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## ***Microcredit as a Tool for Women Empowerment: The Case of the Micro-pinj Project***

Women's empowerment is vital to the realization of women's human rights because human rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible and interrelated. In order to transform a society to be impartial and gender equal, it requires both men and women in the society to equally share the distribution of power, equal access to and control of resources and fully participate in the process of development and the well being of societies. The ability of women to make choices and participate in the process of making that decision is fundamental to gender equality.

Women's empowerment is a significant process that gives women a sense of power to challenge the existing patriarchal values and systems in every institution in the society. For example, in most societies, women are more likely to be poor or paid less compared to men. Often the economic disparity causes women to carry the burden of unpaid work within families and societies. As a result, women will be discriminated against equal economic opportunities which will perpetuate the gender gap. Thus, one of the current approaches to empower women in economic activity is through microcredit.

### **What is Microcredit?**

Microcredit is the provision of financial services to those who are excluded from conventional commercial financial services since most are too poor to offer much - or anything - in the way of collateral. It presents a series of exciting possibilities for extending markets, reducing poverty and fostering social change.

The concept of microcredit originated in the mid-1970s in Bangladesh through a pioneering experiment by Dr Muhammad Yunus, then a Professor of Economics. His aim was to offer poor people financial services, entrepreneurship opportunities, an end to mistreatment by money lenders and a system so that the poor could produce, manage and maintain their own finances. With available credit, these groups can generate their own income and less dependent on others. Bank cannot lend them the money because the poor people are not credit worthy. Thus one of the ways to help them out is by giving them credit in small amount with small interest.

### **Projek Micro Pinjaman USM**

*Projek Micro Pinjaman USM* or better known as *Micro-Pinj* is a form of microcredit that extends small loans to entrepreneurs not eligible for conventional bank loans. *Micro-Pinj* adheres to help the USM bottom billion by providing the low-income group staff in all three campuses regardless of ethnicity, religion or political belief the working capital to increase their household's income. In addition, the project helps to motivate eligible households to participate towards improving the quality of their respective livelihood. USM's *Micro-Pinj* stipulates the needs to fulfill the project's seven (7) Key Transformation Indicators or KTI's which are (1) to increase household income, (2) to increase household saving, (3) to create self employment, (4) to generate productive assets, (5) to fulfill basic needs: housing, education, health and nutrition, (6) to fulfill religious needs and (7) to manage staff productivity at work.

Microcredit is a “community development” approach that seeks to “empower” the poor to change the structural basis of their poverty. Typical microfinance clients are poor and low-income people that do not have access to other formal financial institutions. Microfinance clients are usually self-employed, household-based entrepreneurs. Their diverse “microenterprises” include small retail shops, street vending, artisanal manufacture, and service provision. In rural areas, micro entrepreneurs often have small income-generating activities such as food processing and trade.

Traditionally, microcredit and microfinance programs have targeted women. In most societies, women manage the day-to-day household budget and are more likely to save regularly by investing the benefits from any increases in income into the welfare of their family. Besides that, they have been proven to be much better at taking a credit risk than their male counterparts. Kabeer (2003) listed at least two main reasons why women are better in repaying loans. Firstly, there are not many financial institutions that target women and offer them loans. Thus, the women need to maintain access to these loans and they pay back the loan to ensure themselves continuous accessibility to the loan. Secondly, women with children find it easier to manage self-employment than wage-employment.

Hulme and Mosley (1997) noted that “81 percent of female borrowers have no overdue repayment installments compared to 74 percent by men. In one of “Micro Pinj” case studies, a female borrower from Kelantan managed to settle her loan in only two months because of the large profits her husband gained from their business.

For the Malawi Mudzi Fund in late 1990, the on-time repayment for women was 92 percent as against 83 percent for men (Hulme, 1991). In Micro Pinj, 97 percent of women borrowers pay their loan on-time. In Malaysia, *Projek Ikhtiar* reported 95 percent repayment rates for women as against 72 percent for men (Gibbons & Kassim, 1991). However, the repayment rate in Micro-Pinj is still at the positive level and encouraging which is at 98 percent.

Women actually control loans once they gain access to credit institution. There were relatively high levels of widowed, separated and divorced women that fully control their loans (Goetz & Sen Gupta, 1994). According to Dixon (1980), a woman earning half of their household income will likely to have more bargaining power than women who earns none, even when the total household income were the same.

Saving and credit programs improve women’s social status where husbands and other relatives are described as showing more respect, members are more confident in their dealings with the outside world and they show greater awareness of their rights (Todd, 1996).

Microcredit is not merely an instrument for credit extension to the poor borrowers. It is a movement to emancipate the poor—especially women—to alleviate their poverty, improve their quality of life, and build their capacity and awareness and to integrate them economically and socially into the mainstream of the economy.

A survey conducted by the Micro Pinj USM on 24 women microcredit borrowers in 2010, conclusively shows that there is an increase in the borrowers’ capacity; in the awareness in terms of children’s health and education, domestic environment, acceptance of family planning (income & saving), self identity (to perform hajj as religious basic needs), control over domestic or productive assets and in sharing their personal opinion in various families issues. Thus, Micro-Pinj is seen as a tool to empower women and enabling them to be active recipients of the programme.

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## Glossary

### Differential Access to and Control over Resources:

Productive, reproductive and community roles require the use of resources. In general, women and men have different levels of both: access to the resources needed for their work, and control over those resources.

**Access:** the opportunity to make use of something.

**Control:** the ability to define its use and impose that definition on others.

### Economic/

### Political/Social/Time/

**Resources:** Resources can be economic: such as land or equipment; political: such as representation, leadership and legal structures; social: such as child care, family planning, education;

and also time — a critical but often scarce resource.

**(Source: Gender Mainstreaming Learning & Information Packs prepared by the United Nations Development Programme- UNDP)**

Website: <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/> (accessed May 31, 2010)

**Microcredit.** The loan of small amounts of money to very poor households at commercial rates, rather than at the 'usurious rates of loan sharks' (S. Buckingham-Hatfield 2000). The classic model is the Grameen Bank, initiated in Bangladesh by Mohammed Yunus. Small groups of women negotiate

loans, which are given to the neediest group members, from the Bangladesh Central Bank. The women are expected to go through training in their proposed enterprise, and in financial management. The loans are repaid in fifty equal installments, and the repayment rate is above 94%. Similar micro-credit schemes have been set up throughout the developing world, and have been enormously effective, not only in alleviating poverty and improving child nutrition, but also in increasing the voluntary use of contraception.

**(Source: <http://www.answers.com/topic/micro-credit> [Accessed on June 15, 2010] )**

**Resources:** Resources are means and goods, including those that are economic (household income) or productive (land, equipment, tools, work, credit); political (capability for leadership, information and organization); and time.

**(Source: United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women <http://uinstraw.org>)**  
Website: <http://www.medinstgenderstudies.org/> (accessed June 15, 2010)

## Special Event

### Lawatan Penyelidikan ke Kampung Bujang, Merbok, Kedah

Salah satu cabang dalam kluster penyelidikan yang ditubuhkan oleh KANITA dalam Gender, *Livelihood, In (Equality), Development dan Empowerment* atau ringkasannya disebut GLIDE ialah ICT. Justeru itu, satu perbincangan awal dengan kakitangan akademik Pusat Pengajian Sains Komputer yang terdiri daripada Prof. Rosni Abdullah Dr. Nasriah Zakaria, Puan Fatin Damanhuri, Puan Maziani Sabudin dan Puan Norlia Mustafa telah diadakan pada bulan Mac 2010 khusus untuk membincangkan peluang penyelidikan rentas bidang yang boleh dilaksanakan.

Hasil daripada perbincangan ini, satu idea tercetus untuk mengadakan penyelidikan di

Kampung Bujang, Merbok, Kedah. Antara faktor yang menyebabkan kampung ini dipilih adalah kerana kerjasama yang diberikan oleh Tuan Haji Romli Abu Bakar yang juga merupakan mantan Timbalan Pendaftar USM. Tuan Haji Romli banyak membantu para penduduk meningkatkan taraf hidup mereka dari sudut ekonomi serta pendidikan contohnya menyediakan kelas tambahan Bahasa Inggeris untuk kanak-kanak di kampung tersebut dan persekitarannya.

Pada 5 April 2010, rombongan daripada USM yang diketuai oleh Prof. Datin Rashidah Shuib telah mengadakan lawatan ke kampung ini bertujuan untuk meninjau kemungkinan menjalin kerjasama dan meneliti kemungkinan penyelidikan yang boleh diadakan.

Lawatan ini juga turut dihadiri oleh beberapa kakitangan akademik daripada Pusat Pengajian Sains Komputer terdiri daripada Dr. Nasriah Zakaria dan Puan Fatin Damanhuri di samping lima orang kakitangan akademik KANITA. Ahli rombongan telah dibawa melawat sebuah rumah yang asalnya merupakan rumah dingin beku perikanan yang diubahsuai untuk dijadikan tempat kelas tambahan serta bilik penginapan kepada para penyelidik yang datang menjalankan kajian di situ.



Pemandangan di Kampung Bujang, Merbok, Kedah



**Warga KANITA dan penduduk kampung sedang mendengar taklimat yang diselenggarakan oleh Prof. Datin Rashidah Shuib.**

Semasa sesi perbincangan yang dikendalikan oleh Prof. Datin Rashidah Shuib, beberapa isu telah dikemukakan oleh penduduk wanita di situ tentang keperluan mereka yang boleh melibatkan ICT seperti penggunaan dan kepentingan komputer dalam perniagaan, internet dan seumpamanya. Kebanyakan penduduk kampung yang hadir terdiri daripada kaum wanita yang menunjukkan minat dengan penggunaan ICT bagi membantu mereka meningkatkan taraf hidup.

Pada akhir sesi lawatan ini, KANITA telah menyumbangkan beberapa buah buku rujukan untuk membantu para pelajar Kampung Merbuk yang akan menduduki peperiksaan UPSR, PMR dan SPM. Cenderahati kepada mereka yang hadir turut diagihkan melalui Tuan Haji Romli.



**Tuan Haji Romli, pengasas dan tokoh yang banyak menyumbang kepada pembentukan pembangunan sendiri dan pendidikan penduduk tempatan**

## ***Trip to South Korea on 5-10 June 2010***

On 5<sup>th</sup>. June 2010, KANITA had its first venture into the heart of South Korea. This delegation was headed by Prof. Datin Rashidah Shuib, accompanied by Prof. Cecilia Ng, Dr Noraida Endut, Ms. Hasniza and Ms. Norshielawati.

The main objective of this visit was to link up with the Asian Association of Women's Studies (AAWS) whose secretariat was in Seoul. In addition it was also to network with other institutions which are engaging in women's issues in Korea. AAWS is a forum for discussion and co-operation on new ideas in feminist education and research with a focus on Asia. This is done by establishing an institutional basis for feminist education and research on Asia, linking associations of women's studies, research institutions, resource centers, as well as individual scholars and practitioners in the region, with the intent of addressing issues of common interest in Asia.

AAWS acknowledges KANITA's role and capability in championing women's issues in Asia. Thus one of the out-

comes of the meeting was to confirm KANITA hosting the next AAWS congress with the theme of "Debating Gender Justice in Asia". This congress will be held on 9-11 December 2010 in Penang. It is anticipated that around 200 participants will be attending this event.

During the trip, the delegation also managed to visit the Korean Women's Development Institute (KWDI), Seoul Foundation of Women & Family (SFWF), Korean Foundation for Women (KFW), Research Institute of Asian Women (RIAW), Sookmyung Women's University Korea and Korean Women's Institute at Ewha Women University. Prof. Datin Rashidah, Dr. Noraida Endut and Prof. Cecilia Ng Choon Sim also presented papers on the women's movement and Feminism in Malaysia at the Korean Women's Institute, Ewha Women University.

It was a successful trip where most of the institutes met agreed to collaborate with KANITA.



**KANITA members and AAWS members**

## Highlights

### Bengkel Perancangan Strategik KANITA 2010

Pada bulan April, Pusat Penyelidikan Pembangunan Wanita [KANITA] telah mengadakan dua bengkel bertujuan untuk membincang dan menyemak semula struktur dan hala tuju KANITA sebagai sebuah pusat penyelidikan di USM. Bengkel pertama diadakan di Hotel Awana Porto Malai, Pulau Langkawi Kedah pada 1 hingga 4 April 2010 yang lalu. Bengkel selama 3 hari 2 malam ini dihadiri oleh semua kakitangan akademik dan pentadbiran, pegawai penyelidik dan beberapa orang penuntut sarjana. Penglibatan semua warga KANITA dalam perancangan strategik ini dianggap penting untuk mendapat sebanyak input yang mungkin di samping membentuk semangat kekitaan dan "sense of ownership".

Objektif utama bengkel ini diadakan adalah untuk mendapatkan maklum balas, pandangan, informasi dan buah fikiran daripada semua kakitangan di KANITA berhubung dengan perancangan strategik KANITA untuk tempoh 5 tahun yang akan datang. Bengkel ini juga merupakan satu titik permulaan sebelum satu bengkel untuk peringkat pengurusan tertinggi diadakan.

Dalam bengkel ini, beberapa perkara telah diteliti kembali seperti objektif dan peranan KANITA dalam membantu Universiti mencapai status APEX. Hal ini adalah penting agar selaras dengan keperluan Universiti. Tambahan pula KANITA merupakan salah satu Pusat Kecemerlangan yang wujud di USM. Melalui bengkel ini diharapkan ia akan membantu meneliti kelemahan serta kekuatan setiap bidang teras yang ada di KANITA bagi memastikan kesemua bidang teras tersebut relevan dan dapat diteruskan oleh pelapis-pelapis baru.

Seterusnya, bengkel peringkat pengurusan tertinggi pula telah diadakan pada 26 hingga 28 April 2010 bertujuan memurni serta memantapkan segala perancangan strategik KANITA bersama dengan seorang Tenaga Sumber dan seorang ahli Panel Penasihat Industri KANITA di Hotel The Zon, Kuala Lumpur.

Segala keputusan dan perancangan yang telah dibuat semasa bengkel di Pulau Langkawi telah dibentangkan. Antara panel yang terlibat ialah Dr. Asma Abdullah dan Puan Rashidah Abdullah (pengasas kepada ARROW, sebuah NGO). Visi, Misi dan objektif KANITA diubah supaya lebih mantap dan relevan untuk kelestarian KANITA sebagai sebuah pusat penyelidikan yang akan terus relevan. Di samping itu juga, bengkel ini menggariskan nilai-nilai murni yang perlu diamalkan oleh warga KANITA.

Secara kesimpulannya, kedua-dua bengkel ini berjaya memberi satu impak yang baik kepada KANITA dalam usaha menjadi sebuah Pusat Kecemerlangan dan Penyelidikan yang terbaik dalam pengajian gender di USM umumnya, di Malaysia dan serantau khususnya.



**Bengkel ini merangka impak KANITA dalam tempoh lima tahun.**



**Perbincangan antara kakitangan KANITA di Bengkel Perancangan Strategik KANITA 2010, Hotel The Zon, Kuala Lumpur.**



**Dari kiri: Dr. Asma Abdullah dan Puan Rashidah Abdullah**

## Internal Activities

### KANITA Seminar Series

#### “Tesis Ijazah Tinggi Terbaik: Gagasan dan Cabaran”

Tarikh : 15 April 2010  
 Masa : 2.30 petang  
 Tempat : Bilik Persidangan Rafidah Aziz, KANITA  
 Penyampai : Dr. Fadzila Azni Ahmad

Dr. Fadzila Azni Ahmad telah diberi penghormatan untuk menerima Anugerah Tesis Terbaik (Kluster Sastera Tulen) Tahun 2008 oleh Institut Pengajian Siswazah, USM. Beliau juga turut dinobatkan sebagai penerima Anugerah Tesis Terbaik Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin pada peringkat PhD yang julung kali diperkenalkan dalam tahun 2009. Pengajian beliau pada peringkat Doktor Falsafah (PhD) diperoleh menerusi tesisnya yang bertajuk *Kaedah Pengurusan Institusi-Institusi Pembangunan Berteraskan Islam di Malaysia*.

Dalam gagasan menghasilkan tesis, beliau telah menekankan bahawa persediaan diri dari segi rohani adalah aspek yang paling penting. Tesis yang dihasilkan perlu merangkumi keperluan minat yang mendalam dan usaha yang berterusan untuk mencapai yang terbaik, katanya. Sikap yang positif dalam menerima kritikan dan seterusnya melakukan penambahbaikan dari semasa ke semasa adalah penting dalam penghasilan tesis, ujarnya.

Menurut beliau lagi, selaras dengan kedudukan USM sebagai sebuah universiti APEX, tesis yang dihasilkan perlu mencerminkan kelainan dan keunikan yang tersendiri. Antara pendekatan yang dikongsi ialah Strategi Samudera Biru. Aplikasi strategi tersebut bermaksud tesis yang dihasilkan perlu menjelajahi bidang ilmu yang belum diterokai serta memberikan peluang pertumbuhan dalam bidang pendidikan dan pembelajaran yang sangat menguntungkan.

Secara keseluruhannya, beliau menekankan bahawa pelajar harus mempunyai disiplin diri dan kekuatan mental mahupun fizikal secara konsisten untuk menghasilkan tesis yang terbaik. Pembentangan ini ternyata telah memberikan impak positif dengan menyediakan garis panduan yang signifikan kepada pelajar untuk menghasilkan tesis mereka.

#### ICPD+15-Status of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Asia

Date : 23 April 2010  
 Venue : Rafidah Aziz' Room , KANITA

The sixth seminar series presentation of KANITA was delivered by Ms. Saijyothirmai Racherla, who is currently the Programme Officer for the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD+15) project under The Asian-Pacific Resource & Research Centre for Women (ARROW). Her presentation was about the recent study completed by ARROW which involved 12 countries in Asia such as China, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan on the status of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The presentation also touched on achievements to date on the issue as well as discussed the situation in Malaysia within the regional context. The results of the research showed that progress across the region is uneven and slow with regards to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Besides that, the political will of local governments is crucial to recognise the sexual and reproductive health and rights of the citizens. Several recommendations highlighted in the presentation are as follows:

1. The policy changes at the national level should be underpinned by commitment to the ICPD PoA, with respect to reproductive rights and sexual rights.
  2. Ensure universal access to affordable, quality, gender-sensitive services to enable the realisation of the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health.
  3. Ensure continued, committed and sustained investments in women's sexual and reproductive health and rights by governments and donors.
- Reinforce the rights to sexual and reproductive health especially those of adolescents, marginalised groups of women and those with diverse sexual orientation and gender identities.

This seminar as part of sharing information managed to attract 32 participants.

### GLIDE Research Cluster Meeting



Date : 27 May 2010  
Venue : Equatorial Hotel, Penang

The GLIDE (Gender Inequality and Empowerment in Livelihood and Development Issues) Research Cluster Meeting was organised by the Women's Development Research Centre (KANITA) on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2010 under the purview of the Social Transformation Platform. It was a whole day event that gathered 23 researchers from various disciplines. The schools that were involved in this meeting comprised of the School of Computer Sciences, School of Biology, Vector Unit, School of Pharmaceutical Sciences, School of Communication and KANITA. Dr Maznah Omar, a fellow researcher from Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), also attended the meeting.

The aim of this meeting was to brainstorm about possible research projects that could be conducted in this cluster. The meeting began with welcoming remarks and a short presentation by the Head of the GLIDE Cluster, Prof Datin Rashidah Shuib. This was followed by the presentation on Research Cluster by Prof Abdul Rahman Mohamed, who elaborated on the guidelines and procedure to build a research cluster. The meeting also included three major presentations and discussions in the area of Gender and ICT headed by Prof Rosni Abdullah, Gender and Aquaculture headed by Prof Roshada Hashim, and Gender and Dengue by Assoc. Prof Zairi Jaal.

#### Introduction to Practical Neuro- Linguistic Programming (NLP) Presentation Skills: Sharing and Learning Workshop

Date : 17 June 2010  
Venue : Mutiara Meeting Room

Neuro- Linguistic Programming (NLP) was discovered in 1970s and it has been described as a model of excellence in teaching, training, coaching and learning. In essence, NLP is a way to use the language of the mind in achieving specific and desired outcomes.

Last April, Lai Wan Teng attended the two-day training on NLP Presentation Skills and Practical 'NLP' for lecturers. The course was conducted by The Principal Consultant of Competence Strategies International Pte Ltd, Singapore, Mr. Zainal Abidin Rahman. The course objectives are to: i) introduce the application of NLP in education, ii) develop skills in managing their well-being and in building relationships, iii) develop platform and performing skills in front of a class, iv) enhance the role as mentors and coaches through the usage of NLP skills.

In NLP, a presentation is strongly seen as an art of performing. A good presenter is the one who is able to engage with the audiences from the beginning to the end of the presentation. Thus, it is crucial for the presenter to use an effective techniques and skills in building and maintaining a rapport with the audience.

At KANITA's in-house training workshop for sharing and learning NLP, Lai Wan Teng introduced the philosophy of NLP and highlighted some of the practical and important NLP techniques, such as making eye contact, asking questions throughout the presentation and creating small activities connecting with the audiences. Wan Teng also emphasized that one of the effective ways to improve a presentation is through role plays by modeling the style of some actors from selected videos.

### Graduate Student's Seminar

#### Access to Justice: Women's Experiences in Syariah Courts by Shariza Kamarudin

Date: 9 April 2010, 10.00 am  
Venue: Mutiara KANITA Room, KANITA USM

Shariza Kamaruddin presented her thesis proposal entitled '*Access to justice: women's experiences in Syariah Courts in Penang*' at KANITA's Graduate Seminar. The study will be focusing on women's experiences in Syariah courts by examining its procedure as well as exploring women's needs and expectations on these procedures. This will be a qualitative study in which a total of 30 women will be interviewed by using in-depth interview technique to capture their experiences in Syariah Courts, Penang. By sharing the findings with relevant agencies, she hopes that the data will contribute to the literature on the subject and also to society especially women. She will be using a conceptual framework adopted from United Nation Development and Planning (UNDP) model of access to justice. Shariza believes that her research will empower women to seek information about their rights under the syariah law in order for them to have access to justice.



### **“How Fathers’ and Mothers’ Involvement in Parenting Affect Adolescents’ Well Being and Relationship Satisfaction” by Ooi Pei Wen**

Date : 14 May 2010  
Venue : Mutiara KANITA Room, KANITA USM

Ooi Pei Wen presented her Master’s proposal on **‘How Fathers’ and Mothers’ Involvement in Parenting Affect Adolescents’ Well Being and Relationship Satisfaction’** at KANITA’s Graduate Seminar. Her study will be focusing on the fathers’ and mothers’ roles in parenting and the effect of parental involvement on adolescents’ well being and the satisfaction towards their parental relationships. The objective of the study is to understand more about the parenting situation among Malaysians’ families. The study will adopt quantitative method where questionnaires survey will be carried out among form four students in Penang and Kedah high schools. Throughout this study, she hopes to enlighten the society by demonstrating the involvement of a father in parenting and how it affects the adolescents’ development especially the later’s well being.

## **External Activities**

### **Introducing Gender Equality Workshop**

Date : 27-28 March 2010  
Venue : Paradise Sandy Beach Resort, Tanjung Bungah, Penang

This workshop aimed to introduce and educate participants the concept of substantive equality, social justice and the integration of gender equality into good governance. The two-day workshop was organised by the Good Governance and Gender Equality Society, Penang (3Gs) in collaboration with the Penang State Government’s Women, Family and Community Committee. 3Gs is an NGO body which was established in December 2009.

They were 46 participants from diverse backgrounds, namely political parties (Democratic Action Party (DAP), Parti Keadilan Rakyat (PKR), Parti Islam Semalaysia (PAS), NGOs (World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA), Women’s Center for Change, Suara Rakyat Malaysia (SUARAM), academicians from KANITA and individuals who were interested on issues of good governance. Prof. Rashidah Shuib, Dr. Noraida Endut and Dr. Cecilia Ng from KANITA were among the key facilitators. The interactive workshop encouraged the participants to discuss, debate and share their views throughout the lectures on gender discrimination, intersectionality, gender equality, gender mainstreaming and good governance. During the evaluation session, most of the participants expressed their appreciation for organizing this workshop as they recognized the importance of understanding gender equality issues. They agreed that promoting good governance and gender sensitivity are highly crucial to encourage and increase women’s participation at all levels of the decision-making process. Notably, utilizing the gender lens is needed to gear towards empowerment of women’s representatives at the high level of all sectors. The empowerment strategies can be enhanced by providing leadership training for women, implementing gender sensitized policy, creating the public awareness on gender issues and other related endeavors which are in light of empowering women representatives.

### **International Women’s Human Rights Summer Course Training**

Date : 19-24 April 2010  
Venue : Women and Gender Institute (WAGI), Miriam College, Quezon City, Philippines

Human rights issues are very much relevant to women as these can be used to defend women’s rights and to prevent discrimination and exploitation. Using gender lens in analysing the human rights of women is important as it provides a critical analysis of the difference in terms of power relations between men and women. For the last 12 years, Women and Gender Institute (WAGI) at Miriam College has been conducting a series of academic-based course on women’s human rights issue. The main objective of the course is to provide a training to enhance the participants’ understanding of women’s rights issues. The training/course examines the use of international human rights instruments such as CEDAW’s document in analysing issues of inequality and discrimination from both gender and an Asian perspective. During the training, the participants were exposed to various women’s issues including International Agreements Related to Women’s Rights, Concepts and Issues on Women’s Rights (peace and security, media, gender and Islam etc), laws on women (sexual harassment, domestic violence etc) and others.

This year, WAGI’s Annual International Women’s Human Rights (IWHR) Summer Course invited Zaireeni Azmi as a participant representing KANITA. The institute has trained more than 300 participants from national and international agencies including educators, graduate students, NGO workers, technical staff of legislators and mid-level public servants. This year, there are 24 participants representing public servants from national agencies such as Civil Service Commission of Philippines, Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines, Department of Environment and Natural Resources among others. It was enlightening to see both male and female participants from Philippines who were very aware of the problems related to gender equality and social justice and were able to discuss about them critically and objectively. The training was conducted informally through various methods such as lecture discussion, open forum and sharing, group exercise, case study analysis and exposure trip. As a result, the participants were very interactive with each other and the presenter.

In a nutshell, the training not only provides a framework of human rights instruments and mechanisms to advance democracy, gender equality and social justice in good governance but also helps to establish a network among the participants to promote women's human rights at various levels. It also enables the participants to sharpen their analysis in relation to women's human rights issue as well as empower themselves and others to advance women's rights and exercise it.

### **'Rebut Harta, Rebut Anak' (Fight for Money, Fight for Children)**

Date : 23 May 2010  
Venue : Dewan Kuliah A, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pulau Pinang

A seminar on Islamic Family Law with the title of **'Rebut Harta, Rebut Anak'** (Fight for Money, Fight for Children) was jointly organised by Persatuan Isteri, Anak-anak dan Anggota Wanita Penjara Malaysia (PERSIAP), Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM), Lembaga Kebajikan Perempuan Islam Pulau Pinang (LKPIPP), Jemaah Islah Malaysia, (JIM), Women's Centre for Change (WCC), Persatuan Keluarga Polis Diraja Malaysia (PERKEP), Dewan Perniagaan Melayu Malaysia Pulau Pinang (DPMM) and Persatuan Staf Islam USM (PSIUSM).

Shariza acted as a rapporteur in this seminar. The objective of the seminar was to discuss issues of maintenance and guardianship/custody of Muslim children. The workshop started with a presentation by Prof Madya Dr Najibah Bt Md Zin from International Islamic University Malaysia (UIAM), Kuala Lumpur on **Nafkah Isteri Dan Anak serta Pelaksanaan Perintah Nafkah** (*Maintenance for wife and children, and the implementation of maintenance*). It was then followed by a dialogue session comprising three panelists, Prof Madya Dr Najibah Bt Md Zin, Yang Arif Tuan Adam bin Tumiran ( Hakim Mahkamah Rendah Pulau Pinang), and Encik Ahmad Munawir bin Abdul Aziz, (a lawyer) on the issues related to the topic and chaired by Cik Yuslinov Ahmad, a lawyer and a volunteer at Women's Centre for Change (WCC). The audience was informed of the existence of Bahagian Sokongan Keluarga as a unit under Syariah Courts to assist Muslim families particularly Muslim women on maintenance issues. The workshop had succeeded in attracting both women and men to attend and participate in the discussion.

### **Bengkel Pemerksaan Hak-Hak Wanita di bawah Undang-Undang Islam (Workshop on Empowerment of Women's Rights in Islamic Family)**

Date : 27 Mei 2010  
Venue : Attorney General Chambers, Putrajaya

Shariza Kamarudin participated in this one-day workshop organized by Attorney General Chambers (AGC). The objectives of this conference were to give an understanding and awareness on issues related to the Islamic Family Law and Syariah Courts; and also to examine in details the implications of the law on women and family in the light of women's rights. The workshop was attended by academicians, judges, students, and AGC's representative. It was an eye opener to hear some progressive voices from the judges in Syariah Courts, for example, Judge Abas Nordin and Judge Abdul Wahid Abu Hassan who empathized with women's struggle and made changes in handling cases. They emphasized that empowering women would not be enough if men are not made responsible for their actions. Academician, Prof Dato' Dr Zaleha Kamaruddin presented a working paper on the women's perception on Syariah Courts. The seminar was very informative but lacked of discussion on Islamic Family Law and women's situation from gender perspective. This is because without the understanding of the gender dimensions, the situation between men and women will not be improved in every aspect of life. The questions such as how to achieve justice without equality and how to empower women without looking at equality and equity in the law and society? could be further investigated in future workshop of the nature.

### **Regional Gender and Politics Pilot Training Workshop: Skills and Capacity Training Building Training Workshop For Women Political Leaders**

Date : 7-10 June 2010  
Venue : Radius International Hotel, Kuala Lumpur

The training was jointly organised by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), KANITA, Institute of Occidental Studies (IKON, UKM) and SAMA. It was designed as a pilot training to gauge feedback from the participants on how effective the training manual was in transferring skills needed for women leaders to play a central role at the leadership and at decision making level. Puan Zaireeni Azmi was invited to attend the training as a participant among 17 others from various backgrounds including women parliamentarians, women who are interested in contesting formal elections, women activists and academicians. The participants were selected from five different regions namely, Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan), South Asia (India, Nepal, Pakistan), East Asia (Mongolia, Cambodia, Indonesia, Philippines, Timor-Leste, Malaysia) and Pacific (Solomon Island).

The main objectives of the training were to strengthen the decision making capacities of participating women leaders and potential candidates, to mainstream gender issues within political systems from women's human rights approach and to enable them to take part in governance at all levels.

At the end of the workshop the participants were equipped with the skills to understand and apply the principles of gender budgeting, to enhance advocacy, lobbying and campaigning skills, to run a campaign and to be able to identify issues based regional solidarity and networking with a focus on women's participation in politics.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

Women's Development Research Centre (KANITA), Universiti Sains Malaysia in collaboration with the Asian Association of Women's Studies (AAWS) and the South East Asian Association for Gender Studies, Malaysian Branch (SAMA), will be hosting The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of The Asian Association of Women's Studies (CAAWS 2010) with the theme of "Debating Gender Justice in Asia" on 9-11 December 2010 at City Bayview Hotel, Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia. For further information please visit <http://www.usm.my/kanita/aaws2010.asp>

### KANITA: VISION and MISSION

KANITA envisions itself as the Centre of Excellence in conducting and advancing research relevant to women's lives, in particular, using the gender analytical framework. Its mission is to advance gender equality and equity through research and through collaboration with various stake-holders. It aims to have impact on policy and strives to institutionalise gender as a factor of inquiry and approach. KANITA has a special focus on the bottom HALF billion!

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## Personal Interview with Frauke-Katrin Kandale\*

### Her Personal Thought...

One question which I was asked quite often during my fieldwork on interethnic marriage and religious conversion in Penang was: "Why are you writing your PhD about Malaysia?" It is a good question and to be honest I might not have a satisfying answer, but there is one story that I like. It is about an anthropologist from Pakistan who came to Germany to do ethnographic research in a German village. One fact which impressed him the most during his fieldwork was the close relationship the German villagers had with their dogs. Dogs are the most popular pets in Germany, but for the Pakistani Muslim scholar this was absolutely unusual and became a focus of his research. Ordinary Germans would not question the position of dogs in Germany because it is a fact

everyone is too familiar with.

I like this anecdote because it shows that outsider researchers might sometimes be able to see things in a different light and ask questions from another perspective. At least, they will come home with a bag full of interesting stories. I would love to meet more foreign researchers, Pakistani or Malaysian, coming to my country as I came to Malaysia to ask some fresh questions. I guess the work of anthropologists will not have any direct effects on politics or policy making, but it will always be beneficial to send people abroad to learn about foreign nations and cultures. At least they will learn that everywhere on this planet people have the same concerns and: "We all put our pants on the same way!"

For me and my family spending seven months in Penang has been a valuable experience which we will always

remember. Spending more than half a year abroad, away from family and friends, make us understand better what foreigners in Germany have to go through. Life as a local is easier, but being a foreigner is definitely exciting and challenging. That's why I am grateful for the support I received from all the strong young ladies at KANITA. The institute became a home for me and extremely important for a good start of my fieldwork. During lunch times, especially at the Kopitiam and my favorite veggie restaurant Ananda Bahwan, with my KANITA colleagues, I was able to reflect on my research and ask all kinds of naïve questions about Malaysian life. I am grateful for the support of my supervisor, Prof. Datin Rashidah Shuib, who advised me to travel to her hometown in Kelantan where I was able to conduct several interviews at a college for Islam converts. I am still planning to go back there one more time.

My family and I fell in love with Malaysian food and Tamil music. So now, when we are traveling through German landscapes we are listening to the CDs we bought in Market Street and feel like we are driving around in Penang in our Perodua Kancil. Last week my son requested me to prepare Roti Canai for him, his favorite Malaysian food, so now I am searching for the recipe on the internet. At the end of our stay during our roundtrip through West-Malaysia we noticed that there are still so many faces and facets of the country we do not know anything about. As you can see we have many reasons to come back.

\* Frauke-Katrin Kandale hails from the University of Humboldt, Germany. She did her fieldwork in Malaysia for her PhD thesis on: "Becoming Muslim: Chinese Muslim Converts in Malaysia" and was KANITA's non-graduate student for seven months (October 2009-May 2010)