

Chapter 5

NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN AND NATIONAL WID MACHINERY

A. Women in Development Policies and Planning

The Declaration of the Women's Decade (1975-85) by the UN added impetus to ongoing efforts to integrate and increase the role of women in the development process. The Government has shown its support by allocating funds and setting up organizations. The National Advisory Council on Women in Development (NACIWID) and HAWA were instituted, which acted as catalysts in this process. The purpose of the Council was to advise the Government on women related issues in development. Subsequently in 1982-83, the Women's Affairs Secretariat was set up in the Prime Minister's Office to administer matters related to women. The Government made allocations of funds to the Third Malaysia Plan (3MP) for the development of women, primarily in their roles and functions as housewives, mothers, and supplementary income earners. These funds were channeled through organizations such as the National Family Planning and Development Board or the ministry dealing with social welfare. A National Policy for Women was prepared in December 1989. Its contents were incorporated in the 6MP period. The formulation of a National Action Plan to support the implementation of the National Policy on Women was an integral component of the planning process. Therefore, the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-95) emphasized the formulation of the National Action Plan, which was to integrate women in the institutional process for planning, implementation, and monitoring.

The 6MP states, "The government recognizes that specific strategies must necessarily be formulated to effectively incorporate women in the process of development. Towards this end, concerted efforts will be made to progressively reduce existing constraints and facilitate the assimilation of women into the mainstream of social and economic activities."

In support of this position, the objectives of the National Policy for Women as stated in the 6MP are:

- (i) to ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and information as well as access to opportunities and benefits of development, for both men and women;
- (ii) to integrate women in all sectors of national development in line with their abilities and needs in order to improve the quality of life, eradicate poverty, abolish ignorance, and illiteracy, and ensure a peaceful and prosperous nation.

These objectives provide the basis for integrating women's contributions in all national development efforts, with the aim of focusing on areas where support facilities have not yet been adequately provided, and women's role not yet fully acknowledged.

B. The National Action Plan for the Development of Women

The National Action Plan for the advancement of women was being formulated as early as 1992. It was prepared to operationalize the National Policy on Women. Under the Plan various strategies and programs were drawn up to be implemented by the government agencies,

private sector, and NGOs. As a result of the Beijing Conference, the Plan was reformulated to integrate the strategies and programs contained in the Platform for Action. The Action Plan for the Development of Women outlines 13 critical areas of concern to be addressed. These are as follow:

- (i) Strengthening the Machinery for the Advancement of Women;
- (ii) Increasing public awareness and sensitivity of government bureaucracy to women's issues;
- (iii) Activating NGOs to improve the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Socioeconomic Programs;
- (iv) Women and Health;
- (v) Women and Education and Training;
- (vi) Women and Economy;
- (vii) Women and Law;
- (viii) Women and Power-Sharing;
- (ix) Women and the Media;
- (x) Women and Religion;
- (xi) Women and Culture;
- (xii) Women and Sports; and
- (xiii) Women and Family.

Once the Action Plan is approved by the Cabinet, the participation of all parties identified as implementors will be necessitated to fully carry out the Plan. The progress of the implementation of the Plan will be monitored by HAWA through the Inter Ministerial Coordinating Committee established recently.

C. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

Malaysia acceded to CEDAW in July 1995 with reservations to some of the articles. In order to honor the commitments made by the national delegation to the Beijing Conference, the Government has agreed to review the reservations made with regard to CEDAW. A paper has been prepared to seek government approval on the removal of some of these reservations.

D. The Beijing Platform for Action

At the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women, the government prepared its Report to the Conference which outlines (i) the enabling environment for the advancement of Malaysia women; (ii) a review of the situation of women in the early 80's, prior to the Nairobi Conference; (iii) changes that have taken place since the Nairobi Conference in the context of the seven critical areas of concern; (iv) Future Strategic goals and objectives. The Report notes the progress made by women in the areas of education, health, labor market participation, participation in power sharing and decision-making, enactment of laws and legal policies and strategies to improve women's sociolegal status. The Report also notes that all the recommendations envisaged in the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Policy on Women are in line with the macro policies of the national development plans, Vision 2020, and the World Platform for Action endorsed in the Beijing World Conference.

The Report acknowledges that while it appears that women have made significant advances in all aspects of private and public life, as reflected by the overall status of women in the country, detailed analysis of the participation of women in all the spheres of development, reveals the continuous existence of obstacles and constraints to the fullest utilization of women's potential.

Women's position, the Report acknowledges, relative to men, remains less than satisfactory. Women still lag behind, particularly in assuming political power, leadership roles, legal standing and employment. These issues have been identified and strategies to address these, included in the Action Plan. The five main strategies for the Action Plan are to:

- (i) strengthen the national machinery to address women's issues;
- (ii) re-orient the institutional process for the planning, implementation and monitoring of government policies and programs to accommodate women's concerns;
- (iii) raise public awareness and sensitize the government bureaucracy with regard to women's concerns;
- (iv) activate NGOs in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of socioeconomic programs; and
- (v) redress problems of discrimination and promote affirmative action for the benefit of women in particular.

The Government's acceptance of the Plan demonstrates its commitment towards a fundamental shift in development policies that would adequately address the realities of women's lives, and actively assist women in gaining equal access to resources, wages, employment, health care, education, personal autonomy, and decision making.

E. National Policy on Women

The close of 1980s saw a major policy advance for WID in Malaysia. This was the adoption of the National Policy on Women in December 1989. It was based on the realization that women were unable to participate equally with men in national development due to various constraints that hinder their full integration in development. The need for special efforts to remove all constraints in order to facilitate women's equitable participation was recognized.

The primary objectives of the Policy are:

- (i) To ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources, information, opportunities and benefits of development for men and women. The objectives of equality and justice must be made the essence of development policies which must be people-oriented so that women, who constitute half of the nation's population, can contribute and realize their potential to the optimum; and
- (ii) To integrate women in all sectors of development in accordance with their capabilities and needs in order to enhance the quality of life, eradicate poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, and ensure a peaceful, harmonious and prosperous nation.

A visible impact of the National Policy on Women was the inclusion of a chapter on Women in Development in the 6MP. The Chapter cited the past achievements of women, outlined

the issues and concerns still outstanding, and identified those concerns, which restricted the full integration of women in development. These concerns were identified as follows:

- Gender differentiation in schools not only transforms into occupational differentiation later, but also limits the adaptability and participation of women in the labor market.
- Social norms and prejudices regarding the role and status of women in society and in the labor market restrict their involvement in economic pursuits.
- Women with children who are financially dependent on husbands are particularly vulnerable in cases of domestic violence. The lack of skills very often limits their options in securing alternative sources of income.
- Women are often perceived as secondary earners who only supplement family incomes, rather than as co-earners whose economic activities are crucial to the family well being. Consequently, income generating programs targeted at women generally reinforce their home-maker roles, providing few opportunities for the acquisition of new and marketable skills.
- The lack of appropriate management training, consequent absence of professionalism, inadequate access to credit, and a paucity of relevant market information, hinder the full participation of women in the economy.
- The working environment not being conducive to the sustained employment of the wife and mother; the separation of home and workplace and the fixed hours of work, constitute additional drawbacks which preclude women's prolonged and sustained participation in the labor market.

The National Policy on Women includes the Action Plan. All the recommendations envisaged in the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Policy on Women are in line with the broader macro policies of the National Development Plans, Vision 2020 and the Platform for Action endorsed in the Beijing World Conference.

In general, women's position relative to men remains less satisfactory. These issues have been identified, and strategies and programs to address these issues have been laid down in the Action Plan to be implemented under the 7MP.

F. WID Machinery

In Malaysia, WID institutions can be categorized into: (i) advisory and planning (National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development); (ii) advocacy (National Council of Women's Organizations); (iii) coordination and monitoring (HAWA); and (iv) implementation (government, semi-government and non government organizations).

G. Advisory and Planning Mechanisms

The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) was formed in 1976 in accordance with the United Nations' Resolution on integrating women in the mainstream of the development process. It was set up as a multisectoral body comprising representatives from the government and non-government sectors. NACIWID's objectives are: (i) to serve as a coordinating, consultative and advisory body to the Government, and between the Government and non government organizations; (ii) to arouse national consciousness amongst women on their roles and responsibilities towards nation-building; (iii) to ensure the full integration of women in national development; (iv) to enable women to develop their potential capabilities to the maximum; and (v) to arouse awareness among women regarding their rights; and (vi) to contribute towards the promotion of international peace. In order to achieve its objectives, NACIWID (i) provides advisory services to Government and non government organizations; (ii) evaluates and plans activities of women's organizations to ensure integration of women in development; (iii) acts as the main body through which women-related issues are channeled to the relevant authorities; (iv) promotes and encourages research studies and appropriate action on such research; and (v) communicates with relevant organizations within and outside the country to promote national and international understanding.

H. Advocacy Mechanisms

Since 1960, the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO), a non-political, non-religious and non-communal organization, was formed to act as an umbrella organization for non government women's organizations in Malaysia. One of the first tasks of the NCWO was to advocate (in 1964) for the establishment of a Women's Bureau that would seek to improve women's status in terms of equality of opportunities to education and access to legal aid. At present, the NCWO has over 200 welfare, political, professional and labor organizations affiliated to it, including a number of active and important women's organizations. NCWO's main roles are: (i) to bring all the women's organizations together; (ii) to raise the standard of living of women, and to work for the welfare and advancement (through education, training, welfare and development) of women and children; and (iii) to be a consultative and advisory body to women's organizations in the country. It also has a Commission for Action on the National Policy for Women and state level committees. To accomplish its advocacy role, NCWO's main concerns are to (i) press for appropriate action regarding laws affecting women and children, following up on research findings; (ii) work to improve the status of women by means of legal, political, social, economic, moral and educational development; and (iii) encourage the participation of women in the development and growth of the country.

I. Coordination and Monitoring Mechanisms

HAWA is now considered to be the lead agency in government in the national machinery for women, responsible for the integration of women in the national development process, through coordination, monitoring and evaluation, planning and policy formulation, and reporting to government.

Before 1983, the Women's Affairs Department was known as the Women's Division under the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources, and served as the secretariat to the NACIWID. In 1978, the Women's Division was transferred to the Implementation and Coordination Unit (ICU) in the

Prime Minister's Department. In 1983, the Women's Division was re-designated a Secretariat named HAWA in the Administration and Finance Division of the Prime Minister's Department. About the same time, the portfolio of a Deputy Prime Minister's Department was increased to include women's affairs. Since its inception in 1983, the administrative structure of HAWA has undergone several changes but with the same name. In 1986, women liaison officers have been identified in all the line ministries, with their roles and responsibilities to gather information, and identify relevant matters on women and development within the respective ministries. Following the Cabinet reshuffle in 1990, HAWA has been placed under the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development in 1991.

Since its establishment in 1981, HAWA has been entrusted with the following objectives:

- (i) to promote the participation of women in the national development process; and
- (ii) to ensure that national development plans take into consideration the integration of women through the provision of equal opportunities and access to facilities and resources.

The major responsibilities of HAWA are to: (i) monitor the implementation of government policies and programs by the various ministries, departments, and agencies, and their projects for women, ascertain their contributions for women, and their positive and negative impacts, identify the constraints and issues confronting women, and provide feedback to the government for appropriate necessary action; (ii) organize courses, seminars and workshops aimed at improving the knowledge and skills of women in various fields in order to facilitate their entry into the labor market, or ensure their sustenance in employment; (It organizes special projects in collaboration with other agencies and NGOs, such as the Family Literacy Project and the Legal Literacy Project.) (iii) undertake the review of the existing legislation that affect the interest of women, with a view to addressing the discriminatory provisions of some of the legislation; (HAWA is involved in the formulation of new legislation to address issues pertaining to women); (iv) organize gender sensitization programs and gender planning courses to enhance the awareness about women's concerns among policy makers, planners, and programmers, and providing skills in integrating gender issues in development planning and policy formulation; (v) identify priority research areas on women and women's issues for the agency or individuals to undertake the research; (vi) act as the national contact point for networking with international agencies dealing with women's issues, and representing the country at international meetings or conferences on women, and serve as the Secretariat for the regional and international agencies pertaining to women's programs; (vii) collect and disseminate information about women's concerns at the international, ASEAN, national and state levels; (viii) serve as the secretariat for NACIWID; (ix) assist, coordinate and monitor the activities of women's organizations to ensure that government policies are adhered to and to enable these organizations to carry out their activities. (HAWA provides advisory and financial services to women's organizations. To date, there are 228 women's organizations.)

HAWA is the sole agency representing women in Malaysia. It also plays the role of secretariat for NACIWID and is the main contributor to the planning process at the Ministry as well as the central agencies. It has a major task to perform in mainstreaming gender into all aspects of planning and development. In order to do so, HAWA has to act in a catalytic, leadership role, influencing and assisting other government agencies and departments, to undertake gender responsive planning and policy formulation, and deliver women specific or gender responsive

programs. The Bank assisted HAWA and the Government of Malaysia to do an institutional assessment of HAWA²² in relation to policies and commitments, both national and international, of the Government of Malaysia concerning women. Based on the assessment, a number of recommendations have been made in consultation with the major parties concerned: HAWA, Ministry of Unity and Social Welfare, Economic and Planning Unit, Treasury, Public Service Department, and other government and non government organizations concerned with the welfare of women. The recent reconstitution of HAWA into a Department of Government, the appointment of a Director General, and the expected establishment of state level committees for WID are expected to further strengthen HAWA's capacity and outreach.

J. National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID)

The NACIWID was formed in 1976 in accordance with the UN resolution to integrate women in mainstream of development. Its members are nominated by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development and appointed by the Prime Minister. Nominees are drawn from women leaders in the community, NGOs, retired civil servants, and the private sector. As ministerial appointees, NACIWID members can act as advisors to Parliament and to ministries. NACIWID's objectives are: (i) to serve as a coordinating, consultative and advisory body to the Government and between the Government and non-government organizations; (ii) to arouse national consciousness among women on their roles and responsibilities towards nation-building; (iii) to ensure the full integration of women in national development; (iv) to enable women to develop their potential capabilities to the maximum; and (v) to arouse awareness of women regarding their rights; and (vi) to contribute towards the promotion of international peace. In order to achieve its objectives, NACIWID (i) provides advisory services to Government and non-government organizations; (ii) evaluates and plans activities of women's organizations to ensure integration of women in development; (iii) acts as the main body through which women-related issues are channeled to the relevant authorities; (iv) promotes and encourages research studies and appropriate action on such research; and (v) communicates with relevant organizations within and outside the country to promote national and international understanding.

With data, information, and research provided by HAWA, NACIWID would better be able to make recommendations regarding legislation, policy, and planning to government. Similarly, NACIWID could act as a bridge between government and the public, conveying government messages regarding gender issues to the public and public opinion and concerns to the government. A strengthened HAWA through its role as secretariat would foster a more active NACIWID.

²² Study undertaken under TA 2439-MAL: Institutional Strengthening of the Women's Affairs Division in March/April 1996. Separate full report of TA study will be available around the end of 1996. Part of the institutional assessment is in Appendix 1 to provide more information about HAWA.

K. Malaysian National Clearing House On Women in Development (MAWID)

The MAWID acts as a one stop agency in information supply and document delivery on WID in Malaysia. It also acts as the regional/international focus for dealing with WID information queries, supporting women's projects and programs through information activities. MAWID functions within a national network collecting materials on a variety of areas. The network members consist of women's associations, government and nongovernment organizations, political auxiliaries, national academic and research institutions, libraries and archives.

L. State and District Consultative Committees

State consultative committees (SCCs) were established in 1992, chaired by the state legislature and with secretariat support by a welfare department officer of the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development. District Consultative Committees (DCCs) are composed of representatives of women's organizations, and counseling agencies. These committees were intended to provide HAWA with a direct link to state and local government. However the lines for communication have not yet been well established although a significant number of such committees is active at the local level.

M. Liaison Officers

In 1986, female liaison officers (LOs) were appointed to gather information and identify issues regarding women and development in their respective line ministries. No mechanisms for regular meetings, coordination, and accountable reporting have been established nor have the LOs received support or credit for their additional workload. As a result the LOs have not played a significant role.

N. Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee

An Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee for Women's Affairs (IACC) was established in mid-1996 to address coordination issues. This committee is chaired by the Secretary General of the Ministry for National Unity and Social Development and members are drawn from the planning bureaus of key line ministries.

O. Mechanisms for the Implementation of WID Programs

Several major organizations are implementing WID programs and have contributed to a certain extent to the economic and social welfare of women in Malaysia, in particular rural women, such as:

- (i) **Community Development Division (KEMAS)**, was established in 1972, and operates under the Ministry of National and Rural Development. KEMAS' programs for women focus mainly on family development including home economics such as nutrition and family health at village level; work-oriented classes such as tailoring, handicrafts and agriculture aimed at producing goods for family or market for supplementing the family incomes; visits by home economics workers to help housewives to improve their

socioeconomic conditions; pre-school children programs such as establishing community pre-school child-care centers; and adult literacy programs.²³

- (ii) **National Family Planning Board (NFPB)**, established in 1966, focuses on the promotion of family planning ideas and techniques, and offering of counseling services for marital and family planning problems and implementation of handicraft programs. The other areas of the NFPB activities address cultural, social, economic and demographic factors which affect women's roles in development.
- (iii) **Department of Agriculture (DOA)** basically focuses on three major areas for women, namely, leadership development, improvement of quality of life, and entrepreneurship of target groups. The DOA also runs a Farm Family Development Program for Rural Women. This program was initiated in 1968 with emphasis on enhancing the home-making roles of rural women through home economics courses and activities.
- (iv) **Rubber Industry Smallholders' Development Authority (RISDA)** was set up in 1973 to operate the smallholding sector of the rubber industry in Malaysia. Since 1978, there has been a policy to form local Women Rubber Smallholders Groups (WRSG). The WRSG conducts economic activities aimed at increasing family income as well as encouraging small-scale business among rural women.
- (v) **Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA)** was established in 1956, as the major land development agency of the government. In 1957, a family development program was initiated with the objective of encouraging maximum participation of all members of FELDA families in the social and economic progress of the nation. The other programs include promotion of income-generating activities through the provision of training, financial assistance and other inputs for the benefit of woman.

²³ ESCAP, 1982.