

# A Case Study of Collective Action in Fishermen's Wives Group (KUNITA), Malaysia

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**Abstract**—Collective action can be an effective means for local development as well as important strategy to enhance livelihoods especially among rural people. This article explores the level of collective action among members of Fishermen's Wives Group (KUNITA) in Malaysia. KUNITA was established by the Malaysian Fishery Development Authority (LKIM) with an objective to increase the socio-economic status of fishermen's families. The members who are mostly the wives and daughters of fishermen are strongly encouraged by LKIM to venture into entrepreneurship activities. The objective of this research was to see the level of collective action among members in KUNITA groups in the state of Selangor. The finding shows that high level of collective action among KUNITA members is strongly based on volunteerism. However, the level of cooperation among members in the group is relatively low. The findings present significant challenges for the group in maintaining the sustainability of KUNITA organization.

**Keywords**—collective action, entrepreneurship, fishermen's wives group, LKIM

## I. INTRODUCTION

MANY studies on women's organizations emphasized the important element of collective action as this is vital in mobilizing women to achieve their group's goal [2], [9], [1]. However, there are always challenges to mobilize women into collective action. This is due to the fact that women constitute a large and diverse social group. According to Goss and Heaney [6], these differences include variations in age, race and ethnicity, class background, education, sexual orientation, geographic origin, political ideology, experiences of subordination and attitudes toward the proper roles of women in society. They argue that these differences, together with changing times and circumstances, do not guarantee all women to be reachable through same calls of action. Despite these challenges, studies have shown that many organizations formed and organized by women undertook various collective action projects.

Collective action indeed plays an important role in many aspects of human interaction, including income generation, risk reduction, and public service provision. Collective action can be an effective means of local development and also a strategy to enhance livelihoods especially among rural people [2].

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Previous study shows that institutions of collective action play an important role to ensure how people use natural resources, which in turn shapes the outcomes of production systems [7]. In the natural resource management for instance, scholars confirmed the collective action play an important role in enhancing farmer participation and human capital [5], [12]. Additionally collective action can also be a vehicle for enhancing equity in natural resource management [8], [10].

It was observed that substantial studies on collective action have been done in the area such as natural resource management, however little attention was given to understand the collective action process of women groups in fishing communities. In Malaysia, government agency such as Malaysian Fishery Development Authority (LKIM) has been seen as a responsible body in the establishment of women's association known as Fishermen's Wives Association (KUNITA). KUNITA is one of the examples of women's group that undertook various collective action projects particularly in entrepreneurship activities to enhance the socio-economic status of fishing families. Thus, this study is deemed important to understand how collective action arises in dealing with different issues and how it is sustained [15].

This paper explores the level of collective action among members of KUNITA group in four villages in Selangor. The discussions of the paper focus on the different level of indicators of collective action which includes level of cooperation, boundedness, voluntary and social capital. Data was collected through quantitative survey with members of four KUNITA groups. The finding shows that high level of collective action is strongly based on volunteerism. Interestingly the study also revealed that the level of cooperation among members in the group is rather low. To this end, the findings of this study identify significant challenges in maintaining the sustainability of KUNITA organization. The study reckons that if the organization failed to sustain, it would be difficult for government agencies like LKIM to implement their development program that focusing on the upgrading of socioeconomic status of the fishermen's communities.

## II. MALAYSIAN FISHERY DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY (LKIM) AND KUNITA ORGANIZATION

KUNITA is an association established under the Fishermen's Association which in turn is under the control of the Malaysian Fishery Development Authority (LKIM). KUNITA is formed with an objective to increase the socio-economic status of fishing families, simultaneously strengthening the institution of fishing communities. Fishermen's wives as members are encouraged to venture into small-scale businesses particularly based on marine products. To achieve this objective, LKIM together with Fisheries

Department provides capacity building programs that offer free courses and trainings to selected KUNITA members. These trainings are important to expose and enhance their skills which are essential as a starting point to venture into entrepreneurial activities. By only paying RM25 as registration fee and RM3 for annual fee, members are accessible to various courses and trainings. Upon completion, these participants are encouraged by LKIM to start their own businesses by providing equipments and business premise.

Various kinds of businesses have been ventured by the KUNITA members which among them are marine-based products such as fish balls and fishcakes, fish crackers and non-marine products such as the processing of yellow noodle, tofu, traditional cakes, bean sprout and tailoring. Apart from focusing on economic activities, KUNITA is also actively involved in socio-cultural activities. Group members are often invited to perform at the wedding ceremony or as volunteer group to entertain guests for special functions in their communities. At the wedding for instance, members of KUNITA will be invited to perform *Nasyid*<sup>1</sup> and *Marhaban*. Reciting Quran has also become a weekly social event as one of the ways to create bonds between KUNITA members and the community.

### III. METHODOLOGY

There are 74 respondents from 4 KUNITA groups in Selangor participated in the survey. Table 1 shows the KUNITA group and their business activities.

TABLE I  
KUNITA GROUPS

No.	KUNITA groups	No. of respondents	Type of business
1.	KUNITA Pengkalan Kelanang	31	Handcraft, sewing, catering
2.	KUNITA Permatang Pasir	16	Handcraft, catering, fish ball, fish crisps
3.	KUNITA Morib	22	Various type of crisp (banana, tapioca), catering, handcraft
4.	KUNITA Pulau Carey	5	Handcraft
	<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	

Each indicator was selected according to the suitability of the topic and the organizations involved. For this study, four indicators were chosen. Several questions were constructed under each indicator to capture and measure the element of collective action in KUNITA group activities. The four

<sup>1</sup> Nasyid or *Nasheed* in Arabic word is an Islamic-oriented song that glorifies Allah and prophet Muhammad.

indicators as shown in Table 2 are cooperation, voluntary, boundedness of group and the social capital.

TABLE II  
INDICATORS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Indicators	Definition	Objective
Cooperation	The action together to achieve a common objective particularly when the outcomes depend on interdependence of members	To examine whether or not the decision making process and implementation of activities are carried out collectively.
Voluntary	Voluntary usually would involve a certain level of sacrifice in terms of physical energy, time and also money	To examine the level of willingness in participating in every activities organized by the group.
Boundedness	The closeness between group members in terms of sharing ideas, experiences and information.	To determine how the group members mobilize time, effort and resources to sustain collective action in the group
Social capital	Refers to networks, social relationships, or connections among individuals in the group and the group with the community	To examine the social network and relationship created between individuals with group members and the group members with the community

TABLE III  
ADMINISTERING THE SCALE

Indicators of Collective action and among the questions asked

1. Cooperation
  - i. Are the members working together to achieve group's objective?
  - ii. Are the decision-making in any aspect of the activities be made together?
  - iii. Are the opinions of the members represented, directly or indirectly in the organizational processes and structures through which collective action is organized?
2. Voluntary

- i. Are they willingly to become the KUNITA members?
  - ii. Are the members willing to sacrifice (in terms of money and labour) to mobilize group activities?
3. Group Boundedness
- i. Are they described their relationships with other members as closed?
  - ii. Are the members share things beyond their group activities?
4. Social Capital
- i. Are the members working based on egalitarian ?
  - ii. Is the relations of trust and reciprocity strong?
  - iii. Are they having good relationship with PNK and LKIM staff

In this study, the likert scale is used to measure respondent's perception on each of the items where they were asked to rate the level at which they agree or disagree with a given statement. The questionnaires used a likert scale from 1 to 5, corresponding to (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) somewhat agree (4) agree and (5) strongly disagree.

#### IV. LITERATURE REVIEWS

Based on literature review on the study of collective action, there are various definitions for collective action. According to Marshall [3], collective action is an action taken by a group (either directly or on its behalf through an organization) in pursuit of member's perceived shared interests. Meinzein-Dick [15] defines collective action as "the involvement of a group of people, requiring shared interest within the group, involving some kind of common action which works in pursuit of that shared interest and is voluntary". Studies on collective action have been conducted on various issues among them is the analysis of gender and collective action by investigating the intersection of collective action and gender [7]. The main analysis investigates how gender-oriented can foster more effective collective action in the context of agriculture and natural resource management and how collective action can be used as a vehicle for gender equality. Meanwhile, a study among women in Self Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) in Gujarat shows that the significant factors that have sustained collective action of these women are the presence of strong grassroots institution, the establishment of a technical cadre of women (barefoot technicians) and the ability of women's groups to transcend social barriers and continuous dialoguing with the state [16]. Through this collective action project, women have benefited in terms of increased income, reduced drudgery, improvements in the livelihoods of their families, reduced migration of both women and men and increased participation in SEWA's other programs. Other impact observed is the strengthening of women's collective agency and women's confidence to independently negotiate in the public domain in the water management sector, which was earlier occupied by men.

Most studies on the benefit of microfinance program in empowering women emphasized the element of collective action as the main contributor [4]. Based on Sanyal's study among the participants of microfinance groups in West Bengal, India revealed that structuring socially isolated women into peer-groups for an explicitly economic purpose such as access to credit has an effect on the women's collective social behavior [14]. She also discovered that improvements in women's social capital and normative influence fostered this capacity for collective action. Other factors contributed to these transformations are economic ties among members, the structure of the group network and women's participation in group meetings. She also argued that microfinance groups have the potential to promote women's social capital and normative influence and therefore facilitating women's collective empowerment. In other places, collective action can be used by women to resist exploitation especially amongst women working within the industry sector. Dannecker analyse how women in garment sector in Bangladesh resist exploitation through collective action, creating organization and networking [13]. In the case of KUNITA group, the success of a collective action groups depends on the role and charismatic leadership of its leader, as well as the seriousness and commitment of the host agencies involved which include the Area Fishermen Association and LKIM [11].

#### V. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### A. Profile of Respondents

Majority of the respondents are married (82.4 percent), widowed (10.8 percent), divorced (5.4 percent) and single (1.4 percent). In terms of education, more than 70 percent of respondents received formal education, 23 percent are form five school leavers, 20.3 percent SRP, 32.4 percent standard six while 13.5 percent do not received any formal education. About 48.6 percent do not have sources of income, 28.4 percent of respondents are running a small scale business while 12.2 percent working in private sector followed by 2.7 percent respondents work in government sector. Only small number of them (8.1 percent) involved in fishing activities. Nearly 32 percent of the respondents earned between RM500 – 1000, more than RM1000 (4 percent) and the rest is between RM100 – 500 (14 percent). More than 32.4 percent of the respondents' spouses work as fishermen whereas 2.7 percent work in private sector. Some of them involve in small scale business (12.2 percent) and a few of them work as government servant (2.7 percent). 45.9 percent of respondents indicate that they found out about KUNITA activities through their friends and neighbors. Among the factors that encouraged respondents to become KUNITA members are to fill up free time (51 percent), to increase source of income (32.4 percent), to enhance personal skills (36.5 percent), to learn something new (35.1 percent). Some other factors include being persuaded by friends (27 percent), deep interest (14.9 percent) and others (17.6 percent). However, only 16.2 percent claimed that they are full-time members of KUNITA whereas 81.1 percent are part-time members (which mean that

they do not fully participate in all activities organized by KUNITA group). Majority of them are ordinary members (81.1 percent) while 8.1 percent are committee members, and the rest (5.6 percent) are the chairperson, deputy chairperson, secretary and treasurer of the organization.

### B. Likert Analysis

Each of the indicator for collective action discussed below were based on the likert scale analysis. The average likert scores from the questionnaire on each item: cooperation, voluntary, boundedness and social capital will be shown and explained. The items ranked by respondents are arranged from the highest point to the lowest point based on the mean score for each item. Reliability test for all the likert scale variables shows the significant with the value of Cronbach's Alpha at 0.987.

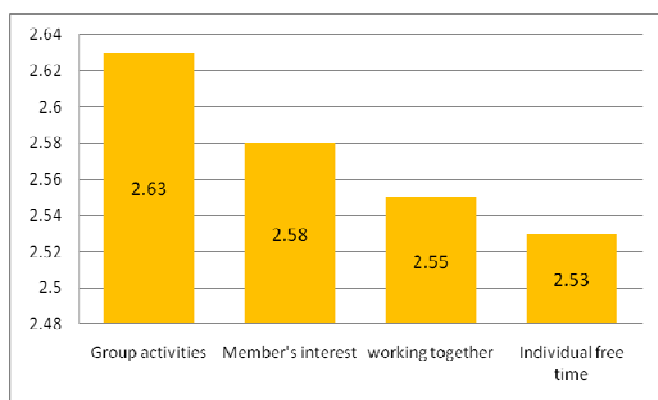


Fig. 1: Cooperative Items (Highest Mean Score)

Based on the Fig.1, respondents are more or less agreed to the fact that they as member of KUNITA group are doing group activities with the objective to achieve the group's goal which is represented by the highest mean score of 2.63. The likert data shows that majority of respondents do not feel that their level of cooperation is high as most scores are below 2.5.

As presented in Fig.2, the respondents do not feel that they are fully involved in business decision making process particularly in the marketing and the distribution of profit when most mean scores are below 2.0. Almost 50 percent of respondents agreed that not all group members involved in the decision-making on where their products will be marketed which is represented by the mean score of 1.93, the lowest score in the group. Therefore, it could be concluded that generally the respondents do not feel that their level of cooperation are high among the members.

Fig. 3 shows the average mean scores from the questionnaire on the voluntary items. Nearly 60 percent of respondents strongly agree that they voluntarily participated in KUNITA group based on the mean score of 3.23, the highest mean score from all the scores shown. Respondents also strongly believed that the member have a high level of volunteerism to get involved in any activities organized by KUNITA.

In fact, all the mean scores of each item under voluntary indicator are above 2.5 which signify a high level of volunteerism among the members of KUNITA group.

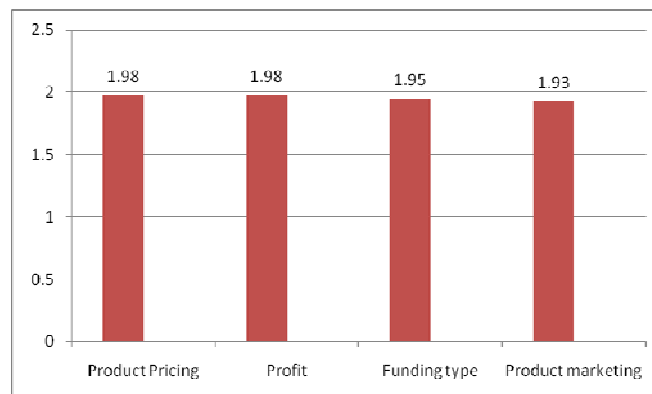


Fig. 2: Cooperative Items (Lowest Mean Score)

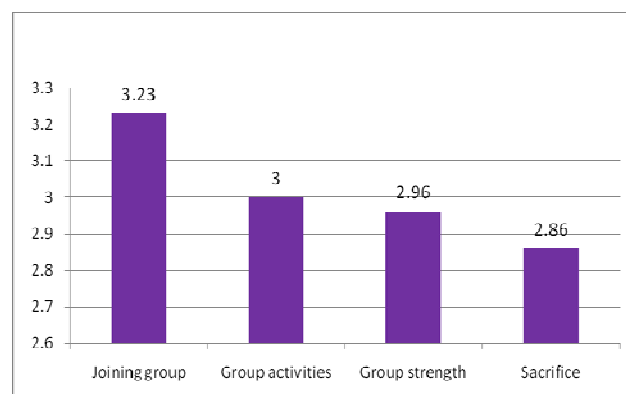


Fig. 3: Voluntary Items (Highest Mean Score)

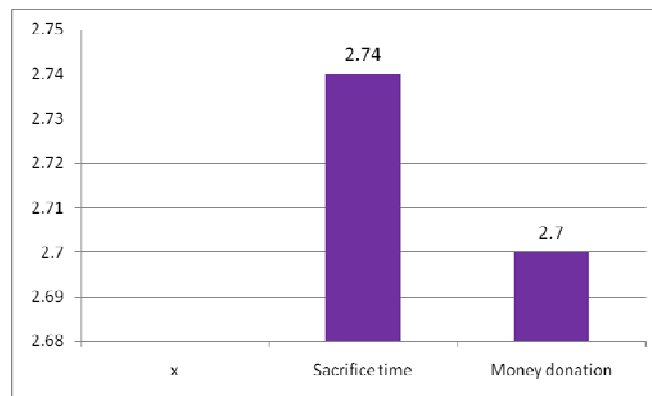


Fig. 4: Voluntary Items (Lowest Mean Score)

The lowest mean score of 2.7 as presented in Fig. 4 explains that respondents are quite willing to a certain extent to donate some money to maintain group strength though the amount maybe too small.

In terms of group boundedness, majority of the mean scores are between 2.5 – 2.9 as presented in Fig.5. More than 50 percent of the members tended to agree that they have high level of trust towards other group members where the mean score is 2.93, the highest mean score in the group. The result above suggest that many of the members of this study agreed or strongly agreed (59.5percent) with the view that “I have high level of trust towards my other members of the group”.

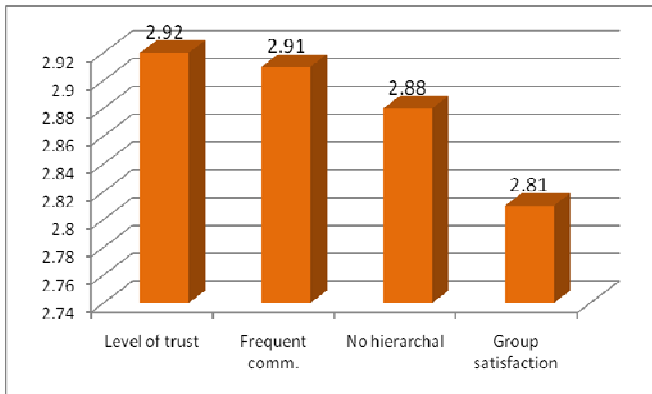


Fig. 5: Group Boundedness (Highest Mean Score)

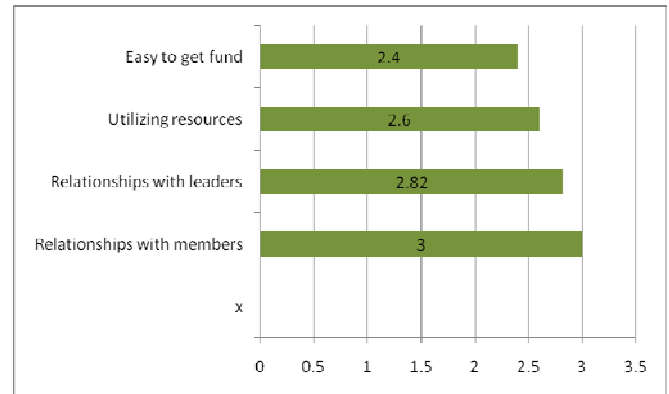


Fig. 7: Social Capital Items (All Mean Score)

Most members somewhat agree that they do share group's value, understand each other, share the same belief and group activities and will take over other member's work when emergency arises.

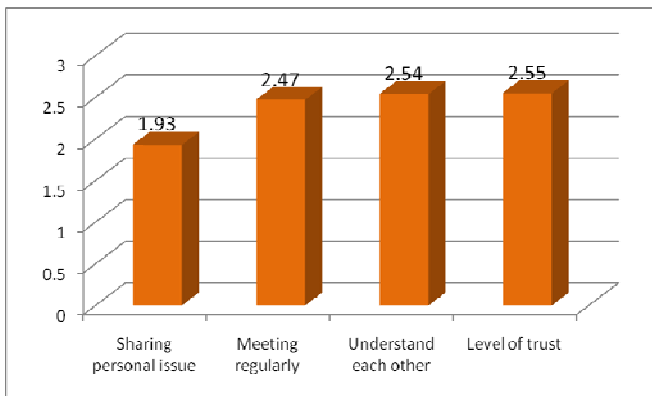


Fig. 6: Group Boundedness (Lowest Mean Score)

However, it is revealed in Fig. 6 that more than 75 percent of members strongly disagree or disagree that "we do shares our personal problems" with the average score of 1.93 (the lowest). This shows that group members are quite open in sharing group activities and information but not their personal problems.

Based on Fig. 7, more than 56 percent of members agree to the fact their relationship with the other members are very close with the mean scores of 3.0, the highest among the other scores in the group. The respondents agreed that they are fully utilizing the resources. On the other hand they also feel that it is not easy for the group to get fund for their group projects.

Fig. 8 shows the result of the comparison of mean score of each indicator of collective action. It shows that the respondents are somewhat agreed with the level of volunteerism of their group members as the likert ranking system shows that the highest mean score is 2.92 followed by level of boundedness (2.65) and level of social capital (2.71). The lowest mean score is 2.44 which indicates that respondents do not feel or somewhat disagreed with the fact that the level of cooperation among their group members is high.

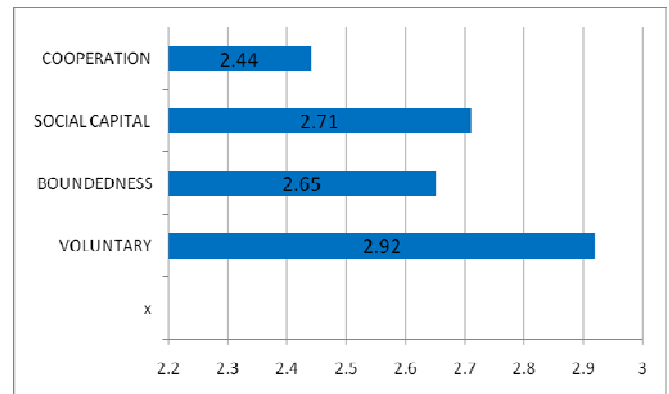


Fig. 8: Mean Scores of Each Indicators of Collective Action

By combining the likert score for all items under these 4 indicators, the minimum score is 42 and the maximum score is 206 while the mean score is 140.07. This would mean that the overall level of collective action among the KUNITA group's members is at 3.335 which shows that majority of the respondents are more or less agreed that the level of collective action of KUNITA groups in Selangor is relatively high.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

This paper discusses the case of collective action among members of Fishermen's wives groups (KUNITA) in Selangor. In terms of cooperativeness, members felt that they were quite cooperative to get participated in group activities with the objective to achieve the group's goal but unfortunately majority of them felt that they do not have power in decision-making process particularly in product marketing and the profit distribution. Therefore, generally, the members do not feel that their level of cooperation is high. However, interestingly, the members have no doubt with the level of volunteerism among their members and also the high level of trust that they have towards the other members of the group. Although they do not share personal problems but they do share group's value, understand each other and share the same belief and group activities. They also have strong relationship with each other and also with the leader of the group.

These are among the factors that sustain the level of collective action in KUNITA groups of this study. However, extra measures need to be taken not only by the members of

the group but also the host agency such as LKIM to increase the level of collective action among the members ensure the sustainability of the group. There are many cases where KUNITA groups have become inactive due to the lack of commitment and cooperation among the members. We believe that any efforts taken to increase the level of collective action will benefit the members in terms of the increased in their incomes and the improvements in the livelihoods of their families. Some of the suggestions to increase the level of collective action are by having a strong leadership, full support from host agencies, creativity of the group members and the ability to transcend social barriers and have continuous interaction with the local leaders and politicians.

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