

CHAPTER V

KAREN WOMEN'S ROLES IN HOUSEHOLD FOOD

PRODUCTION AND HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION

Women perform various tasks in both the households and in the fields. They usually do less strenuous activities that take a long time to finish. Weaving and spiritual ancestor respect rituals are only done by women because Karen people believe that women have matrilineage and that they are the house owner even if the house was built by men (Ruttanakul *et al.*, 1995).

5.1 Karen women's role in household

Housework is a predominant role of Karen women as with other rural women. Housework includes taking care of everybody in the family especially children, other work like cooking, rice pounding, water collecting, animal feeding, house cleaning, and clothes washing, is also their duty. In Karen communities, sometimes men share this responsibility, but not too often. According to their custom, men never do weaving

Gender role on housework can be seen from some examples, such as rice pounding, water collecting, and pig feeding. From 30 interviewed households, 100 percent of women and 80 percent of men collected water. Women did this activity twice a day and spent 10-25 minutes for each time, but men did it not more than 15 times per month. The distance to go to collect water depends on the house location and water source. They usually go to the village water well which is about 200-800

meters from their house. Women do rice pounding once a day for about 7 kilograms of rice per time and spend about 1 hour to finish. Other work such as pig feeding, women spent 10-15 minutes to take care of 2-8 pigs per household. These pigs were kept for home consumption and sold for cash (about 600-5,000 baht). Men never do rice pounding or pig feeding (Table 8).

Table 8. Examples of gender role in housework.

	water collecting		rice pounding		pig feeding	
	time/month	Minutes each time	kg./time daily	Minutes each time	pig/HH	Minutes each time
Women	60	10-25	7	60	2-8	10-15
Men	<15	8-20	0	0	0	0

Source: Household interview, 1998.

Note: HH = household

Women weave for their personal use and for family members. Women's dresses show their marital status. Unmarried women wear a long white slip-over tunic of white, coarse, homespun cotton. Many new generation girls often do not wear it because it's very easy to get dirty and is inconvenient. Girls wear it at special occasions like during their New Year. Married women wear a red skirt and short sleeved blouse of black or blue embroidered with black and white beads. Weaving is done on back strap looms that takes a long time to get a finished product. They have been introduced to other styles by the Queen's Handicraft Project. The new style is faster. Products from weaving include skirts, short sleeved blouses, long white slip, bags, turbans, and raw cloth (Table 9). These products can be sold for about 50-300 *baht* per piece.

Table 9. Weaving products produced by Karen women in Chan, Den and, Nong Jet Nuai villages.

Products	Total days used per product
Bags	1-2
Long white slip	3-4
Raw cloth	1-3 metre/day
Short sleeved blouse	2-3
Skirt	3-4
Turban	1-2

Source: Household interview, 1998.

5.2 Karen women's role in food production and consumption

Karen people practice cyclical swiddening, which is also call secondary forest cultivation, secondary forest swiddening, bush fallowing, continuing cultivation, bush fallow rotation, recurrent cultivation, rotational bush fallow, cyclical bush fallow, land rotation. This form of cultivation is also a type of slash and burn that allows the vegetation to regenerate for subsequent clearing (Sutthi, 1996). Rice is the staple food crop and is grown in both upland fields (upland rice), and in irrigated fields (paddy rice). Karen also grow other plants with the upland rice, such as eggplant, squash, chilli , and sorghum.

Beside rice, which is their staple food, Karen also grow other plants in the fields and home gardens for family use. Plants which are the most popular among Karen home gardens are chilli, beans, loofah, local pumpkin, mango, jack fruit, papaya, lemon, garlic, turmeric, and lemon grass.

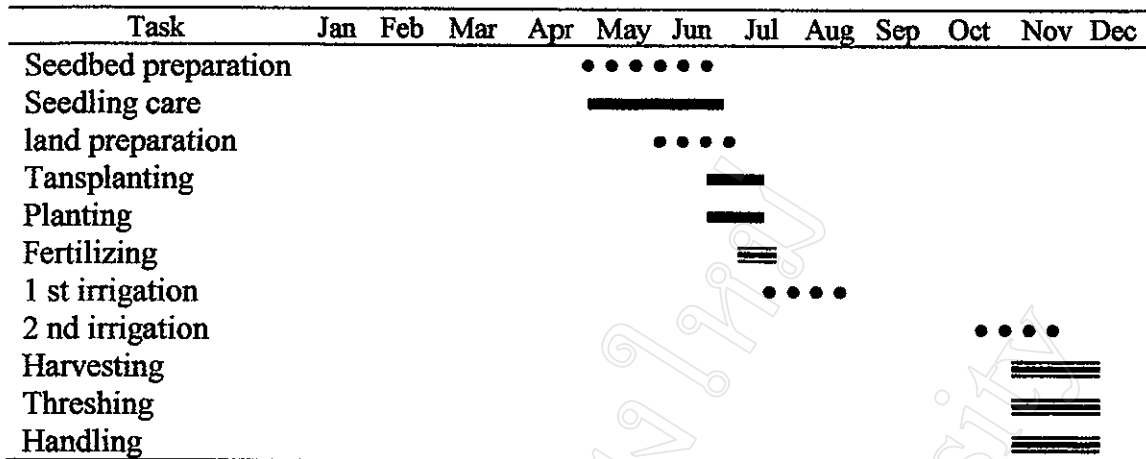
At Wat Chan, Karen also grow other crops that are promoted by the Royal Project, for example Japanese pumpkin, lettuce, green pepper, and gladiolus. They

also grow taro and ginger that are bought by private merchants. Both of these crops do not have good profits since they have high price fluctuations (Ekasingh, *et al.*, 1999). Some Karen also have fruit orchards *such as* peach and plum.

1) Karen women's role in household food production

Women's activities in rice production are the same as men. They do planting, weeding, harvesting, and carrying the crop back home. Activities that they do not or rarely to do were strenuous work, such as clearing the fields by cutting down the vegetation, fencing, land preparation, and irrigation.

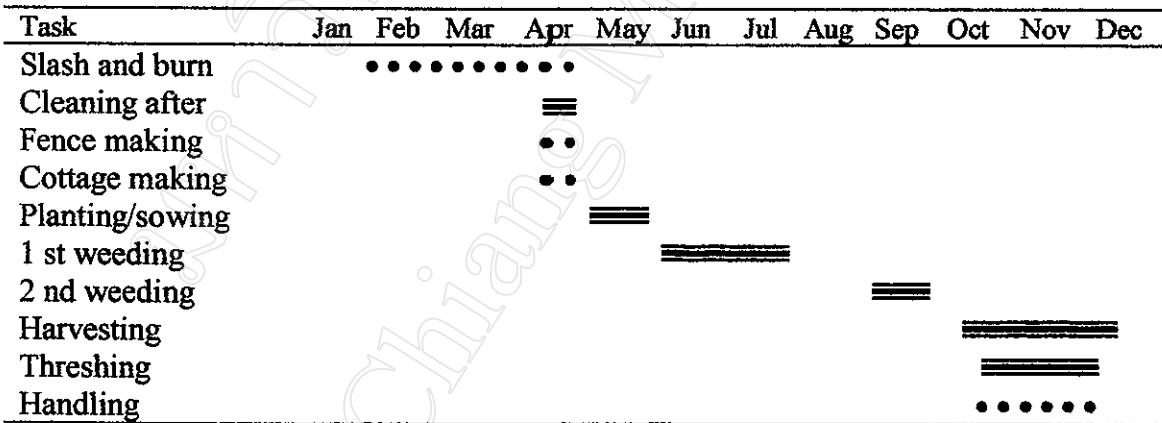
Pumpkin, lettuce, ginger, taro, green pepper, and gladiolus are cash crops. For pumpkin cultivation, women do more planting and fertilizing than men. They also work together with men in harvesting. Women do not have apparent role in lettuce cultivation, but work together with men in almost activities such as sowing, planting, weeding, fertilizing, and harvesting. Activities that women do more than men in taro and green pepper cultivation were fertilizing and planting, respectively. Women also do weeding and harvesting together with men. Women also have an important role in food production especially in their home gardens. Women usually take care of their home gardens. Chapter 7 has more details about women and home gardens. Figures 5-12 summarise labour utilisation among men and women.



Note: women do > men =====
 men do > women ••••••••••
 both of them do the same =====

Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

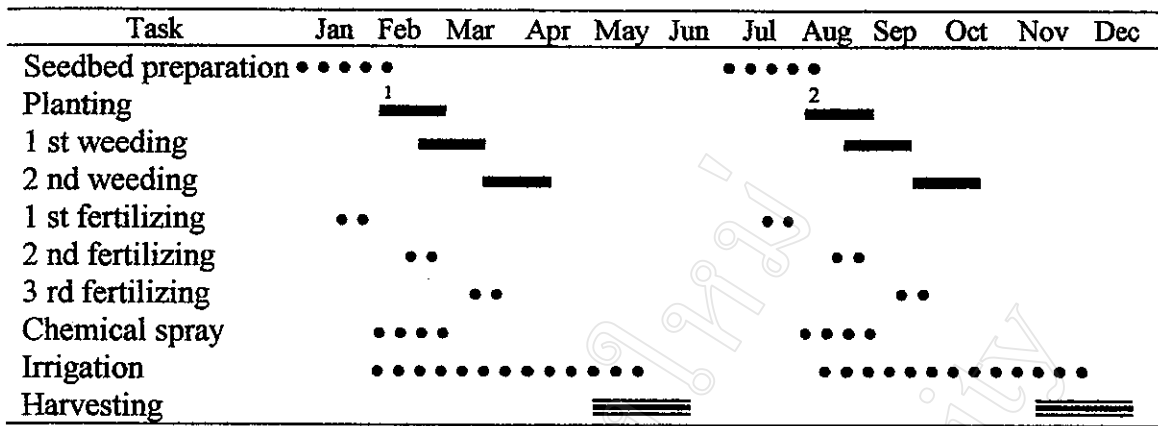
Figure 5. Labour utilisation for paddy rice



Note: women do > men =====
 men do > women ••••••••••
 both do the same =====

Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

Figure 6. Labour utilisation for upland rice



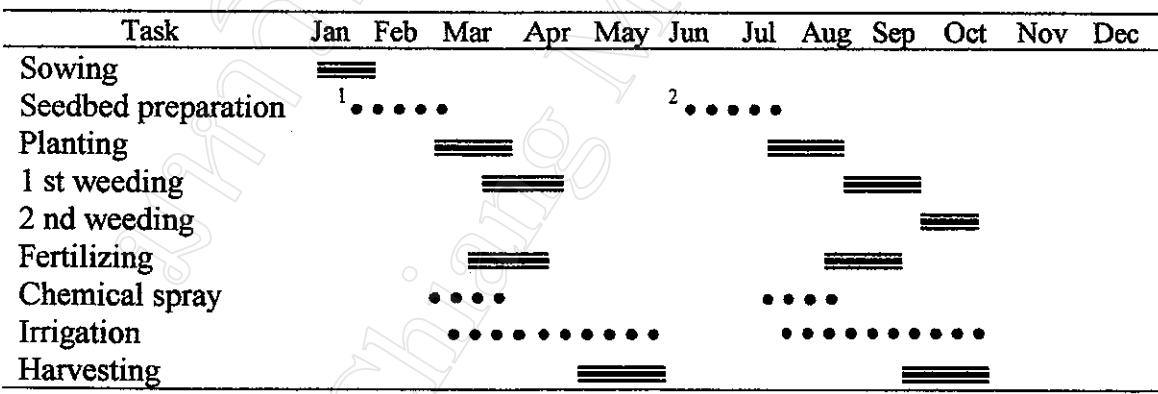
1 = first cultivation cycle
 2 = second cultivation cycle

Note: women do > men
 men do > women
 both do the same

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Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

Figure 7. Labor utilization for pumpkin



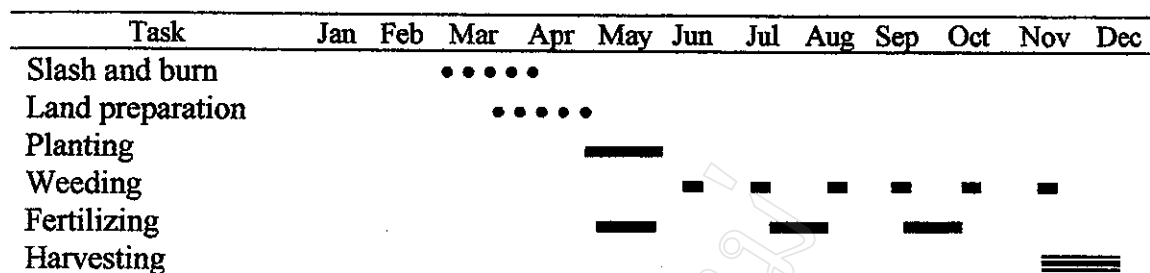
1 = first cultivation cycle
 2 = second cultivation cycle

Note: women do > men
 men do > women
 both do the same

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Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

Figure 8. Labor utilization for lettuce

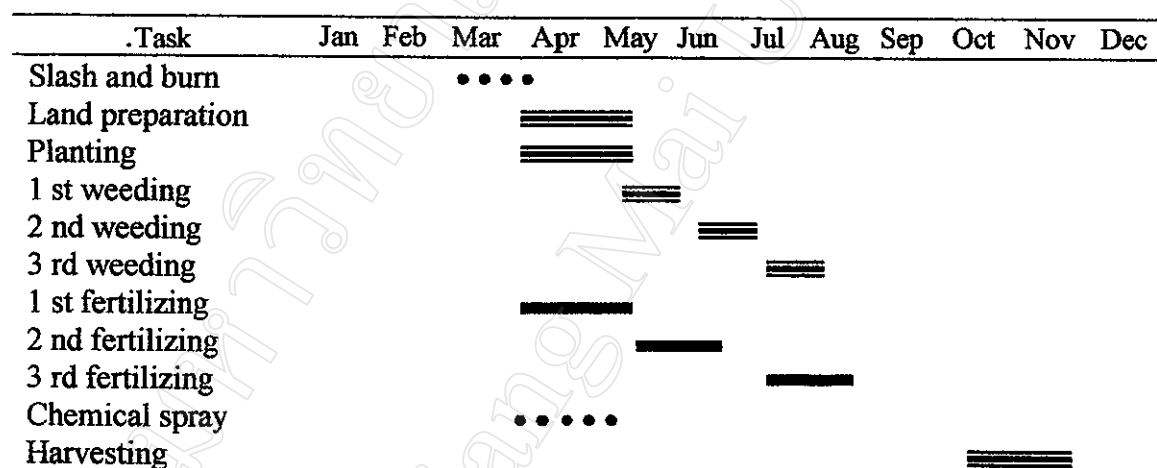


Note: women do > men
 men do > women
 both do the same

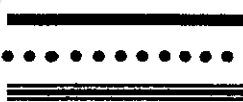


Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

Figure 9. Labour utilisation for ginger

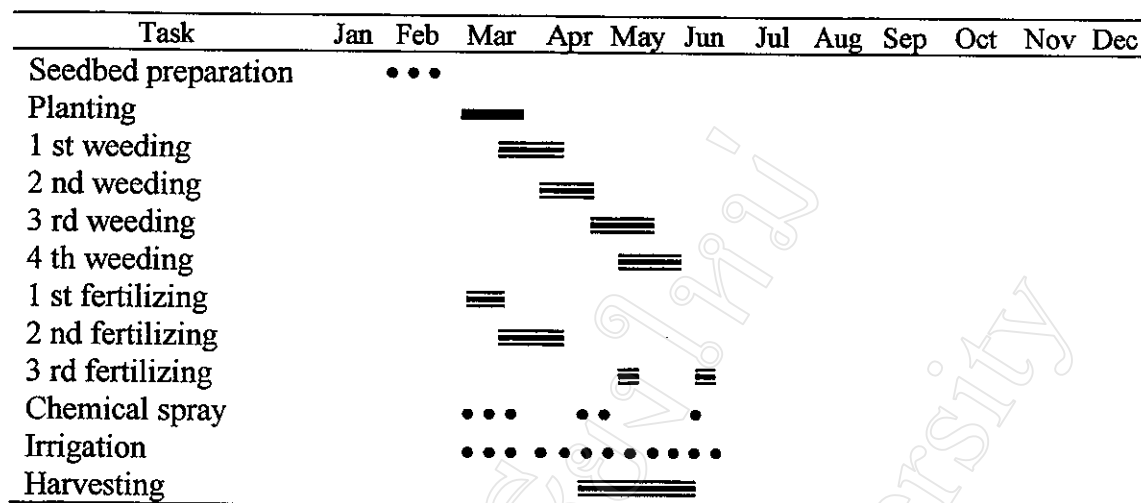


Note: women do > men
 men do > women
 both do the same



Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

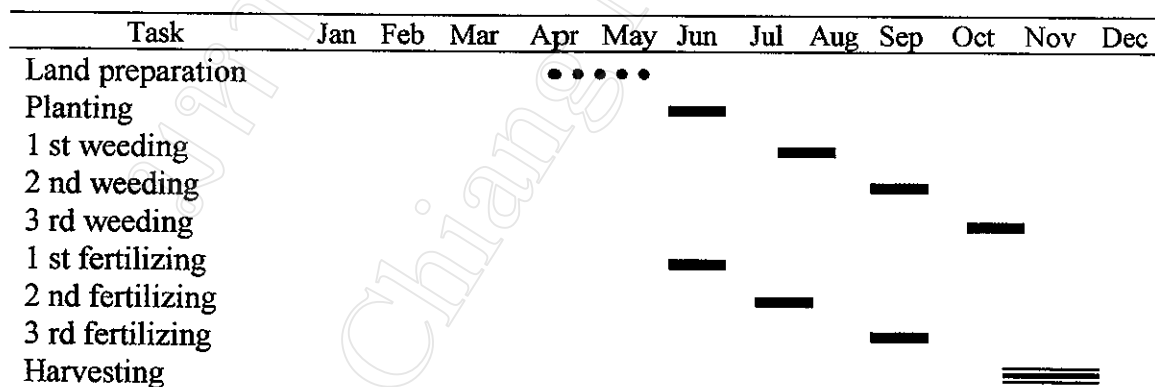
Figure 10. Labour utilisation for taro



Note: women do > men
 men do > women
 both do the same

Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

Figure 11. Labour utilisation for green pepper



Note: women do > men
 men do > women
 both do the same

Note: Expanded from Ekasingh, 1999.

Figure 12. Labour utilisation for gladiolus

Women also gather other cultivated plants from home gardens, and wild food to cook for their family. Women gathered more wild food than men.

2) Karen women's role in household food consumption

Karen women's duties in their households are similar in each day. They wake up not later than 6 a.m. and boil water. After that they prepare food for their family. Food comes from three sources *viz.* cultivated plants from their fields and gardens, bought from shops in their village and from outside merchants, and wild food collected from the forests. For lunch, if it is not left over from the morning, it will be a simple meal which takes a short time to prepare such as instant noodles and canned fish with chili paste. Women prepare food for dinner about 5.30 p.m. Even if they work together with men in the fields, they have to go back home earlier than men to prepare dinner.

Karen people consume hill rice, which the seeds are shorter and fatter than the rice consumed by lowland people. Women will pound this rice in the afternoon everyday and will be cooked before other food. The taste of Karen food is spicy and salty. Karen food has as main ingredients salt, chilli, and some sweet smelling vegetables. Women also prepare fermented soybean, fish preserved with salt, and preserved vegetables prepared by women with chilli paste. Some food and ingredients were bought more often than others (at least 3 times per month) such as canned fish, mackerel, salt, and instant noodles. Fresh vegetables, collected from the natural sources, are not cleaned enough. Some of them still have soil on their parts. Pork consumed by Karen is usually killed by women. A small pig will be killed, cleaned, and cut by 2-3 women. This pork will be preserved by grilling, if it cannot be

consumed in one day. Fresh pork (meat and bone) can be sold 100 *baht* per about 1.5 kilograms. Furthermore, Karen also have some desserts made from sticky rice, sugar and sesame. These desserts are cooked for special occasions by women such as their new year, wedding days and other celebrations.

Karen prefer chili paste which is eaten with many kinds of forest vegetables and curries more than food cooked with oil, which can be seen from the menu for one week from a sample household.

Menu for in 1 week from a sample household.

Monday

Breakfast	chilli paste and vegetables (<i>Monochoria hastata</i> (L.) Solms ² , <i>Clerodendrum glandulosum</i> Colebr. ex Lindl., and <i>Oenanthe javanica</i> (Bl.) DC.)
Lunch	canned fish
Dinner	tilapia chilli paste and vegetables (<i>Centella asiatica</i> (L.) Urb., <i>Solanum melongena</i> L., and <i>Spondias pinnata</i> (L. f.) Kurz)

Tuesday

Breakfast	curries with dry lettuce and chicken
Lunch	canned fish chilli paste and vegetables (<i>Clerodendrum glandulosum</i> Colebr. ex Lindl., <i>Clerodendrum paniculatum</i> L., <i>Ipomoea batatas</i> (L) Lamk., and <i>Solanum melongena</i> L.)
Dinner	curries with fish, tomato, lemon grass and ginger

² See appendix A for botanical details

Wednesday

- Breakfast chilli paste mixed with crab and vegetables (*Gluta obovata*
Craib and *Centella asiatica* (L.) Urb.)
- Lunch pork mixed with chilli, salt and spice
- Dinner pork curries

Thursday

- Breakfast fried pork, chilli paste and vegetables (*Centella asiatica* (L.)
Urb., *Oenanthe javanica* (Bl.) DC., *Solanum melongena* L.,
and *Monochoria hastata* (L.) Solms)
- Lunch rodent curries
- Dinner curries with lettuce, pork and preserved soybean

Friday

- Breakfast curries with lettuce and pork
- Lunch tadpole chilli paste and vegetables (*Centella asiatica* (L.),
Urb., *Oenanthe javanica* (Bl.) DC., *Solanum melongena* L.,
and *Monochoria hastata* (L.) Solms)
- Dinner curries with lettuce and fish

Saturday

- Breakfast fish curries, fish chilli paste and vegetables (*Oenanthe*
javanica (Bl.) DC., *Monochoria hastata* (L.) Solms, and
Clerodendrum glandulosum Colebr. ex Lindl.)
- Lunch preserved soybean chilli paste and vegetables (*Centella*
asiatica (L.) Urb., *Monochoria hastata* (L.) Solms and

	<i>Centella asiatica</i> (L.) Urb.)
Dinner	curries with lettuce and pork
Sunday	
Breakfast	chicken chilli paste and vegetables (<i>Centella asiatica</i> (L.) Urb., <i>Houttuynia cordata</i> Thunb., and <i>Oenanthe javanica</i> (Bl.) DC.)
Lunch	pork curries
Dinner	preserved fish chilli paste and vegetables (<i>Limnophila</i> <i>indica</i> (L.) Druce, <i>Clerodendrum paniculatum</i> L., <i>Centella</i> <i>asiatica</i> , <i>Monochoria hastata</i> (L.) Solms (L.) Urb., <i>Houttuynia cordata</i> Thunb., and <i>Oenanthe javanica</i> (Bl.) (DC.)