

**COUNTRY BRIEFING PAPER**

**WOMEN IN  
MALAYSIA**

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The views and interpretations in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Asian Development Bank.

This paper is one of a series prepared by consultants in conjunction with the Programs Department and Social Development Division (SOCD) staff. Substantial editing and rewriting has been done by Cecile Gregory and Lisa Kulp, Social Sector Specialists, Programs East (Division 2) and Manoshi Mitra, Social Development Specialist, SOCD. The purpose of the series is to provide information on the role of women in development to assist Bank staff in country programming work and project design and implementation.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	-	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
DCC	-	District Consultative Committee
DMC	-	Developing Member Country
DVA	-	Domestic Violence Act
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product
HAWA	-	Women's Affairs Department
ICU	-	Implementation and Coordination Unit
ILO	-	International Labour Organization
LFPR	-	Labor Force Participation Rate
MAWID	-	Malaysian National Clearinghouse on Women in Development
MCA	-	Malaysian Chinese Association
MIC	-	Malaysian Indian Congress
NACIWID	-	National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development
NGO	-	Non-Government Organization
NCWO	-	National Council of Women's Organizations
RETA	-	Regional Technical Assistance
SCC	-	State Consultative Committee
TA	-	Technical Assistance
WID	-	Women in Development



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **A. Introduction**

This paper deals with the socioeconomic status of Malaysian women. It provides an analysis of the recent trends of the female labor force participation, the areas where the female labor force is concentrated at present, and gender differentials in wages, and it makes recommendations to improve women's status through their participation in economic development. It also makes an attempt to analyze some of the emerging gender issues in the wake of the recent financial and economic crisis that has occurred in Asia.

The human resource development of women supports their ability to participate in national development and contribute to economic recovery. The Paper focuses on the need to enhance the educational and health opportunities for Malaysian women. The assessment of women's educational and health status reveals greater gender disparities in education and health in Sabah and Sarawak and Kelantan and Terangganu than in other parts of the country. Recommendations are made for improving women's situation in such geographical and socioeconomic contexts where they are now lagging behind, so as to bring more women into productive sectors, thereby contributing significantly to the social and economic development of the country. The need for routine collection and publication of gender disaggregated data on labor, and other non-demographic statistics has been identified as a measure to enhance policy formulation and fine tuning of program and policy interventions.

The paper analyzes national WID policies and the national machinery related to WID. The paper also analyzes the Bank's WID strategy in terms of its pipeline of technical assistance (TA) and loan projects, and makes further recommendations on WID for the Bank to pursue.

### **B. Malaysia's Economy**

Much progress has been achieved in the past few decades in narrowing the gender gap in Malaysia, as is shown in the developments in women's roles, both in absolute and relative terms, in the major socioeconomic aspects of the country's development: increasing rates of female labor force participation, gains in productive activities of women and their strengthened economic standing, their increased participation in education, and their improved health status. The impact of global recession in the mid 1980s, pushed the government to undertake structural adjustment policies, which led to the reduction of government expenditures. Private investment was sluggish or in decline up to 1986, and the real GDP growth fell to 1 percent in 1985 on account of an across the board decline in commodity prices. This led to retrenchment of labor across sectors. However, due to internal adjustments by the government to counteract the economic downtrend, the economy recovered remarkably from the recession of 1985. Malaysia's economic boom, which began in the late 1980s, continued in 1995 with gross domestic product (GDP) growth improving to 9.6 percent. The structural transformation of the economy since the 1980s is evident, from the growth of the manufacturing and services sectors in the GDP, as well as in exports and employment. The rapid expansion of the economy led to a decline in the unemployment rate to 2.8 percent in 1995. Malaysia's impressive economic growth has been accompanied by the greater participation of

women in the formal workforce and in a range of other activities.

### **C. Women's Labor Force Participation**

The rapid expansion in manufacturing increased employment in the sector sharply during the Sixth Malaysia Plan period, and dramatically altered the employment structure. The attainment of virtual full employment in 1995 marked a new milestone in the country's socioeconomic progress. The unemployment rate decreased from 2.8 percent in 1995 to 2.6 percent in 1996. Women's participation in the labor force has increased very much since 1970, and even though Malaysia is a newly industrializing country, its female labor force participation rate compares favorably with those of the industrialized countries of the Asia and the Pacific region. Women constitute 43.4 percent of the workforce in the manufacturing sector. However, the majority of women remain in low-skilled, labor-intensive jobs in agriculture, and in semi-skilled assembly work in the industry sector.

### **D. The Economic Crisis and Its Impacts on Women**

While the Paper does not deal at length on the impacts on women of the ongoing Asian economic crisis, an effort is made to identify some of the significant issues that need attention. During the period prior to mid 1997, as discussed in the preceding sections, women's participation in education and employment has been increasing. In identifying and beginning to analyze issues related to the gender impacts of the ongoing economic crisis, it will be important to keep in mind the need to safeguard the gains made by women, and to prevent/mitigate negative impacts through appropriate policies related to labor markets, support for human development, and gender disaggregated data collection, and monitoring and evaluation.

In the second half of 1997 Malaysia entered a new and painful economic crisis as compared with the 1980s downturn.<sup>1</sup> There was a 1.8 percent fall in the GDP in the first quarter of 1998, and the worst hit sectors were construction and manufacturing. It is now envisaged that the economic slowdown will persist throughout 1998 and recovery will take longer than anticipated.

Women are the most vulnerable to the effects of external shocks in the form of commodity price collapse and changes in terms of trade and economic crisis. An immediate assessment of the immediate impact of the economic downturn on the labor market has been the marked increase in the retrenchment of workers. The slower GDP growth is expected to result in a significant decline in employment growth and loss of jobs. The level of employment is projected to decrease in all sectors except for the export-oriented industries. The Human Resource Section of the Economic Planning Unit of Malaysia (EPU) expects that with slower employment growth there would be an increase in the unemployment growth rate to about 3.5 to 4.5 percent in 1998. The official data show that a total of 46,643 workers were retrenched from July 1997 until June 1998, with the manufacturing sector accounting for 60.5 percent of them. Women accounted for 38.4 percent or 12,853 of the 33,510 workers retrenched until May 1998.<sup>2</sup> It is also estimated that annually, there will be about 220,000 new labor market entrants looking for jobs. With the

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<sup>1</sup> "Economic Crisis and its Impact on Women in Malaysia, Measures Taken and Future Strategies", Paper prepared by HAWA for the APEC HRD Task Force on the Social impact of the Financial and Economic Crisis, June 1998).

<sup>2</sup> HAWA, 1998 *Ibid.*

contraction of employment in most industries many of them will have to compete with the retrenched workers for the same jobs.

Unskilled women workers, particularly women heads of households are vulnerable in the present circumstances of increasing unemployment, and the retrenchment of workers. Approximately 18 percent of Malaysian women are single parents.<sup>3</sup> Combined with low levels of skill, low job levels, and total responsibility for the maintenance of the family, such female headed households are particularly at risk. With the loss of jobs, families would be forced to cut back on food, education, and other essentials. There is likelihood of the involvement of children in informal sector work as a result of economic pressures.

While the government, unlike the private sector is not likely to retrench people, it is likely to cut back on employment, particularly at the lower levels. Since women form a large part of the lower ranks of government jobs, educated women are thus less likely to be hired as compared to men. Private firms are also likely to prefer hiring men as women may be seen as a high risk group, likely to get married and raise children. Again, women and children are likely to be adversely affected by any cutbacks in government spending in health. Societal violence against women is also likely to rise during the economic downturn.

The government is well aware of these problems and prospects for women workers, female headed households and the poor, and is arranging special assistance and support for retrenched women workers to participate as entrepreneurs in small-scale industries, business or trading. Retraining of retrenched and low level women workers to improve their skills and employability is envisaged. The government is also taking steps to ensure strict enforcement of labor laws and court decisions to protect the interests of women workers.

## **E. National Policy on Women**

The progress in the advancement of the cause of women in Malaysia should be viewed within the context of the overall framework of national development policies, plans, and objectives. This is because efforts and plans to improve the status of women are integrated and incorporated into the various long-term sectoral planning and the National Five-Year Development Plan. The relevant policies are the New Economic Policy (1971-1990), the National Development Policy (1991-2000), and Vision 2020. More specifically, based on recognition of the need to ensure that women share equitably in the development processes in all sectors of growth and national life, the National Policy on Women was adopted by the Government in 1989. The objectives of the National Policy on Women are to ensure equitable sharing of resources and development opportunities between men and women and to integrate women into all sectors of development in accordance with their capabilities and needs. A visible outcome of the policy was the inclusion of a chapter on Women in Development (WID) in the 6MP (1991-1995). This chapter is significant, as it outlined the issues and concerns regarding WID that were still outstanding and identified those concerns that restricted the full integration of women in development. These concerns were as follow: (i) gender differentials in education; (ii) social norms and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

prejudices regarding the role and status of women in society and in the labor market; (iii) domestic violence; (iv) sex stereotyping of women's roles, leading to limited prospects for them to access new opportunities for income earning; (v) lack of access to management training, credit, and market information; (vi) lack of support services to enable women to combine care giving and workplace responsibilities, leading to their withdrawal from the labor market at particular stages.

1. *Mainstreaming Gender and WID*

To fully enhance the socioeconomic status of women and their contribution to national development, further improvement can be made in certain key sectors of social and economic development. For example, gender gaps are still prevalent in employment in certain areas and at certain levels, in wages, and in education, for instance in the areas of science, technology, and engineering. Regional imbalances in socioeconomic development are reflected in greater gender disparities in Sabah, Sarawak, Kelantan and Terengganu. Here the gaps in terms of women's educational levels, health status, and income levels are more pronounced than in Peninsular Malaysia, although there have been improvements during the Sixth Malaysia Plan period.

**F. Programming Opportunities for the Bank to Address WID**

1. *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 takes a proactive approach to designing gender-sensitive projects and selected, specific WID initiatives. Bank operations should therefore explicitly incorporate gender issues and concerns arising therefrom in ways that take into account the need for improving women's access to scientific and technical education and to employment in order to strengthen women's economic position, and to contribute to national development. In line with the maturing of the Malaysian economy to its present level, the emphasis of the Bank strategy of supporting and sustaining high economic growth with equity requires the mainstreaming of gender concerns into development strategies, capacity building, and policy formulation. In response to the ongoing financial and economic crisis, the Bank should attempt to identify and address WID and gender concerns arising out of the crisis.

2. *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 should accord priority to gender concerns in macroeconomic management and policy analysis, and supporting Malaysia's TCDC activities.

It is essential to increase gender awareness at decision making levels to further support the commitment to, and understanding of the need for 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.

3. *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 arising out of the ongoing economic crisis, with regard to policy development, capacity building needs, and the identification of necessary ameliorative measures.

**G. Support to the National WID Machinery**

1. *Institutional Strengthening of HAWA*

The Bank's TA No. 2439-MAL: Institutional Strengthening of HAWA recommended structural, administrative and human resource changes to HAWA to promote its role as 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 the support required by HAWA to prepare programs to enhance the gender sensitivity of Government administrators, especially decision makers.

**H. Legal Status of Women**

1. *RETA No. 5700: Sociolegal Status of Women*

Under the Bank's regional technical assistance (RETA) No. 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, and various laws and conventions. It makes recommendations addressed to the Government, NGOs, women and law groups, and the Bank, for legal reform, awareness raising programs, institution building and training activities.

2. *Education*

While female enrollment at all levels of education is comparable to that of males, their participation in vocational and technical education is limited. Gender segregation arising from gender stereotyping, which influences students' choice of courses, is still prevalent. This reduces efficiency as well as equity, by limiting half the population from participating fully in the structural transformation of the 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. As a result of the current economic crisis, the need for improving the skill levels of women workers has been demonstrated. This is important for retrenched workers who have to be adequately absorbed into alternative



employment or income generating activities. It is also important to improve the skills of low level, low skilled women workers in order to enable them to retain their jobs, and improve their position. Skills development, gender disaggregated data collection, and the development of labor market information systems would thus be important areas for Bank support.

3. *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 that may be involved such as provision of public or private child care facilities. An important issue in the context of the current economic downturn is the possibility for women to take up part time employment. The government has introduced changes in legislation to enable such work arrangements. This is likely to facilitate married women to enter/re-enter the labor market.

4. *Gender Disaggregated Data on Education and Employment*

The Bank should provide support for the collection of gender-disaggregated data on education and employment, particularly in the areas of scientific, technical, and vocational education, as well as training programs for diversified skills development and entrepreneurship development.

5. *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 economy has removed surplus labor from most rural areas except in Sabah and Sarawak. The Bank and the Government have developed an approach that 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 1996-2010; in carrying out feasibility studies for high priority subprojects in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and infrastructure; and in the preparation of a cohesive proposal for the design and implementation of subprojects.

6. *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 biases are more pronounced. Areas of support could include improving women's health and education status and development of women's employment opportunities.

7. *Support for the Outcome of the Beijing Conference*

The Bank could provide Malaysia with assistance to translate the Beijing 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.

HAWA's report to the Cabinet 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.

## **I. Conclusion**

The proposed programming opportunities for the Bank to address WID in Malaysia recommends that important gender objectives and strategies be further integrated into Bank operations. These are mutually supportive and are of critical importance to the social and economic progress of women in Malaysia.

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. These gains need to be protected and enhanced. However, certain concerns that have emerged with regard to the WID and gender impacts of the economic crisis need to be fully considered in the Bank's work in the areas of WID and gender in Malaysia. Increasing women's participation in development is both an opportunity and a challenge in Malaysia, and success in this area can help meet the emerging challenges and increase preparedness for the oncoming economic upswing.

## *Chapter 1*

# **COUNTRY OVERVIEW**

Malaysia, comprising Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak is undoubtedly one of the most rapidly developing countries in the region. With a population of 19.7 million in 1994, Malaysian society is pluralistic. The main Malaysian groupings for policy discussions are the Bumiputera, literally – “sons of the earth” – who comprise 60.6 percent of the population, people of Chinese origin comprising 29 percent; people of Indian origin consisting of 7.9 percent; and others 3.4 percent. The Bumiputeras are defined as Malay people plus other groups indigenous to Peninsular Malaysia – Sabah and Sarawak. Malays are considered to include those adopting Malay language and customs, and who are Moslem. It is thus an umbrella term covering a number of distinctive ethnic groups: Buginese, Javanese, Malays, Minangkabau and others. The other Bumiputeras consist of a number of groups including the Negrito, Senoi, in Peninsular Malaysia, the Bajau, Dusun, and Kadazan in Sabah, and the Bidayuh, Iban and Melanau in Sarawak. The main Chinese speech groups are Cantonese, Hainanese, Hokkien, Khek and Zeochew. The main Indian subgroups are Tamil, Malayali, Punjabi/Sikh. In addition, there are a number of Indonesians, Thai, Filipinos and other groups. The ethnographic mix of Peninsular Malaysia (West Malaysia) and Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) differs both within each region and between regions with the kaleidoscope of cultural manifestations that it implies.

Malaysia is experiencing an economic boom since 1988. During the Sixth Malaysia Plan period (1990-95) overall GDP growth averaged 8.7 percent per annum and the per capita GNP growth was even higher. The high growth rate of the economy was achieved with price stability and since 1993, with virtual full employment. The structural changes in the economy, which began in the 1980s, have continued and recent developments have further strengthened this process. These features include the declining share of agriculture in the GDP (13.6 percent by the end of the Sixth Malaysia Plan period), and in providing employment, the increasing share of manufacturing in value added (34.5 percent approximately in 1996) and employment. The attainment of full employment in 1995 marked a new milestone in the country’s socioeconomic progress. The unemployment rate decreased from 2.8 percent in 1995 to 2.6 percent in 1996. The average nominal wage increased in the manufacturing sector by 19.6 percent during 1995, 18.4 percent in 1996, and 12.3 percent in 1997.

The savings and investment rates increased substantially in the last five years. By 1995 Malaysia’s gross domestic savings rate, at 37.5 percent of GDP was second only to the People’s Republic of China in developing Asia, and its investment rate, at 40.7 percent of GDP, was the highest in Asia.

The high level of sustained growth over the last five years, together with the impact of Government programs directed at raising incomes of the poorest groups in society have resulted in a reduction in the general incidence of poverty from 16.5 percent in 1990 to 8.9 percent in 1995. Per capita income increased to RM9,786 (about US\$4,027). Rural poverty decreased from 21.1 percent to 15.3 percent over the same period. The level of hard core poverty defined as those with incomes below half the poverty line, declined from 3.9 percent in 1990 to 2.1 percent in 1995, and the number of hard core poor households from 121,600 to 69,200. Access to services also improved during the

Sixth Malaysia Plan period. By 1995, 72 percent of rural poor households had access to electricity, 65 percent had access to safe drinking water, 77 percent were within nine kilometers of a health clinic, and 94 percent were within nine kilometers of a primary school. Life expectancy rates of both women and men increased to 74 years and 68.9 years respectively by 1995, and the infant mortality rate declined from 13 to 10.5 per thousand live births. The sharp decline in poverty and the high attainment levels reflected in the social indicators, show that the benefits of the strong overall economic growth were widely distributed across socioeconomic groups. However regional disparities remain between the eastern corridor of the Peninsula and Kelantan being the states with the highest incidence of poverty, lowest economic growth rates, and the most pronounced gender differentials in education, incomes and health.

The country faces new challenges in the medium and longer term. Important among these are the need to address the increasingly complex issues related to macroeconomic management; upgrading its human resources to meet the demands of greater technological sophistication of the economy; redressing the existing socioeconomic disparity between the Peninsular Malaysia and the rest of the country, particularly Sabah and Sarawak; and managing the vast forest and other natural resources in a sustainable manner. The Seventh Malaysia Plan (7MP) (1996-2000) is the latest phase of an economic strategy envisaged to transform Malaysia into a fully developed country by 2020. Key objectives of the 7MP include among others, sustenance of overall economic growth rate at about 8 percent per annum with price stability, further enhancement of international competitiveness, substantial upgrading of skills, higher levels of technological sophistication. The 7MP also aims at eradicating hard core poverty by 2000, and reducing the existing disparity in socioeconomic development in the less developed regions and states of the country.

In the second half of 1997, Malaysia entered a new and painful economic crisis as compared with the 1980s downturn. There was a 1.8 percent fall in the GDP in the first quarter of 1998, and the worst hit sectors were construction and manufacturing. It is now envisaged that the economic slowdown will persist throughout 1998 and recovery will take longer than anticipated.

An immediate assessment of the immediate impact of the economic downturn on the labor market has been the marked increase in the retrenchment of workers. The slower GDP growth is expected to result in a significant decline in employment growth and loss of jobs. The level of employment is projected to decrease in all sectors except for the export oriented industries.

The official data show that a total of 46,643 workers were retrenched from July 1997 until June 1998, with the manufacturing sector accounting for 60.5 percent of them. Women accounted for 38.4 percent of workers retrenched until May 1998.

The Bank is well placed to provide assistance to Malaysia both for capital requirements and technical assistance for the period of growth after the current crisis is over. The Bank's proposed strategy for Malaysia includes as its objectives, human development including improvement of the gender balance, capacity building in selected areas, mitigation of existing socioeconomic disparities across States and regions of the country, sustainable environment management, and subregional cooperation. In the area of WID, the Bank should address the need to preserve the gains made by women in health and education, employment, and address the needs of women arising out of the current crisis by mainstreaming gender concerns in the areas of strengthening the WID machinery, technical and vocational education and training, labor market

information systems, support for the less developed regions, sub regional cooperation, and capacity building for policy analysis.

### **Malaysian Women in Society and the Economy**

Malaysian women are highly important contributors to the country's economic and social development. Their access to health and education and their participation in the economy have increased rapidly over the years.

Women's health condition is an indicator of women's status, as good health enables their active participation in economic and social development. Maternal mortality rates declined from 0.6 per 1,000 live births in 1980 to 0.2 per 1,000 in 1990. Life expectancy for both males and females improved during the period 1990 to 1995. However women did better than men insofar as the female life expectancy improved from 73.5 years in 1990 to 74 years in 1995, compared to the male life expectancy, which increased from 68.9 years in 1990 to 69.3 years in 1995. The mean age at marriage increased from 22.3 years in 1970 to 24.1 years in 1991, and the proportion of women with seven or more children declined from 22.3 percent in 1970 to 8.3 percent in 1995. Together with decreased family size, the total fertility rate dropped from 4.9 in 1970 to 3.3 in 1990.

The Government of Malaysia reaffirmed its commitment to improve the status of women at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in September 1995. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action were unanimously endorsed by all participating members of the United Nations. Malaysia has specifically committed itself to strengthen the implementation of the National Policy on Women in order to: (i) involve more women in decision-making; (ii) safeguard their rights to health, education, and social well-being; (iii) remove legal obstacles and discriminatory practices; and (iv) ensure access to and benefits of development particularly in science and technology.

To improve the status of Malaysian women, Government and NGOs in collaboration with universities, and the private sector, work together through a national machinery. The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) was set up in 1976 as the coordinating and advisory body on women's affairs. Following this, a Women's Affairs Division was formed in 1983 as the focal point for women's affairs in the country. The implementation of the National Policy for Women started during the 6MP, which expressed an increased awareness of and concern for women's issues. The 7MP will continue to address women's concerns and provide the appropriate enabling environment for women to participate more effectively as partners in social and economic development, as well as allowing them to continue to play a significant role in the development of their families. The Human Development Report (HDR), 1995 ranked Malaysia at 59 based on human development index and ranked it at 38 based on the gender-related development index (GDI), which indicates that it performed better on gender equality than on average achievement alone.

Economic growth has been accompanied by the greater participation of women in the formal workforce and in a range of other activities. Female labor force participation rate has kept pace with population growth and the number of female and male workers doubled between 1970 and 1995, while the labor force participation rate remained relatively unchanged after 1980. The labor force participation rate increased from the upper thirties for women between 1970 and 1980, and has remained between 44 and 46 percent between 1990 and 1995.

Malaysian women have continued to play an increasingly important role in the national development of the country including greater participation in the economy and labor market as well as improved access to education and health. As noted above, these improvements were made possible generally by the rapid growth of the economy which created more and new opportunities for women, but also resulted from the implementation of gender-sensitive programs of the Government and NGOs, including changes in the legal and institutional framework, which further facilitated their involvement in the economy. The major area of achievement has been the significant and rapid increase of the numbers of women participating in the labor force. The expansion of this during the seventies and into the eighties is generally attributed to the pull of the manufacturing industry, due to the growth of electronics and garment industries, and expansion of export processing zones which began in the 1970s. The industrial expansion had a profound effect on the pattern of employment and on rural-to-urban migration, and drew unprecedented numbers of young, unmarried Malay women for the first time from villages into urban factories.

The phenomenon of young female Malay rural-to-urban migration in the seventies and eighties was particularly of note, because it signaled a change in previously established societal norms against the movement of unaccompanied young women. The traditional pattern of female migration was family-based and non-autonomous, while the manufacturing industry-induced migration was on an individual basis. A number of population and migration studies of Malaysian women, including a major study commissioned by HAWA, indicate that the primary reasons for rural women to migrate are to seek employment, obtain independence, and remit money home.<sup>4</sup> Those that migrated were more likely to come from poorer households. Young women who migrated in the 1970s and 1980s were likely to find husbands and start families in urban settings where there would be few kinship ties. Studies indicate that relatively few of these migrant women workers who married and had children, continued to work, and brought their children back to their home village to be cared for by their families.<sup>5</sup> While strong rural-to-urban ties were maintained – particularly for work-related information networks, remittances and kinship ties – the urbanization of the family, meant an increase in nuclear family child rearing arrangements increasing the focus of responsibility for day-to-day childcare on both parents, but particularly on the mother.

An important factor contributing to the economic and social advancement of women has been the equal access of women to educational opportunities. Female enrollment at the primary and secondary levels was about half of total enrollment, while at the upper secondary level, female students accounted for about 52.3 percent of total enrollment. Female intake in universities expanded rapidly to 49.5 percent in 1994 from 37.2 percent in 1990. Although female students are still predominantly in the arts stream, with about 65 percent of total enrollment in arts courses, they have recently increased enrollment in science and technical courses. This is evidenced by the doubling of female enrollment in vocational courses from 22.2 percent in 1990 to 45.9 percent of total enrollment in 1992. An ADB-assisted Government program to build girls' dormitories contributed to this.

The health condition of women is also a good indicator of women's status, and their

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<sup>4</sup> Ariffin, Jamilah, *Reviewing Malaysian Women's Status. Country Report in Preparation for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women*. Population Studies Unit, University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> Ariffin, Jamilah, *From Kampung to Urban Factories*, Findings from the HAWA Study. Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaysia Press, 1995.

improved health status as noted above helps in their active participation in economic and social development. However, despite the gains made by Malaysian women as regard education and health, and labor force participation, there are issues related to gender and WID which still need to be addressed. These pertain to women's political participation, their sociolegal status, gender tracking in technical and vocational education, and the need to diversify and improve employment opportunities and working conditions for women workers. This paper attempts to analyze women's situation and make recommendations to further mainstream gender and WID in Bank operations.

## *Chapter 2*

### **THE POLITICAL AND LEGAL STATUS OF WOMEN**

This part of the paper analyzes the trends in Malaysian women's participation in political life and the civil service, and women's legal status with regard to citizenship, education, employment, legal rights and status in marriage, divorce, and the guardianship of children.

#### **A. Women in Political Life**

From the time of Independence in 1957, Malaysian women have had the right to vote and to hold office. Today women comprise one half of the registered voters and are active in political life. The trends of participation among women members of various political parties do not show significant differences among them. Women have continued being loyal supporters of political parties in Malaysia. Members of the Wanita UMNO in 1971 have continued to gain wide recognition for their prominent role amongst women's political organizations in Malaysia. These party members are regarded as the very backbone of the UMNO party.

However, women have continued the trend of providing solid support for male leaders, and have engaged themselves primarily in raising financial support for the parties. Women members turn out in full force during election campaigns, and carry out routine tasks related to daily campaigning and facilitating voter participation during the election process. While women provide strong support to their parties, the majority of women seem to have remained in their role as supporters of male leaders, and have, with important exceptions, retained traditional gender roles within contemporary political life.

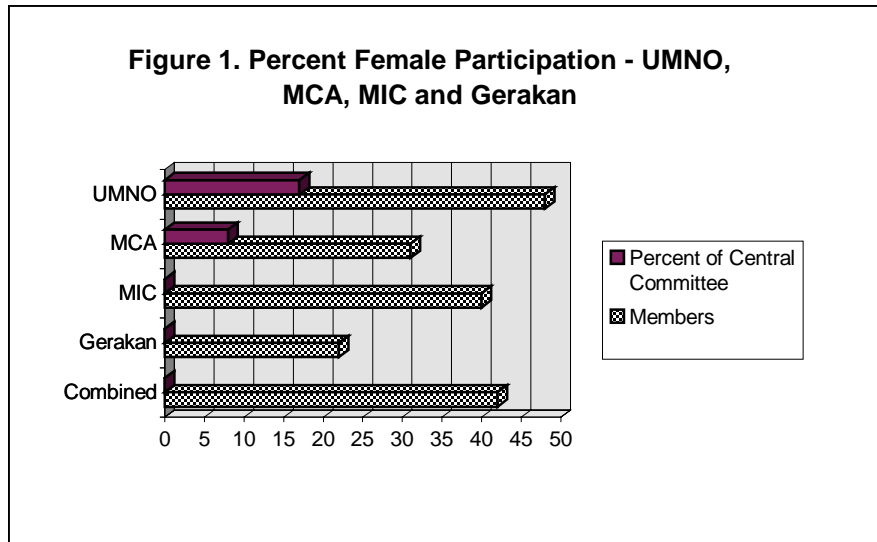
Despite the significant roles played by the Wanita UMNO and the other women's auxiliaries at the level of mass politics, the representation of women as branch or division heads is limited (see Figure 1). In UMNO, in 1993, 5 out of 30 members (17 percent) of the central committee were women, and out of 153 divisions only one is headed by a woman. None of the 14,784 branches is headed by a woman. For more than forty-five years, the women's auxiliary of UMNO has only three women heads of divisions. The discrepancy between women's participation as members of the UMNO and their representation at higher echelons of the party is reflected by a comparison of the above mentioned figures with the fact that women constitute 872,116 of the total 1.8 million total UMNO members.<sup>6</sup>

Within the central committee of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), of a total of 38 members, there are only 3 women (8 percent). In the Malaysian Indian Congress, (IMC), only one woman was in the central committee in 1995.

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<sup>6</sup> Ariffin, Jamilah, *Reviewing Malaysian Women's Status, Country Report in Preparation for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women*, Population Studies Unit, University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1994.





Source: Ariffin, Jamilah, 1994, *op cit*

## B. Women in Local and State Governments

The proportion of women gaining electoral office in local and state governments is limited. Gender inequalities still persist in this sphere, as is indicated by the extremely low percentages of women at all levels of political office. The proportions of women to men in the advisory board of the Kuala Lumpur City Hall, and local councils in five states of West Malaysia are extremely low. At the Kuala Lumpur City Hall, the ratio of women to men was 1:12 between 1985-88 and 1:13 between 1989-91.<sup>7</sup>

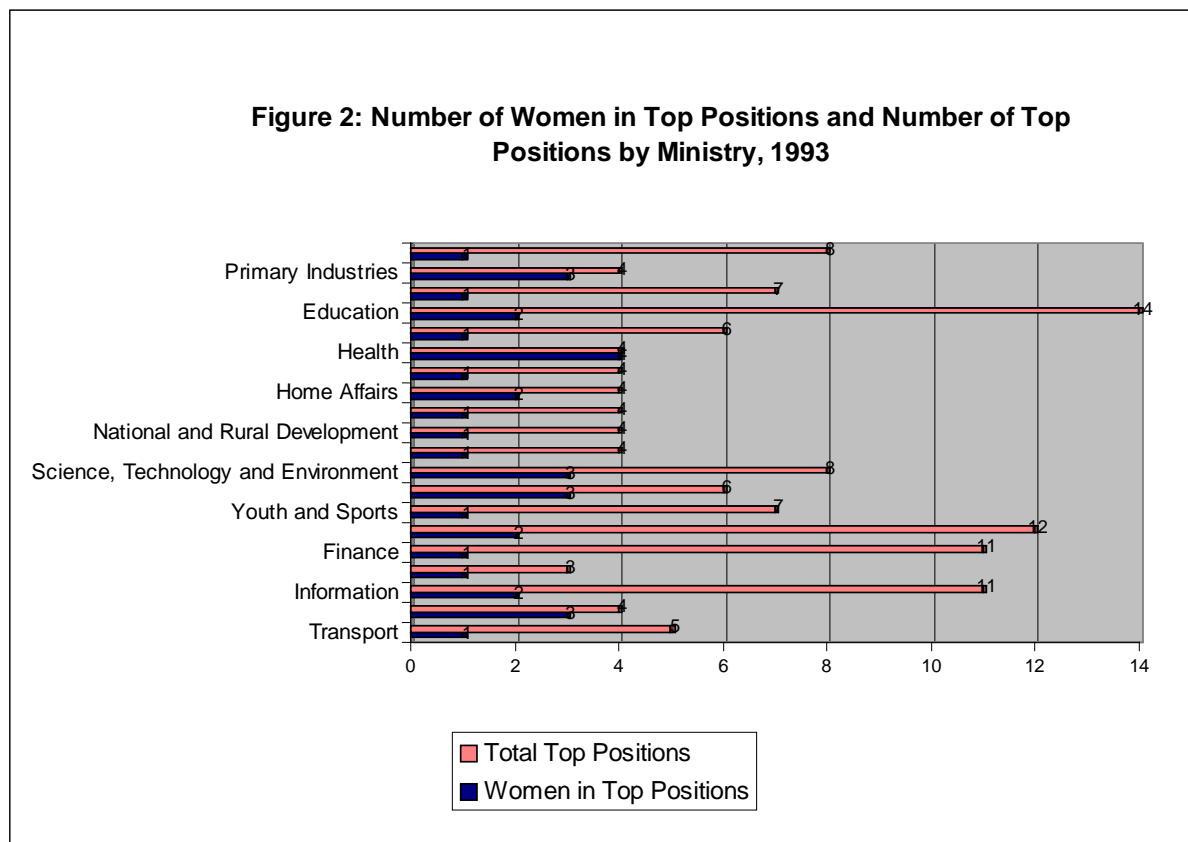
From available data on local councils from five state governments in Peninsular Malaysia, (Selangor, Penang, Johor, Kelantan, and Terengganu), the number of women councilors for the period 1988-93 is insignificant in comparison to male councilors. The representation of women in Selangor local councils is now lower than the pre 1991 period at seven percent of the total, as compared to eight percent in the earlier period. Women's representation in Penang local authorities has not changed significantly since 1988. On the basis of data analyzed from the states of Johore, Kelantan, Terengganu, similar trends are to be found.

In 1993, women were even less visible in state assemblies. At the national level, women's representation is still relatively low. Women's participation in decision making positions in government ministries is similar (see Figure 2).

Since 1985 the number of women appointed as senators has remained at similar levels. In the period 1985-87, there were 11 women senators, with a decrease in the next period of 1988-90. In 1994 the number went up to 13. Women's participation in the cabinet reflects the overall

<sup>7</sup> Ariffin, *op cit*.

pattern of their roles in decision making positions in the political hierarchy. It was not until 1969 that the first woman member of the Malaysian cabinet was elected. In 1994-95, the female-male ratio in the cabinet was 1:12.5, and nothing has happened to increase women's representation. In this period there were three women deputy ministers.



Women's participation in the diplomatic services is limited. The first woman ambassador was appointed in 1976. In 1994-95 there were three women ambassadors, as compared to 67 men. The current overall ratio of women to men serving as diplomats overseas is 1:22. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not impose any limitations when appointing women overseas. Gender stereotypes still prevail, with women themselves not preferring to go abroad on long postings, unless single or divorced.

### C. Women in Government Service

Trends in women's participation in the government sector are important insofar as government is still the single largest employer, although the share of the private sector is increasing rapidly. Government policies therefore directly and indirectly impact on policies and approaches of employers in the private sector. Government officers also develop policy advice for government and implement the same. The advancement of women, with gender sensitive policy making and program/project design and implementation, is dependent upon their access to higher levels of policy agenda setting, and decision making, in politics and government. It is also dependent upon the

creation of gender awareness and sensitization, among both men and women responsible for policy making, implementation of programs and projects, monitoring and evaluation.

Women's participation in government service has increased rapidly between 1980 and 1991, from 27 percent to 33.6 percent. Several factors are important in this regard, the most significant being women's increasing participation in education. It was also in part due to the expansion of the health and education sectors, and the increased opportunities in government service for teachers and health workers. There is a positive correlation between the educational attainments of women, and their labor force participation rates. Women have increasingly opted to join the government services. This has to do with the expansion of government employment from the 1960s until the 1980s, during which period, government extended its scope to include support services to provide for the rapid social and economic development of the nation. Women's entry into government service also helps illustrate attitudinal changes among parents, who recognize that girls have educational and professional potential, which provides options for them outside of marriage.

Table 1 shows the distribution of women in the different divisions in their government services. However, as Table 1 shows, in the distribution of women in the different divisions of government service, women made slow progress in the Group A category between 1970-90. Only 8.9 percent of women were in this category of a total of 214,814 women in government

Group	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991
Salary	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Group A	244 (1.1)	19,032 (8.9)	19,962 (9.2)	21,367 (9.5)	22,965 (9.9)	25,050 (10.5)
Group B	748 (3.2)	15,066 (7)	15,475 (7.1)	16,551 (7.4)	17,805 (7.7)	23,461 (9.8)
Group C	15,804 (68.5)	104,153 (48.5)	105,551 (48.8)	109,366 (48.8)	113,686 (49.5)	11,596 (48.3)
Group D	6,268 (27.7)	76,563 (35.6)	7,097 (35.4)	76,766 (34.3)	75,329 (32.8)	74,708 (31.3)
Total	23,064	214,814	218,084	223,050	229,785	238,415

Source: Mansor, Norma and Rosnah Nik (1993). Data obtained from Central Staff Records, Public Services Department (1988).

employment by 1988. By 1993 there was an increase to 25.5 percent.<sup>8</sup> In the Category B, there was a 51.6 percent increase. While the trends in women's participation in Categories A and B were favorable as compared to men between 1988-91, in absolute terms, the majority of women are in category C, and they account for 42.6 percent of total government employees in this category. Women are also concentrated here in traditional women's jobs such as in health, medical, and

education services. These are still in keeping with gender roles of women as providers of care, and child rearers. Also, within the medical and health services, women are still predominantly nurses, rather than doctors or hospital administrators.

<sup>8</sup> Mansor, Norma, and Nik Rosnah, 1993, Quoted in Ariffin, Reviewing Malaysian Women's Status: Country Report in Preparation for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, Population Studies Unit, University of Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1994.

The under representation of women in the higher and middle echelons of government service is an area of concern, insofar as these positions are critical in terms of gender sensitive policy making, and program and project design and implementation.

#### **D. Women's Legal Status**

##### *1. Women under the Federal Constitution*

The State enacts laws which are meant on the one hand, to prevent any forms of discrimination among citizens, with regard to the laws and policies of government, and on the other, to create positive opportunities for vulnerable groups to be able to participate in development processes. In Malaysia, there are two sources of laws, written and unwritten laws. The written laws comprise the Federal constitution, legislation enacted by parliament, and subsidiary legislation prepared under powers conferred by Parliament and State Assemblies. Unwritten laws consist of English common law suitable to local circumstance, judicial decisions of the Supreme Court, and local customary laws. Since Independence in 1957, Malaysian women's rights as citizens to participate in the political and administrative life of the nation have been recognized and guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, which states under Article 8, clause 1, that " all persons are equal before the law and entitled to the equal protection of the law". Clause 2 further provides that "except as expressly authorized by this Constitution, there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, or place of birth in any law or in the appointment to any office or employment under a public authority or in the administration of any law relating to the acquisition, holding or disposition of any property or the establishing or carrying on of any trade, business, profession, vocation, or employment". The Federal Constitution thus contains no specific provision against gender-based discrimination, as opposed to other types of discrimination based upon religion, race, descent or place of birth, which are expressly stated in the Constitution. The omission of gender from among the categories is increasingly regarded as significant, and needing change, inasmuch as it allows for the existence of provisions that provide for protective discrimination against women in the Employment Act, and avoids elimination of alleged discrimination under Islamic laws.

#### **E. Women's Participation in the Legal System**

Within the legal system, women are well placed to support reforms to improve the legal status of women. In 1991, one-third of the registered lawyers were women. In 1993, one-half of the session court judges, 44 percent of the Magistrate judges, and 15 percent of the appointees to the Attorney-General Chambers were women. In 1994, the first female Solicitor General was appointed.

## **F. Laws Affecting Women**

### *1. Citizenship and Permanent Residence*

Under the Federal Constitution, both men and women are equally competent to acquire citizenship by means of the law, through registration, or naturalization. Under Article 15 of the Constitution, no conditions were imposed upon foreign wives of citizens from applying for citizenship to the registering authority. However by a subsequent amendment made in 1962, conditions are imposed upon such acquisition of citizenship, including "good character". By another amendment in Clause (2) of Article 15, citizenship rights could be acquired by any child of a citizen. This amendment put women on par with men as regards the automatic citizenship of children born to them. However, discrimination remains as regards acquisition of citizenship rights by foreign spouses of Malaysian women. This can be related to the view that upon marriage a woman should follow her husband and not vice versa. There is a growing demand among educated Malaysian women that the policy requires to be changed in order to reflect women's increasing participation in education, and in the economy, and their contribution to the advancement of the country. It is feared that if the policy is not changed, highly skilled and educated women may leave the country in search of other opportunities simply as their foreign husbands cannot stay in the country. This would militate against the country's need for a highly skilled and increasingly technically competent labor force.

### *2. Education*

In the area of education, there are written laws which categorically forbid discrimination against women and men with regard to education. An important legislation in this regard, is the Universities and University College Act of 1991 which stipulates open membership to all irrespective of sex.

### *3. Women's Status under Labor Legislation*

While labor laws do not reflect inequalities on the surface, and apply to both the sexes equally, yet there are gender concerns related to provisions of laws that apply exclusively to women, and can be discriminatory.

### *4. The Employment Act, 1955<sup>9</sup>*

This Act covers both unionized and non-unionized labor and employers but it only applies to Peninsular Malaysia, while Sabah and Sarawak have their own labor ordinances. The Employment Act is more beneficial to workers than the latter, and there are ongoing debates to extend it to all of Malaysia. This is the major legislation which regulates all labor relations, and certain parts apply equally to men and women, such as contracts of service, wages, rest hours, hours of work, holidays, annual leave, sick leave, maternity benefits and termination and lay-off benefits. However, there are some aspects of these that can be detrimental to women workers. There is no stipulation in the Act with regard to employers paying lower wages to their women employees, as

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<sup>9</sup> Revised in 1981.

compared to male workers, for doing the same amount of work. Women in the private sector are subject to wage discrimination as compared to their male counterparts. In the public sector, women are better placed as the norm of equal pay for equal work prevails. Women in the private sector do not at present have any legal redress against wage discrimination.

5. *Prohibition Against Nightwork*

Section 34 of the Act prohibits night work for women in the agricultural and industrial sector, subject to the proviso that empowers the Director General of Labor to exempt in writing, any female employees from the prohibition. Given the structural changes in the economy and in the labor market, the increasing employment of women in light industries, and for longer hours of work involving night work, is becoming more widespread. The practical value of such prohibitions is now being called in question by women in today's conditions, and Malaysian women are asking for legislation to regulate the working conditions for women during night time employment, not by prohibition, but by employers being asked to provide suitable support facilities for women who opt to work during night shifts.

6. *Maternity Benefits*

Pregnant women under the Employment Act are entitled to maternity leave for 60 days during which they are to receive full pay. Recently, the Government has reviewed maternity leave allowed for public sector employees and extended the 42 days to 60 days after which the leave can be extended up to three months as unpaid leave. Women in Malaysia are entitled to full pay for five deliveries.

It is important from the public viewpoint, that young Malaysian women who are increasingly entering the labor force, should gain full social protection benefits for themselves and their children.

7. *Employees' Social Security Act, 1969, and Pensions Act, 1980*

These Acts regulate social insurance and pension benefits for Malaysian workers. The Employers' Social Security Act provides social security protection for workers. It excludes certain categories of workers including domestic servants and self-employed persons. These Acts are based on the premise that the male is the breadwinner of the family, and hence, should not be dependent upon the benefits arising from the loss of a female worker belonging to the family. Both acts prescribe different entitlements for widows and widowers, in case of compensation, and pension payments for employees suffering death or injury sustained during work. While social security and income laws have been amended to meet the needs of working women to pay taxes and accumulate pensions, there are ongoing gender issues regarding differentials in laws, rules and regulations. Some ongoing issues are the following: (i) self employed women must pool their income and file in their husbands' names; (ii) women supporting families are not entitled to the same dependent allowances as men; and (iii) while tax reliefs are available for men claiming to have a "dependent" wife, no such provision is made for women who support their husbands. These are important gender considerations for legal reform, especially given the increasing participation of women in the Malaysian labor force, and the situation of households which are female headed or primarily supported by women.

## G. Other Laws Impacting upon Women's Status

### 1. *Guardianship of Children*

The Guardianship of Children Act of 1961 militates against women, as regards the legal recognition of their guardianship of their children, *vis-à-vis* their husbands. This poses a particular difficulty for women whose husbands desert their families, and who then have to apply to the courts for legal recognition as guardians of their children. Malaysian women have been advocating a change in the law to provide for equal rights to guardianship for both parents.

### 2. *Inheritance*

The Distribution Act also goes against the interests of women who die intestate in that, their property will be inherited by their husbands irrespective of whether they have children or not. This Act is also under review and amendment. For Muslims, the rule whereby the widow gets an eighth share of the husband's estate if there are children, and a fourth if there are none, is justified by the patriarchal ideology that the man is responsible for support to all the members of his family, whereas by implication women do not have such a responsibility.

The provisions related to marriage and divorce for non-Muslims is governed by the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act 1976 (LRA). The law outlaws bigamous and polygamous marriages, and its implementation in 1982 represents a progressive step for the women of the country.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. *Secular Family Law*

The LRA invalidated early marriages (below the minimum age of 18), and introduced compulsory registration of all marriages. The LRA provides for divorce by mutual consent after two years of marriage, which is easily effected. However, when the divorce is contested, the entire process is complicated and long. Women are disadvantaged on issues such as child custody, division of matrimonial assets, and maintenance payments.<sup>11</sup> Although the LRA includes provision for the maintenance of the spouse, the real problem arises for women in the enforcement of the husbands' legal responsibility to provide maintenance. Women thereby suffer the most due to the breakdown of marriage. Guardianship of children is vested with the father under the Guardianship of Infants Act 1961. This law is in the process of amendment in the Attorney-General's Chambers.

### 4. *The Islamic Family Law Enactment*

Islamic Family Law is under the legislative authority of the States with the Sultan as the prime authority. In each state, the Islamic Religious Council takes care of all matters pertaining to Islam, and the Mufti presides over a legislative committee. Administrative matters are under state religious departments, while the judiciary is under the state Syariah Court system.

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<sup>10</sup> RETA 5700: Sociolegal Status of Women in Selected DMCs: Draft Country Study for Malaysia, 1997.

<sup>11</sup> *Op cit.*

A fundamental issue of contention is the problem of ensuring uniformity of laws across the different states. In the late 1970s, the federal government started a process of legal reform, which is still ongoing. A Committee set up by the Department of Islamic Development in the Prime Minister's Office has drawn up a model statute which has been passed on to the states for adoption. Model statutes for family law, administration of the law, procedural law, Syariah Criminal Law, and laws of evidence have been submitted to the states. The problem that arises is that after adopting the model statutes of the Islamic Family Law, the states make their own amendments. The model statute of the Islamic Family Law provides for greater protection of women's rights, which are whittled away by state amendments. The lack of uniformity leads to errant husbands crossing state boundaries to escape court judgments, payments of maintenance, or in order to contract polygamous marriages.

Women's organizations recently presented two memoranda on legal and administrative reform to the Government, one on polygamy and the other on other aspects of Islamic Family Laws and the overall administrative system.<sup>12</sup>

Consent to marriage is required from both parties. However enactments in certain states allow the father or paternal grandfather to marry off an unmarried, virgin daughter/grand daughter without her consent. Change in this has been asked for by women, as all marriages should be based upon women's consent. Besides this, the consent of the father/guardian to the marriage has also to be obtained. In cases where such consent is not forthcoming, there is the possibility of women going to other States, or outside the country to escape the provision. This creates complications regarding "foreign marriages" and the registration of these under the local laws.

##### 5. *Violence Against Women*

The Domestic Violence Act of 1994 (DVA) implemented in 1996 was the "crowning achievement" of a campaign that began in 1985.<sup>13</sup> It is administered by the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, and enforced by social welfare officers and the police. The rules and regulations under this Act are still to be prepared. The main problems with the law are the difficulty and length of time needed to obtain police protection, which is very often ineffective due to the lack of adequate provisions, as well as the attitude of the law enforcement agencies, which tend to treat domestic violence against women as a private family matter.

The rape laws were amended in 1989 as a result of a vigorous campaign, but there are still shortcomings. There is no law specifically for incest, which is subsumed under rape. This is unsatisfactory, and proposals for a new law are under consideration.

The Women and Girls Protection Act of 1975 (WGPA) contains provisions for prosecuting persons involved in prostitution and trafficking of women. The Act is very vaguely worded and can be liberally interpreted. As a result, any under-aged woman found in a questionable place or circumstance may be defined as "in need of protection" and detained. This law needs to be studied and its discriminatory aspects should be amended or repealed.<sup>14</sup> The Government is currently

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> RETA 5700: *Op cit.*

<sup>14</sup> RETA 5700, op cit.



reviewing all legislation that pertains to social matters. This is being undertaken by an inter-ministerial committee chaired by the Minister of Education. Recently, it was announced that a new law has been proposed to replace three existing Acts – the Juvenile Courts Act (1947), Child Protection Act (1991), and the WGPA (1975).

6. *Sexual Harassment*

At present, there are no laws against sexual harassment at the workplace. Women who wish to pursue the matter have to make a police report and rely on the police to prosecute the aggressor under criminal law. It is very difficult to prosecute harassers in the courts and at the workplace. The situation is complicated as the women's jobs may be at risk if they file a complaint against the aggressor(s).

The Labor Department headquarters has set up a special division in its office to deal with problems of female employees at their workplace. There is clear need for specific legislation to deal with the problem of sexual harassment. It should also be addressed as an area of concern in the National Policy for Women.

## Chapter 3

# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### A. Female Employment Patterns by Sector

A number of factors have contributed to the rapid absorption of women into the labor market. The rapid economic growth was due largely to important growth in the manufacturing and services sectors, where substantial and proportionally larger increase of female workers has been registered. In Malaysia, among all sectors of the economy, the manufacturing sector has recorded the highest growth rate during the last decade. The manufacturing sector has created about 0.6 million new jobs between 1990 and 1994 and in 1994 alone provided employment to 1.9 million people.<sup>15</sup> The growth of this sector has led to the mobilization of female labor and increase in employment, with about 46.4 percent (1990) and 43.4 percent (1995) of the workers being women. The financial services and the government are major employers of women and women account for about 60 percent of the total labor force in these sectors. Agriculture is no longer the major employer of women and the proportion of female labor in agriculture has declined as well – from 40 percent in 1970 to 30 percent in 1995. Malaysian women have been able to move into relatively better-paying opportunities in

other sectors. The proportion of females in the total labor in manufacturing peaked at nearly 50 percent in 1990, and showed a decline in the female percentage of the total labor force in 1995. This seems to result from a trend towards increasing technology-intensive new investments to the concomitant demand for skilled labor, and provides early warning of the need to train female workers in sunset industries to prepare them for redeployment.

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Female Labor Force  
(over Total Labor Force) by Sector (1970-1995)**

Sector	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Fishing	38.0	39.0	38.4	34.4	28.4
Mining and Quarrying	12.6	10.3	10.5	12.9	11.9
Manufacturing	28.1	40.1	43.1	46.4	43.4
Construction	5.3	7.5	3.4	6.9	12.4
Electricity, Gas and Water	6.7	7.1	5.6	4.3	7.8
Transport, Storage and Communication	18.2	29.3	37.4	38.6	11.2
Wholesale and Retail Trade, Hotels and Restaurants	4.3	6.3	10.4	11.1	37.6
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Services	-	29.5	35.1	34.2	40.3
Community, Social and Personal Services; Public Administration; and Other services	-	29.4	36.8	37.9	39.2
Average Percentage Distribution				31.4	33.7

Source : *Sixth Malaysia Plan, 1991 and Seventh Malaysia Plan, 1996.*

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of International Trade and Industry: (1995), *Malaysia International Trade and Industry Report*, Kuala Lumpur.

The importance of women in the industrial labor force in a developing country like Malaysia can be analyzed in relation to the new development in the world economies linked with export-oriented industrialization. Since the 1970s the influx of multinational companies into Malaysia, especially in the export-oriented zones is on the increase. This process has systematically linked the national to international markets, thus expanding the demand for labor force in the industrial sector, especially the manufacturing sector. Malaysian women have benefited more than men from such industrialization. The establishment of export-oriented zones in the 1970s had provided more employment opportunities in the manufacturing sector. For example, the electronics industry was not only the largest exporter of manufactured products but also the largest employer in the manufacturing sector, and more than 75 percent of its workforce consisted of women. Likewise, over 90

percent and about 85 percent of the workers respectively employed by the clothing and textile industries were mainly females.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, with the proportion of women in manufacturing (30.1 percent), it became the largest sector of employment for women in 1995 (Table 3). The Government sector began its

Industry	1990		1995	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Fishing	24.8	28.5	20.3	15.9
Mining and Quarrying	0.7	0.2	0.5	0.1
Manufacturing	15.6	29.5	20.0	30.1
Construction	8.6	1.4	0.8	0.2
Electricity, Gas and Water	1.0	0.2	10.7	1.8
Transport, Storage and Communications	4.0	5.6	7.2	1.8
Wholesale and Retail Trade, Hotel and Restaurants	23.6	6.4	16.3	19.3
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate and Business Services	3.7	4.2	4.3	5.6
Other Services	18.0	24.0	19.9	25.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: *Seventh Malaysian Plan*, 1996

expansion in the 1980s. At present, the manufacturing sector is the single largest employer of women followed by community, public, social services, trade and agriculture.

**B. Causes and Effects of the Increase of Women in the Workforce**

The increase in the labor force participation rate of women in Malaysia could to a certain extent be explained by the decline in fertility rate from 3.9 in 1982 to 3.3 children per woman in 1993. The decline in fertility rate could in turn be traced to the rise in the average age at marriage thus reducing the span of active reproductive life. In 1980, women were marrying at an average age of 23.5 years, and in 1991 their age at marriage increased to 24.7.<sup>17</sup> The postponement of age at marriage among women led to the postponement in giving birth to the first child, resulting in the decline in child births among the younger age group of 20 to 24 and an increase in births among women of older age group of 25 to 29 in 1993, as compared to the number of births in 1982 (Table 4). The highest female labor force participation is within the age group of 20 to 24, coinciding with the end of schooling age and before the age of marriage. Hence the age of marriage together with fertility bears a relationship with female labor force participation.

<sup>16</sup> Ariffin, Jamilah, (1994), "Economic Development and Women in the Manufacturing Sector", in Jamilah Ariffin (ed) *Readings on Women and Development in Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, Population Studies Unit, University of Malaysia.

<sup>17</sup> Department of Statistics, (1995) *Social Statistics Bulletin*, Kuala Lumpur.

The increase in the female labor force participation may be attributable to improving economic incentives in employment and policies favoring the employment of women. In addition, the combined effects of improved maternal and child health care, access to family planning services,

**Table 4: Percentage of Live Births Born to Women by Age Group and by Live Birth Order, Malaysia (1982 and 1993)**

Age Group	First Child		Second Child		Third Child		Fourth Child	
	1982	1993	1982	1993	1982	1993	1982	1993
15-19	15.5	9.4	5.8	3.0	1.3	0.8	0.3	0.2
20-24	44.4	40.1	39.8	27.0	25.4	6.8	12.8	6.8
25-29	30.0	35.6	37.4	42.8	43.3	40.5	41.2	31.6
30-34	6.9	11.0	13.5	20.2	23.4	32.1	33.6	40.4
35-39	1.6	3.1	2.8	5.2	5.5	17.8	10.0	17.8
40-44	1.3	0.6	0.5	0.9	0.8	1.5	1.2	3.0
45-49	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Total (rounded-off)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Data calculated and compiled from Social Statistics Bulletin, Department of Statistics, Malaysia, (1984, 1995).

increased years of schooling, leading to a rise in the average age at marriage, have allowed women to take advantage of the increased employment opportunities. Postponement of marriage from age 22.3 in 1970 to age 24.7 in 1991, and longer

intervals between children, has enabled more women of all ages to enter and remain in the workforce. (Table 5 shows the participation rates of women in the labor force by age groups between 1957 and 1990.) While the participation rate for the age group 15-19 years declined between 1982 and 1993, due to increased enrollments in secondary school, the other age groups of 20-24 years increased their participation. The decline in the participation rate after the age of 24 is related to marriage and the start of an active reproductive life. There are no significant additional incentives for women to re-enter the labor force at a later age, which is why there is no rise in participation among women over 40 years. However, despite the decline in the participation rate from over 60 percent of women in their early 20s, to about 30 percent for women over the age of 50, over 40 percent of women in Peninsular Malaysia remain in the workforce over the course of their reproductive lives.

Female labor force participation also seems to be related to the attitude of the family towards women. A study of selected successful career women in Malaysia, for example, revealed that changing attitudes of parents and husbands towards a more positive trend were perceived to be related to higher educational attainment of women<sup>18</sup> which in turn could influence women's participation in the labor force. The importance of the attitudinal factor is further substantiated by a study of rural women's economic participation, which found that women whose husbands have less traditional orientation towards gender roles were less burdened with domestic work<sup>19</sup>. With the decrease in domestic responsibilities of women resulting from an increase in spouses sharing domestic work, women could spare more time for economic activities. There is also increasing evidence pointing to the importance of female remittances to rural income, which is another factor contributing to female rural-to-urban

<sup>18</sup> Fatimah Hamid Don, Malaysia, Report Prepared for the Education of Women in Asia, ADB 1993

<sup>19</sup> Aminah Ahmad and Narimah Ismail, "Wives Work Roles Among Rubber Farming Households in Two Districts of Malaysia", H. Funke (ed), Abstracts of the Research Presentations of the XVIth World Congress of the International Federation of Home Economics, Paris, 1992.

migration and postponement of marriage. A final contributing factor has been the availability of relatively higher wage employment for previously underemployed women from agriculture or informal sectors. These changes in social norms and the pull of the marketplace have been instrumental in promoting women's participation.

**Table 5: Labor Force Participation Rate by Gender and Age Group  
Peninsular Malaysia, 1957-1990**

Age Group	Participation Rates (%)											
	1957		1970		1975		1980		1985		1990	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
15-19	60.0	27.9	52.3	33.0	54.3	39.4	47.9	33.5	43.7	28.2	44.1	31.4
20-24	92.7	31.2	87.1	41.9	94.0	56.4	91.1	54.0	90.7	58.3	89.1	63.9
25-29	-	-	93.5	38.4	98.1	46.3	92.4	44.6	98.1	49.2	97.4	53.9
30-34	-	-	94.4	39.0	98.9	47.5	98.0	40.5	98.8	47.3	98.5	50.2
35-39	-	-	94.0	40.0	98.8	52.4	98.2	42.7	98.9	48.5	98.8	47.8
40-44	-	-	93.2	40.0	98.7	52.1	97.7	43.8	98.4	50.4	98.5	48.8
45-49	-	-	91.5	40.7	97.2	53.2	96.6	41.4	97.9	48.7	97.2	48.5
50-54	-	-	86.7	36.6	93.2	49.4	92.7	36.5	93.5	40.0	93.3	40.9
55-59	-	-	75.6	29.2	83.3	37.5	77.4	30.8	76.6	32.6	71.3	29.4
60-64	87.6	22.3	65.2	23.7	72.0	28.5	68.6	25.0	67.1	23.9	59.9	24.0
15-64	90.0	30.8	83.4	36.3	86.0	37.3	86.6	39.3	84.6	44.6	84.4	46.8

M = Male F = Female

Source: Department of Statistics, 1960 and Siti Rohani Yahya, (1993), "Patterns and Trends of Labor Force Participation of Women", Paper submitted to Women and Development Project (HAWA).

### C. Gender Differences in the Labor Force

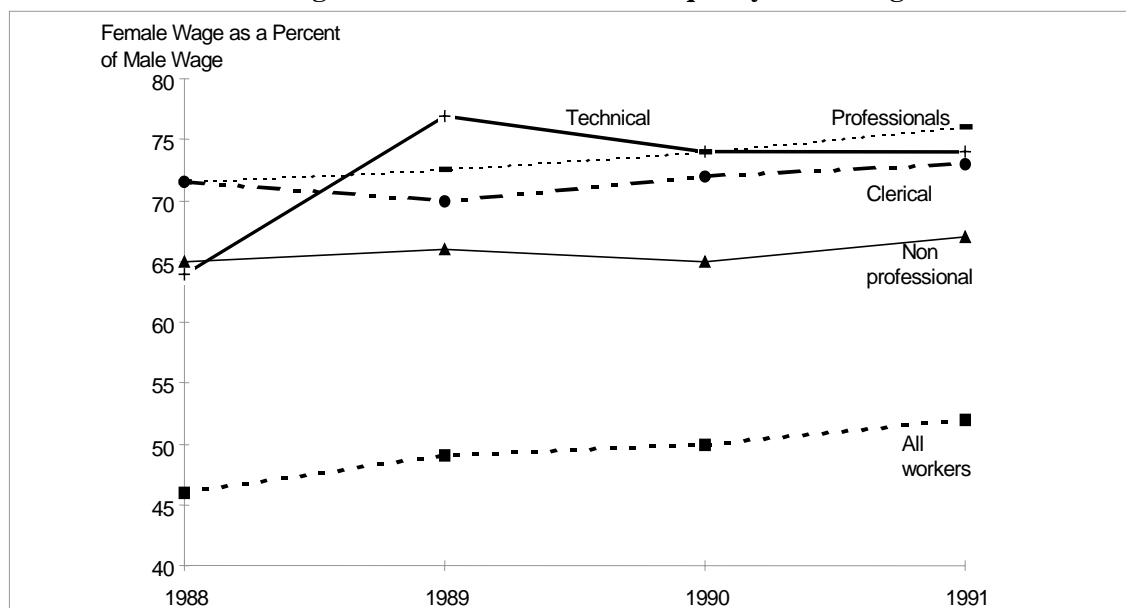
The unemployment rate in Malaysia has decreased to about 2.6 percent in 1996, caused largely by the increasing growth of the manufacturing sector creating more and new employment opportunities, resulting in labor shortage in Malaysia. In spite of the increase in the female labor force participation rate, within the context of the situation of labor shortage, the percentage of economically active women is still considered inadequate by planners and employers. Women over the age of 25 are the largest pool of potential labor which can be mobilized in order to increase local labor participation in the workplace. To effectively determine incentives to encourage women to undertake appropriate training and remain in the workforce, it is important to be able to access gender disaggregated time series data such as on employment and unemployment by sector, age group, educational level and experience. However, in the absence of detailed information, some general observations can be made.

While much improvement has occurred in women's education and labor participation, there are still areas where women are lagging behind their male counterparts in these sectors. For example, while technological changes in industry have led to changes in skills and knowledge requirements of workers, women are still concentrated more in low-skilled jobs and labor-intensive

operations. Similar patterns of gender segregation in the occupational structure persist in both the public and private service sectors whereby women are not represented to the extent their male counterparts are at professional and sub-professional levels.

Gender differentiation is seen in the wage structure of the labor force and the average gap for all types of labor may be as much as 50 percent in the private sector (see Figure 3). It is Government policy to pay male and female civil servants according to the same pay scale. In the private sector, differences in responsibilities and designation make comparisons difficult at the managerial level. There are indications, however, that the gap exists. At low skill levels, jobs for males and females are often not identical, which complicates the measurement of gender-based wage differentials. It is observed that jobs that are considered "heavy or important" are generally carried out by men, and pay better than "light" female work. Some studies also show that even where men and women perform the same job, men are sometimes paid more (Ariffin, 1994a).

**Figure 3: Trends in Gender Inequality in Earnings**



Source: World Bank, 1995

Gender differences in mandated fringe benefits for workers have increased the difference in the cost of male and female labor. While some of these are socially desirable such as maternity benefits, others may benefit neither employer nor employee. Under the Employment Act, women are entitled to 60 days paid maternity leave in the private sector, which is paid entirely by the employer regardless of length of tenure or size of firm. In the public sector, women are entitled to only 45 days, less than the UN-recommended standard. Women are excluded from underground work. In industry and agriculture, women cannot work between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. Women are required to stop for 11 hours between shifts. Some restrictions may be excessively restrictive for employer and employee. Some employers may consider women more expensive to employ than men, and apply a downward wage adjustment. While maternity leave is a benefit to society, the cost is borne solely by the employer, and the need to provide maternity benefits can act as a disincentive towards hiring females. Cost-pooling social insurance arrangements for the provision of maternity benefits would serve the

needs of society and spread the cost more equitably among employers, while making the cost predictable and transparent. A review of current labor laws may be needed to ensure adequate protection of female workers without putting them at a disadvantage.

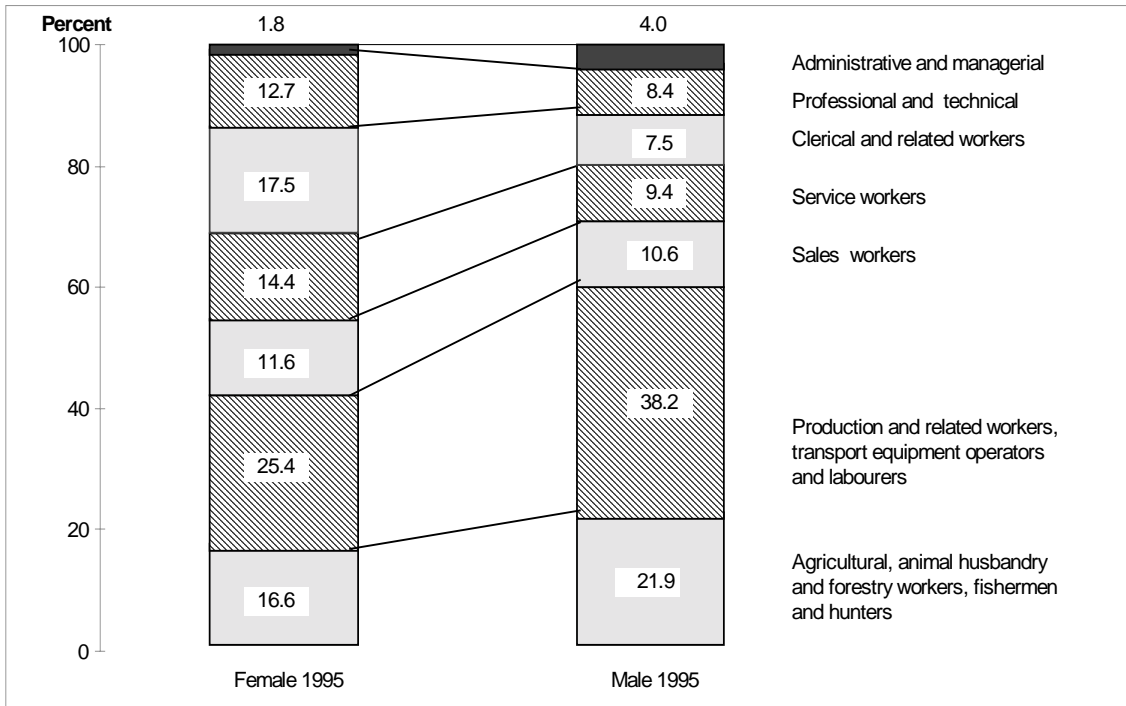
Employment patterns reveal that women are concentrated in labor-intensive operations in manufacturing as clerical workers, equipment operators, production workers, and service workers — positions that require little pre-employment training. As a result, employers have little incentive to retain older, experienced workers; and in times of cyclical retrenchment, the rule “first in, first out” applies. Women with factory experience who have taken time out for child rearing find that they have lost any accrued seniority when re-entering the labor force (Ariffin 1994a, World Bank 1995). It is partially for this reason that the market fails to retain women. Despite the discussion of the need to retain women in the work force, the present market appears to prefer young, trainable women, over experienced, semi-skilled workers. However, as the manufacturing industry moves into more skill-intensive production methods, there will be additional pressure to reduce training costs by: (i) retaining experienced workers, (ii) giving some preference to women with prior experience, or (iii) rehiring persons who have been absent from the work force for an extended period.

At the administrative and managerial level, there are proportionally fewer women (1.7 percent) than men (4 percent). However at the combined professional and technical level, there are proportionally more women (12.7 percent) than men (8.4 percent) due to the size of the health and education sector and the preponderance of women in teaching and nursing. Women are also more likely to be found as clerical and service workers than men. Despite the importance of the manufacturing sector, proportionally, more men are production workers (38.9 percent) compared with women (23.9 percent) (see Figure 4).

While Malaysian women have benefited from increased employment opportunities in the private sector, these have been concentrated in low skill, labor-intensive jobs requiring little job training or previous experience and, consequently, they are the most vulnerable to fluctuations in demand. As a result, they have the least bargaining power which results in wage discrimination in the private sector. Although critical labor shortages occur, these are in skilled labor slots where women are under-represented and under-trained. As Malaysia moves from labor-intensive manufacturing to more capital-intensive forms of production, female workers will be even less competitive, unless measures are taken to address the situation. Under the present economic downturn, women are vulnerable on account of their low skills levels, low job levels, and structural constraints to their continued participation after marriage and the onset of family responsibilities. In order to protect women against gender based disadvantage in the context of the economic crisis, it is important to provide support for skills development for retrenched women workers, skills improvement for low level women workers, entrepreneurship development and access to labor market information. To maintain Malaysia's competitive edge, there is a need to reduce its dependence on foreign labor and promote gender equity policies in order to:

- assist re-entry of women who have taken time off for childcare (e.g., skills upgrading or retraining programs, access to child care, and flexible work hours);
- ensure equal pay for equal work;
- encourage young women to select studies leading to higher-skilled and better-waged jobs through vocational counseling; and provide management training for women at supervisory levels.

**Figure 4: Female and Male Employment by Occupation, 1995**



Source: Labor Force Survey, 1995



## ***Chapter 4***

# **WOMEN'S ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH OPPORTUNITIES**

### **A. Women's Education**

There has been rapid expansion of educational opportunities and openings for women and men to improve their economic participation. Overall, the trend shows an increase in the literacy levels of both males and females, which stood at 89 percent for males and 80 percent for females in 1990. The progress made in reducing the gender gap is attributable to remarkable increases in girls' enrollment in schooling. Concomitantly, it is therefore expected that the male and female literacy gap will be further narrowed in the years to come. The change since the 1950s, when schooling was not considered very appropriate for women, has been helped by measures such as the introduction of free primary education and changes in family attitudes. In 1994, enrollments in primary and secondary levels were 51 percent for males and 49 percent for females. The gender gap in tertiary education stood in 1994 at 54 percent male and 46 percent female, pointing towards persistent structural and attitudinal barriers to women's equitable participation at the highest educational levels.

### **B. Women's Health**

In 1994, women constituted 49.8 percent of the total population of 19.7 million in Malaysia. While life expectancy has increased in general over the years in Malaysia, the increase in life expectancy of women has been more important from 70.5 years in 1980 to 74 years in 1995, compared to men's from 66.4 to 69.4 years.

Table 6 also shows that fertility rate has declined over the years and crude birth rate dropped from 32.2 per thousand in 1970 to 27.5 per thousand in 1990. Maternal mortality rate, which is a good indicator of the quality of health services since most maternal deaths are preventable, has decreased from 0.7 per thousand in 1970 to 0.2 per thousand in 1990, and neonatal mortality has also decreased from 14.2 per thousand in 1980 to 8.6 per thousand in 1990. Sabah and Sarawak have lower maternal mortality rates (0.1 percent) as compared to Peninsular Malaysia (0.2 percent) (Table 17). Another consequence of the improvement in women's health was the increase in the number of women over 65 years. There are now approximately 0.4 million women over the age of 65 years. There have been considerable improvements in the availability of health services. However differences remain in Sabah and Sarawak which are below the national average as regards ratios between trained midwives and population (Table 18). As regards deliveries attended by trained personnel, Sabah ranks lower (70.9 percent) than Peninsular Malaysia (77.1 percent) and Sarawak (88.5 percent) (Table 20).

Women's education is by far the most important determinant of fertility, as shown by the sharp differentials in the number of children ever born to women of different education levels. As primary education is becoming universal and more women are pursuing higher education, family size can be expected to drop further, reflecting the pattern in more developed countries.

Family planning services are provided by a network of government-sponsored clinics. Increasingly, couples are making use of family planning services through private clinics and pharmacies. The coverage of family planning services has been more comprehensive in urban areas, and has been gradually expanded to remote rural areas as an integrated package of services provided through the rural health program. As a result, regional differences exist with better coverage in Peninsular Malaysia, than in Eastern Malaysia and urban versus rural fertility rates.

**Table 6: Health Indicators of Women in Malaysia 1970-1993**

Indicators	1970	1980	1990	1993
Life Expectancy (female)		70.5	73.4	74.0
Life Expectancy (male)		66.4	68.8	69.4
Fertility Rate	5.0	4.0	3.3	-
Crude Birth Rate	32.2	30.9	28.0	27.5
Maternal Mortality Rate (per 1,000 live births)	0.7	0.6	0.2	-
Neo-Natal Mortality (per 1,000 live births)	-	14.8	8.4	-

Source: Compiled from reports of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, 1970, 1980 and 1994.

### C. Major Gender-Related Issues in Education

#### 1. Gender Segregation and Stereotyping in Education

While the enrollment of women at all levels of education is equitable to that of men, their participation in the entire range of courses available is not as equitable. Gender segregation arising from gender stereotyping which mediates students' choice of courses is still prevalent. Enrollment in vocational and technical fields has been male-dominated. Strong male preference for fields related to industries like building and wood-work, metal-work, and electrical work continues. On the other hand, women have been oriented towards service courses like hotel and catering, tailoring, and commerce. In institutions of higher learning, women are more inclined to enroll in courses traditionally considered more suitable for them such as arts and education, but less in courses related to science and technology, which tend to lead to higher-paid jobs. Likewise, providers of non-formal education and training tend to conduct programs that relate to women's domestic role rather than their productive role. Entrepreneurship courses offered to women are more often limited to areas like food processing, tailoring and handicraft. Women tend also to participate highly in programs that relate to their domestic role.

#### 2. Technical and Vocational Education

Since the implementation of the National Education Policy in 1960, which emphasized science and technology as important thrust areas in planning for the generation of trained manpower, government-sponsored technical and vocational education (TVE) schools increased in number and in enrollment. Increases ranged from 20,340 in 1985 to an estimated 52,180 in 1995, with about four times

more students in vocational schools than in technical schools.<sup>20</sup> However, a higher proportion of male students concentrated in science than in arts, while the reverse was true for female students. Although the enrollment rate of male students has always been greater than that of female students, both in lower and higher levels of education and training, and in vocational and technical streams, a recent phenomenon showed that the enrollment of female students in vocational courses doubled from 22.2 percent in 1990 to 45.9 percent of total enrollment in 1992 (Table 7). The provision of dormitories for women and the increase in the number of TVEI schools (as part of Government Education Policy to promote education to less privileged population) generated greater access of these schools to women resulting in their increased enrollment. The larger body of female students in the vocational courses is expected to help reduce their isolation, which was due to the low access of women to such courses earlier.

**Table 7: Lower Secondary Female Graduates by Stream and Year, Malaysia**

Year	Science		Arts		Vocational		Technical	
	Female (%)	Total (No)	Female (%)	Total (No)	Female (%)	Total (No)	Female (%)	Total (No)
1983	45.1	41,001	51.5	110,107	27.6	6,836	32.6	2,672
1985	45.9	50,527	51.3	106,708	25.8	7,250	35.8	2,832
1988	24.9	44,992	54.1	122,721	21.1	9,877	35.8	2,672
1990	48.2	41,860	55.5	125,640	22.2	13,555	34.8	2,729
1992	47.1	38,044	54.9	130,476	45.9	27,689	38.0	2,508

Source : Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1993.

Female participation in TVE increased steadily in the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s, as reflected in enrollments (Table 8) and the proportion of female teachers employed in the secondary vocational schools (SVS) and secondary technical schools (STS). In the early 1990s, female participation continued to increase in real terms but leveled out proportionately.

**Table 8: Female Enrollment in TVE (Percent of Total)**

	1970	1980	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
SVS	16.3	30.4	23.1	23.6	25.5	25.1	24.0	24.1	25.5
STS	4.3	27.1	36.1	37.2	38.4	40.2	39.0	39.5	32.2

Source: Ministry of Education

**Table 9: Female Enrollments in TVE**

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
SVS	5 777	6 260	7 122	9 076	10 054	10 184	9 614
STS	2 125	2 135	2 089	2 199	2 223	2 324	3 352
Total	7 902	8 395	9 211	11 275	12 277	12 508	12 966

Source: Ministry of Education

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
SVS	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0	35.0
STS	65.1	65.1	64.6	64.6	65.0	65.0	65.1
Total	39.5	39.6	38.8	38.8	38.6	37.8	37.7

Source: Ministry of Education

Table 11 also shows the continued and increasing predominance of women in teacher training resulting in the relatively larger number of female teachers.

Institution of Higher Learning	1980	1985	1990	1993
Teacher Training Colleges	39.3	44.8	56.1	65.9
Other Colleges	48.3	62.7	45.5	49.2
Polytechnics	20.3	22.3	25.5	24.9
University	35.5	40.3	45.7	48.3
Total	38.6	44.9	45.7	47.5

Source: Compiled from Statistics of Department of Statistics Malaysia, 1990, and Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1995

Female participation as a proportion of total enrollment is higher in the technical stream than in the vocational stream, while a very small proportion participated in skill development courses. Female students account for a high proportion of commerce and home economics

enrollments, and a relatively low proportion of engineering courses. While female participation in engineering subjects has been low, it has increased in absolute terms. In 1993 only 922 women in STSs (42 percent of female enrollment) were enrolled in engineering courses; in 1996 the corresponding figure was 2,095 (63 percent of female enrollments). Female participation in different SVSs, STSs, and skill courses is given in Table 12.

Course	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
<b>STS courses</b>							
Engineering courses	23.6	22.6	24.4	25.3	26.3	25.4	23.9
Commerce	71.4	73.5	72.9	77.6	72.5	77.9	77.6
Agriculture	55.9	62.4	65.6	59.4	62.7	70.2	72.2
Others	41.7	48.2	49.9	58.9	48.6	55.8	69.4
<b>Total STS</b>	<b>36.1</b>	<b>37.2</b>	<b>38.4</b>	<b>40.2</b>	<b>39.0</b>	<b>39.5</b>	<b>32.2</b>
<b>SVS courses</b>							
Engineering trades	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	6.2	7.9	8.9	9.2
Home economics	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	92.6	92.1	90.9	89.9
Commerce	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	76.0	82.4	83.1	83.8
Agriculture	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	34.4	44.0	49.3	44.7
Skill courses	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	24.0	16.9	14.9	12.2
<b>Total SVS</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>23.6</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>25.1</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>25.5</b>
<b>Total TVE</b>	<b>25.5</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>27.6</b>	<b>26.9</b>	<b>25.8</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>27.0</b>

Source: Ministry of Education

While there has been development in terms of female participation in TVE, more needs to be done in order to address problems of gender stereotyping in education. This is prevalent not only at the upper secondary (vocational and technical education) but also at the pre-university level. A comparison of enrollment in the arts and science stream in pre-university education shows a distinct predominance of males in engineering (science) while females prefer commerce and agriculture (arts) (Table 13).

**Table 13: Female Enrollment in Assisted Technical Schools by Type of Course, Malaysia, 1989/1992**

Type of Course	1989	1992
Engineering	7.2	18.7
Building	41.1	39.9
Agriculture	52.6	65.6
Commerce	69.5	72.9
Services	49.3	51.3

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1994

It is clear that over a decade from 1983 through 1992, the vocational and technical field had been male-dominated in terms of enrollment rate. On the other hand, even when women joined TVE and skill courses, female enrollment was higher in the so-called 'feminine' courses, such as home economics and hotel and catering. Despite the absence of any known educational policies which limit female enrollment in vocational and technical schools, females seem to demonstrate reluctance to go for these fields compared to their male counterparts. In vocational training, there was also a considerable segregation with respect to the types of training courses undertaken. The trend of male preference for fields related to industries like building and wood-work, metal-work and electrical work is observed. On the other hand, females were more oriented towards service courses that included hotel and catering, tailoring, and commerce.

It appears that the low enrollment rate of women in vocational and technical schools is

**Table 14: Percentage Distribution of Female Teachers in Technical and Vocational Schools, and Polytechnics, Malaysia (1970-1993)**

Year	Technical	Vocational	Polytechnics
1970	18.4	8.1	-
1975	31.4	21.7	-
1987	41.1	22.8	16.6
1990	46.0	29.7	21.1
1993	52.5	34.3	20.9

**Source:** Ahmad, Aminah, "Status of Education of Women in Malaysia", Report Prepared for the Education of Women in Asia Project, ADB, 1993. Data for 1993 are taken from Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 1995.

reflected in the employment of teachers in these schools. Data presented in Table 14 shows that the percentage of female teachers in vocational and technical schools was lower than male teachers from the year 1970 through 1993 (except for technical school teachers in 1993). Although there is an increasing trend in the number of female teachers over the years, with 52.5 percent of female teachers in technical schools in 1993, males are still predominant in such fields. As it appears, this fact holds true even in the case of institutions of higher learning too. For instance, the

proportion of women lecturers in polytechnics was only 16.6 percent in 1987, although this figure increased to 20.9 percent in 1993. In terms of fields of specialization, the female lecturers were least represented in mechanical engineering, while the highest representation was recorded in the field of electrical and electronics engineering. Table 15 reveals 58 and 23 as the highest number of university trained and college trained female lecturers, respectively, in the field of electrical and electronics engineering. In contrast, the highest number of university trained and college trained male lecturers were 127 and 132 respectively in the field of mechanical engineering. Overall, it is apparent that except for food technology field, the number of university trained as well as college trained lecturers in polytechnics shows the prevalence of high male dominance.

In light of the foregoing discussion, it appears that segregation in education arising from gender stereotyping, perpetuated by the socialization process, continues to prevail. Evidently, females are more inclined to enroll in courses traditionally considered more suitable for women. To enroll in male-dominated courses, or to deviate from the accepted norm, may mean risking social disapproval. Conformity then becomes important as a means for gaining social support, as well as avoiding feelings of isolation. The training received determines the employment one takes up eventually, and as a general observation, female-dominated training courses tend to lead to relatively lower-paid jobs of lower status. Self-selection and access rather than Government Policy is responsible for continued enrollment in traditional courses, perpetuating employment patterns, and concentrating women in low technology, low skill, or low status occupation. However, parents and girls are responsive to efforts geared to changing traditional education patterns. Efforts to increase access by building dormitories for girls in technical and vocational schools enabled increase in female enrollment. Other efforts such as introduction of vocational counseling, gender-based assessment of recent secondary and tertiary school graduates in terms of time to first job, unemployment rates, salaries, and suitability of job to education can provide important inputs towards improving the efficiency of the educational system.

**Table 15: Lecturers in Polytechnics and their Respective Area of Specialization  
Malaysia, 1993**

Areas of Specialization	University Trained		College Trained		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Civil Engineering	111	42	101	34	288
Electrical and Electronics Engineering	94	58	98	23	273
Mechanical Engineering	127	14	132	5	278
Commerce	108	25	16	3	152
Food Technology	11	5	3	3	22
Total	451	144	350	68	1,013
Gender Ratio (M/F)		3:1		5:1	4:1

Source: Ministry of Education Malaysia, 1993.

### 3. *Geographical Disparities in Access to Education and Health Services – The Case of Sabah and Sarawak*

The expansion of educational facilities in the 1970's have benefited women and helped reduce the literacy gender gap to 89 percent for men and 80 percent for women (1991 population census).<sup>21</sup> However, the literacy rate was lower for the rural (80 percent) than the urban (90 percent) population, and in the states of Sabah (72 percent) and Sarawak (76 percent). School attendance, as a correlate of literacy, showed that 74 percent of rural women compared to 84 percent of men aged six years and above had ever attended school in 1991. The states of Sabah and Sarawak had the lowest percentage of population aged six years and above who had ever attended school in 1991, 71 and 76 percent respectively, as compared to 90 percent in the state of Selangor. This suggests that special attention in terms of access to education should be given to women, especially those in the rural stratum, in the states of Sabah and Sarawak in order to improve the level of literacy.

Similar observations can be made about disparities between the rural and urban sector, as well as among ethnic groups of the population regarding the health conditions of women, especially in terms of maternal mortality and fertility rates. The high maternal mortality rates among rural Malays reflect their poor access to health services and facilities as well as education, resulting in low health status, which could constrain their advancement and participation in development.

<sup>21</sup> Social Statistics Bulletin, Department of Statistics, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, 1995.





## ***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 HAWA<sup>22</sup> 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.

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<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

- (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.

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<sup>23</sup> ESCAP, 1982.



## ***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.





## **Chapter 7**

### **CONCLUSION**

Malaysia is experiencing an economic boom since 1988. The high growth of the economy was achieved with price stability and since 1995, with virtual full employment. The strong growth performance resulted in fundamental structural changes in the economy. There were accompanying changes in the composition of employment, and women's increasing participation in the growing manufacturing sector was noteworthy. There were accompanying sharp declines in poverty and high attainments in social indicators. Women's health situation improved considerably. Access to education expanded across all levels. Despite these achievements, gender issues remain important in the context of upgrading the capacity of human resources to meet future challenges. The female labor force participation rate still remains at 47 percent, well below the 86 percent participation rate for men. This and other issues related to women's employment, their capacity to meet the challenges emerging from the ongoing economic crisis, and prepare for future economic growth, really depends upon the preservation of gains made by Malaysian women in the areas of human development and employment, while addressing the need to further diversify their education and training, and improve their employment prospects in an increasingly technological society. Increasing women's participation in development is both an opportunity and challenge for Malaysia.

In an effort to reduce the gender gaps in economic participation and human resource development, the government promulgated the National Policy on Women in 1989. This policy articulates the needs, interests and situations of women and ensures that these concerns are included in mainstream development policy and programs with women participating as full and equal partners in development. Policy statements in the Government's Second Outline Perspective Plan (1991-2000) provide women with opportunities for economic participation as well as participation in education and training. The Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996-2000) contains a separate section on women, but in the sectoral chapters, the lack of gender-differentiated data and analysis is striking particularly in education, labor, and poverty chapters. The growing shortage of labor opens a wider avenue for women to move from unpaid to paid labor. The growth of the manufacturing sector places demands on well qualified and highly skilled persons, both men and women.

Despite these opportunities, it is suggested that the present scenario for economic participation and human resource development, which still appears to be skewed against women, be seriously analyzed before the labor shortage problem, especially of skilled labor, can be solved. Factors constraining the increased labor force participation of women have been discussed and measures for overcoming these constraints were suggested. They include, among others, compulsory education, expanded accessibility to vocational and technical education for women, upgrading of skills among employed women, national labor legislation supporting part-time employment, provision of child care facilities, gender neutral selection of employees for training, alleviation of wage discrimination in the private sector, elimination of gender stereotyping of domestic work, expanded accessibility to health facilities, and institutional strengthening of HAWA as the lead agent in the national machinery for integrating women in development. These measures will have far reaching implications not only on the socioeconomic status of women but on Malaysia's economy as it faces challenges in undergoing rapid industrialization process.

Training serves as one of the means of developing human resources. In this regard, one of the major insights of human capital theory is the observation that individuals can increase their productivity not only through investment in formal education but also by learning important work skills outside the formal school system.<sup>24</sup> Viewed from this perspective, women as active actors—in both the private and public spheres—should be trained with their male counterparts focusing not only on their domestic role but also on their productive role.

In order to meet the need for trained workers in technical and vocational field, as well as to fully integrate women in the development process, institutional and structural changes may be required in the education system to improve the output of education and training programs. More specifically, education programs at secondary as well as higher levels will have to be more oriented towards the needs for meeting the challenges of achieving an economically prosperous and a fully industrialized society. The design and implementation of education programs should be such that the prevailing problem of women preferring particular courses in education and training on account of social and structural factors, is resolved so that the larger proportion of available human resources could be integrated into the development process.

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<sup>24</sup> Blau and Ferber, 1986.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 16: Life Expectancy by Age-Group, Sex and Ethnic Group, Malaysia, 1996.**

Age	Total		Ethnic Group					
			Bumiputera		Chinese		Indians	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
0	69.34	74.08	68.67	72.52	71.77	77.31	64.54	72.44
1-4	69.16	73.81	68.53	72.28	71.30	76.81	64.29	72.08
5-9	65.39	70.02	64.79	68.52	67.44	72.97	60.47	68.24
10-14	60.53	65.12	59.95	63.62	62.54	68.05	55.56	63.33
15-19	55.67	60.23	55.10	58.73	57.65	63.14	50.73	58.43
20-24	51.06	55.37	50.52	53.88	53.05	58.24	46.17	53.73
25-29	46.49	50.53	46.02	49.03	48.38	53.38	41.73	48.97
30-34	41.88	45.70	41.39	44.22	43.74	48.50	37.27	44.20
35-39	37.28	40.90	36.74	39.42	39.16	43.67	32.90	39.46
40-44	32.71	36.13	32.13	34.67	34.57	38.86	28.68	34.80
45-49	28.24	31.46	27.62	30.02	30.02	34.13	24.75	30.18
50-54	23.93	26.93	23.31	25.52	25.58	29.51	21.01	25.77
55-59	19.87	22.58	19.30	21.25	21.41	25.03	17.31	21.45
60-64	16.17	18.47	15.68	17.23	17.52	20.71	14.42	17.73
65-69	12.74	14.65	12.28	13.50	13.96	16.69	11.67	14.17
70-74	9.74	11.24	9.35	10.22	10.86	12.98	8.73	10.72
75-79	7.36	8.37	7.08	7.53	8.14	9.64	6.49	8.06
80+	5.41	6.18	5.26	5.74	5.88	6.95	4.82	5.91

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia.

**Table 17: Maternal Deaths and Maternal Mortality Rate by State, Malaysia, 1996**

<b>State</b>	<b>Maternal Deaths</b>	<b>Maternal Mortality Rate</b>
Perlis	1	0.2
Kedah	7	0.2
Pulau Pinang	8	0.3
Perak	9	0.2
Selangor	15	0.2
W.P. K. Lumpur	1	-
Negeri Sembilan	1	0.1
Melaka	2	0.1
Johor	16	0.2
Pahang	6	0.2
Terengganu	3	0.1
Kelantan	5	0.1
SEM. MALAYSIA	74	0.2
SABAH	7	0.1
W.P. LABUAN	-	-
SARAWAK	3	0.1
MALAYSIA	84	0.2

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia.

**Table 18: Availability of Midwife Clinics and Dental Clinics by State**

State	Total Number of Midwife Clinic	Midwife Clinics/ Rural Population Ratio	Total Number of Dental Unit	Dental Unit: Population Ratio
Perlis	29	1: 5 048	45	1: 4 738
Kedah	221	1: 4 229	198	1: 7 606
Penang	66	1: 3 333	123	1: 9 837
Perak	259	1: 3 055	259	1: 8 044
Selangor	136	1: 3 388	177	1: 16 439
W. Persekutuan	-	1:	125	1: 10 871
Negeri Sembilan	105	1: 4 159	141	1: 5 659
Melaka	63	1: 5 019	92	1: 6 266
Johor	276	1: 4 281	278	1: 8 986
Pahang	231	1: 3 558	184	1: 6 597
Terengganu	132	1: 3 937	135	1: 7 025
Kelantan	197	1: 4 492	157	1: 8 988
Pen. Malaysia	1715	1: 3 915	1 914	1: 8 739
Sabah	186	1: 8 711	162	1: 15 572
Sarawak	97	1: 10 913	296	1: 6 484
<b>MALAYSIA</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1: 4 701</b>	<b>2 372</b>	<b>1: 8 924</b>

**Table 19: Ratio of Health Personnel to Population**

Type of Health Personnel		PENINSULAR MALAYSIA		SABAH		SARAWAK		MALAYSIA	
		Number	Health Personnel: Population Ratio	Number	Health Personnel: Population Ratio	Number	Health Personnel: Population Ratio	Number	Health Personnel: Population Ratio
Nurse	<i>Public</i>	12 002	1: 1 394	1 405	1: 1 796	1 207	1: 1 590	14 614	1: 1 449
	<i>Private</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	5 442	1: 3 890
	<i>Total</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	20 056	1: 1 056
Asst. Nurse	<i>Public</i>	7 790	1: 2 147	1 402	1: 1 799	267	1: 7 188	9 459	1: 2 238
	<i>Private</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	<i>Total</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Midwife Div. II	<i>Public</i>	3 897	1: 4 292	584	1: 4 320	1 265	1: 1 517	5 746	1: 3 684
	<i>Private</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	150	1:141 126
	<i>Total</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	5 896	1: 3 590
Dental Nurse	<i>Public</i>	960	1: 17 424	130	1: 19 405	198	1: 9 693	1 288	1: 16 436
	<i>Private</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	<i>Total</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Dental Technician	<i>Public</i>	318	1: 52 600	23	1:109 683	39	1:49 213	380	1:55 708
	<i>Private</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
	<i>Total</i>	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Medical Assis- tant	<i>Public</i>	3 339	1: 5 010	578	1: 4 365	635	1: 3 023	4 552	1: 4 650
	<i>Private</i>	12	1:1393 908	37	1:68 181	59	1:32 531	108	1:196 009
	<i>Total</i>	3 351	1: 4 992	615	1: 4 102	694	1: 2 766	4 660	1: 4 543

**Table 20: Deliveries Attended by Trained Personnel, Malaysia, 1996.**

Region	Total Deliveries	Deliveries by Trained Personnel					Deliveries by Trained Health Personnel (Government)		Deliveries by Trained Health Personnel (Government and Private Sector)	
		Government Hospitals & Government Clinics/Dispensary	Government Midwives At Public Health Facilities (Home Deliveries)	Private Maternity Homes/Hospitals	Estate Hospital	Private Trained Midwives	Number	%	Number	%
<b>Penin-sular Malaysia</b>	370009	259153	25075	80446	140	108	284228	76.8	364922	98.6
<b>Sabah</b>	66847	40057	7328	2556	186	637	47385	70.9	50764	75.9
<b>Sarawak</b>	46636	41219	62	3881	0	0	41281	88.5	45162	96.8
<b>Malaysia</b>	483492	340429	32465	86883	326	745	372894	77.1	460848	95.3

Source: Ministry of Health – Information and Documentation System Unit

**Table 21: Coverage of Ante-Natal Mothers (1<sup>st</sup> Visit) by Public Sector and by States, Malaysia 1996**

State	Estimated Pregnant Mothers	No. Of Ante-Natal Attendances (1 <sup>st</sup> Visit)	Coverage Of Ante-Natal (1 <sup>st</sup> Visit) %
Perlis	6 553	4 637	70.8
Kedah	55 271	41 867	75.7
Pulau Pinang	36 568	28 322	77.5
Perak	63 319	43 109	68.1
Selangor	109 083	74 138	68.0
Wilayah Persekutuan	44 203	34 155	
Negeri Sembilan	25 059	18 956	75.6
Melaka	20 911	12 603	60.3
Johor	85 437	59 620	69.8
Pahang	40 643	28 118	69.2
Terengganu	33 965	23 972	70.6
Kelantan	56 223	31 422	55.9
Peninsular Malaysia	577 235	400 919	69.5
Sabah	79 899	66 018	82.6
Sarawak	64023	49 939	78.0
<b>MALAYSIA</b>	<b>721 157</b>	<b>516 876</b>	<b>71.7</b>



**Table 22: Coverage of Ante-Natal Mothers for Tetanus Toxoid in Public Facilities and by State, Malaysia 1996**

State	No. of Livebirths	Ante-Natal Mothers Given Tetanus Toxoid			
		1 <sup>st</sup> Dose or Booster Dose		2 <sup>nd</sup> Dose or Booster Dose (Completion Dose)	
		Number	Coverage %	Number	Coverage %
Perlis	4 915	3 845	78.2	3 855	78.4
Kedah	41 453	36 618	88.3	36 733	88.6
Pulau Pinang	27 426	20 372	74.3	20 174	73.6
Perak	47 489	44 639	94.0	44 354	93.4
Selangor	81 812	57 962	70.8	57 953	70.8
Wilayah Persekutuan	33 152	11 854	35.8	10 150	30.6
Negeri Sembilan	18 794	16 175	86.1	16 017	85.2
Melaka	15 683	11 555	73.7	11 379	72.6
Johor	64 078	54 624	85.2	52 979	82.7
Pahang	30 482	27 361	89.8	26 967	88.5
Terengganu	25 474	23 487	92.2	23 404	91.9
Kelantan	42 167	32 074	76.1	32 148	76.2
Peninsular Malaysia	432 925	340 566	78.7	336 113	77.6
Sabah	59 924	65 839	109.9	62 885	104.9
Sarawak	48 017	47 877	99.7	46 921	97.7
<b>MALAYSIA</b>	<b>540 866</b>	<b>454 282</b>	<b>84.0</b>	<b>445 919</b>	<b>82.4</b>