

PART ONE

OVERVIEW OF TRENDS IN ACHIEVING GENDER
EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN MALAYSIA

Country's Commitment

At the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Malaysia has explicitly expressed commitment to the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women.

"The fact that we are meeting at this Platform for Action is a means of demonstrating our commitment and preparedness to change."

"Our goal is to operationalize the commitment to gender equality. The Malaysian Government is committed to equal opportunities for women."

Malaysia has consistently and creatively championed gender equality and women's advancement.

Since the Beijing Platform for Action, Malaysia has formulated and approved a National Policy for Women based on the principles and strategies contained in the National Development Looking Strategies of 1989. The National Policy for Women sets out the objectives of gender equality, eradication of poverty, integration of women in national development as equal partners with men as well as the promotion of women's advancement.

2.2. The adoption of strategies for further advancement of women. These include:

• Greater participation of women in decision-making
• More education and training to support of women

• Review of laws and regulations that discriminate against women

• Strengthening and consolidating mechanisms for the advancement of

• Women's

• Friendly

• Women's studies

• Increase allocation for programs and projects

• Measures to create environment that are

• Collecting sex-disaggregated data for

3. Situation of women and girls in sectors not covered by National Action

3.1. The National Plan for Action is a comprehensive document that covers urban, suburban areas, minority groups especially the indigenous, women, single parents and migrant workers.

3.2. The situation of women and girls can be said to be among the hard-core poor, the

majority of whom are women, has drastically been reduced since 1995. For example, the

government is determined to eradicate the incidence of poverty among hard-core poor when it sets the target to reduce the figure to 0.5% by the year 2000. For the relative poor, the target is set for 5.5% reduction by the year 2000.

4. Gender Equality and priority in relation to other public policy goals

4.1.1 In recent years, Malaysia has not pursued gender discriminatory policies in its development goals. All efforts are being made to integrate women as fully as possible - both as actors as well as beneficiaries. However, as women are "late comers" or "late starters" in the development process, their participation rates especially at higher decision-making levels are less than that of men. The disparities are gradually narrowing down as women have access to education opportunities and better health standards, as the economy diversifies and grows.

Country's Priorities in terms of the Critical Areas of Concern

Generally, Malaysia recognizes the Platform's critical areas of concern as its immediate priorities. The National Plan for Action notes that these 12 areas are advancement and therefore need to be given focus in all national development programs. These 12 areas

5.2.1 The National Plan for Action, however, identified 13 actions

- Actions to strengthen national machineries and institutions
- Actions to increase public awareness and communication of government bureaucracy to women's related issues.

• Actions to mobilize non-governmental organizations and voluntary organizations of socio-economic programs;

• Actions to address social issues related to women and their families

• Women's health status;

• Women's status in the economy especially

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), women affected

status of domestic workers and informal sectors;

... training (as provided ...
Technology and Vocational

... to review existing
Violence Act;
... decision-making bodies;
... media;

... in the Culture and Arts, and
... in sports.

... the girl child as a separate priority.

... address instances such as:

- Actions to improve the rate of women in science and technical field, including (Retraining);
- Actions to improve women's legal and discriminatory laws and enforcement
 - Actions to improve women's participation
 - Actions to counter negative impact
 - Actions to improve the status of women
 - Actions to increase the participation
 - Actions to increase opportunities

5.5. The National Action Plan

PART TWO

FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

1. The National Budget

1.1. Recently, the National budget allocates annually the sum of approximately RM 50 million for women specific programs under the Department of Women's Affairs,

provided during the Sixth Plan, was approved during the Sixth Plan (1981-1985). The recent budget allocation includes funding for NGOs to carry out government approved projects as identified in the National Plan for Advancement of Women. In addition to this allocation, various other ministries have women specific programs, namely:

- Ministry of rural Development for poverty eradication projects;
- Ministry of Entrepreneur Development;
- Ministry of Health; and
- Ministry of Human Resources.

1.2. HAWA as the central agency for women's advancement monitors the various policies and programs on women.

2. Structures and Mechanisms

2.1. The organizational chart of the basic institutional mechanism for advancement of women is attached (See Appendix "B"). The

Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, Women's Affairs Department. Its functions include the co-ordinating and monitoring of the implementation of governmental policies and projects that women's interests and concerns are taken into consideration in these

and programmes, and that development programmes do not have negative impact on women.

2.2. HAWA is also involved in sponsoring and facilitating courses, seminars, workshops and meetings aimed at increasing the knowledge and skills of women in specific areas and enhancing their awareness concerning their roles and

responsibilities in the development process. HAWA collaborates with other agencies in organising "gender sensitisation" training for government officials

development projects and programmes.

and receives feed backs on the implementation of programs and by various ministries through its liaison officers and

at the state and district levels.

Consultative Committee

ves as a focal point for international co-

mechanisms HAWA

ness of any treaties

es are

ed in

2.4. At the international le-

operation and cooperation between the bodies that deal with women's programs.

It receives feed backs of the implementation of conventions and resolutions. Regular meetings with other co-ordinated by the Ministry before any national or international bodies/committees.

3. III Role of Non-Governmental Organizations

3.1. In the NGOs, in particular the National Council of Women (NCWO) which was formed in 1962 has played an active role in advocating equality of status for women and equal opportunity of women in development. NCWO was instrumental in

equal pay for women and similar conditions of service as men in the 60s and 70s; in the establishment of the National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) in 1976; in securing a special day for the observance of women's contribution or achievements, that is *Hari Wanita* (Women's Day) in 1963 which is celebrated yearly on the 25 August; and for obtaining women's representation in many policy making bodies. NGOs are also involved in making review and recommendations in such areas as education, law, health, media, environment, consumerism, religion, culture, economy, employment and welfare. NCWO has set up *WOMEN WATCH* in 1998 to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The trust and confidence of the NCWO are implemented through the following commissions:

1. Economic Commissions;

2. Education and Training Commissions;

3. Finance and Consumer Commissions; and

4. Law and Legislation Commission.

3.2.0 Other than NCWO, there are various women NGOs that are very active in their own programs and projects for the benefit of women. All Women's Society of Malaysia (AWAM), Women's Aid Organization (WAO), and Women Crisis Centre are examples of committed and active women NGOs in Malaysia. These NGOs have set up shelters for battered women, providing services to women who are victims of AIDs and are active in helping and supporting the abused, including children. The NGOs work closely with international agencies (including the donors) and government agencies, such as the police and the Ministry of Health.

The 1995 mandate for NGOs has been further strengthened to enable them to be more effective in fulfilling their roles as partners in implementing programs to

PART THREE

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION - OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED AND MEASURES TAKEN

1. Strengthening of National Machinery

1.1. Two years after the Beijing Conference and a year after the National Plan of

maintained.

International Macroeconomy was initiated by a study undertaken by the World Bank... (ADB) commissioned by the government through between Canada and Malaysia.

Asia
bilateral

Dissemination and Utilisation

2. Data

Z.F. In our attempt to address the paucity of gender disaggregated data of development, Resource Centre on Women in Development within the Department of Women's Affairs. The Resource Centre idea was initiated by members of the ASEAN Women's Program (now ASEAN Sub-Regional Women) with studies being undertaken on a Regional level to develop a thesaurus on Women in development for the region. In spite of these weaknesses and lack of direction, the resource centre has continued its capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate information, and to provide training and technical advisory support to other ministries. It has the responsibilities to implement the Plan of Action on the advancement of women. Since its establishment, statistical reports on the women in labour force sector in Malaysia has been produced and updated. The resource centre also produces Bulletins and other publications on women in development for local use. The department is now in the process of establishing an adequate management information system (MIS) and the mechanisms for data analysis at the resource centre. Plans are under way to develop a web-site and E-Community to promote linkages and innovation.

3. Women in Decision Making and Power Sharing

3.1. Despite the improvements in women's educational levels, employment

of men, in the arena of
elections has slightly
candidates have somewhat
ic sector is shown in

participation of women at
forums organized by the
been targeted in the
the setting up of family and women
facilities and the introduction of
sectors have been undertaken and

attention to the obstacles that have
More effective measures are being
se a gender-positive environment in
re of both genders and be part and
Gender sensitivity training with the

prevailing stereotyping and perceptions on the role of
sensitivity modules which have been developed will be tested
over-changing management environment.

opportunities and successes attained by
decision-making level is still very low as
politics, the number of women candidates
increased with time and the proportion of
improved. The number of women in po
Appendix "C" and "D".

3.2. Problems, barriers and constraints that in
the decision-making level have been ra

Department of Women's Aff
National Plan of Action. Mea
friendly work environment su
flexible working hours in the p
some progress have been achie

3.3. The Government continues to
hindered women's advancement
taken by the Government to c
which the organizational clin
narrowed of and human resource

makers
efforts to
women
and asse

educational disparity which exists between men and women. The enrolment of

in schools and universities is shown in Appendix "E". However,

gender stereotyping is still very much alive in the technical fields. In view of the fact that women and girls are still being influenced by cultural norms that are not in favor of their association with technology, hence their limited representation in these areas. Efforts are being made to bring those areas into higher institutions and other training programs.

A number of institutions of higher learning has set up women's/gender studies units within their faculties/departments. Four of the Universities in Malaysia have women's/gender studies and research programs to encourage girls to choose careers in the scientific fields. Efforts are being undertaken so as to increase the number of female students in science, technology, engineering and related labor market. Career guidance and vocational training are being undertaken so as to increase the number of female students to choose technical and non-technical vocational training.

Human Rights

The Constitution of Malaysia lays down the minimum standards of the human rights. As a multi-racial society, the human rights standards are based on the values of national values, accommodating the various traditions, customs, social and economic conditions in the country. In order to protect and promote human rights in Malaysia, the government has agreed to establish an independent Commission on human rights at the national level. The Commission constitutes an essential mechanism for the implementation of human rights.

5.2. By virtue of the Article 8, the Federal Constitution has clearly embodying the spirit of Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

"All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination".

5.3. The Article 8(5) of the Malaysian Constitution, however, allows for the relaxation of this principle based on the grounds of any of the following provisions:

a) regulating personal law;

b) or practice restricting office or employment connected with the

affairs of any religion, to

protection, well being or

has been the subject of considerable

33. The legal status of M

tion that protect women are the adoption of

(1969); similar rights under this

dent Fund Ordinance and the

(1955) which is applicable to Malaysian citizens

Act (1955) which covers all foreign workers

except housemaids; the Employment Act (1955) which provi

ing matters such as pay rates, overtime

work, holidays, termination and all other matters pertaining to employ

which are to promote high

from both sexes; the Income

employee to have her income

1973) amended in 1987; The

assessed under her own name; Girl's

Some of the

the principle of equal pay for equal

Pensioners Act (1970); the Un

Women's Com

only. Workmen

legal mar

apply to both men and women in the

and the Factories and Machinery Ac

standards of health and safety at wo

Tax Act (1967) amended in 1973 to a

assessed under her own name; Girl's

of information will be carried out by the local mass media to increase awareness

amongst men and women of their r

of women and health has been recognized as one of the main priority

development. A Plan of Action on Women and Health has been

ed to ensure that women's health becomes part of the national agenda.

ernal and Child Health Services continue to carry out antenatal care,

clude family planning care, child health care, pre-school and school

education, nutrition activities including

health services, family plan

function education and nutrition surveillance, to reduce maternal and infant

motherhood) Malaysia has also adopted antinoma methods, i.e. develop and

apply the risk approach strategy whereby cases identified as priority or requiring

special care are managed according to set criteria and more intensively. A color

coding system is used to identify high-risk mothers and new-born, with red for

high risk cases, white for low-risk, and yellow and green for those in between.

Malaysia is one of the first countries in this region to develop this approach.

6.2 A series of seminars on women and AIDS have been launched both by the

Ministry of Health and NGOs. Majority of the AIDS cases are men, but the

proportion of women infected with HIV is on the rise from 4.30% (1986-1996) to

in 1989 to 1997.

5.08 in 1997. The percentage of women reported

is as shown in Appendix "F".

the prevention and

and small group

by their behavior.

ledge in teachers

re been taken

and some of

6.3 Health education and health promotion is the ma

control of HIV/AIDS. Mass awareness campa

approaches to motivate people with high risk be

and adopted to healthy lifestyles, and inclusion's

are examples of r

6.4) The government will continue with the on-going efforts to provide women of all ages to quality and affordable health care and family services, in particular to those from the low income groups living in rural areas.

7. Violence Against Women

7.1. In the area of violence against women, Government agencies in collaboration with NGOs have succeeded in making significant progress towards reducing domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1997 and its provisions have been effectively enforced. Domestic violence is now dealt with as a criminal offence with appropriate penalties imposed and the protection order and the imposition of penalty for breach of the protection order.

Realizing that legislation may only remove the more blatant discriminatory practices, the government and NGOs in Malaysia continue to push for greater training and sensitization of the relevant parties.

In the past, all agencies have been urged to refrain from taking a hard-line approach on the issue of domestic violence and seek positive avenues and measures for the prevention and speedy redressal. A one-stop-crisis center has also been set up in all hospitals in Malaysia to provide treatment for victims of violence. This has improved inter-agency co-operation by bringing together the police investigation and medical procedures in one place, that is at the hospital. The interrogation of victims will be conducted in the hospital instead of the police station, and all procedures, police and medical take place in the hospital if a specialist is available. This place is seen as a more neutral and gender friendly place.

7.3.1) Another innovation is the standardized special rape investigation kit which gathers medical and legal evidence throughout the country. This has reduced the

...with the aim of developing women to become better wives and
... More programs are now formulated to encourage female
... productive activities and to provide opportunities for related
... skills training, especially in new technologies, to enable the women
... to benefit from modern agricultural and rural development

8.3. To increase the number of women entrepreneurs, more training opportunities will
be provided to women and will be conducted on continuous basis. The Ministry of
Entrepreneur Development has launched a series of training programs to assist
rural women and women retrenched by the
Entrepreneurship Development Program will be

men's capability in using modern technology in
n quality as well as cooperative and innovative
... further enhanced
... producing goods
... The local women's partners
... up. Business aid or micro credit schemes
... more "gender friendly" will continue to
... of small scale women entrepreneurs.

... credit assistance which are
... to promote the development

... further enhanced
... producing goods
... The local women's partners
... up. Business aid or micro credit schemes
... more "gender friendly" will continue to
... of small scale women entrepreneurs.

9.1.1. Modifying Stereotypes and Prejudices

... equality between men and women has official
to perpetuate itself because it is internalized and
... perception of what is appropriate for men and

9.1. Although the pe
endorsement, ve

Changing these perceptions is, of course, not an easy task, as stereotyping
... negative assumptions towards women are complex factors that have their
... both historical and cultural processes. Stereotypes held by any society are
... to change. Therefore, any attempt at changing perceptions of women
... begin with the re-examination of cultural and traditional norms. Where

these are no longer valid or justifiable, efforts must be made to make these redundant, and therefore removed.

02 Persistent effort to modify the prejudices in the organizations is now being

of women
that for a change
c concept of human
ould become an integral part of organizational practice
eved that pursuing an officially gender blind policy is

irstly to ensure that individual women are not penalized by stereotypical
assumptions about the characteristics of women as a group and secondly to
espond to the challenge that the new generations of women are more robust,

versatile; and ambitious. The characteristics that have been appropriate and
effective for managerial positions.

ing is being discussed
fids women, to recruit
akers, implementers, and
tion of the importance of
ces already allocated to
ement of gender equality

of gender mainstreaming. In
Women in Development and
the national machinery has
ing mainstreaming. Inter

9.3. The present gender awareness and s
address the need to change negative
thinking, and to change the mind-set
public service personnel. Given the e
in-service and pre-promotion training
this, efforts are being made to incorp
in all training courses for the public pe

10. Gender Mainstreaming

10.1. Many agencies do not really understand
this respect two approaches, have been
Gender and Development approach.
been entrusted with the responsib

ministerial committees and consultative committees have been set up to further

carry out mainstreaming activities, particularly from the perspectives into their planning, policy making and implementation.

Platform for Action, Commonwealth Plan of Action, ICPD and other conventions and declarations endorsed or ratified by Malaysia.

10.2. While inter-ministerial and consultative committees have been set up, it has not been able to carry out mainstreaming activities seriously, due to limited resources (financial and manpower). Moreover, officials in various Ministries as liaison officers are burdened with their routine work and cannot carry out the mandate given to them as expected by the national machinery. As the national machinery is also part of the implementing agency, it lacks the authority over other ministries. A clear mandate will have to be given to the relevant departments and ministries for implementation and for ensuring accountability. There is also a need for reorganizing in terms of structures, processes, practices and work methodologies, particularly in ensuring that the targets are included as an integral part of the overall sectoral plans and the enabling conditions where necessary.

11. Conclusion

Although, due to some difficulties, some activities in the Beijing Platform for Action have not been fully implemented, it is believed that with full support from the government, particularly in providing sufficient funds for the programmes and projects as stipulated in the national plan of action, and support from NGOs and relevant agencies, Malaysia would be able

to fulfil the mandate of improving the status of women more effectively in the years to come.