

THE KANITA PROJECT, MALAYSIA: WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, comprising the Malayan Peninsular, Sabah and Sarawak, is possibly one of the most rapidly developing nations in South East Asia. It has a highly stable economy which is mainly dependent on export earnings from oil, tin, rubber, palm oil and a variety of other agricultural produce. With a population of twelve million, Malaysian society is multi-ethnic and comprises three main ethnic groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians, which constitute 53 per cent, 35 per cent and 10 per cent respectively of the total population. The remaining 2 per cent consists of Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, Eurasians, Europeans, and aborigines or *Orang Asli*. The multi-ethnic composition of Malaysian society reflects socio-economic differences, in terms of occupation and income, with the Malays being mainly agriculturalists living in the rural areas of Peninsular Malaysia, the Chinese concentrating on processing and retailing businesses and industries in the urban areas and the Indians providing the main source of labour in the estates and plantations which sprawl between Malaysian villages and the towns and cities.

In Peninsular Malaysia, although the average monthly income per household was M\$ 546 in 1976, radical differences exist between the average monthly incomes of the rural and the urban population, that of urban areas being M\$ 417. In 1979, with the poverty line being set at M\$ 282 on a monthly average, it was found that 54.6 per cent of the rural population lived below the poverty line.* In these economically depressed areas, Malay Muslims continue to maintain traditional economic activities centred around the cultivation of rice, rubber smallholdings, fruit cultivation, and poultry breeding. An inadequate infrastructure in terms of road accessibility, public and private transportation, and telecommunication systems has reduced the possibilities and opportunities for wider marketing and distribution of agricultural commodities. Similarly, such under-served areas are generally without potable water or electricity, posing an added encumbrance to domestic activities and chores. Inaccessibility and inadequate water supply contribute to the ineffectiveness of public health services which are rather poorly implemented and maintained under such physical conditions. Schools and educational facilities are relatively inferior to those in less physically remote areas and urban centres. Physical distance and dependence on public transport which is usually irregular causes a high rate of absenteeism from schools. Absenteeism and a high drop-out rate are also related to the problem of child labour; children between the ages of ten to fifteen are called upon to help their parents in the rice fields during transplanting and harvesting,

* These figures are obtained from the Mid-Term Review of the Third Malaysia Plan, Malaysian Government Printers, Kuala Lumpur, 1979, p.46. The poverty line as set by the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department has shifted from M\$ 200 (average monthly earnings) in 1970, to M\$ 282 in 1979. In 1970, 65 per cent of Malay households in Peninsular Malaysia lived below the poverty line, compared to 26 per cent and 39 per cent of Chinese and Indian households respectively.

or to provide an additional source of income for the household by working as wage labourers in neighbouring plantations or farms.

In Peninsular Malaysia, the roles played by women of the various ethnic communities are influenced by different social values and customs, but essentially, the marginal status of women in society is an accepted norm. Culturally Malaysians belong to a patriarchal society. The majority of the women are under-educated or illiterate and in most instances are not even aware of their own rights and privileges.

In rural Malaysian society the problems of children, in terms of health, nutrition, education and psychological development, usually stem from the low nutritional and educational status of their mothers. Together, the mother and the child represent the most vulnerable physical and social unit in the family. Although the health of women and children has improved tremendously during the last decade, the health of rural women is still not satisfactory. Anaemia, malnutrition and other diseases are still widespread and pregnancy and childbearing are still hazardous to health. The maternal death rate is still very high in some areas, as is the foetal wastage rate through miscarriages and still births. In 1975 the maternal death rate for Peninsular Malaysia was 26 per cent per 1,000 live births. Out of the total number 85 per cent occurred amongst the Malays, the majority of whom reside in rural areas.

So long as the woman's health is poor, she is unable to perform her basic functions as wife, mother and homemaker, and she will also be unable to participate effectively in, and enjoy the benefits of, development. Greater efforts are necessary in the provision not only of basic health infrastructure but also of services, in health and nutrition, education and motivation and family planning.

Among the youth, the high drop-out rate in schools is often attributed to poverty and low achievement motivation; it aggravates youth unemployment and underemployment. More often than not, young people are even excluded from certain types of vocational and technical training requiring minimal literacy. Training facilities for girls from rural areas are particularly limited and unsatisfactory, accelerating the rural-urban drift which has resulted in young girls being employed in factories that do not provide technical training or the development of a skill that guarantees long-term productivity and employment.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

Academic institutions in Malaysia have not devoted much research to women and children's studies, nor have they devised programmes that may directly or indirectly improve the living conditions of women and children. It is in response to this problem that the Kanita Project, whose name is derived from the Malay words for children (*kanak-kanak*) and women (*wanita*) was initiated in June 1978, following discussions with UNICEF and the Dean of the School of Social Sciences, University Sains Malaysia, Penang. Between June 1978 and January 1979, the Kanita research team held a series of discussions to formulate a feasible research programme. It was decided that the group would focus its research on the most economically depressed Malay communities in the State of Kedah, in Peninsular Malaysia. Furthermore, it was felt that the programme should employ a much more action-oriented approach, whereby women could be encouraged and motivated to express their problems and needs and formulate plans of action using their own initiative skills and, as far as possible, local community resources. In this way, women could participate directly in village level decisions and be active agents of change.

The Kanita team also realised the importance of working within the existing constraints of the Malay social structure. More specifically, it was necessary to recognise the limitations of working with a group of women who continue to be bound by certain traditional social institutions, that may seem incompatible with action-oriented research. These are:

1. the maintenance of an ego-centred kinship network with a strong patriarchal bias;
2. the prevalence of Malay social norms in a society where women enjoy a high status in the domestic sphere and a relatively marginal status in the political and economic spheres;
3. the political structure of Malay villages in which men dominate the decision-making processes through both ascribed and achieved roles;
4. the perpetuation of cultural beliefs, taboos and superstitions that limit the responses of women and men to modernity and change;
5. the entrenched custom of women working in the traditional time-consuming or labour-consuming economic activities, particularly in rice and rubber cultivation.

Given these existing constraints, it was realistic to assume that while women and children would be the focal point of Kanita's research activities, it was crucial to work closely with the men - formal and informal village leaders, ritual specialists, and officials within the existing government machinery on the local, state and federal level. Simultaneously, it was imperative that the research team also understood the functions of *ad hoc* communal and informal groups and networks, communication flow patterns, kinds and levels of conceptualisation of information and ideas and symbols of change.

Objectives

The objectives of the Kanita programme of social research are:

1. to identify the problems and needs of women, children and youth in Peninsular Malaysia, with particular emphasis on rural areas which are economically depressed;
2. to work with the village population and the government through community service programmes for the purpose of developing the skills and resources of villagers so that women and children can directly or indirectly benefit from these programmes;
3. to attempt to develop self-reliance and initiative in women, within the existing constraints of the social system of rural Malay society;
4. to assist in the development of the theory and methodology of community service programmes, by recognising and analysing contextual, situational and cultural problems that arise in the formulation and implementation of these programmes and by using suitable social indicators for evaluation;
5. to bridge the gap between academia and development by training academics and students in applied social research, and by integrating research on women, youth and children into the teaching curriculum of the university.

Research Components of the Programme

Three research components were developed in February 1979 to initiate a series of research activities in different areas in Kedah.

Participatory Research

This focuses its activities in the District of Kubang Pasu. A full time researcher and a developmentalist (who lives in the village for considerable periods of time) employ participant observational techniques and schedules to gather data, establish rapport and gain acceptance from the villagers. The objective is to help the villagers establish plans of action to overcome physical and socio-economic problems which impede the physical and social development of women and children.

Study Service

This involves students in a "live and learn" community programme in the District of Padang Terap. Generally, students are trained by members of the Kanita research team to gain acceptance from the villagers by participating in village level activities and integrating with the community as a whole. Each student is fostered into a family and maintains a relationship with the same family over a period of two years. Gradually, the student acquires an understanding of the problems of the villagers and, with the help of the Kanita team and a field assistant, formulates programmes that can help elevate the living conditions of women and children.

Evaluative Research

Administered by a team comprising a sociologist, an anthropologist and a research assistant, evaluative research attempts to assess the effectiveness of the participatory research and study service programmes in Kanita through:

- providing a continuous evaluation procedure with the purpose of improving the research design or methodology of participatory research and study service;
- using an evaluation procedure in the form of an evaluative survey, conducted before and after the programmes to test the reliability and validity of some social indicators used, such as participation, leadership, and referential groups;
- comparing the community service approaches in participatory research and study service with other governmental community service programmes, particularly the Family Development, Applied Nutrition and Primary Health Care Programmes in Malaysia. An in-depth study of these community service programmes is also undertaken in the District of Yan, through schedules, depth interviews and participant observational techniques.

Between 1979 and 1981 the Kanita Research Programme received the attention and interest of local academics, social administrators, government officials and several foreign researchers. Various seminars, workshops and discussion groups were held to discuss the progress of the project and to evaluate the results and findings of the various research components within the Kanita programme. Members of the Kanita team also attended several seminars and workshops, both local and international, to keep up with current research programmes on women and children as well as to develop a better understanding of Kanita's own research problems, in relation to other comparative research in the field of women and children. The support Kanita has received from UNICEF, several local government agencies, and universities has finally resulted in the formal integration of the Kanita Research Programme with the existing government programmes on women and children. More specifically, Kanita is since 1982 considered as a programme within the National Advisory

Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID). This Council is based in the Prime Minister's Department, at Kuala Lumpur, and is represented by local academics, government administrators and prominent voluntary social workers. Specifically, the objectives of the Council are as follows:

1. to serve as a coordinating, consultative and advisory body to the Government and between the Government and non-governmental women's organisations;
2. to arouse national consciousness amongst women on their role and responsibilities towards nation-building;
3. to ensure the full integration of women in national development;
4. to enable women to develop their potential capabilities to the maximum;
5. to arouse the awareness of women on their rights;
6. to contribute towards the promotion of international peace.

It can be seen that the broader objectives laid out in NACIWID are compatible with Kanita's more specific objectives in applied social research. With the integration of Kanita into NACIWID, it is possible that the local universities may be able to play a more positive and effective role in assisting towards the development of social policies and programmes on women, youth and children in Malaysia. In this way, research activities on a regional or state level may be more easily channelled into the wider national network of activities and programmes on women, youth and children.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Organisational Structure

The project is administered by a Convenor who is a full-time member of the academic staff of the School of Social Sciences and is responsible to the Dean of the School. The Convenor's main function is to coordinate all the activities relating to the programme, including the development, planning and evaluation of research activities within each component. The Convenor is also responsible for correspondence and communication with local and international agencies as well as organising other related activities such as seminars, workshops, meetings, the hiring of consultants and liaising with government agencies, women's organisations and voluntary associations. Other members of the academic staff in Sociology, Anthropology and Development Studies work closely with the Convenor as principal investigators in programming the project and delegating duties to the project assistant, researcher, field work assistant, research assistants and students. Each principal investigator is ultimately responsible for organising the different research components of the programme, i.e. study service, participatory research and evaluative research (see Chart I). However, they jointly participate in the evaluation of the programme. Principal investigators play a primary role in establishing rapport with members of the community and government agencies and in obtaining their cooperation and goodwill.

Principal investigators in the study service programme assist in the organisation and administration of all student activities and are responsible

for training students in techniques of community work and community service and for organising seminars and workshops, once students develop field experience in community service and community work. In participatory research the principal investigators involved work closely with a full-time researcher in the field, though both undertake action-oriented research aimed at creating in the villagers an awareness of their problems. The principal investigators in evaluative research plan the research design to evaluate the Kanita programme. Here a survey type of research is undertaken with the help of research assistants who are involved in the design, translation and completion of the questionnaire in the field; this includes in-depth interviews with government sponsors.

In addition to the principal investigators, the Kanita research group also comprises several research affiliates who are full-time members of the academic staff of the School of Social Sciences but contribute on an *ad hoc* basis. They may assist in supervising students in the field and contribute papers for Kanita's workshop or the Kanita journal called *Kanita Papers*, but their contributions are entirely on a voluntary basis. Foreign researchers or exchange students (from other universities) may be affiliated to the research group, if they are directly involved in an aspect of research that deals with women, youth and children.

The technical administrative tasks of the research group are generally undertaken by the project assistant, who is mainly responsible for supervising the clerk/personal assistant and the driver, the maintenance and upkeep of the resource centre, the office, the project rooms, and the log book for field transport. The project assistant is also responsible for the collection of secondary data for Kanita's resource centre and the compilation and indexing of the bibliography for the resource centre. Finally, the project assistant is ultimately responsible for coordinating the quarterly progress reports and budgets submitted by the different research components within Kanita.

Researchers and research assistants work with their respective principal investigators in establishing contact and rapport with members of the community, government officials and voluntary bodies. Although the major part of their time is spent in the field, they are also responsible for the collection of secondary data, the compilation of progress and project reports and for undertaking other relevant duties. When a research assistant works with students, he/she is also concerned with the on-the-spot training of students in community service and community work.

From time to time, principal investigators or affiliates may undertake academic research in the field of women, children or youth for the preparation of papers or as partial fulfilment for a Master's or Doctorate programme. Principal investigators and affiliates who do so make their reports and findings available to the Kanita research group and the material is stored in Kanita's resource centre and made available to interested academics and students within the School of Social Sciences and the university.

Meetings are held as often as possible to ensure the smooth implementation of current and future activities. The Dean, other interested academic and administrative staff members of the university, and relevant government officials are invited to these meetings. In this way, a kind of monitoring control system is developed, when the project's activities are discussed and reviewed, in the light of the project's goals and university and government policies.

Latihan Amali Student Training Programme

Perhaps a significant change in the organisation of the Kanita programme is that the study service component is now subsumed under the newly proposed compulsory *Latihan Amali* Programme (Student Training Scheme) organised for all Social Science students within the School, whereby students are accredited with eight units when they submit a graduate exercise (*Latihan Ilmiah*) at the end of the fourth or final year in the university. Kanita will, however, assist students who wish to fulfil their *Latihan Amali* requirements by doing a study service or community service kind of programme. The study service principal investigator in Kanita will provide supervisors for these students with Kanita's training materials for study service, as well as holding lectures, seminars or workshops. Students reports provide Kanita's resource centre with guides for developing suitable field work methodology and techniques in community work. Kanita also assists the university in administering its Study Service Voluntary Corps (*Bersama Desa*) in the selection and training of students for the programme.

Study Service Programme

Kanita's study service attempts to provide university students with opportunities to apply the theoretical content of education which they have learnt in the classroom to the practical and material problems of community development at the local level. It also strives to create an awareness amongst the student community of the needs for civic consciousness and voluntary service which will enable them to take up responsibilities as citizens of the nation. In this way, students would be able to contribute meaningfully to national development and academic research by undertaking constructive action-research oriented projects in the context of the needs of the population through the mobilisation of local resources, manpower and a spirit of self-reliance.

IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

It appears that the Kanita Project has had the effect of developing greater awareness and concern for the needs and problems of women, children and youth in rural areas. This is seen in the response of students, researchers and government officials, in planning project activities that would reach this sector of the community more effectively. It is also manifested in the way in which local government officials have devised new techniques of communication that would enable women and youth to understand and conceptualise government programmes and project implementation procedures in a better way.

A preliminary evaluation of the study service programme was undertaken in 1981, based on the first group of students who participated in the scheme in 1979-80. Radical changes were seen in the students' intellectual and mental development. Firstly, the students appear to have been shaken from their tranquil, innocent existence to a world of painful reality. The poverty they experienced gradually sharpened their knowledge and understanding of the ecological, social, economic and political circumstances of Malaysian farmers in North Kedah. Secondly, they developed a keen objective perceptiveness towards ideas of social justice and equality. Study service students were keen to develop programmes and strategies that could restore and improve the spirit and optimism of the villagers, leading them to think about problems collectively rather than individually, so that a stronger leadership base could develop and spur the villagers towards self-reliance and cooperation. Thirdly, the villagers themselves became more aware of their problems through discussion and dialogue with the students, and were more encouraged to express what they felt to be some of the more serious problems they faced. A few schemes suggested by the students to solve some of these problems, such as collective savings for school expenses using the traditional saving system of *kud* (or *kutu*), family development guidance for women, and the organisation

of school transportation, proved to be immensely successful. The students' foster parents were also encouraged to visit the university and it was apparent that they were impressed and inspired by the achievements of the students. They expressed the need to motivate and encourage their own children to aspire to higher education. It was obvious that the direct exposure and involvement of villagers in the university's activities helped to reduce their ignorance of the outside world and gave them a better understanding of the achievements of others through formal and informal education. Fourthly, the development of mutual concern and empathy between villagers and students inculcated a sense of permanent cooperation between them. Students, in particular, appeared to be constantly concerned with the problems of their foster parents and the villagers and paid them unofficial and social visits whenever they could.

Finally, and most important, students needed to be developed mentally and socially before their full potential could be discovered. They had to be exposed directly to situations of poverty and be more intensively involved with the problems of people whom they cared for, before they could develop a sense of dedication and commitment to the problems of the poor. The value of the study service programme was revealed in the opportunity it provided for this important learning experience. It facilitated the development of leadership qualities which would enable students to undertake administrative, research or field-based careers with greater confidence and understanding. Though students may have had to spend time gathering data for their various research reports, while providing community service to the villagers, the experience itself developed in them a new social conscience and a new, strong sense of social ethics and morality.

Participating Research Programme

Kanita's Participatory Research Programme focuses on the problems of certain communities in the State of Kedah, with particular emphasis on the identification and solving of problems related to the roles and status of women and children in a rural Malay environment. A researcher spends much of his/her time in the village in which the research is being carried out, backed by a principal investigator and the rest of the Kanita team based at the university. He/she collects data, supports the initiation and implementation of projects, and attempts to contribute to the development of a more aware, dynamic and self-regulating community. The concept of participatory research challenges the idea of "research" as being something monopolised and framed by academics and professionals, and instead underlines the necessity for the local community to be involved fully at all levels and at all stages of the research.

The emphasis is on the provision of opportunities for villagers to articulate their problems, particularly concerning women and children and their physical and social development, and to initiate processes by which they can be solved. The researcher is therefore part anthropologist and part community worker. Through an understanding of the community in which he/she is based comes a facility to encourage and mediate in formulating most appropriate plans of action and developing projects most beneficial for the community. It must be emphasised again that the researcher does not conceptualise the problem or direct solutions independently: this is done in a group, in the village, with the local people. It is on them that the organisation of any project will fall; it is on them that the identification of problems properly rests. The researcher will if necessary mediate between them and relevant government agencies until the two can successfully communicate independently; he/she will also be responsible for the provision of information about resources and alternatives so that decisions made are in the best possible manner. Ideally, he/she strikes a balance between voicing

information and pointing out possibilities. It is a process of enabling rather than leading; it is not the aim to make the villagers in any way dependent on the researcher. On the contrary, through assisting villagers in community programmes aimed at solving such problems as water shortages, low educational and health provision, and low land productivity, villagers may be able to develop enough leadership and internal dynamics to become self managing in the future.

To date, the Kanita team has experienced and experimented with different facets of participatory research, and gained considerable insight into the development process and the situation of rural communities. It would appear that participatory research has potential in Peninsular Malaysia not so much in terms of creating or accelerating radical changes in the existing socio-political structure, as of providing a congenial psychological base for the right kind of local-level leadership qualities to emerge. The research process has been shown to have a catalytic effect on leadership development which may have positive consequences in enabling village problems to be resolved more swiftly and effectively. The presence of the researcher and his/her continuous involvement in the problems of the villages suggested that a village leader should have similar priorities. In a situation when the village leader was too involved in personal or political activities outside the interests of the community, the limitations of this type of leadership were gradually made obvious to the villagers. This engendered a new kind of awareness amongst the members of the village - a more critical, aggressive and competitive spirit in which mediocre leadership based on self-interest will be unable to command a hold over the villagers for long.

However, the limitations of the participatory research method have been discerned in the context of Malay rural society. The existing political structure encourages the perpetuation of a formal leadership system which is greatly dependent on the bureaucracy for assistance, guidance or information about new, more innovative development strategies. With grass-roots leaders being nominated by the bureaucracy and being given ascribed statuses that guarantee long-term accessibility to government benefits and services, it is likely that complacency and self-interest may be more frequently manifested than dedicated leadership based on community interests. The ideal strategy would be to change the system of leadership, by decentralising the powers of the District Office and transferring the responsibility to the people. If this is done, there would possibly be no need to introduce participatory research in rural areas in Malaysia and a system of checks and controls would naturally emerge in rural Malay leadership. Furthermore, a political party system which encourages both alienation and over-participation in development (depending on which party one supports) among groups of villagers reduces the villagers' ability to conceptualise and perceive problems on a regional basis or to view them in terms of more fundamental social issues. If the participatory research method is able to overcome such structural differences in Malay rural society, so that problems can be viewed in terms of broader, ecological, regional and social issues, rather than in terms of political values and spontaneous and situational decisions and ideas, the methodology would have a bigger impact on applied social research in Malaysia.

Furthermore, in uplifting the status and power of rural Malay Muslim women, participatory research has been able to provide new channels of social communication between women and men and between women and local government officials. Village women appeared to show greater confidence in expressing their needs and problems and devising plans to overcome them. But it was observed that, in determining changes, the task of transferring some of these opportunities to women necessitates a change of traditional social values relating to the status and power of women.

Married women, in particular, have a definite handicap when compared to unmarried women, since their domestic activities expand radically after their marriage. The status of an unmarried daughter in a Malay household is very different from that of a newly married woman, who is expected to play a more active productive role economically. The kind of labour provided by Malay women in rice cultivation, tobacco cultivation and rubber smallholdings, for example, leaves very little time and energy for communal, social and political activities. The problem here is not so much that men do not contribute towards economic labour, but that their economic productivity is mainly in specific labour-intensive and non-domestic tasks, such as ploughing, planting, rubber-tapping, building and construction. Women in rice areas are generally engaged in time-consuming and labour-extensive tasks such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing, but they also participate in tapping, poultry rearing, and the watering of plants in garden plots and fields. Over and above these tasks, women also manage other major time-consuming domestic activities relating to the fetching and carrying of water and firewood, cooking, cleaning, washing and child care. Men often lend a hand in some of these activities, particularly in the nursing and caring of infants, but the ultimate responsibility to see these tasks through is left to the females of the household. This implies that communal political decisions are normally left to men, particularly male elders.

Thus, not only does the formal political system encourage greater political participation by men than by women, but the traditional social system also skilfully excludes women from political participation, even if they were motivated to contribute. It frequently happens that women who actively participate in communal decision-making have husbands who are politically active or do not need to spend much time in economic and domestic pursuits, being relatively wealthy or having enough grown-up children to take over some of their tasks. This leads one to understand that rural elites and rural elders, particularly men, monopolise local-level politics, channels of communication with the government bureaucracy, and means for gathering authority and influence through effective leadership. Such social differentiation of roles between women and men makes the task of creating and developing innovative qualities amongst rural Malay women a very problematic one. Women's potential as community leaders may only be realised if the existing social hierarchical structure changes, giving women more time and opportunity for decision-making on the political level.

Again here, participatory research could have the effect of creating positive responses in women towards developing their potential in village-level leadership, but it is important that their traditional role patterns also undergo a radical change; otherwise they will be made to bear an added social and political responsibility. In this respect, Kanita's participatory research programme continues to strive towards the development of a stronger female economic base in the context of planning and implementing economic activities. This would enable women to acquire greater technical knowledge and skills in matters that affect their economic productivity and earning capacity, a situation which guarantees them a greater amount of economic independence and influence. This could elevate their social status in their society, which could enable them to select a wider range of alternatives and priorities in their lives. Only then would it be possible for women to develop a motivation and interest in wider social issues beyond the sphere of domesticity. Thus, the participatory research processes could create both a viable psychological base to trigger off new concepts and ideas in social relationships, and generate enough awareness to affect the structure of society. Local level responses should be energised into long-term strategies affecting social, economic and political policies.

As an external evaluation procedure, on-going evaluation is also carried out on the reaction of the female village population to Kanita's research programme and government community development programmes through informal discussions and observations. At regular intervals, visits are made to the project areas to gauge how change agents and people interact and with what effect. Two programmes have been selected for a more intensive assessment: the Family Development Programme and the Rural Health Programmes. Classes which are aimed at home improvements, learning of handicrafts, and education of pre-school children are evaluated in terms of degree of participation, social background of participants, and their motivation and opinions. In a similar vein, the attitudes towards health services, traditional medical practices, and nutrition programmes are being scrutinised among villagers. Administrators, teachers, health care personnel, and development workers are interviewed in order to assess how they view the programmes which they direct, and in particular how they themselves evaluate the effecting of changes to be brought about. Focus is placed on the features of organisation and the commitment of change agents. Questionnaires of a more formal character are used for this aspect.

In addition to these, week-long visits are made to the selected villages, whereby, through a sharing of community activities, impressions are gathered about the feedback of government-implanted changes. Ideas are formulated with respect to the structural constraints impinging on planned action, the image of government bureaucracies, and the quality of participation. Through the various study methods, ranging from fixed questions to participant observation, an evaluative picture is constructed which may help to understand the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to assist women within their own conceptualisation of desired social change.

This external evaluative procedure has also elucidated similar problems in the villagers', particularly the women's, understanding of community development. It is apparent that formal government development procedures aimed at rural communities overlook real needs of villagers, particularly of women, in terms of the kind of technical or vocational training required and non-formal educational facilities and services.

Thus, community needs projected by the Government through Community Development Programmes do not necessarily reflect needs of villagers, particularly women and youth, and are not necessarily crystallised in the village though the need is apparent. In addition, they do not necessarily succeed in "community building" or "development", i.e. creation of a self-reliant, cooperative society responsive to local, regional or national needs and goals.

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

As explained earlier, the internal evaluation procedure in Kanita is undertaken by the use of specific social indicators that are considered to be appropriate for rural Malaysian women and youth. In both the structured evaluative survey and informal depth interview methods, the evaluative team placed emphasis on *form of participation* (more specifically, form of local involvement in projects) and *leadership development* as the most significant indicators to show the effectiveness of the community service methodology used.

The initial results of the evaluative exercise demonstrate that conventional government community projects are less able to tap locally felt needs than community service "action-oriented" programmes like study service and participatory research. Community action programmes also achieve better

success in developing and creating awareness, interest and motivation in formulation of effective plans of action to overcome immediate physical and social problems.

In study service, for example, villagers have actually begun to learn new techniques and ideas in development, methods of group or community organisation and re-organisation, and implementation procedures that can effectively bring about socio-economic changes in a constructive way. They have also begun to discover limitations in existing venues of communications and knowledge and to undertake steps to remedy the existing weakness in the communication and information systems among members of the community and between the villagers and the Government. Furthermore, the instilling and creation of interest and motivation in children, who are inspired by the interest of others in their own intellectual and psychological development, is an additional catalyst to informal learning and socialisation.

Participatory research has had the effect of diverting women's pre-occupations away from domesticity and religious activities towards issues that are related to their economic and social advancement, through improving formal and non-formal educational activities and informal technology training. The psychological effects of in-depth and intensive learning and understanding of problems have a significant catalytic effect on leadership development, particularly charismatic leadership and participation in community affairs, which would have long-term beneficial effects on the people if the researcher's leadership is subtly underplayed and transferred to relevant local personnel; this appears to have been done in Kanita. The research process has also provided a move towards self-reliance whereby villagers work out their own priorities among problems and resolve them according to their own time schedules and constraints. Finally, because of the interest in and sensitivity towards village problems of outsiders (researchers), women and youth have been able to develop greater confidence and self-esteem in seeking and developing their full potential in local economic and political activities.

However, it is apparent that community action programmes like those implemented by Kanita are subject to several constraints, mainly of a social, administrative and political nature. Much of this has to do with the actual status of academic institutions in implementing applied social research that has consequences for policy direction and change.

CONSTRAINTS OF THE PROJECT

Generally, the limited numbers of skilled research personnel, administrative and financial constraints by the funding agency, and the university's conservative policy towards integrating applied research into the formal teaching curriculum have prevented the research team from expanding its activities in a wider direction. Furthermore, it is obvious that the micro-procedures of both study service and participatory research have not the same far-reaching effects as Government Community Development Programmes (in terms of target population and area coverage) unless the methodologies are formalised into programmes in both the university and government agencies. Stability and continuity are not granted unless universities and the Government realise the potential of college and university students, academics and applied social researchers as effective agents of change. Kanita's status as a research programme within NACIWID may help to overcome some of the problems mentioned above, though it may be necessary to continue to maintain neutrality and autonomy in its organisational structure and implementation. Thus, if political considerations are given priority in resolving the problem of the poor, the overall philosophy and objectives of the programme may not be realised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is obvious that a programme like Kanita's has tremendous value in contributing further knowledge and experience in the field of research on women, children and youth. It would, however, be important to expand upon the existing areas of research, to include neighbouring states like Penang, Province Wellesley and Perak, to ensure that the data and findings have a greater comparative base in Malaysia. It may also be necessary to have a bigger input, in academic research on women, youth and children, in areas which have been under-researched, particularly in relation to problems of female land ownership, land alienation affecting women and youth, work behaviour and working patterns of women, the notion of work productivity in men and women, and the development of female leadership; these areas of research have hardly been attempted in any significant degree in Peninsular Malaysia and would significantly facilitate programmes like Kanita that focus on non-formal education.

Finally, the integration of research programmes on women should be given consideration, whether they be administered from universities or government agencies, to enable researchers to exchange ideas and learn more about appropriate methodologies and techniques of research in the field of women. NACIWID, as a national integrating and advisory body, may well serve this function, and it is possible that Kanita may play a more positive role in drawing research groups together for this purpose. It is only in this way that non-formal educational techniques can be suitably developed and formulated into effective community action programmes that serve to benefit women, children and youth in Malaysian society.

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CHART 1

ORGANISATIONAL CHART

