not conduct any other works other than fishery, like farming or raising fowls, because they do not own any land. The land surrounding their houses is not suitable for farming. Like many fishing villages in Sabah, their houses are built on swampy area in between the land and the sea. These lands are never developed and are located on the edge of development centre. As it is not developed and unmanaged, the fishers are able to build their settlement there. They built their settlement on water surface, to ease them to go to the sea; and also because of that, they do not have much chances to look for other side works in the local area. They do not have the skills, nor well educated enough to be involved in works other than fishery.

In the evening, the Bajau women use the time to fold the clothes, prepare dinner or watch television. Other than that, they sew the casting net or repair torn drag net. They sleep about 10:30pm.

Observation shows that the Bajau women do not pay too much attention on their children’s education. They only provide their children basic needs like food, clothes and school fee. This is because 40% of the Bajau parents have never been to school, only 20% of them finished their primary school education, and 20% of them managed to sit for their Lower Secondary Assessment and the rest of 20% managed to obtain Malaysian Certificate of Education. From the interview conducted, we found out they only send their children to school because it is made compulsory by the government. They fear if they do not do so, legal actions will be taken against them. Many Bajau women do not have confidence that education can really change their lifestyle. They say that most of the children of fishers in Kampung Mengkabung who finished their Malaysian Certificate of Education do not have a job, and many ended up working as artisanal fishers like their parents.

Income, Expenditure and Saving

Researches show that the income, expenditure and savings are managed by the Bajau women, even though most of them are not the head of the family. Only a widow can be the head of family in Bajau community. This is mainly because their husbands do not deal with the family’s finance. They catch the fish and give the catches to their wives to sell. Their wives buy them cigarettes and give them coffee money [3] everyday after returning from the market. All the family's financial matters are wholly handled by the women.
Bajau Women’s Monthly Average Income

Concerning their monthly average income of a Bajau family, it is the combination of the income of a Bajau wife and her husband, who mainly works as a fisher. This research shows that the Bajau women and their husbands do not do any side job. This is because they do not own land; lack of skills required in other jobs other than fishery, and also the job vacancies in their location are rather limited. Their children are also unable to help much, since many of them are married in an early age, which is in their twenties, and they need to support their own family. Most of their children work as artisanal fishers as well.

Bajau families are often categorized as poor or as the poorest group. This is because when conducting the researches, the related researchers did not review the authenticity of the questionnaires, and did not review the answers given by the respondents. The respondents who answered the questionnaires would often state their lowest income, in order to gain the sympathy of the researchers. This is because they assumed the researchers are from governmental agencies like the Sabah Department of Fisheries, the Sabah Fisheries Development Authority of Malaysia or from other agencies, and that they were there to conduct census or researches, so that they might give them help and subsidies. They were hoping that they could be listed in the fisher category which is eligible to receive help.

Generally, a Bajau woman’s fisher family could obtain 5kg to 20kg of catches every day. If they go out to the sea for 20 days in a month, they are able to obtain 100kg to 400kg a month. The price of the catches varies in type, grade and freshness. However, assuming that a kilogram of catch is RM10, and the fishers are able to sell all their catches, this would mean that they would earn an average income of RM1,000 to RM4,000. This calculation is based on a lower estimation, if the fishers go out to the sea for 26 to 28 days, and the catches are sold at the price of RM12 to RM15 a kilogram, certainly they would earn even more. This calculation shows that the Bajau women are above the poverty line.

Their housing condition is unattractive and is often associated with poverty. What needs to be emphasized here is that some of the fisher houses are built on the water. The fishers do not own any land, and they think the house is only temporary. There is no guarantee for them to stay there permanently, since the houses can be torn down by the authorities anytime. If that happens, they would move to other places and build a new settlement with the same characteristics. Therefore, they think it is useless to build permanent, well-organised and beautiful houses like those on the land. Another reason for them to prefer living on water is that it would be easier for them to work as fishers. That is why they do not pay too much attention on decorating their houses.
It is unheard of a fisher family in Tuaran who died of hunger because of poverty. Observations show that none of the fisher in the research area actually becomes a beggar. Other researches show that many foreigners involving in the fishing industry from neighboring countries like Indonesia [4], Philippines [5] and Thailand [6] that entered this country, legally or illegally, managed to bring back thousands of ringgit back to their own country each year. The question is, are these fishers in Kampung Mengkabong perceived as poor because of their unorganized lifestyle?

**Average Expenditure of the Bajau Women**

The spending on groceries is usually decided by the Bajau women everyday while returning home from Pekan Tuaran. This part of expenditure is not big because the lifestyle of the Bajau women is simple. They often only buy basic household items like rice, coffee, tea, sugar, biscuits, cooking oil, onions and others. This expenditure in average costs from RM350 to RM500 a month. The family size and age of the dependents are the main factors that decide the family expenditure.

Another big part of expenditure is their children’s education fee. Bajau women have to pay for transportation fee and the expenditure of the children in their school. Normally, the daily expenditure stated above is RM3 for primary school children and RM5 for secondary school. Their expenditure depends on the number of children they have, as well as the education level of their children. The average monthly expenditure for a Bajau household for education is from RM60 to RM380.

Almost all Bajau men smoke; and they have started smoking since the adolescent age. Their excuse to smoke is to kill the boredom when they are at the sea. The expenditure on cigarettes sometimes exceeds the fuel for their boats to go to the sea. The cigarette brand varies, from the cheaper ones to the more expensive brands. Usually, they finish a carton of cigarettes or two in a day. The average monthly expenditure for cigarettes is from RM60 to RM480 a month.

Other than smoking, the Bajau men need coffee money as well. The husbands of the Bajau women often drink their coffee at the coffee shops in the afternoon before going to the sea. In the coffee shops, they would spend their time chatting, playing games of chess or cards, or watching television. They are also fond of gambling. The coffee money needed is in between RM90 to RM300 a month.

The boat fuel is a required expenditure, without the fuel it would be impossible for the fishers to go to the sea. All Bajau men use outboard motor boat, with horse power of 5hp to 15hp. The distance to the catch site is not far, which is about 5 nautical miles from the shore. For every trip, they spend from RM10 to
RM20 on the fuel. The monthly expenditure for the fuel is between RM200 to RM500, depending on how many days they go to the sea in a month.

Other than the above expenditure, the Bajau women also need to pay for the other utilities, ranging from RM50 to RM200 a month. Other expenditures for health, entertainment and money for parents are not huge, ranging from RM80 to RM350 a month. The expenditures mentioned above are listed in the following table:

Table 1: Average Monthly Expenditure of Bajau Women, Kampung Mengkabong, Tuaran, Sabah

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenditure Type</th>
<th>Amount of Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>RM50-RM100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen Expenditure</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Expenditure</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cigarettes</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee Money</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boat Fuel</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilities</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bajau Women’s Average Savings

36% of the Bajau women stated that their monthly saving is less than RM500, 4% stated their monthly saving is in between RM500 to RM999, and 4% RM1,000 to RM1,499. They keep some of the money at home, at some in the banks in Pekan Tuaran. These savings are to be used during the emergency time, like when a family member fall sick, marriage, funerary and thanksgiving feasts, house repair, and boat and motor repair. They do not keep any saving for their children’s further education.

On the platform, there is a staircase that is used to get up or get down from the boat. The boat is clinched to staircase. There is also a space in the platform to place the boat motor, fuel vessels, lubricants, the buckets to hold rain water and others. Woks, pots, knife, crab traps, rags are hang on the wall of the platform. A bathroom and a toilet are built on the side of the platform. The toilet is rather
simple; it is merely a covered space that looks like room, with a hole on its floor, so that the feces drop directly to the water. In another word, the platform is fully utilised and it is a crucial part of the fisher community, as shown in Picture 3.

**Photo 3: Multi-purpose platform in a Bajau house**

![Photo 3: Multi-purpose platform in a Bajau house](image)

Source: Fieldwork

**Photo 4: Unorganised condition of a Bajau house**

![Photo 4: Unorganised condition of a Bajau house](image)

Source: Fieldwork

A Bajau woman does not rear fowls in her house because there is no land for her to do so. However, in some of the households, the husbands and the sons do rear one of two fighting cocks (Siamese cocks). These cocks are only kept in
small cages put on the platform of their house. Cock fighting is still a common activity in the corners of Kampung Mengkabong.

None of the Bajau women owns a transport like car, motorcycle, or even a bicycle. Their reason, other than unable to afford one, is that it would be very difficult for them to obtain the driving license, as many of them are illiterate, therefore they are not able to pass the computerised examination. Furthermore, there are other more urgently required things than a personal transport. Some of them stated that they are too shy to own a personal transport, for being feared that they are accused as showing off.

**Conclusion**

The role played by the Bajau women in Kampung Mengkabung cannot be underestimated. They are not merely helping their husbands, but themselves are the pillars that support the economy of their families. Normally these women follow their husbands to the sea and assist them in fishing, yet they are not paid, because they are seen as helpers who only do light works.

However, this research shows a different situation of the Bajau women. They do not follow their husbands to the sea, but rather they fish alternately with their husbands. When their husbands are out to the sea at night, they stay at home; when their husbands return from at the dawn, they go to the river mouth to fish, as if it is a shift work. In this matter, the Bajau women actually have the right to receive salary payment, since they are willing to go to the sea without the help of their husbands.

They mix their catches with their husbands’ and sell it in Pekan Tuaran without any middle man. This enables them to receive the proper income, and this also shows that the Bajau women are not being exploited by anyone. They are not depending on the middle man that usually practices “tauke system” [7]. The business transactions are conducted in cash, and this enables the Bajau women to buy their daily needs other than their fishery inputs. This can be done because the distance between Kampung Mengkabong and Pekan Tuaran is very short. The distance between landing site and the selling site influences the socio-economy of the fishing community. Fishers are often being portrayed as a marginal, poor community, but this case is an exception.

Other than that, the physical condition of the river mouth provide source of living to the fishers of Kampung Mengkabong. The fishing resources in the water of the river mouth are plenty, and they have been using traditional methods to fish for a very long time. The catches fulfill the local need and there is no sign of fishing source extinction. There is no commercialized fishing industry in the river mouth area, which might use modern equipments that procure a large amount of catch in
a short period. Therefore, it can be said that the fishing resources there are managed in a sustainable way. The development in the dry land and in the hinterland is controlled and not drastic, so the threat of pollution is not severe.

Bajau women who play the role as fishers and fishmongers do successfully increase the living standard of the fisher family of Kampung Mengkabong. Although the economic development can be considered as successful, yet it does not balance with social development, particularly educational development. As stated above, majority of the Bajau women did not go to school, and even if they do, the highest education standard among them is only passing the Lower Secondary Assessment. Similar trend happens among their children. Although all of their children go to school, yet many stop at lower education level. They do not put much hope on their children’s education level, saying that even those who pass the Malaysian Certificate of Education are either unemployed or continuing their job as fishers. It is clear that the development of new generation fisher community should be given attention as much as economical development.

The fisher community is often portrayed as poor because of their lifestyle and their unorganized surrounding. This is because they live on the water, as they do not own any land. Giving them lands is not the right choice, as the land near the sea is not suitable for agricultural purpose, save the sandy area where coconut trees can be cultivated. To move the community to dry land far from the sea is more of a burden than a help. The only thing it might do is to change their image from a maritime community to an agrarian one.

A fisher needs to live close to the sea, river or above water surface which enables the Bajau to be connected to the sea. Therefore, it is time to think out of the box, where a way should be conceived and conducted, that provides the fishing community grants that acknowledges their ownership of the area of the water. This acknowledgement gives them a guarantee to do something permanent, like building better houses, private landing jetty, permanent fish cage, recreational place, grocery, seafood restaurant and other amenities. With this permanent acknowledgement, it is certain that the image of the fisher community as unorganised, poor, dirty will change to something more pleasant. That is why, from then, the names of fishing villages changed their names from “Kampung Atap” (Roof Village), “Kampung Sungai Sembilanbg” (Sembilang River Village), “Kampung Sungai Ular” (Snake River Village) to “Kampung Nelayan Maju” (Progressive Fishing Village), “Kampung Nelayan Jaya” (Victorious Fishing Village) and “Kampung Nelayan Bahagia” (Happy Fishing Village).
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1. A footnote here to explain this LSA and MCE to non-Malaysian readers…

2. A kereta sapu is a vehicle that functions as an unlicensed taxi. The fee is cheaper than taxi and the passenger can go to any desired destination.

3. Coffee money in Malaysia usually refers to bribery, however here the meaning is literal, i.e. the money spent for food and beverage in a coffee house.

4. Mohammad Azzam Manam, “Penglibatan Buruh Perikanan Asing Dalam Perusahaan Perikanan PukatTunda dan Pukat Jerut di Sabah” (The Involvement of Foreign Fishery Workers in the Fishing Industry of Pukat Tunda and Pukat Jerut, Sabad), undergraduate thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Art & Social Science, University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2005.


Involvement of Thai Fishery Workers in Fishing Sector in the Peninsular Malaysia: A Case Study of Tok Bali, Kelantan), undergraduate thesis, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, Faculty of Art & Social Science, University Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, 2007.

7. A footnote on tauke system is recommended