

# opción

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,  
Lingüística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, 2019, Especial N°

# 21

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

ISSN 1012-1537/ ISSNe: 2477-9385

Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia  
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias  
Departamento de Ciencias Humanas  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

# **A case study of sustainable livelihood strategy of women porters at Entikong-Tebedu**

**Parveen Kaur<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>University Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohamad Musa, 94300  
Kota Samarahan, Malaysia,  
[sspkaur@unimas.my](mailto:sspkaur@unimas.my)

**Nurul Nadzatul Farah Binti Mohd Khairi<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>University Malaysia Sarawak, Jalan Datuk Mohamad Musa, 94300  
Kota Samarahan, Malaysia,  
[farahacs@unimas.my](mailto:farahacs@unimas.my)

**Khalil Ur Rahman<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>3</sup>Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah Saudi Arabia  
[kurehman68@unimas.my](mailto:kurehman68@unimas.my)

**Isma Rosila Binti Ismail<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>4</sup>University Malaysia Terengganu, 21030 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu,  
Malaysia  
[ismarosila@umt.edu.my](mailto:ismarosila@umt.edu.my)

**Arif Jawaid<sup>5</sup>**

<sup>5</sup>Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan  
[arifjawaid54@lgu.edu.pk](mailto:arifjawaid54@lgu.edu.pk)

## **Abstract**

This article reveals the case study of women porters (tukang pikul) at the Entikong-Tebedu border by taking the sustainable livelihood framework. A qualitative approach formed the structure of enquiry adopted. Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary field involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. As a result, the women porters were mostly motivated by the desire to support their household, in fulfilling basic daily expenses. In conclusion, this informal activity is an important source of income for the women thus, with the right livelihood strategies their livelihood outcome would remain sustainable.

**Keywords:** Women Porters, Sustainability, Livelihood, Sarawak.

## Un estudio de caso de la estrategia de medios de vida sostenibles de mujeres portadoras en Entikong-Tebedu

### Resumen

Este artículo revela el estudio de caso de mujeres portadoras (tukang pikul) en la frontera Entikong-Tebedu al adoptar el marco de medios de vida sostenibles. Un enfoque cualitativo formó la estructura de la investigación adoptada. La investigación cualitativa es un campo interdisciplinario que involucra un enfoque interpretativo y naturalista de su materia. Como resultado, las mujeres portadoras estaban motivadas principalmente por el deseo de mantener a su hogar, en el pago de los gastos diarios básicos. En conclusión, esta actividad informal es una importante fuente de ingresos para las mujeres, por lo tanto, con las estrategias de subsistencia correctas, su resultado de subsistencia se mantendría sostenible.

**Palabras clave:** Mujeres portuarias, sostenibilidad, medios de vida, sarawak.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There are types of work just do not conform to orthodox categories of paid employment. For instance, work that is carried out in the informal economy is not recorded in any official employment statistics. The term informal economy refers to a transaction outside the sphere of regular employment; involving the exchange of cash for services provided, but often the direct exchange of goods and services.

Ahlvin (2012) refers the informal sector to parts of the economy that is not taxed or monitored by the government, thus, such occupations within the informal sector include temporary and casual jobs and an unofficial earning strategies. It is described as the sum total of economic activity that happens outside the state regulations which is neither taxed nor represented in a country's GDP. Giddens (2013) reported that in most developed countries, the informal economy is relatively small in comparison with the formal paid sector. However, this pattern is reversed in developing countries. In developing countries, people's main experience of work is in the informal sector, which is seen as the norm.

World Bank Giddens (2013), between 25% and 40% of GDP in developing Asian and African countries comes from the informal sector. In Nigeria, Africa's largest country, the figure might be close 65% of GNP. The jobs include goods and services; from handicrafts and street trader to farm labor and money lending. Theresa and Ahlvin (2012) reported that the poor take on informal employment such as subsistence informal jobs, secondary jobs and occasional jobs. Such situation also occurs in Indonesia where the informal economy contributes significantly in Indonesia's economy, particularly in terms of employment by providing economic opportunities to those displaced from or who cannot be absorbed by the formal sector. Informal sector and informal employment statistics, however, have not yet been regularly collected nor included in Indonesia's office labor force statistics.

Women dominate the informal sector of developing countries. The informal economy and cross border trade define cross border as the buying and selling of goods and services between businesses in neighboring countries. According to Awumbila and Schandorf (2008), women remain concentrated in the invisible area of informal work, such as domestic labor piece-rate homework, and assistance in small family enterprises which offer precarious employment status, little or no access to social security or protection. Poor women, employed in the informal economy, also face a number of serious health and safety risks, including dangerous working conditions. The informal economy has the ability to reduce poverty or empower women based on a few studies. Schneider and Colin stated that informal border trade is essential for poverty reduction. It provides specific opportunities for the empowerment of women through the development of informal and formal sector retail market.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *2.1 Sustainable Livelihood Framework*

A livelihood is a means of making a living, securing necessities of life such as water, shelter medicine, and clothing. The most commonly used definition of livelihood written by Carney (Haan, 2012), a livelihood system comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with

and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhances its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.

This has been the starting point as what is known as sustainable livelihood approach. This approach is people-centered in terms of understanding the struggle of poor people in the formation of policies and intervention. According to the Harvard Humanitarian Academy, vulnerability context describes external uncontrollable factors that influence people's assets and livelihood opportunities. These factors are classified as shocks (environmental-conflict related), trends such as resources and technology, and seasonality such as price fluctuation and employment opportunity. Example of shocks and stresses includes earthquakes, droughts and other natural disasters; economic recession, pest and disease epidemics, wars, hungry season, death of the family. Those who are unable to cope or adapt are unlikely to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

## *2.2 Women Porters*

According to Chtatou (2016), hundreds of poor Moroccan women of Amazigh work as women porters and enter the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Mellila to be used as mule's porteadoras to transport huge bales of contraband goods into Moroccan territory to be sold in markets all over the country. This is a form of informal cross border trade in the service sector in which the women involved are

called female porters, carrier women or mule women. Kirton (1994), defined these women in Morocco-Spain border as carrier women who carry bundles of goods from Ceuta – the city in the country with higher macroeconomic indicators to nearby Moroccan border towns and cities –in the country with lower indicators.

In Ghana according to Ahlvin (2012), the local term for the female porter is Kayayei. The kayayei are usually unskilled migrants from Northern Ghana who come from underdeveloped rural areas in search of jobs in the cities of the south. It is common, according to Yeboah, for kayayei to be exploited by their patrons and hassled by police and city authorities. Lack of education as stated by Awumbila and Schandorf (2008), is recognized as a major factor behind their poverty. A large number of them are involved in the informal sector because they have dropped out of school or never enrolled at school thus the only way for greater economic stability is by being women porters. Kayayei is employed by travelers, shop owners, general shoppers, or traders and is used to offset the difficulty of vehicles accessing the center of the market to load or discharge goods. These studies reviewed are all concern about porters at international borders.

### *2.3 Informal Sector*

International Labour Organization stated that all activities that are, in law or practice, or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements are defined as the informal economy. Kirton (1994)

stated that the informal sector refers to the activities of the poor who are working very hard but are not recognized, recorded, protected or regulated by the public authorities. Economic growth during the past few decades has largely taken place in the informal economy. The outflow of the labor force from subsistence farming into industry and services in the developing countries does not reduce the importance of informal employment as a global phenomenon. According to Kirton (1994), informal work in Africa accounted for almost 80 % of non-agricultural employment and over 90 % of new jobs. Informal employment also compensated for the demise of the formal economy in the countries in transition: When the formal sector partly collapsed in the 1980–1990s, the deterioration was widely made up for by increased informal employment.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative approach formed the structure of enquiry adopted. Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary field involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter, in addition to creativity and insight in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings. According to Kirton (1994), qualitative research is multi method in focus. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings or interpret phenomena in terms of how people bring about the meanings to them. Kimmel and Aronson (2012) reported that qualitative methods often rely on more inductive and inferential reasoning to understand the social life and experience of

social interaction. The aims and objectives are directed at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of the social world of research participants by learning about the sense they make of their social and material circumstances, experiences, perspectives and histories. Epistemology taken for this research is interpretivism in which it is a contrast of positivism. Kirton (1994) reported that this view that the subject matter of the social sciences, people and their institutions is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. The philosophy traditions underlying this epistemology is phenomenology that is a concern with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the researcher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of the world. Kirton (1994) reported that phenomenology is used to understand the constructs, concepts or ideas people use in everyday life to make sense of their world. This is to uncover meanings contained within conversation or text.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

##### 4.1. Background of Respondents

Table 1: Details of Respondents

Respondent	Age (years)	Ethnicity	Education Level	Marital Status	Years Involved as tukang pikul	Income Per Month (RM)
1	40	Malay-Dayak	Junior High School	Married	12	400 to 500

2	47	Malay	Primary School	Married	10	200 to 300
3	66	Dayak	None	Widowed	33	500 to 800
4	46	Bidayuh	Informal Islamic School(Madrasah)	Married	25	500 to 600
5	49	Malay	None	Married	30	600 to 700

All of the women interviewed are from a rural area that is Balai Karangan, Entikong sub-district of West Kalimantan. From table 6.1.1 it is found that they are from 40 to 66 years old. All of them are Muslims and consist of two Malays, one Bidayuh and two are of Malay-Dayak ethnicities. Respondent 1 is the daughter of the oldest tukang pikul or in the region that is respondent 3. She inherited this livelihood from her mother. Respondent 3 and respondent 5 have no formal education at all. The other two have studied up to junior high school and primary school but only respondent 4 had gone to madrasah or informal Islamic School but all of them did not finish their studies and had to drop out due to lacking of financial capital. The longest years involved in this informal job is respondent 3 who is also the oldest of all the respondents. She is the only widow while the rest are all married and living with their spouses.

She also earns the highest of all the women porters as her earnings could reach up to RM800. The lowest income is earned by respondent 2 which is RM200. All respondents sell other things to add in their income as women porters except for respondent 2, thus

indicating why she earns the least among all the other women that are from RM200 to RM300. Respondent 1, 3 and 5 sell drinks and food such as tapai or fermented rice, bean curd and crackers except for respondent 4 who sells turmeric herbal drinks or known as jamu with the price of RM5 per bottle. It takes approximately from 30 to 40 minutes from Balai Karangan to the Entikong-Tebedu border and they ride a minivan which is called ojek with a fee of RM10 for a round trip to and from the border.

#### *4.2. Findings*

Respondent 1 is a 40-year-old married woman and lives at Balai Karangan, West Kalimantan. She is married for 23 years and has six children. She is of Malay- Dayak ethnicity and she is a Muslim. Her husband works at Immigration as a cross border pass handler. It is an informal sector which provides and handle cross border pass. She only received formal education up to junior high school which is known as Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP) in Indonesia because her family could not afford to pay for her education. Thus, she gets married to her husband at the age of 17 years old and becomes a full-time housewife. However, after a few years, due to the increase in the number of household members, she decided to work as a tukang pikul consequently inherited the job from her mother who is already involved in this informal sector since the 1980s. Her household expenses in a month are approximately about RM 600 to RM 700.

Combined with her husband income, it is not enough to support their needs because the income is not fixed, in which the husband earns around RM 400-500 per month. As a result, she chooses to work as tukang pikul and sells food to supplement the income. For instance, she sells Tapai or known as fermented rice for RM1 per piece, bean curd for RM 5 for three pieces. Meanwhile, for the income of tukang pikul she usually gets the highest around RM 50 per week. In general, the total income of the household is approximately RM 1000 per month and could be lesser than that. For the past three months, she has delivered her sixth child and she rested for three months before continue working.

She has decided to get involved in this informal sector in order to help her husband support the household income. After witnessing her mother for many years in this sector, she thinks that she can help her family even she does not earn much, but she still can contribute to the family rather than not doing anything and only become a full-time housewife. For the past three months, she delivered her sixth child and she only rested for three months and continue to work. For her, even though she could not carry heavy luggage for this few months, she still wanted to go to Tebedu and sell drinks. Working as a tukang pikul is not easy. Respondent 1 had experienced a lot of challenges while working. She had gone through the hardship to carry all the customers' goods with her hands. Because of the physical pain, she decided to buy a wheelbarrow to help her transfer the things from the Tebedu to Entikong. It takes about 10 minutes to walk from one post to the other post border with the heavy luggage under the hot weather.

Sometimes she suffered severe headaches. Other challenges that occurred while working as *Tukang Pikul* is that when she has to deal with customers who are rude and they are not willing to pay for the service. In addition, there are also customers who only pay RM 0.20 for the goods she had to carry. There were also some customers who did not want to pay at all. The situation may get harsh, but they still continue working. Furthermore, respondent 1 did not regret and get tired to go to work because she can earn side income for her family. It is not that they do not want to try another opportunity to work in another sector, such as working in a restaurant or factory, but because the job opportunities in Indonesia is very limited and competitive. When it is raining, the demand for service is also reduced. However, she stated that there are the times when there are a lot of customers who need this service which was during public holidays. For instance, Eid festive and others.

During that time, Indonesians in Malaysia will go back to Indonesia and they need all this women service to carry their luggage as the time taken from Tebedu and Entikong approximately around 10 minutes' walk with a distance of 1.5 kilometres. Respondent 2 is 47 years old and has been married for 8 years. She has two children; the first child is still in primary school and the other one still in kindergarten. Her husband works as a driver who sends people from Balai Karangan to Pontianak with the fees of RM 120 round trip per person. In order to support the household income, she decides to work as a *tukang pikul* at Malaysia- Indonesia border. Every day, she will go to Tebedu post border at 6 a.m until 4 p.m to carry customers' goods.

She is involved in this informal work because there is no need of high capital to start the service and also due to encouragement from her tukang pikul' friends. Before she works as a tukang pikul, she was a full-time housewife.

Hamidah stated that by working as a tukang pikul, she can contribute to the household expenditures. She crosses the border using the Pas Lintas Batas (PLB). Every day she uses the van which is known as Ojek to the locals to travel for 15 KM from her house to border post with RM5 fees for one way. Her income for a week can reach up to RM 50 or may be less than that. Not like her other friends, Hamidah uses only her hand and head to carry all the customer's goods. She did not have a trolley like some other tukang pikul. Due to this, she gets high blood pressure and pains at the neck and head areas. Until today, she still consumes medication from the clinic. She still wants to continue her work as tukang pikul because this work helps her to generate income and helps support the household expenses.

### *4.3. Discussion*

#### *4.3.1. Challenges faced as women porters and the strategies to overcome them*

The main human capital asset for the women porters is relying on physical strength. With a lack of education and lack of access to financial capital, they lack the means of achieving high-quality

livelihood outcomes. For poor people, the main asset is their body in the form of labour power that is used to generate income. In being the tukang pikul, the impact they get of long years of carrying heavy goods is bad headaches, because, in order to carry heavy loads, they wrap up all the goods in a huge cloth, tie up the bundle of goods and put it on their heads. This is a labour intensive job. Three of the respondents had started to purchase trolley to overcome their problems. This is part of the livelihood strategy to overcome problems in carrying heavy goods. Kirton (1994) stated that livelihood resources may be combined creatively and innovatively often in complex ways to create more livelihood. The trollies are purchased 5 years ago in Malaysia for a price of RM150.

With the use of trolley, it has changed the way tukang pikul operate. They have changed their strategy to achieve sustainable livelihood outcome through adaptation. The physical capital that is the tool has changed from the traditional ways. Beule and Nauwelaerts (2013), stated that innovation is a practical application and adaptation of ideas. However, innovation can lead to the ruin of culture. It has been altered from the original ways. Those who do not own a trolley to help them carry heavy goods are lacking the financial capital to purchase it. For the past three decades before, there has never been the use of trolley in this job scope. We can see the alteration of pursuing this livelihood activity.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The discussion identifies the strategies as they relate to capital assets and diversifications and how they access the assets as outlined in

the livelihood framework. Low education, poverty and lacking employment opportunities have encouraged the women to be involved in the informal sector to support the household income. Being a tukang pikul is no easy task for women especially the older ones in their 50s and 60s to carry heavy goods. However, to ensure it is sustainable, they have acquired livelihood strategies such as purchasing trolleys as an option to replace the old way of carrying the goods. It does not release them from being out of poverty but helps them to make ends meet and save a little of their financial capital to secure their family's future and also for other household obligations.

Other than that they have also adopted mutual support and networking with the officials at the borders to allow them to operate as originally before the establishment of official customs and immigration post, this cross border service is legal. These women at the border are concerned about the decreasing of economic opportunity and have to arrive to an agreement with the authorities. They also adopt food rationing strategy to increase financial capital for other household expenditures. In addition, they have outlined structural institutions and processes that impact their livelihood.

It is not that they are not hardworking enough, but the limit of employment opportunities limits their access to basic necessities. Being a tukang pikul is an income generating activity and a way to earn one's livelihood in the border area. The formal sector is not enough to promote economic development in the remote and underdeveloped region of the border area. The informal activity can

provide a significant economic opportunity for households since it can diminish poverty, enhance household wellbeing, produce job opportunities and increase income.

## REFERENCES

- AHLVIN, K. 2012. **The Burden of kayayei: Cultural and Socioeconomic Difficulties Facing Female Porters in Agboglobshie**. PURE Insights. Vol. 1, N° 4: 11-16. Australia.
- AWUMBILA, M., & SCHANDORF, E. 2008. **Gendered poverty, migration and livelihood strategies of female porters in Accra, Ghana**. Norwegian Journal of Geography. Vol. 62, N° 3: 171-179. Norway.
- BEULE, F., & NAUWELAERTS, Y. 2013. **Innovation and Creativity: pillars of the future global economy**. Cheltenham, Gloucestershire: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited. UK.
- CHATATOU, M. 2016. **Mule women of morocco**. Retrieved from International Policy Digest Website: <https://intpolicydigest.org/2016/03/20/the-mule-women-of-morocco/>. UK.
- GIDDENS, A., & SUTTON, P. 2013. **Sociology**. Cambridge. UK: Polity Press. UK.
- HAAN, L. 2012. **The livelihood approach: A critical exploration**. Erdkunde. Vol. 66, N° 4: 345-357. UK.
- KIMMEL, M., & ARONSON, A. 2009. **Sociology Now**. Boston, Massachusetts: Pearson Higher Education. USA.

**KIRTON, M. 1994. *Adaptors and Innovators: styles of creativity and problem solving*. New York, New York: Routledge. UK.**





**UNIVERSIDAD  
DEL ZULIA**

---

## **opción**

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales  
Año 35, Especial N° 21, (2019)

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.  
Maracaibo - Venezuela

[www.luz.edu.ve](http://www.luz.edu.ve)

[www.serbi.luz.edu.ve](http://www.serbi.luz.edu.ve)

[produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve](http://produccioncientifica.luz.edu.ve)