

Participation of Women in Side-Income: A case study of Iban Women as a Bread-earner in the Family in Sarawak

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Abstract

Nowadays, women also play a role as bread-earners in the family, whether as workforce or part-time workers, due to the increase in living costs. Doing side-income activities among working women and full-time housewives is one of the common ways to earn additional income for the family. Iban ethnic women in Sarawak perform several activities as daily life activities and for additional earnings. This study investigates side-income activities among Iban women in Sarawak. The study will be conducted using survey methods among Iban women participating in side-income activities using simple random sampling, and a total of 325 Iban women participated in the survey. The study's findings show three main side-income activities, i.e., farming, handicraft making, and business. However, respondents need help conducting side-income activities, such as a lack of knowledge and skills in certain fields, problems in marketing and promotional, and financial constraints. Based on the identified problems, three suggestions have been recorded by a high percentage of respondents, i.e., marketing, and promotional assistance, providing business and entrepreneurship courses, and providing financial assistance. Thus, such assistance and pieces of training could support their side-income activities. The side-income earners among Iban women benefit the family, develop Iban society, and encourage Iban women's development and empowerment in Sarawak.

Keywords: Iban Ethnic, Bread-Earner, Family Income, Social Development

Introduction

Women's contribution to socio-economic development, families, and society is undeniable. Women's role changes over time. In the modern economy, due to modern life and rising living

costs, dual-income families are growing, and women are transitioning to economic activities as workforce and part-timers. The position of women in the family and society at large has shifted due to rising in women's education, employment, and earnings (Smith, 2015). Women's roles are not limited to traditional roles; they play crucial roles as bread-earner to contribute to family income, whether married, single, or even single mothers. Besides, if their husband is away due to job responsibility and social prestige, housewives become family heads (Kelly, 2013). Thus, the multi-roles of women nowadays are undeniable, and they become a bread-earner instead of traditional status as wives and family heads.

As the country progresses, the government encourages women to participate actively in the economy, which has been emphasized since the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000). Among the action plans are integrating women in development, raising public awareness and sensitivity towards issues related to women, encouraging positive action for the advancement of women in various fields and promoting the role of women in family development (Aini et al., 2020). This continued with the National Vision Policy (NVP) (2001 – 2010) under the subsequent Malaysia Plans to lessen the gaps between men and women regarding social and economic status. Among the strategies for the advancement of women are increasing their participation in the labour market, providing more education and training opportunities for women to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy and improve their upward mobility in the labour market, enhancing their involvement in business, and reducing the incidence of poverty among female-headed households (Aini et al., 2020).

Instead of being hired as workforces in the formal sector, women who become bread-earner are also involved in side-income activities in the informal sector. The informal sector is flexible, which fits well with the "demand of multiple roles" such as managing households and making a living. The informal sector does not require high education and skills (Ida and Nurliani, 2016). In fact, as the informal economy is a global and pervasive phenomenon, about 60% of the world's population participates in the informal sector, especially in emerging and developing economies, as it is also an important part of advanced economies (International Monetary Fund, 2021). In Malaysia, 9.4% of all females employed in Malaysia worked in the informal sector (Statista, 2021). According to Department Statistics Report, Malaysia (2020), most informal employment in the informal sector have the education level of Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and below, followed by those with a degree and no certificate in 2017. However, the percentage share of informal employment among degree holders in the informal sector increased from 2.8% in 2015 to 8.6% in 2017. Meanwhile, more than 40% of the activity in the informal sector operated at home, one-third with no fixed location (mobile) and 18.1% at market or street stalls. This indicates that there is an increasing number of educated women who are involved in the informal sector during this period.

Increasing the participation of women in economic activities could increase their status, which means they are empowered as a result of that (Roy et al., 2017). They pointed out that for women, economic empowerment is the basis for overall empowerment for them. Today, we can no longer confine women to the traditional roles that limited their access and control over household resources and limited their skills, as this has led to women being vulnerable in the past (Sebstad and Cohen, 2000). As we progress economically, we need to empower women to play active roles in building the nation, and this has inevitably resulted in more women playing multiple roles in our society today.

Iban Women and Side-Income Activities

The Iban community represents 50% of Sarawak's total population and is also known as "Sea

Dayaks" ethnic. A sizeable number of Iban communities (30,000 to 40,000) could also be found in Peninsular Malaysia (especially Johor state and Kuala Lumpur (Nation's Capital)) due to bejalai culture (sojourn). Like other women, Iban women perform several activities as daily life activities and earn extra income, such as farming, handicraft making, traditional and modern food processing, sewing, and making traditional costumes. Environmental factors influence side-income activities among Iban women. For instance, Iban women in rural areas or longhouses are involved in traditional activities such as farming, fishing, handicraft making, tailoring, and food processing. However, some traditional activities may discontinue when Iban women move to urban or town areas, such as farming, as they need land space. Iban women in urban areas are involved in traditional and modern economic activities such as handicraft making, home-baker, catering, tailoring, and online business. They may continue traditional handicraft-making activities, but they may differ regarding raw materials used and design. For example, rattan mats and bamboo baskets could produce by using plastic packaging strips (PPS) as the main raw materials due to the lack of rattan and bamboo supply in the urban areas.

Problem Statement

The statistic shows that approximately 80% of households in Sarawak could be categorized as low-income and middle-income families, and the average income recipient was 1.7 recipients. According to Household Income and Basic Amenities Survey Report 2019 Sarawak (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2020), the total number of households in Sarawak was 625, 400 and 40% of the household were categorized into B40¹ and M40² income groups respectively, while about 20% of the total households categorized as T20³ income group. Besides, there is more than half (53.3%) of household income is contributed by a single recipient, while 31.5%, 10.2%, and 4.8% of the household income contributed by two recipients, three recipients, and more than four recipients, respectively. As living costs increase, households need at least two income earners, usually a wife who will either be a full-time worker or a part-timer, to support family expenditures. The statistic shows that the Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased by 3.4% from 123.2 (2021) to 127.4 (2022) due to the increase in food and fuel prices (Pocket Stats, 2022). Earnings side-income is not only by a wife or mother but also contributed by their children. It is a common phenomenon where family members contribute to family income instead of the husband or father.

The involvement of women, either single or married, in side-income activities will contribute to family income and as well as able to improve the economic family. Instead of income earnings, other factors could encourage participation in side-income activities, such as having related knowledge and skills in particular activities and as a hobby. Besides, environmental factors such as consumer or societal demand will create business opportunities for women. For example, due to the enforcement of wearing a face mask during the pandemic Covid 19, creating mask extenders has created income-earning opportunities for women with handicraft-making and sewing skills.

The study about the involvement of Iban women in side-income activities is useful for Sarawak state or even Malaysia as the Iban community represents 45% (the largest) of Sarawak's total

¹ Household income is below RM3,719 (USD852.40) per month.

² Household income between RM3,720 (USD852.62) to RM8,649 (USD1982.35) per month.

³ Household income exceeds RM8,650 (USD1982.58) per month.

population and the fourth largest in Malaysia after the Malays, Chinese and Indians. The involvement of Iban women in side-income activities is beneficial for family and their society and contributes to the state's and country's economic development. Iban women, especially in rural areas, need to rise and develop their skills and translate them into products that can be marketed either locally or globally to increase income and raise the economy of each family (Borneo Online, 2016). Thus, the state government should emphasize supporting them through education, skills training, and financial assistance. The Sarawak government always adheres to the principle of women's empowerment because that group is one of the pillars of development that is very important to include all aspects of state and national development (Sarawak Public Communication Unit, 2022).

Thus, this study aims to investigate the role of Iban women as bread-earners by participating in side-income activities. The study will be conducted using survey methods among Iban women participating in side-income activities. The study of side-income earners among Iban women can gain an understanding of the Iban community, their lives, and their contribution to social development and the Sarawak state economy.

Research Objectives

The study purposely investigates Iban women's participation in side-income activities in Sarawak. There are three sub-objectives constructed to support the main objective of the study. The sub-objectives are as follows:

- To identify the type of side-income activities
- To investigate barriers to side-income activities
- To propose a relevant solution to the barriers

Literature Review

The review of related study findings shows that women's employability is influenced by their age, educational background, fertility restrictions, work-life balance and cohort effects (Sassler et al., 2017; Kriesi et al., 2010; Saadin et al., 2016). Employers typically tend to rate the job options based on the job challenges and difficulties in which certain sectors are female-dominated, and others are male-dominated segments. Nonetheless, men employees continue to thrive in decision-making roles in most corporations and organizations. It needs to reflect the ability of women to play an important role as income earners in their families.

The designation of women as Agents of Change by the United Nations in Climate Action demonstrated that women's distinctive abilities could formulate strategies and develop solutions, particularly when empowered (United Nation Women Watch, 2009). In rural areas, most incomes depend on local natural resources such as crops, fisheries, and forestry, and most women are responsible for domestic activities. Women's expertise and knowledge transfer on issues related to natural resources are extremely valuable in ensuring climate change mitigation (Adedeji et al., 2018). Women's contributions are not only beneficial in the context of climate change mitigation but this is also supporting the adaptation of women as family income earners.

In the agricultural sector in rural areas, for example, women's roles in farm and livestock-rearing are vital, either working on the family farms or outside (Pattnaik and Lahiri-Dutt, 2020). In the context of family farms, even if not as wage labourers but as joint owners within the family, contributions from women would greatly enhance their livelihoods. Krumbiegel et al (2020) also discovered that women's participation as wage labourers in the agricultural industry could increase their family income 30per cents higher than unemployed women in

the family. In addition to being directly involved in farming activities, women are also involved in agricultural production operations and small-scale commercial ventures. Women in rural areas have recently shown much interest in pursuing entrepreneurial careers. As studied Padilla-Meléndez and Ciruela-Lorenzo (2018), for female indigenous entrepreneurs, they suggested that numerous drivers and inhibitors, including socio-cultural setting, government institutional supports, inheritance community, and self-individual traits, enhance the competitiveness of female indigenous entrepreneurs.

Women in Malaysia, including the Iban, are included in helping households to earn an income. According to Chesher (1990), women already accounted for around 26 per cents of the workforce in West Malaysia decades ago, about half the proportion of male labourers (47.4 per cents). Women's employment patterns in Malaysia have evolved over the decades, with significant predominance in Community, Social and Personal Services, Public Administration, Other Services and, notably, the Manufacturing sector (Bakar and Abdullah, 2007). Apart from being employed, Malaysian women are increasingly resorting to entrepreneurship to generate income and support their families. The Malaysian government and corporate sector have implemented several programmes and initiatives to encourage women to start businesses (Mutalib et al., 2015; Teoh and Chong, 2014).

Despite having a significant contribution to family income, some issues need to be addressed concerning working women's welfare, especially in rural areas. Financial difficulties, job insecurity, concerns about hazardous employment, and home-related issues have all been linked to a higher risk of depressive illness or mental disorder among working women of low socioeconomic status (Lipscomb et al., 2007). It was also shown that 75 per cents of women diagnosed with depression had children in the home, which may indicate the childcare support issue. Childcare assistance by the employer and aid from parents or in-laws may help alleviate this concern (Arpino et al., 2014). Apart from that, women working indoors, including bread baking, carpet weaving and using biomass fuel, might potentially expose them to health risks such as asthma and chronic bronchitis (Golshan et al., 2002).

Gender discrimination in the workplace is another issue. This is true not only for the form of work to be completed but also a perception that either woman can perform a good job. As a result, wage disparity exists between women and men in the organization. According to a recent analysis conducted by Ismail et al (2017), the wage gap in Malaysia, despite reducing by years, still exists, mostly due to women being in lower-ranking jobs and unable to advance their careers. To overcome this issue, it has been discovered that women with a higher level of education may have a better chance of earning more money, narrowing the wage difference (Miki and Yuval, 2011). Besides the wage gap, a study by Goy and Johnes (2012) suggested that women's employment in Malaysia between 1980 – 2008 was concentrated in sectors that were not favourable for men, such as education and health and social work. Their observation was in agreement with Blackburn and Jarman (2005), in which the discrimination against women's career progression decreases when working in occupations that favour their sex.

There needs to be more study on the role of women as family income earners, notably in the Iban community. Indeed, many accomplished women in Sarawak hold high-ranking positions locally and internationally (Borneo Post, 2019). Their achievement in various sectors, including economics and politics, shows that women in Sarawak also played a vital role towards Sarawak.

Theoretical Framework

Based on the discussion in the previous sections, the framework of the study is constructed (Figure 1). Hobby and interest, demographic factors, and environmental factors influence participation in side-income activities. Besides, side-income activities could be supported and hindered by several factors, such as a lack of knowledge and skills and financial support. Participation in side-income activities could contribute to income earnings for family or household, reducing the burden of family expenses and improving Iban community life. However, if they are not successful in side-income activities due to some constraints, thus should identify solutions to the problems. Thus, one of the purposes of this study is to provide relevant solutions and suggestions according to their problems.

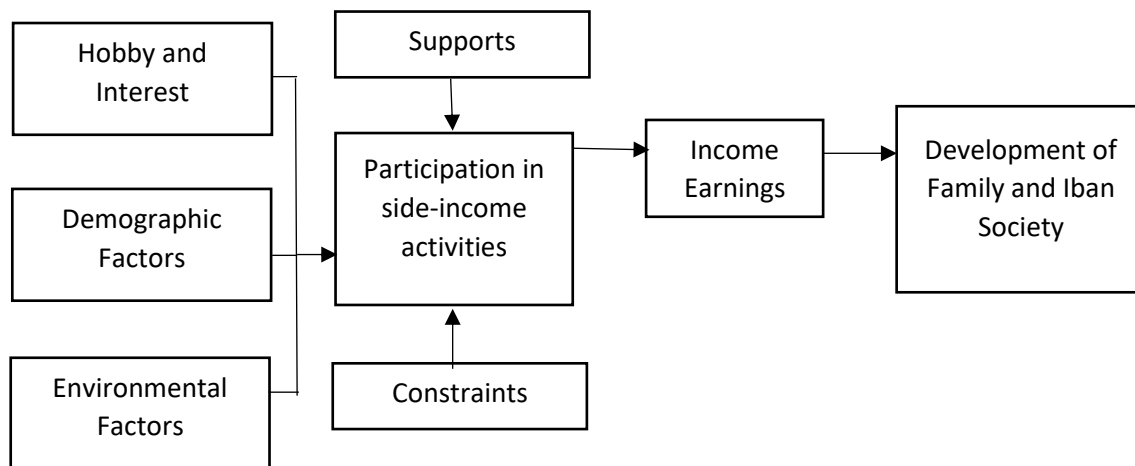


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework of Participation of Iban Women in Side-Income Activities

Materials And Methods

This paper uses a descriptive study design and the data obtained from a field survey among Iban women who have participated in side-income activities in Sarawak. The purpose of descriptive study design is to describe the characteristics and phenomena of a research subject. The research instrument is the questionnaire, and the information has been collected through a self-administered and face-to-face interview. The self-administered technique was applied to those who could read and understand the questionnaire, while face-to-face interview had conducted for the illiterate and those who did not understand the questions. The following information is collected as follows:

- a) Respondent's profile, such as age, married status, education, occupation,
- b) Side-income activities such as type of side-income, income obtained obstacles in side-income activities, and suggestions or alternatives to overcome the problems.

As statistics of population Iban population according to gender is not available during the research period, a calculation or estimation of the number of Iban women population and Iban women who may involve in side-income activities is required to determine the sample size for this study. Table 1 shows the Sarawak population according to gender, race/ethnicity, and age category for 2022 (Department of Statistics, 2022)

Table 1

Sarawak Population According to Gender, Race/Ethnic and Age Category For 2022

Demographic item	Population (million)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	1.27	51.41
Female	1.20	48.59
Total population	2.47	
Race		
Iban	1.25	50.8
Malay	0.48	19.3
Chinese	0.41	16.7
Bidayuh	0.16	6.5
Melanau	0.08	3.1
Others	0.00	0.2
Indian	0.01	0.3
Age category (years old)		
Young (0 – 14)	1.02	41.3
Working age (15 – 64)	0.74	29.8
Older (more than 64)	0.28	11.5

Source: Department of Statistics, 2022

The number of Iban women population could be estimated based on the percentage of the female population in Sarawak, which is approximately 583,080 (48.59% of 1.20 million women) in Sarawak. Then, based on the age group and working age in Sarawak, 29.8% of the total population is working age (15 to 64 years old), and 11.5% of the total population is older (65 years old and above). It assumes Iban women involved in side-income activities are 15 years old and above is 41.3% (240,812 out of 583 080). Even though the number of Iban women population could be estimated based on the available data, not all of them make side-income activities. Then, assume the percentage of Iban women involved in side-income activities represents 50% (maximum) of the Iban women population (15 years old and above). Thus, the population of the study is 120,406.

Krejcie and Morgan's table (KMT) suggested that 384 sample is sufficient to represent 1,000,000 or more, and simple random sampling is the appropriate choice (Memon et al., 2020). A total of 325 respondents were obtained from November 2021 to May 2022. Based on the estimated research population (120,406) and the assumption from KMT, 325 sample is sufficient to represent and describe the study population. The researcher identified Iban women who were involved in side-income activities and willing to participate in the survey in several ways. For example, researchers have been approaching sellers or hawkers in guest markets and street stalls, visiting long houses, and identifying potential respondents from friends and relatives. The statistical tool of SPSS 23 was used to analyze the data, and descriptive analysis was employed to present and summarize the research findings.

Results and Discussion

Respondent's Profile

There were 325 respondents interviewed for this study, and their locations are given in Table 2 below. The respondents come from all over Sarawak. There are ten divisions involved in data collection, i.e. Betong, Bintulu, Kapit, Kuching, Miri, Mukah, Samarahan, Sarikei, Sibul, and Sri Aman. Most of the respondents are from Sibul and Bintulu in the central region, followed by Miri and Kapit. These are predominantly Iban areas; unsurprisingly, many respondents came from these areas.

Table 2

Number of Respondents According Division

Location (Division)	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Betong	6	1.85
Bintulu	72	22.15
Kapit	46	14.15
Kuching	27	8.31
Miri	51	15.69
Mukah	3	0.92
Samarahan	13	4.00
Sarikei	18	5.54
Sibul	82	25.23
Sri Aman	7	2.15

Table 3 summarizes the respondents' profiles in this study. The group that comprises the below 20 years are mainly students involved in side-income activities. Iban women working, especially those 30 and above, are mostly active in side-income activities. About two-thirds of the Iban women engaged in side-income activities are married women, which signifies their role in supporting the household income. There 26% of them have obtained a Diploma or higher education. About 45% of them did attend secondary school, and less than 7% did not go to school, mainly those of the older age group (60 and above).

About 45% of the respondents work mainly in the government and private sectors, while 35% are housewives. Only 9% (n=30) of the Iban women engaged in this side-income activity are those that have retired. Slightly more than two-thirds (68%) of the respondents are from the B40 income group, which may explain why many of them engaged in side-income activities to support their household income. Only 5% of them are from the T20 income group, consisting mostly of those working, and a good number of them are highly educated. The size of households among the respondents is mainly 4 to 5 household members (41.54%) and followed by 6-7 household members (27.38%).

Table 3

Respondents Profile

Demography Characteristics		No.	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 20	8	2.46
	20-29	55	16.92
	30-39	76	23.38
	40-49	73	22.46
	50-59	72	22.15
	60-69	30	9.23
	70 and older	11	3.38
Marital status	Married	227	69.85
	Not married	59	18.15
	Single mother	37	11.38
	Widow	2	0.62
Education	Not attending school	21	6.46
	Primary school/UPSR	69	21.23
	Lower secondary (SRP/PMR)	45	13.85
	High school (SPM)	77	23.69
	Certificate level	2	0.62
	STPM	26	8
	Diploma	39	12
	Degree	33	10.15
Master/PhD	13	4	
Occupation	Government employee	56	17.23
	Private sector employee	60	18.46
	Self-employed full time	30	9.23
	Students	23	7.08
	Retiree	30	9.23
	Housewife	114	35.08
	Unemployed	6	1.85
	Vegetable Sellers	3	0.92
	Others	3	0.92
Income level (RM)	Less than 1,951	94	28.92
	1,951 - 2,539	41	12.62
	2,540 - 3,029	35	10.77
	3,030 - 3,729	29	8.92
	3,730 - 4,539	23	7.08
	4,540 - 5,479	25	7.69
	5,480 - 6,769	22	6.77
	6,770 - 8,649	21	6.46
	8,650 - 11,859	17	5.23
	Above 11,859	18	5.54
No. of household (person)	1-3	49	15.08
	4-5	135	41.54
	6-7	89	27.38
	8-9	41	12.62
	10 and more	11	3.38

Participation of Iban Women in Side-Income Activities

Side-income activities are flexible for working women and housewives as well. Iban women's decision to earn side income was due to several reasons. Based on the present survey, 253 respondents believed that what they earn from the side-income activities would be an income source or additional income for the family, while some of them saw the side-income activities as a leisure activity (n=118) and as a hobby (n=67) (Table 4). The activities were likely as a hobby and for leisure from the beginning, but somehow, they became a source of income.

Table 4

Reasons to Participate in Side-Income Activities

Division (Number of Respondent)	Income Source	As Hobby	For Leisure
Betong (6)	5	2	1
Bintulu (72)	55	10	33
Kapit (46)	27	12	16
Kuching (27)	20	6	11
Miri (51)	37	11	17
Mukah (3)	3	1	1
Samarahan (13)	12	4	3
Sarikei (18)	15	6	7
Sibu (82)	75	11	24
Sri Aman (7)	4	4	5
Total 325 respondents	253 (77.8%)	67 (20.6%)	118 (36.3%)

Types of Side Income Activities

Iban women were involved in a variety of side-income activities such as farming (n=243), handicraft making (n=202), business (drop shipping agent) (n=129), food processing (n=84), tailoring (n=24), babysitting (n=13) crocheting (n=6), and other (n=5) (Table 5). Other income activities included part-time employees, e-hailing drivers, tuition teachers, traditional dance instructors, and runner services. The activities were based on their needs, interest, skills, and market needs. For instance, farming is for subsistence and as a source of income. Some of them interested in business (n=129) became drop shipping agents, and those with skills in handicraft making produced handicraft products for personal use and selling.

Through this survey, farming activities were recorded as the highest side income activity. Among 243 respondents involved in farming, 79.4% of them plant vegetables, 44% plant fruits, followed by other types of crops such as oil palm (24.3%), paddy (13.1%), and rubber (20%) (refer to Table 6). Vegetable crops were the main crop among respondents as vegetables are simple crops, involve less production and maintenance cost, and can be harvested in a short time compared to paddy, fruits (especially seasonal fruits), and perennial crops (oil palm, rubber, cocoa, pepper).

Table 5

Types of Side Income Activities

Division (Number of Respondents)	Businesses							
	(Drops hip/ Agents)	Farming	Handicraft	Homemade Foods	Tailoring	Baby Sitter	Crochet	Other
Betong (6)	4	5	5	3	2	0	2	0
Bintulu (72)	29	58	52	17	2	3	0	2
Kapit (46)	15	42	41	8	2	2	1	0
Kuching (27)	7	18	17	5	3	0	0	2
Miri (51)	22	36	17	9	5	6	0	0
Mukah (3)	2	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Samarahan (13)	5	10	10	5	1	0	0	0
Sarikei (18)	7	15	13	5	0	0	0	0
Sibu (82)	34	51	42	28	9	2	3	1
Sri Aman (7)	4	6	3	2	0	0	0	0
							6	
	129 (49.2%)	243 (74.8%)	202 (62.2%)	84 (25.8%)	24 (7.4%)	13 (4.0%)		5 (1.5%)
Total 325 respondents								

Table 6

Farming Activities (Types of Plant/Crops)

Division (Number of Respondents)	Farming Activities								
	Paddy	Vegetables	Fruits	Oil Palm	Rubber	Cocoa	Pepper	Others	
Betong (5)	0	2	3	1	1	0	1	0	
Bintulu (58)	3	49	27	20	6	3	9	0	
Kapit (42)	17	39	15	1	3	1	11	0	
Kuching (18)	1	16	8	4	1	0	0	0	
Miri (36)	1	25	18	16	4	0	6	0	
Mukah (2)	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	
Samarahan (10)	0	6	4	3	1	1	1	0	
Sarikei (15)	1	8	3	2	0	0	3	1	
Sibu (51)	9	44	28	9	4	2	0	2	
Sri Aman (6)	0	3	1	3	0	0	1	0	
								3	
	32 (13.1%)	193 (79.4%)	107 (44.0%)	59 (24.2%)	20 (8.2%)	7 (2.8%)	32 (13.1%)	3 (1.2%)	
Total 243 respondents									

Handicraft-making has recorded the second-highest number of respondents (n=202). For those involved in handicraft making as a side-income activity, 53.9% of them produce weave products (basket and mat), 50% of them produce beads-based products (neckless, bracelet, key chain, souvenir), 16.8% of them produce traditional accessories (*tango*, *sugu tinggi*, and others), and 14.8% of them produce traditional textile (such as *pua kumbu*, traditional custom, and others) and other products (homemade perfume from flowers, face mask, mask extender) (3.9%) (refer Table 7). It shows that some Iban women in Sarawak are still actively involved in traditional handicraft making as a source of income.

For those who are involved in homemade food processing (n=84), their products were cake and biscuits (72.6%), Iban traditional food (37.5%), and others (23.8%) (dishes, western food,

and others) (refer Table 8). Homemade food is a common and simple business nowadays as it does not involve shops or stalls rent and produces based on demand.

Table 7

Types of Handicraft Products

Division (Number Respondents)	of Traditional Textile	Beads	Weave	Traditional Accessories	Others
Betong (5)	1	3	2	3	0
Bintulu (52)	9	29	34	8	0
Kapit (41)	6	9	32	3	0
Kuching (17)	1	7	5	5	2
Miri (17)	4	11	9	5	4
Mukah (2)	0	1	1	0	0
Samarahan (10)	1	7	2	2	0
Sarikei (13)	2	6	6	1	0
Sibu (42)	6	25	17	7	2
Sri Aman (3)	0	3	1	0	0
Total 202 respondents	30 (14.8%)	101 (50%)	109 (53.9%)	34 (16.8%)	8 (3.9%)

Table 8

Homemade Food Products

Division (Total Respondent)	Traditional food	Cake, Biscuits	Others
Betong (3)	3	2	1
Bintulu (17)	5	14	0
Kapit (8)	4	7	2
Kuching (5)	1	3	2
Miri (9)	4	5	4
Mukah (2)	0	1	1
Samarahan (5)	3	1	1
Sarikei (5)	2	5	1
Sibu (28)	11	21	8
Sri Aman (2)	0	2	0
Total 84 respondents	33 (37.5%)	61 (72.6%)	20 (23.8%)

Selling Methods and Frequency of Selling

Respondents sold their products in several ways, such as selling in their neighbourhoods (n=200), online selling (n=163), from their homes (n=127), guest market (also known as *Pasar Tamu* in local language) (n=78), selling at the retail shops (n=50), selling to the wholesaler (n=40), and selling during the festival exhibition (n=39) (see Table 9). However, the selling methods depend on the type of products. For instance, vegetables and other perishable foods are sold from homes, around the neighbourhood, in guest markets and online (cash on delivery).

Approximately 31.7% of the total respondents reported that they sell their products every day, followed by 10.5% of respondents who sell their products one to three times per month, and 2.2% of respondents who sell their products four to six times per month and more than six times per month, respectively (refer Table 10). However, as side-income activities are flexible, more than half of the respondents (53.3%) reported that their selling activities were erratic. The selling frequency depends on the products' availability and the customer's order. For instance, food products were "made to order" or depending on customers' demands.

Table 9

Selling Methods

Division (Number of Respondents)	Neighbourhood	At retail shop	Guest Market	Through Wholesaler	Online Selling	Exhibition /Event	At home
Betong (6)	3	0	2	3	5	1	1
Bintulu (72)	53	5	20	10	32	6	24
Kapit (46)	34	11	17	5	13	6	20
Kuching (27)	8	6	2	2	14	4	7
Miri (51)	26	12	17	6	18	8	24
Mukah (3)	1	0	0	0	2	0	0
Samarahan (13)	7	0	0	0	10	2	2
Sarikei (18)	11	0	3	3	10	1	5
Sibu (82)	53	14	17	9	57	11	43
Sri Aman (7)	4	2	0	2	2	0	1
Total 325 respondents	200 (61.5%)	50 (15.3%)	78 (24.0%)	40 (12.3%)	163 (50.1%)	39 (12.0%)	127 (39.0%)

Table 10

Frequency of Selling Per Month

Division (Number of Respondents)	Everyday	1 to 3 Times	3 to 4 Times	4 to 6 Times	More Than 6 Times	Erraticall y
Betong (6)	2	0	0	0	4	
Bintulu (72)	12	12	0	0	48	
Kapit (46)	21	5	0	1	19	
Kuching (27)	7	3	1	1	15	
Miri (51)	26	3	0	0	22	
Mukah (3)	0	0	0	0	3	
Samarahan (13)	3	2	0	0	8	
Sarikei (18)	5	1	2	0	10	
Sibu (82)	27	8	4	5	38	
Sri Aman (7)	0	0	0	0	7	
Total 325 respondents	103 (31.7%)	34 (10.5%)	7 (2.2%)	7 (2.2%)	174 (53.5%)	

The income for side-income activities was unpredictable. A total of 150 respondents have reported earning RM500 or below per month from side income activities, while 130 respondents earned RM501 to RM2000 per month. Meanwhile, 15 respondents reported unstable monthly earnings (Table 11).

Table 11

Income obtained from Side Income Activities

Division (Number of Respondents)	Below RM500	RM501 to RM1000	RM1001 to RM1500	RM1501 to RM2000	More than RM2000	Not Stable
Betong (6)	2	2	1	0	0	1
Bintulu (72)	44	21	2	0	3	2
Kapit (46)	15	22	7	2	0	0
Kuching (27)	15	5	2	2	2	1
Miri (51)	12	8	4	3	15	9
Mukah (3)	3	0	0	0	0	0
Samarahan (13)	8	3	0	0	2	0
Sarikei (18)	12	6	0	0	0	0
Sibu (82)	36	21	8	7	8	2
Sri Aman (7)	3	4	0	0	0	0
Total 325 respondents	150 (46.2%)	92 (28.3%)	24 (7.4%)	14 (4.3%)	30 (9.2%)	15 (4.6%)

Obstacles in Side-Income Activities

The respondents have reported several obstacles when conducting side-income activities (refer to Table 12). Based on the survey, there were three main obstacles in side-income activities, i.e., lack of knowledge and skills in certain fields (n=303), problems in marketing and promotional (n=293), and financial constraints (n=247). Meanwhile, a total of 30 respondents reported a lack of time to do side-income activities, and 19 respondents have other obstacles such as competition with other sellers, halal status (especially for Muslim buyers), difficulty in meeting demand (change over time), health issues, no one looking for their children if they are involved in side-income activities, and no transportation.

Table 12

Obstacles in Side-Income Activities

Division (Number of Respondents)	Lack of Knowledge and Skills	Financial constraints	Marketing and Promotional Problems	Time Constraints	Others
Betong (6)	6	5	6	1	0
Bintulu (72)	70	58	65	5	8
Kapit (46)	45	45	46	1	4
Kuching (27)	26	21	21	3	2
Miri (51)	51	25	43	5	0
Mukah (3)	3	3	3	1	0
Samarahan (13)	13	13	13	2	1
Sarikei (18)	15	15	17	1	1
Sibu (82)	68	57	73	10	3
Sri Aman (7)	6	5	6	1	0
Total 325 respondents	303 (93.2%)	247 (76.0%)	293 (90.1%)	30 (9.2%)	19 (5.8%)

Lack of knowledge and skills in certain fields

A total of 303 respondents reported that they lack knowledge and skills in certain fields such as business and entrepreneurship (n=182), online business mobile apps (n=121), internet literacy (n=121), handicraft making (n=67), food processing (n=67), farming (n=45) and basic knowledge (reading, writing, and calculation) (n=40) (refer Table 13).

Table 13

Number of Respondents Who Have Lack Knowledge and Skills in Certain Fields

Division (Number of Respondents)	Illite rate	Internet Literacy	Online Business Mobile-apps	Business Entrepreneur ship	Far min g	Handicraf t Making	Food Processi ng
Betong (6)	0	1	1	6	1	2	2
Bintulu (70)	11	34	37	32	6	10	11
Kapit (45)	4	23	33	23	3	4	5
Kuching (25)	1	4	3	16	1	3	4
Miri (51)	18	30	27	38	11	12	9
Mukah (3)	0	1	0	2	1	1	0
Samarahan (13)	0	2	3	10	3	4	7
Sarikei (15)	0	3	3	11	1	3	2
Sibu (68)	6	20	13	41	17	26	24
Sri Aman (6)	0	3	1	3	1	2	3
	40				45		
Total Respondents	303 (13.2%)	121 (39.9%)	121 (39.9%)	182 (60.1%)	149 (49.2%)	67 (22.1%)	67 (22.1%)

Marketing and Promotional

A total of 293 respondents reported that they have marketing and promotional problems such as competition with other producers (n=173), lack of online marketing knowledge (n=158), do not know how to market their products (n=82), living far from town (or sales centre) (n=47), and do not have own transport to market their products (n=44) which caused them to bear high transportation rental costs (n=41). In addition, some of them reported that wholesalers bought the products at a low price (n=32) (refer to Table 14).

Table 14

Marketing and Promotional Problems

Division (Number of Respondents)	No Own Trans portation	Lack Knowledge in Marketing	Online to market/sell	Good place to market/sell	Low wholesale price	Com petition	Transpo rtation cost	Away from sales centre
Betong (6)	0	2	2	2	2	4	1	1
Bintulu (65)	19	43	11	11	7	27	11	6
Kapit (46)	5	35	11	11	2	25	2	3
Kuching (21)	2	5	7	7	2	10	6	2
Miri (43)	5	30	11	11	6	33	9	18
Mukah (3)	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Samarahan (13)	0	4	5	5	0	10	3	1
Sarikei (17)	4	7	4	4	1	10	2	2
Sibu (73)	8	28	28	28	10	50	7	13
Sri Aman (6)	1	3	2	2	2	4	0	0
Total Respondents	293 44 (15.0 %)	158 (53.9%)	82 (27.9%)	82 (27.9%)	32 (10.9%)	173 (59.0 %)	41 (13.9%)	47 (16.0%)

Financial Constraints

For financial constraints, 247 respondents reported that they have problems obtaining capital for side-income activities, 153 respondents do not know about financial institutions or agencies that could provide financial assistance to them, and 120 respondents do not have other income sources as capital for side-income activities, such as full-time housewives, and those who do not have permanent jobs. (Refer to Table 15). Meanwhile, 90 respondents need help in procuring loans. Almost 50% of the respondents earned a household income of RM2539 or less per month, and it is considered a low-income family based on gross income household in Sarawak (Poket Stats Negeri Sarawak, 2021). It may be one of the reasons they could not come up with capital for their side income activities.

Table 15

Financial Constraints

Division (Number of Respondents)	No other income source	Difficult to get financial assistance	Do not know about financial institution
Betong (5)	3	2	4
Bintulu (58)	28	30	24
Kapit (45)	15	12	36
Kuching (21)	11	8	17
Miri (25)	8	13	16
Mukah (3)	2	3	1
Samarahan (13)	5	3	10
Sarikei (15)	7	7	5
Sibu (57)	38	11	38
Sri Aman (5)	3	1	2
Total 247 respondents	120 (48.5%)	90 (36.4%)	153 (61.9%)

Suggestion to Overcome the Obstacles

Based on the identified problems and suggestions to overcome the challenges, three suggestions have recorded a high percentage selected by respondents, i.e., marketing and promotional assistance (58.4%), providing business and entrepreneurship courses (56.3%), and financial assistance (55.6%). It was followed by providing skills courses and subsidies for shop or stall rental, which has been recorded by 44.6% of respondents, respectively. Meanwhile, the other suggestions were the availability of motivation courses to encourage them to participate actively in side-income activities (2.7%) (refer to Table 16).

Table 16

Suggestion to Overcome the Challenges

Division (Number of Respondents)	Skills Courses	Financial Assistance	Marketing and Promotional Assistance	Business and Entrepreneurship Courses	Subsidies (stall/shop rental)	Others
Betong (6)	5	5	3	3	3	0
Bintulu (72)	31	44	33	39	35	1
Kapit (46)	18	20	23	31	20	0
Kuching (27)	11	18	15	12	20	1
Miri (51)	20	20	38	39	20	5
Mukah (3)	2	2	2	1	1	0
Samarahan (13)	8	9	9	7	7	0
Sarikei (18)	8	9	11	8	7	0
Sibu (82)	38	49	52	37	29	2
Sri Aman (7)	4	5	4	6	3	0
Total 325 respondents	145 (44.6%)	181 (55.6%)	190 (58.46%)	183 (56.3%)	145 (44.6%)	9 (2.7%)

Main Outcome

Figure 2 shows the primary outcome of this study. Providing Iban women with relevant knowledge and skills training will enhance and develop their knowledge and skills in particular side-income activities that they are interested in, which could contribute income to their family and develop Iban society in Sarawak as well as a whole. However, the training or programs are need-driven as only some of the training or programs could fit the needs of Iban women in particular areas. For instance, 61% and 54.1% of total respondents in Bintulu need financial assistance and business and entrepreneurship courses, respectively. Meanwhile, 75.5% of Miri and 63.4% of respondents from Sibu need marketing and promotional assistance. Based on the research findings, there are three main problems in the side-income activities, i.e., a need for knowledge and skills in specific fields, problems in marketing and promotional, and financial constraints (n=247). Relevant ministries, agencies and organizations should take note of this, especially Iban ethnic associations close to the Iban community, such as Sarawak Dayak Iban Association and Sarawak Indu Dayak Sarawak (Iban women association) that represent the indigenous peoples of Sarawak. Besides, the efforts should come from the top-level management such as the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, Sarawak Economic Development Corporation (SEDC), and Department of Women Sarawak to form a collaboration with local associations to support and identify the needs of Iban women in terms of the need for knowledge and expertise in the fields they can engage, marketing and promotional assistance, and financial support. Several suggestions are made according to the problems and suggestions based on the findings and the respondents.

Providing Knowledge and Skills**Business education and entrepreneurship skills' training**

Business education and entrepreneurship skills training are crucial to support side-income earning activities and to overcome the challenges they face in running their businesses, especially for Iban women who have low education levels and live in rural areas. Women entrepreneurs in rural areas are very informal, unregistered, and unorganized and are generally less supported and empowered. Most of them need help with problems such as lack of access to capital, entrepreneurship, and business skills, bargaining power within the market, and lack of inclusiveness on major decisions to entrepreneurship development (Aini et al., 2020). Besides, those training could also reduce unemployment among school leavers and fresh graduates. The business management and entrepreneurship training could help them enhance their knowledge and skills in business and help them in decision-making. Entrepreneurial education will encourage entrepreneurial knowledge and skill, and individuals must believe that they can start a business before deciding to become an entrepreneur (Mark et al., 2019).

Providing practical training such as financial management, product management, and marketing management is key in helping them to manage their business. Financial management training could help them efficiently plan and manage capital, stock, profit, and account. Meanwhile, product management training will expose them to pricing strategy, product design, and market research. Next, marketing management will teach how to distribute their products effectively physically and virtually. Empowering women through business and entrepreneurship skills training is common and widely used in Malaysia and other countries to help women generate additional income. Women entrepreneurs could use their earned income to support household and family goals, leading to physically and

financially healthier families and children; improving their living standards; and gaining autonomy (Bullough et al., 2015).

Information and communication technology (ICT) Trainings

Technology and society are embedded as the integration of ICT use in our lives is increasing., (Boeri, 2016). The Internet gives them a platform where people can acquire information and connect with others. Nowadays, online marketing is considered an effective method to reach potential customers. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Tiktok, WhatsApp, Shopee, and Lazada are common marketing channels for sharing products. The seller needs to know how to catch the attention of customers with informative and attractive advertisements. However, not all of them know how to use these platforms. Thus, they need training to guide them on using those platforms effectively. ICT facilities should be developed to support social and economic growth. There are a lot of rural areas in Sarawak that still do not have access to ICT facilities. Government and relevant agencies should investigate this matter, as many areas in rural Sarawak are still without access to ICT facilities. The adoption of ICT knowledge could facilitate the socio-economic growth of rural communities in developing countries, including Malaysia.

Handicraft Making Courses

Iban culture is rich with diverse traditional handicraft products. Other than preserving tradition and culture, handicraft-making training could help Iban women to generate side income. According to Madeline (2001), for the rural people of Sarawak, involvement in commercial handicraft production provides them with the opportunity to earn cash income and participate in part-time employment, especially for the disadvantaged groups such as the poorly educated, women and the elderly in rural Sarawak (Salfarina et al., 2018). If they have fewer or fewer skills and knowledge in handicraft making and are interested in learning, training to enhance their skills in traditional handicraft making should be provided for them. Like handicraft-making issues, most young women staying in town areas do not know how to produce the Iban traditional handicraft as they do not have the opportunity to learn those skills from the elders who are experts in handicraft making. Intensive training sessions should be arranged where the participants will be exposed to handicraft making from the experts. Thus, such training could help them to do home business and earn income to support the family. Besides, support from governmental departments and NGOs to promote the preservation and conservation of handicrafts as a cultural heritage will encourage Iban women to be involved in traditional handicraft making. As an example, in Sarawak, the Society Atelier Sarawak promotes and preserves the handicrafts of Sarawak.

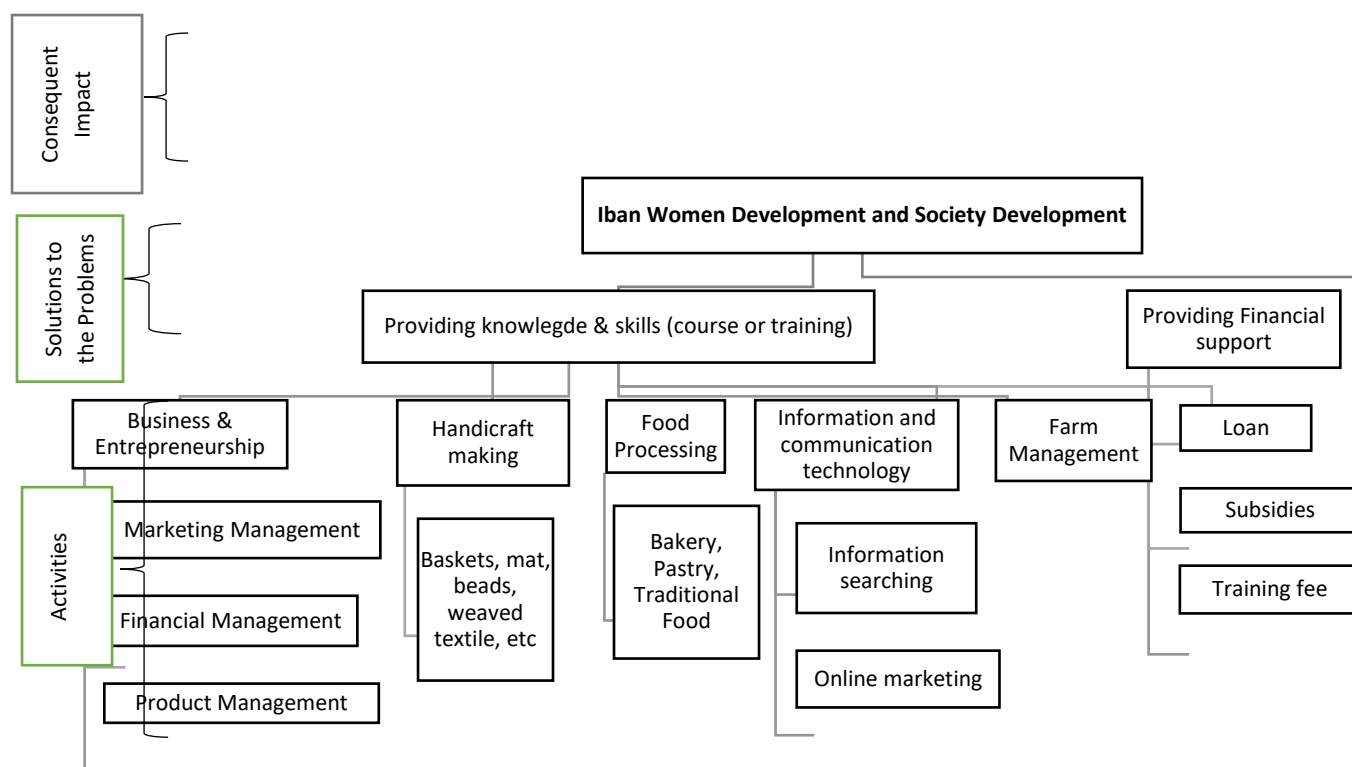


Figure 2: Outcomes of the Study: Iban Women Development and Social Development

Food Processing Courses

The food business is one of the popular businesses among women. Examples of food businesses are bakeries, catering, home-cooked meals, salted or dried foods, traditional foods, and others. They could sell their products at home, online (social media), at street stalls, and at mini stalls or kiosks. Women in urban areas produce modern and traditional food based on the availability of raw materials, equipment, and skills, whereas their rural counterparts, who are mostly involved in farming activities, prefer to produce agricultural-based products such as preserved foods (salted foods, dried foods).

However, some of them may not be experts in food processing. Food preparation courses could provide guidelines for them in terms of raw materials or ingredients usage, storage, packaging, food display, food safety, and food delivery (home business). The studies conducted by Nareman (2012); Sharma and Gill (2018) showed that there was an improvement in knowledge and skills in food processing among the women trainees after the training courses. According to Sharma and Gill (2018), for those who are involved in the agricultural sector, food processing training will help to reduce some post-harvest losses as the fruits have been converted into value-added products.

Modern Farming Management Courses

Farming is considered a traditional economic and subsistence activity for Iban communities in rural areas. Due to the culture of sojourn, males or husbands tend to join the formal workforce for a stable income, while Iban women perform their housewife tasks, live in rural areas, and do farming to support the family. Some still practise old or traditional farming

methods, and the production level is low. According to Cheng (2017), the improvement in people's lives in rural areas involved in the agricultural sector still needs to be improved. Agricultural entrepreneurship activities may be key to improving Sarawak's economic performance, reducing the poverty rate while simultaneously reducing the income inequality gap between the rural and urban areas in the state (Fareiny et al., 2020). Thus, providing modern and good agricultural practices could help rural communities, especially women, to manage their farms effectively and efficiently to increase farm production and profit. Izzah and Asrina (2019), who researched the involvement of rural communities in agriculture in Bintulu, suggested that a baseline guide for anyone who would like to extend agricultural activities to rural farmers by using specific approaches such as designing a good program by extension officers in the future.

Providing Financial Support

Budget constraint is considered one of the challenges to supporting side-income activities among Iban women, especially for those full-time homemakers and unemployed without a permanent income. They may have skills and ideas in side-income activities, but they must forgo their intention due to limited or no start-up capital. Financial assistance such as microfinance programs could encourage Iban women in side-income activities. Microcredit, microinsurance, and social intermediation service reduce poverty among low-income earners (Solarin, 2021). There are a few microfinance programs in Sarawak, such as Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM), Tabung Ekonomi Kumpulan Usaha Niaga (TEKUN), and Sarawak micro-credit scheme. However, based on this study, some of them need to learn the relevant agencies that could support them financially. Thus, the relevant agencies should increase their visibility to the public through mass media promotion and public events such as Borneo Cultural Festival (BCF) and Sarawak Festival Events.

Limitation and Future Research Recommendation

The limitation of statistical data during the study period, such as the number of Iban population according to gender within the Sarawak division, has aggravated sampling size determination. The sampling size may not represent the population of Iban women who have been involved in side-income activities. Thus, an extensive study should be conducted to investigate the participation of Iban women in side-income activities once statistical data on Iban women in side-income earnings is available. Thus, the findings will be able to represent and describe the population of Iban women who are involved in side-income activities. The relevant agencies, such as the Department of Statistical of Sarawak and Malaysia, need to prepare such data as a reference for researchers and the public to understand the characteristics of the Iban population in Sarawak and Malaysia.

Conclusion

This study has described the side-income activities of Iban women in Sarawak even though valid statistical data on Iban women in side-income is not available during the study period. However, the sampling size is enough to describe and summarize the population based on the assumption of KMT. Iban women who play the role of a bread-earner and are involved in side-income activities could benefit their families and develop the Iban society in Sarawak. The selection of appropriate training and programs is crucial to ensure that the training and programs are worth implementing. Not limit to Iban women, relevant ministries, agencies, and organizations should establish collaboration to support side-income activities

of women in Sarawak. Income earnings among women through side-income activities has raise dignity of women, reducing burden of family expense, as well as contributing to community development in terms of social and economic.

This research shows women's role in the family and their contribution to social and economic development through side-income activities. Several factors support successful of women in side-income activities. Firstly, women should have a fundamental educational background, such as the ability to read, write, and calculate, to support their activities. They could grasp easily if they could read and understand the knowledge and skills, they have learned by themselves or through others (such as knowledge and skills training). If they are educated women, it is an opportunity for them to explore more. Thus, fundamental education is a must for women. Secondly, environmental, or situational factors may trigger women to involve in side-income activities. They are willing to improve the family economy by doing side-income activities when the family head (husband and father) cannot support family expenses. Then, they should be wise to take opportunities when there is demand for certain products, and they have knowledge and skills. Being a successful woman is not just about being a full-time worker or having a career, and it can be nurtured if one desires to change family life and herself.

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