

Chapter 6

PROGRAMMING OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE BANK TO ADDRESS WID

A. Incorporating WID into the Bank's Macroeconomic and Sector Work

Women's issues cut across development strategies, policies and programs. Therefore, the way in which the Bank influences macroeconomic policies and development planning will have direct and indirect impacts on women. It is essential that the Bank take a proactive approach to designing gender sensitive projects and selected WID specific initiatives. Bank operations can explicitly incorporate gender issues and concerns arising thereof, in ways that take into account the need to improve women's access to scientific and technical education and employment, in order to strengthen women's economic position, and contribute to national development. In line with the maturing of the Malaysian economy to its recent level, as well as the current economic downturn being experienced by the region as a whole, the emphasis of the Bank strategy of supporting and sustaining economic growth with equity and preparing for the upswing once the current crisis is overcome, requires the mainstreaming of gender concerns into development strategies, capacity building and policy formulation.

B. Support to the National WID Machinery

1. Institutional Strengthening of HAWA

The Bank's TA 2439-MAL: Institutional Strengthening of HAWA recommended structural, administrative and human resources changes to HAWA to promote its role as the lead agency in government in integrating WID into the national development process. The Bank should build on the recommendations, to address HAWA's capacity building needs, and support required by HAWA to prepare programs to enhance gender sensitivity of government administrators, especially decision makers. The proposed TA for Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation in HAWA (1999) should also include a sociolegal component. It should also assist HAWA to build up in-house gender and law capacity, in order to monitor women's sociolegal status, as well as recommend improvements in the law and its enforcement from time to time. The proposed TA for Management Information System for HAWA (1998) should incorporate indicators on women's sociolegal status.

C. Legal Status of Women

1. RETA 5700: Sociolegal Status of Women

Under the Bank's RETA 5700, a study has been undertaken of the legal and practical constraints faced by Malaysian women in participating in economic and social activities. It includes study of the legal status of women under the national constitution, international conventions and agreements ratified by the government, national and state statutes and regulations, religious law, family law, customary law and practice, court decisions, with emphasis on property, contract, inheritance, marriage/divorce, child custody, employment, and criminal law. The study further addresses the issues of the relative standing and application of statutory law, and religious/customary

law, women's awareness of legal rights and ability to protect their rights through the administrative or legal systems, factors preventing women from enforcing their legal rights. It addresses the issue of violence against women, and examines the Domestic Violence Act, which came under implementation in 1996. It also addresses questions related to strategies and programs of NGOs and women and law groups, their effectiveness and constraints, and makes recommendations for legal reform, awareness raising, and institution building and training activities that can be built into the Bank's pipeline of technical assistance and loan projects.

Valid, timely, nationally relevant, and internationally comparable gender disaggregated data, are important to promote and monitor women's legal status. It is important to develop indicators for monitoring women's sociolegal status and build up a database which will help in both monitoring and providing the information base for law reform and strengthening women's sociolegal status. HAWA as the national WID machinery would be well placed to develop such a sociolegal database on women in collaboration with other related agencies, government and NGOs. HAWA's own in-house legal capacity would need to be strengthened by appointing a legal officer. Gender sensitization on women and the law is important to be mainstreamed into all training programs for legal personnel, civil servants, and enforcement agencies possibly through collaboration between HAWA and the National Institute of Public Administration.

D. Education

While women's enrollment at all levels of education is comparable to men, their participation in vocational and technical education is limited. Gender segregation arising from gender stereotyping which influence students' choice of courses is still prevalent. This limits women, half the population, from participating in new employment opportunities, and thereby reduces not merely equity, but efficiency, by reducing the availability of labor with appropriate skills needed during this period of structural transformation of the Malaysian economy. As the Bank has done in the past, efforts can be continued to facilitate female participation in the sciences, advanced technology, engineering and technical education in order to increase female participation in related labor markets. Support for skills development of women workers being retrenched on account of the current economic situation, as well as opportunities for low level women workers to improve their skills would be important. Labor market information systems that can provide current information to workers regarding likely opportunities and trends can facilitate labor mobility to areas where there are possibilities of growth.

E. Labor Force Participation

1. Retention of Women in the Workforce After Marriage

The conditions leading to women's decisions to remain or withdraw from the labor force must be assessed within the context of Malaysian social values to determine the appropriate policy environment and incentives to retain a larger proportion of women in the labor force after marriage. While this is primarily a domestic issue in Malaysia, the Bank may assist in identifying, analyzing, and determining the options for some of the issues which may be involved such as provision of public or private child care facilities. Another related aspect is that of legalizing flexible working arrangements, particularly part time work, which can facilitate women with child care responsibilities to enter the job market, as well as reduce the need for retrenchment of workers. Such

arrangements are being included in the Employment Act. The Bank can provide assistance in monitoring the impacts of such arrangements on women's employment, wages and benefits.

2. *Ensure workers skills meet market needs*

Adult training may be necessary to address the current shortage of skilled labor as well as to avoid retrenchment among the unskilled, working in labor-intensive industries in which women comprise a significant part of the labor force. Under the current economic crisis and resultant retrenchments of labor, skills training for women workers has emerged as a significant area requiring support.

F. Gender Disaggregated Data on Education and Employment

The Bank should provide support for the collection of gender disaggregated data on education, particularly in the areas of scientific, technical, and vocational, education, as well as training programs for diversified skills development, and entrepreneurship development. Such gender disaggregated data collection and use will facilitate the monitoring of enrollment trends, and shifts in these, as well as measures needed to redress any imbalances that may emerge. The Bank's proposed TA project on Technical Education should address gender concerns with regard to enrollment patterns, gender stereotyping, extent of problems of lack of appropriate infrastructure for women students in centers of scientific and technical education, lack of women teachers, need for gender sensitization and training.

G. Capacity-Building and Policy Support

In view of the need for upgrading human resources and the technological base of the economy, the country faces large, varied, and complex capacity-building and policy support needs. Not only is there a scarcity of critically needed skills, but there is also a substantial mismatch of skills. The Bank has substantial experience in supporting capacity-building and policy formulation in its DMCs. The Bank may accord priority to gender concerns in macroeconomic management and policy analysis, and supporting Malaysia's Technical Cooperation and Development Cooperation (TCDC) activities. In responding to the country's varied and complex capacity building needs on a case-by-case basis, the Bank should seek to address gender concerns, and mainstream these in technical assistance projects.

It is essential to increase gender awareness at decision making levels to further support the commitment to, and improve understanding of, the need for a gender-sensitive policy. Within the Bank's proposed activities to provide capacity-building and policy support, the mainstreaming of gender concerns, for assisting the Government in developing gender responsive policy through the provision of advice, technical assistance, and training, will be important.

H. Agriculture

The agriculture sector is in relative decline in the Malaysian economy, as its importance in generating output and employment has steadily diminished in the course of structural change. The rapid transformation of the Malaysian economy has removed surplus labor from most rural areas, except in Sabah and Sarawak. The Bank and the Government have developed an approach, which emphasizes land use planning, development of unutilized lands, and protection of environmentally sensitive areas. The Bank-assisted TA for the Daro-Mukah Coastal Zone Development Project should address gender concerns in the preparation of a framework Master Plan for the coastal zone of the Daro-Mukah area for the period 1996-2010, and in carrying out the feasibility studies for high priority sub projects in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and infrastructure, and in the preparation of a cohesive proposal for the design and implementation of subprojects.

1. The Kota Kinabalu Industrial Port Project

This Project should look out for opportunities where women entrepreneurs may be given special encouragement to participate.

2. Targeted Assistance to Sabah and Sarawak

The Bank can promote women's access to services and income generating activities as part of Bank operations in Eastern Malaysia where gender gaps are more pronounced. Areas of support could include improving women's health and education status and development of women's employment opportunities. Future Bank operations in Sabah and Sarawak involving ethnic minorities can address specific gender concerns. In supporting commercialization of agriculture in Sarawak, the Bank should mainstream gender concerns related to women's land rights and their participation in decision making regarding land use, and access to shares and incomes.

I. Macroeconomic Management and Policy Analysis

The Bank could provide support through economic and sector studies on the analysis of the gender impact of the structural transformation of the Malaysian economy, and the gender concerns with regard to policy development, capacity building needs, and the identification of necessary ameliorative measures.

J. Support to the Outcome of the Beijing Conference

The Bank should consider providing support to develop action plans and programs to implement the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference at Beijing in 1995. While the Platform for Action identified twelve critical areas of concern to be addressed by the respective governments, HAWA's report to the Cabinet on the participation of the national delegation at the Conference identified four priority areas to be addressed by the Government of Malaysia. These are:

- promoting the economic potential and independence of women;
- increasing the participation of women in decision making;

- strengthening mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women; and
- eradicating violence against women.

The Bank could provide Malaysia with assistance to translate the Platform for Action into appropriate programs and projects to achieve the goals and aspirations of Malaysian women in the 21st century. Such assistance would be consistent with the Bank's overall gender concerns in the region.

K. Policy Dialogue

The Bank should address gender concerns in its regular policy dialogue. The needs and concerns of women in Malaysia, the gender differentials in education, employment opportunities and incomes, and the need to eradicate violence against women, should be regularly reviewed as part of the policy dialogue agenda. The regional disparities with regard to gender in Sabah and Sarawak should be consistently addressed in policy discussions with the Government. The Bank should, in addition, inform the Government of the Bank's policies and emphasis on WID and examine further opportunities for Bank involvement in the WID sector.

L. Conclusion

The proposed programming opportunities for the Bank to address WID in Malaysia can help in further integration of important gender issues in Bank operations. These are mutually supportive and are of critical importance to the social and economic progress of women in Malaysia. They include: (i) incorporating WID into the Bank's macroeconomic and sector work, so that the gender implications of macroeconomic management and policymaking are analyzed at appropriate stages, and ameliorative measures adopted; (ii) institutional strengthening of HAWA in order to promote its role as lead agency in government in integrating WID into the national development process; (iii) technical assistance to strengthen women's sociolegal status; (iv) technical assistance to develop gender-specific data on key education and employment indicators and to develop a database on women's legal status; (v) addressing gender disparities in scientific, technical and vocational education; (vi) addressing gender disparities in Sabah and Sarawak; and (vii) support for women workers skills training and support for developing labor market information systems.

Addressing women's concerns in a manner that acknowledges their changing and multiple socioeconomic roles within a rapidly changing economic environment will be a challenging and continuing task. The economic progress made in the last two decades has been accompanied by greater participation of women in the development process. The current economic downturn has brought into sharper focus the need for women workers' skills improvement and their access to alternative employment and income generation. Increasing women's participation in development is both an opportunity and a challenge in Malaysia and success in this area can help sustain its rapid economic growth through the 1990s.