

# THE PROGRESS OF MALAYSIAN WOMEN SINCE INDEPENDENCE 1957 - 2000



**Kementerian Pembangunan  
Wanita dan Keluarga**  
Ministry of Women  
and Family Development





# **The Progress of Malaysian Women Since Independence 1957 - 2000**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- i. Efforts to forge greater gender equality have resulted in Malaysian women achieving significant progress in key socio-economic areas since Malaysia gained independence in 1957. However, despite the progress made, new concerns on the role and status of women have emerged that could adversely affect the participation of women in the economy and social spheres. In light of this, the Government of Malaysia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) jointly undertook a study to document and evaluate the progress of women in Malaysia during the period 1957–2000.
  
- ii. This study is intended to capture the achievements of women in education, health, economy, politics and power sharing, and decision making. Secondary data from the Department of Statistics surveys and administrative records from government agencies and non-governmental organisations are used for the study. The report for the study contains five chapters, with chapters 2 to 5 assessing the progress of women in specific key areas while chapter 1 highlights the Government's initiatives taken to advance women in development.
  
- iii. Development planning for the advancement of women was introduced in the Sixth Malaysia Plan, which has a chapter on the development of women. The Sixth Plan and subsequent plans contain strategies to incorporate women in the process of development in line with the objectives of the National Vision Policy on Women (NPW). Equitable sharing of resources and access to opportunities for men and women forms one of the objectives of the NPW. The formulation and implementation of an action plan to operationalise the NPW during the Seventh Malaysia Plan resulted in the implementation of more coherent and focused programmes to integrate women in development and elevate their status. Significant progress has also been made in the setting up of the required institutional and administrative machinery to plan, coordinate, implement and monitor the development of women. These include the Ministry of Women and Family Development, the Department

of Women Affairs (HAWA), the National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) and the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO). In addition, the enactment of new laws and the continuous review and amendment of existing legislation have been undertaken to preserve, reinforce and protect the rights and legal status of women.

- iv. Malaysian women have benefited from increased access to education and training as indicated by the improvement in their literacy rates and net enrolment at all levels of education since 1957. The enrolment of female students at the primary level increased by more than three and a half times during the period 1957–2000. At the secondary level, the enrolment of female students increased by more than 36 times to reach a total enrolment of 985,692 students in 2000. With regard to enrolment in technical and vocational schools the percentage of male students has always been higher than female students. The enrolment of Malaysian women in tertiary institutions reflected the evolution of tertiary education in Malaysia, which has been gradually expanding in total number and relative terms, especially after 1970. In 1959, female undergraduates comprised 10.7 per cent of the total student enrolment in the University of Malaya, but increased to 51.3 per cent of the total enrolment in local universities by 2000. Non-formal education in the form of adult education, home economics and entrepreneurial training programmes has improved the literacy rates of rural women and enabled them to acquire new knowledge and skills. Despite the increasing number of female student enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the concentration of female students in non-technical courses is a major area of concern.
- v. The participation of women in the labour force has been increasing since 1957, they are engaged in paid employment or are employers, self-employed and unpaid family workers in all economic sectors. Overall, female employment accounted for 34.7 per cent of total employment in 2000 as compared to only 24.5 per cent in 1957. An analysis of female employment by occupational category also shows a rising trend of women moving into occupations that require post-secondary education. However, the majority of women are concentrated in low-skilled and low-waged occupations. They are

under-represented in top managerial and decision-making posts in both the public and private sectors. Gender-specific issues that continue to hinder the progress of women in the economy include traditional gender constructs, sex role stereotyping and gender division of work, multiple roles of women, gender segmentation and stratification, and gender discrimination at work. To address these issues, more concrete steps will have to be taken so that women's involvement in the labour market and corporate world can be more significant and meaningful.

- vi. Improvement in the health status of Malaysian women in the last four decades has been the key to their well-being and active participation in the economic, political and social development in the country. Efforts in expanding and developing health services targeted at women and the family have been successful in reducing the incidence of deaths arising from communicable and non-communicable diseases. The average life expectancy of women increased from 58.2 years in 1957 to 75 years in 2000. The maternal mortality rate, a direct indicator of women's reproductive health, has declined by tenfold to 0.2 per 1,000 live births after 43 years of independence. However, new health concerns are emerging and these include the health needs of older women, occurrence of domestic violence, mental disorders and increased incidence of HIV/AIDS cases.
- vii. Malaysian women's share in power sharing and decision-making in politics and the economy has been on an upward trend since independence. There has been an incremental increase in women voters, membership in political parties, political candidates, and appointments to elected and appointed offices. However, a gender gap still exists between men and women in terms of access to high-level positions and participation in decision-making. The number of women holding top management posts in the civil service and corporate sector is still relatively small. Gender barriers leading to the under-representation of women in decision-making and power-sharing positions include cultural and institutional factors, gender roles and ethnicity, political culture, limited platform for women in political parties, lack of a critical mass, and gender-blind elements in recruitment and promotion.

# Foreword

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Dato' Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil

Minister of Women and Family Development  
Malaysia

Since independence, women in Malaysia have actively contributed towards the development of the country. Over the past four decades, we have seen significant improvements in the status of women and in gender equality. The educational attainment of women is at a higher level, their participation in the labour force has increased and legislation that grants equal opportunities for women and respect for their human rights has been adopted in Malaysia. The country now has a growing number of women Ministers and policy makers.

This report documents the achievements of women in Malaysia since the country attained independence in 1957 and allow us a look into the past to gain invaluable lessons. I sincerely hope that this report will be an important source of information to everyone who has the interest of Malaysian women in their hearts. The report also takes the opportunity to

honour Malaysian women who were pioneers in their respective fields and achieved success, all in their own terms. The accomplishments of these women will definitely be an inspiration to other women in Malaysia to strive for greater heights.

While the progress attained by women in Malaysia is remarkable, there is still room for improvement in certain areas, especially in science and technology. We cannot afford to bask in the successes we have achieved thus far. We must never forget that the gains made to date may be reversed should indifference, complacency or negligence set in.

The journey to enhance women's status in Malaysia is a continuing one because we have an important role to play in supporting Vision 2020, that is, the Government's aim for Malaysia to achieve a developed country status by the year 2020.

The report would not have come to fruition without the support and cooperation from individuals and organizations, the public and private sectors, and the non-governmental organisations. Therefore, I would like to extend my sincere appreciation especially to the Economic Planning Unit of the Prime Minister's Department, members of the Steering Committee, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for the assistance rendered in preparing this report.

Thank You.

July 2003

**Box 1.1: Malaysia's First Lady,  
Dato' Seri Dr Siti Hasmah bt. Mohd. Ali —  
An Inspiring Role Model for Malaysian Women**

Dato' Seri Dr Siti Hasmah bt. Mohd. Ali, wife of the Prime Minister of Malaysia, is a medical doctor. She was the second Malay woman to graduate from the Faculty of Medicine, University of Malaya in Singapore in 1955, and in a way, set the record for women in her time. She attributed her medical achievement to the foresight of her father who encouraged his children to excel in their studies by sending them to the best schools.

She was the first woman to be appointed a medical officer in the Maternal and Child Health Department in the state of Kedah, which had a high incidence of poverty in the early days after independence (1950s to 1960s). In 1974, she was the first woman to be appointed as the State Maternal and Child Health Officer. Thereafter, she became aware of the needs of women, the majority of whom were illiterate, suffering from ill health and living in extreme poverty. Due to poor education as well as inadequate infrastructure, including health services, they were resorting to traditional birth attendants. According to her, in the early days, many women died during childbirth from a lack of health services. Stillbirths and infant mortality were common occurrences. Diseases like tuberculosis plagued the people, especially the children. Women were ignorant of the methods of family planning. This prompted her and her husband to pioneer the setting up of the Kedah Family Planning Association, a non-government organisation offering family planning services to women, thus providing them a means to plan their pregnancies.

Her efforts in promoting the health of women is evident in several articles she wrote on the socio-economic factors associated with pregnancy and child-bearing in Malaysia. She has been accorded academic recognition as reflected by her appointment as the Chancellor of the Multimedia University in 1997 and the honorary doctorates she has received not just from local (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia) but also from foreign universities (Indiana University, USA and University of Victoria, Canada).

In 1992, she was chosen as one of the six Core-Group Initiators of First Ladies to champion the economic advancement of rural women, and in 1995, she

*Continued on next page*

assumed the chairmanship of the Regional Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for the Asia Pacific Region (RSC-AP). In 1996, she took over the helm of the International Steering Committee on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women (ISC) as its president.

According to her, just before independence the country was preoccupied with post-war reconstruction and during that time, health status was static. Health services were mainly provided through a limited number of government dispensaries (in urban as well as rural areas). There has been significant progress made in health services after independence. This is reflected in improvements in health statistics and the easy availability of services, even in remote and rural areas.

The progress is partly due to the peace that has prevailed since independence which had allowed the Government to channel continuous efforts into development in all fields. Education has been an important contributing factor. She says, "The woman of today is educated so that she can be economically independent. She is also healthy and is able to take better care of the family. Social and cultural barriers like marrying young, having big families and having to deal with negative attitudes of men can be overcome when women are educated."

On the progress of women, she says, "Women need to recognise that we have gained so much through the hard work of our predecessors; we need not fight for what we have but they had to fight every inch of the way. Therefore, we must recognise, give credit and be grateful to the men and women who have made it possible. Women must acknowledge that we need to work together with men, and together we will be effective partners in development."

Dato' Seri Dr Siti Hasmah said that the future challenges for Malaysian women include competition among women, exposure to and keeping abreast with men in the area of information technology (IT), and development of entrepreneurship among women. The concerns for women also include married women having to cope with their careers and families, coping with children who are better educated than their parents, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on women, children and men.

*Source: Personal interview, July 2001*

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

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#### **I. BACKGROUND**

1.01 The role and status of women in Malaysia have undergone a profound change since Malaysia gained independence in 1957. With increased access to education, employment opportunities and changes in the socio-cultural environment, Malaysian women have progressed and participated effectively in all aspects of development of the country. Within a period of 43 years they have made inroads into all areas of development and spheres of life. Particularly encouraging is the progress made by women in many key areas such as education, health, employment, and participation in power-sharing and in the decision-making processes. Changes in the legal and institutional framework have also been made to protect, preserve and safeguard their rights and improve their status. As Malaysia evolves from a subsistence agricultural economy to a knowledge-based economy, women will continue to be a primary force influencing the development of future generations of Malaysians as well as an important economic resource. Changes in the socio-cultural environment, which have helped to shape the profile of Malaysian women today, will continue to impact women in development.

1.02 The 2000 Population Census indicates that about 49.1 per cent or 11.4 million of the total population were women, with 52.6 per cent in the age group 24 years and below, indicating a young female population. The proportion of the female population has increased slightly compared to 48.4 per cent in 1957. Women have a longer life expectancy, 75 years compared to 70.2 years for men in 2000. Due to their longer life span, the proportion of women in the 65 years and above age group has increased from 2.8 per cent in 1957 to 4.2 per cent in 2000. The health status of women has also improved since 1957, for example, the maternal mortality rate declined from 2.81 per 1,000 live births in 1957 to 0.2 in 2000. With increased access to education and employment opportunities, women are entering the labour market and marrying at a later age. The mean age of the first marriage for men and women has risen since 1957, when the mean age for men was 23.8 years and 19.4 years for women. For women, it has risen to 22.3 years in 1980 and 25.1 years in 2000.

1.03 As the country progresses towards achieving greater gender equality, the role of the Government has been supportive, pre-eminent and continuous. In particular, the Government has provided an enabling environment for the advancement of women at both the national and international levels. At the national level, the formulation of the National Policy on Women (NPW) in 1989 marked a turning point, enunciating for the first time clear guidelines for the effective participation of women in the country's development. Thereafter, the five-year national development plans prescribed specific strategies and measures, including the establishment of appropriate mechanisms and institutional framework to progressively assimilate women into the mainstream of social and economic activities. Despite the progress made and new measures introduced, new concerns on the status and position of women as well as old issues continued to prevail during the period 1991–2000. The issues are multifarious: violence against women, poverty amongst female-headed households, the need for childcare facilities and support for working mothers, the "triple load" or burden that women have to carry; work-and-family conflicts, sexual harassment at the workplace, and the under-representation of women in politics and decision-making positions. According to gender researchers and analysts, the root cause of these issues is the inability of the Malaysian society at large to understand and handle "gender problems". Malaysian society continued to perceive the role, responsibilities and relationship between men and women according to the traditional mindset, based on the traditional family model where a male bread-winner heads the family and the wife is a full-time homemaker. The family structure has changed over time particular in the 1990s. The trend shows an increase of nuclear families with dual income; and the Population Census 2000 indicates that 58 per cent of working women are married. Working single women and working mothers have specific needs which require a different support system. During the same period, global "gender issues" were also raised, culminating in the Beijing Declaration and Plan of Action, calling on all governments to implement gender sensitivity training that would enable planners to formulate gender-responsive policies and programmes.

1.04 At the international level the Government showed its commitment to promote the development of women by being signatory to several international conventions on women, including the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995). The Conference identified 12 critical areas of concern for the advancement of women. The areas included poverty,

education, health, economy, power sharing and decision-making, and institutional mechanisms. As a follow-up to the Beijing Conference on Women Plus 5 and taking cognisance of the need to have a more comprehensive and integrated database of information on Malaysian women, the Government of Malaysia in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) undertook this study to document and evaluate the progress of women in Malaysia covering the period 1957–2000.

## **II.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

1.05 The main purpose of the study is to chronicle the progress made by women in Malaysia, with special focus on four key areas: health, education and training, employment, power-sharing and political involvement. The study covers the period 1957–2000. The benchmark for measuring women's progress is gender equality, which is the extent and depth of progress made by women in relation to that achieved by Malaysian men. The study will demonstrate the linkages between national policy initiatives and the advancement of women as well as identify future challenges. Specifically, the study will undertake the following:

- provide an overview of the progress of women in Malaysia since independence;
- document the progress made in selected key areas, namely, education, health, employment, politics and power-sharing through basic indicators of quality of life such as access to education, health facilities and economic opportunities;
- review and analyse the integration of women in the nation's development in terms of policy thrusts, key programmes/projects and activities as well as institutional support; and
- capture the achievements of women in Malaysia in other areas such as economics, politics, social development and law; and wherever applicable, singling out prominent women with outstanding achievements and contributions.

### III.METHODOLOGY

1.06 This study relies heavily on secondary data from existing government statistics – census data, labour force surveys, vital statistics of the country – and departmental records from government agencies and ministries, non-governmental organisations and research institutions. These information sources provided women-specific data as well as gender-disaggregated data for the construction of key indicators for the period 1957–2000. Key indicators were compiled for the status of women's health, access to education and training, and employment, as well as participation in politics and decision-making. The study also used information and data culled from official documents, research publications and reports from relevant agencies. The paucity of gender-disaggregated data limits to some extent the analytical aspect of this report in specific areas. An exception is the census and labour force surveys undertaken by the Department of Statistics.

1.07 In addition, data was also collected using the case study approach where prominent women, who have contributed significantly in their areas of specialisation, were interviewed. Two women high achievers in decision-making and power-sharing positions were interviewed as role models for young women in Malaysia.

1.08 Apart from the quantitative analysis using time-series data to show trends in women's progress, this study also attempts to analyse the progress qualitatively by performing in-depth analyses of certain pertinent gender-sensitive indicators. For instance, the high percentage of women enrolled in universities is further analysed to see whether women undergraduates are mainly enrolled in women-traditional programmes (that is, pursuing degrees in education and other soft sciences) or in non-traditional programmes (such as engineering and computer sciences). Women's participation in the professional or higher-level (administrative and managerial) occupational categories and the male-female ratio within a profession are used to assess their progress in employment. The number and share of top-level decision-making positions assumed by women were further analysed to measure the gender gap. To measure the achievement of women in politics, the commonly used gender-sensitive indicator is the women's share of parliamentary seats.

## **IV. OVERVIEW OF THE REPORT**

1.09 This report is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 highlights the government initiatives taken to advance women in important sectors of development, such as the National Policy on Women (1989) and the National Action Plan. A list of recent amendments to existing legislation that have affected women's advancement and well-being are also highlighted. This chapter also highlights the Government's commitment at the international level. Chapters 2 to 5 discuss the progress of women in various key areas.

1.10 Chapter 2 focuses on education and training of women, with highlights on women's achievement in education at various levels of formal schooling and training. The trends in enrolment rates, or the ratio of male to female student enrolment at various levels of education, are analysed to measure changes in educational attainment of women and gender gaps in education. Other indicators used to highlight the educational attainment of women for the 1957–2000 period include the ratio of female to male students in technical and vocational education, as well as enrolment in technical and non-technical degree programmes at tertiary levels. This chapter also identifies the issues, gender barriers and constraints encountered by women in education and training. There is also a discussion on women's access to non-formal education and training. Indicators used to measure the advancement of women in this area include women's overall participation in training as well as in specific types of training offered by various agencies.

1.11 In chapter 3, women's achievements in economic activities for the period 1957–2000 are given prominence. The chapter elaborates the trends in women's participation in the labour force, by industry and occupational category, in comparison to men. Women's progress is assessed by analysing the trends and the gender gap in the employment status, employment pattern and skills as well as their untapped potential and low labour force participation rate. Gender-specific issues and constraints associated with women's work and productivity are also identified.

1.12 Chapter 4 traces the progress of women's health since independence using standard mortality and morbidity indicators. It shows how women in Malaysia have made great strides in achieving a higher level of health

status over the past four decades so that today their mortality and morbidity rates are almost on par if not below that of some of the developed countries. This impressive progress is, in part, due to health programmes that incorporated the risk approach strategy and the confidential enquiry on the maternal death approach. The chapter also highlights how the provision of rural health services has contributed to the improvement of the health status of women in the country. It cautions women against several emerging health issues, which they have to face as they enter the new millennium. These issues include concerns for the health of older women as well as adolescents, the threat of infectious diseases including HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, and mental and emotional health problems affecting women due in part to their dual and competing role as mothers and wives and their role as employees.

1.13 In chapter 5, women's participation in decision-making and power-sharing positions is assessed by analysing the trends and quality of women's involvement in politics, and as political appointees as well as participants in the public service sector. The number and distribution of female executives in the private sector as well as in non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are also included in the analysis. The findings confirm the wide disparity that exists between men and women in leadership and decision-making positions. The majority of women involved in politics, and as employees in the private sector, cooperatives and NGOs primarily held lower ranking positions. The author attributes the low participation of women in top decision-making or power-sharing positions to the strong influence of traditional thinking that "men are leaders, women are followers". In general, this traditional gender ideology permeates the thinking process in the selection of candidates for leadership or decision-making positions.

## **V. GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING**

1.14 Efforts in economic and social development in Malaysia began with the implementation of the First Five-Year Plan (1956–1960) on the eve of the country's independence. This plan and the subsequent development plans concentrated on sustaining economic growth, physical development, diversification of agriculture and industrial development with the objectives of expanding employment opportunities and income improvements. The New Economic Policy, launched in 1971, emphasised national unity and nation-building through a two-pronged strategy of

eradicating poverty regardless of race and restructuring society so as to eliminate the identification of race with economic functions. None of the development plans, however, gave any special attention to issues and strategies for the advancement of women until the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991--1995). It was the first time that a five-year development plan had included a chapter detailing programmes and projects for the development of women. The chapter also contains specific strategies to effectively incorporate women in the process of development in accordance with the objectives of the National Policy on Women (NPW), which are as follows:

- to ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and information as well as access to opportunities and benefits of development, for men and women; and
- to integrate women into 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.

1.15 While the Sixth Plan recognised women as an important economic resource, it identified the following constraints which were inhibiting the involvement of women in economic activities:

- the dual and, often, competing responsibilities of family and career restrict the mobility and increased participation of women in the labour market;
- gender differences in schools not only translate into occupational differentiation later; it also limits the adaptability and participation of women in the labour market;
- social norms and prejudices regarding the role and status of women in society and in the labour market restrain their involvement in economic activities;
- women with children, who are financially dependent on their husbands, are particularly vulnerable in cases of domestic violence. The lack of skills very often limits their options, thus preventing them from 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. Consequently, income-generating programmes targeted at the women generally reinforce their home-maker roles, providing few opportunities for the acquisition of new and more marketable skills;
- the lack of appropriate management training and the consequent absence of professionalism, inadequate access to credit and a paucity of relevant market information also hinder the participation of women in the economy; and
- the working environment is generally not conducive to the sustained employment of wives and mothers. This limits the training opportunities available and hampers career development. The separation of home from the workplace and the fixed hours of work constitute additional drawbacks that preclude prolonged female participation in the labour market.

1.16 These issues provided the backdrop for the Government to formulate strategies, and plan for the setting up of an appropriate institutional structure to enhance the social, legal and economic position of women in the next decade. The formulation of an Action Plan to operationalise the NPW in the Seventh Malaysia Plan reflected the Government's efforts to address these constraints and commitment to include women as equal partners in nation building. The areas included in the Action Plan are:

- strengthening the national machinery for the integration of women in development;
- raising public awareness and sensitivity towards issues relating to women;
- mobilising the NGOs to increase their efficiency and effectiveness in undertaking socio-economic programmes;
- encouraging positive action for the advancement of women in various fields; and

- promoting the role of women in family development.

1.17 The implementation of the Action Plan, a pioneering effort that formally began in 1990, had resulted in more coherent and focussed programmes to integrate women in development and further elevate their status in society. However, there are still constraints that limit progress. At the start of this 21st century, the social and economic status of women relative to men is still not satisfactory and the disparity may become greater due to the effects of globalisation and use of information and communication technology (ICT). In view of these gaps, strategies to enhance the role of women in development were included as one of the key policy thrusts of the National Vision Policy (NVP) 2001–2010. The NVP states that opportunities in employment, business and social activities will be made available without gender bias, thus promoting equity in opportunities for both men and women. Women's economic participation is to be enhanced through the provision of greater access to training and retraining, more extensive use of flexible working hours, the provision of crèches as well as facilities to enable them to work from home. Entrepreneurship among women will be promoted actively by providing greater access to information, financial and technical resources.

1.18 To operationalise the NVP in the medium term, strategies and programmes are contained in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–2005). The strategies for the advancement of women focussed on the following:

- increasing female participation in the labour market;
- providing more education and training opportunities for women to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy and improve their upward mobility in the labour market;
- enhancing women's involvement in business;
- reviewing laws and regulations that inhibit the advancement of women;
- improving further the health status of women;
- reducing the incidence of poverty among female-headed households;

- strengthening research activities to increase participation of women in development and enhance their well-being;and
- strengthening the national machinery and the institutional capacity for the advancement of women.

1.19 The Action Plan, National Vision Policy and various other strategies to promote gender equality and progress of women represent formal and continuing efforts taken by the Government under the various development plans. Their coherent and effective implementation will determine the extent and depth of the incremental progress of women in Malaysia in the years ahead.

## **VI. ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN**

1.20 The implementation of policies, strategies and programmes requires a supportive institutional structure and appropriate administrative machinery. Significant progress has been made in the setting up of the required institutional and administrative machinery to plan, coordinate, implement and monitor development programmes for women. The establishment of the Ministry of Women and Family Development in February 2001 marks the culmination of efforts to assign women's development and issues to a specific ministry. The establishment of this new ministry represents an important change in the mindset of policymakers who have become more gender-sensitive. Currently, the institutional structure for women and development can be categorised into planning, coordinating and monitoring (Ministry of Women and Family Development), advisory and planning (National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development), advocacy (National Council of Women's Organisations), coordination and monitoring (HAWA) and implementation (line ministries and departments, semi-government and non-government organisations).

1.21 The *Ministry of Women and Family Development* is the lead agency to undertake gender responsive planning and policy formulation for women. It is responsible for the integration of women in the national development process through coordination, monitoring and evaluation, planning and policy formulation, and reporting to the Government. Its major

objective is to mainstream women in nation-building and strengthen the family institution by integrating gender into all aspects of planning and development. To ensure that gender and family perspectives are integrated into national policies, it undertakes coordination on gender issues between Government agencies, NGOs, the private sector and communities as well as audits existing legislation and regulations that affect the interests of women. Its functions also include increasing opportunities for women to upgrade their socio-economic status, and providing education and training opportunities to women to support its planning functions. To support its planning functions, it undertakes research and development in gender, population, family development and reproductive health. It also acts as the secretariat for the National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) and is the national contact networking with international agencies dealing with women's issues as well as the secretariat for regional and international agencies pertaining to women's programmes.

1.22 HAWA is a major department under the Ministry and the main contributor to the planning process of the Ministry. It was first set up as the Women's Affairs Department under the Ministry of Labour, being responsible for the coordination of the development of women. It also acted as the secretariat to the National Advisory Council. In 1978 it was transferred to the Implementation and Coordination Unit (ICU) in the Prime Minister's Department. In 1983, it was re-designated as a secretariat named HAWA in the Administration and Finance Division of the Prime Minister's Department. Since 1983 HAWA has undergone several changes. In 1990, it became a government department in the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, but was placed under the Ministry of Women and Family Development upon its establishment in February 2001. The major responsibilities of HAWA are, among others, to implement the capacity development programmes and projects for women, organise gender sensitisation programmes and gender planning courses to enhance awareness about women's concerns among policy makers, planners and programmers, and provide skills in integrating issues in development planning and policy formulation.

1.23 The *National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID)*, a consultative and advisory body to the Government and non-government organisations, was established in 1976

in accordance with the United Nations' Resolution on integrating women into the mainstream of the development process. Its members, who are appointed by the Minister of Women and Family Development, are drawn from women leaders in the community, NGOs, professional bodies, political parties, and the private sector as well as academicians and retired civil servants. NACIWID acts as the main body through which women-related issues are channelled to the relevant authorities, and plans and evaluates activities of women's organisations. Besides promoting and encouraging research activities, it also communicates with relevant organisations within and without the country to promote national and international understanding.

1.24 The *National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO)* is a non-political, non-religious and non-communal organisation, and acts as the umbrella organisation for women NGOs in Malaysia. At present, the NCWO has more than 200 welfare, political, professional and labour organisations affiliated to it, including a number of active and important organisations. The NCWO's main role is to be a consultative and advisory body to women's organisations and to bring all these organisations together. It also has a Commission for Action on the National Policy for Women and state level committees.

1.25 There are various major organisations implementing women in development (WID) programmes. These include the Community Development Division (KEMAS), the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB), the Department of Agriculture (DOA) and the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA). KEMAS's programmes on women focus mainly on family development including home economics such as nutrition and family health at the village level, work-oriented classes such as tailoring and handicrafts and agriculture aimed at producing food for the family or the market, and pre-school programmes such as establishing community pre-school child-care centres and adult literacy programmes. The cultural, social, economic and demographic factors which affect women in development are addressed through activities undertaken by NPFDB. It also promotes population and family development as well as reproductive health-related concerns. The DOA and FELDA carry out programmes mainly on family development, improvement of the quality of life, entrepreneurship of target groups, and income-generating activities such as training, financial assistance and other inputs for the benefit of women, primarily in FELDA's

agricultural schemes/estates.

## VII. LEGAL STATUS OF WOMEN

1.26 Women's legal status with regard to citizenship, education, employment, legal rights and status in marriage, divorce, and the guardianship of children are embodied in the Federal Constitution as well as in other legislation which have been enacted from time to time. Considerable legislative changes have taken place over time, especially after 1957. New laws have been enacted while existing laws and legislation are continuously being reviewed and amended to preserve, reinforce and protect the rights of women. The adoption of the Women and Girls' Protection Act 1973 and its 1987 amendments, the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act 1994 in 1996, and the introduction of the Code of Practice on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace are examples of legislative measures targeted at protecting the dignity of women. Amendments to other pertinent acts and laws such as the Employment Act 1955 and the improved provisions of the Income Tax Act 1967 are aimed at safeguarding the economic interests of women.

### **Women under the Federal Constitution**

1.27 Malaysian women's rights as citizens to participate in the political and administrative life of the nation are implicitly recognised 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 authorised 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 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"*. This clause does not contain a specific provision against gender-based discrimination and may allow for protective discrimination against women under the Employment Act. The omission was rectified on 2 August 2001, when the Dewan Rakyat approved an amendment to Article 8(2) to include the word, "gender" in the categories referred to in the clause, which now reads *"there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion, race, descent, place of birth and gender in any law..."* Women's rights are, therefore, now explicitly stated in the Federal

## Constitution.

1.28 The Government had also taken steps to accord equal status to women under the Constitution's provisions for the award of citizenship and permanent residence. Under Article 15 of the Constitution, no conditions were imposed upon foreign wives of citizens to apply for citizenship. However, a subsequent amendment made in 1962 included various conditions, including the "good character" requirement for foreign wives of citizens when applying for citizenship. By another amendment to Clause 2 of Article 15, citizen rights could be acquired by any child of a citizen. This amendment puts women on par with men as regards the granting of automatic citizenship of children born to them. However, foreign spouses of Malaysian women are denied such rights based on the assumption that, upon marriage, women would follow their husbands to their home countries. With the constitutional amendment of Article 8 (b), steps have been taken to remove the differential treatment regarding the acquisition of citizenship rights by the foreign spouses of Malaysian women (as announced by the Deputy Prime Minister cum Minister of Home Affairs on Women's Day 2001).

## Employment Legislation and Women

1.29 The *Employment Act 1955* (revised in 1981, 1994 and 1999) is the major legislation which regulates all labour 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, termination and lay-off benefits. There are, however, specific parts in the Act, which pertain only to women, such as maternity protection and night work. There is no stipulation in the Act which prohibits employers paying lower wages to their women employees, as compared to male workers, for doing the same amount of work. Women in the private sector may therefore be subject to wage discrimination. In the public sector, however, women have equal pay for equal work. At present, women in the private sector also do not have any legal redress against wage discrimination. Part VIII of the *Employment Act 1955*, "Prohibition Against Nightwork" states that no employer shall require female employees to work between 10 o'clock in the evening and 5 o'clock in the morning in the agricultural or industrial sectors. However, the *Employment Women Shift Workers Regulations 1970* stipulates that "*any female employee employed in shift work in any approved undertaking which operates at least two shifts per day may work at such times within the hours*

*of 10 o'clock in the evening and 5 o'clock in the morning, as the Director of Labour may approve.*" The effect of the 1970 regulations is to allow women to work at night, with the result that female employees working in night shifts have become the general rule rather than the exception. Section 35 of the Employment Act also prohibits the employment of women in underground work, unless the Minister gives an exemption.

1.30 Part IX of the Employment Act provides for paid maternity leave for a period of not less than 60 consecutive days for every female employee in the private sector. In May 1998, the Government reviewed and extended the maternity leave for women employees in the public sector from 42 days to 60 days, for a maximum of up to five deliveries. Public sector women employees can choose to extend their maternity leave up to three months as unpaid leave. Paternity leave of up to three days is also given to male employees in the public sector.

1.31 In 1998, another amendment was made to the Employment Act, which provides for flexible working hours. This provision expands the opportunities for women, including homemakers, to be gainfully employed in part-time work. It also provides opportunities for employees to create flexibility in work processes and arrangements, such as teleworking, home-based work, job sharing, and compressed workweek that would enable women employees to balance their work and family demands.

### **Other Laws Affecting the Status of Women**

1.32 All Malaysians have equal right to education under the Constitution of Malaysia. This implies that there is no discrimination against women and men. Article 12(1) states that there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the grounds of religion, race, descent or place of birth:

- in the administration of any educational institution maintained by a public authority, and in particular, the admission of pupils or students or the payment of fees; or
- in providing out of the funds of a public authority financial aid for the maintenance of education of pupils or students in any educational institution (whether or not maintained by a public authority and whether within or outside the Federation).

1.33 The Universities and University Colleges Act 1991 stipulates open membership to all irrespective of gender. The New Economic Policy of 1970 also provides equal access to educational opportunities for both male and female Malaysians.

1.34 With regard to the legal recognition of the *guardianship of children*, the Guardianship of Infants Act 1961 initially militated against women. The Act was amended in 1999 to allow for joint guardianship of children in matters relating to immigration and registration. With the implementation of the amendment in 2000 mothers are allowed to sign all documents involving their underaged children.

1.35 The Income Tax Act 1967 (amended in 1975, 1978 and 1991) gives an option to married women to have separate *income tax assessment*. The clause prohibiting a married working woman from separate income tax assessment was subject to several amendments (1975, 1978 and 1991). The amendment of 1991 allowed for separate assessments for married women unless they choose to be assessed jointly. Today, women taxpayers, whose husbands have no taxable income, are eligible for taxable relief similar to that available to a male taxpayer whose wife has no taxable income.

1.36 With regard to the protection of women against *domestic violence*, the Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1994 and implemented in 1996. Domestic violence is now dealt with as a criminal offence with appropriate penalties imposed. Realising that legislation may only remove the more blatant discriminatory practices, the Government and NGOs in Malaysia continue to push for greater transparency of procedures adopted by police personnel, and have urged for the appropriate training and gender sensitisation of the relevant parties. Currently, the NGOs are pushing for a review and amendment of the Act.

1.37 The Ministry of Human Resources issued the *Code of Practice on the Prevention and Handling of Sexual Harassment in the Workplace* on 1 March 1999. This Code of Practice contains guidelines to employers on the establishment and implementation of in-house preventive and redress mechanisms to prevent and eradicate sexual harassment at the workplace. This approach is believed to be the most effective way of dealing with the problem. Employers are encouraged to implement policies and programmes on anti-sexual harassment, as well as to provide redress mechanisms at the

organisational level.

1.38 There is also a specific legislation to *protect the rights and dignity of women*. The Women and Girls Protection Act 1973 and the Child Protection Act 1991 were reviewed and streamlined into the Child Act 2000. Both the Women and Girls Protection Act (which contains provisions for prosecuting persons involved in prostitution and trafficking of women) and the Child Protection Act were criticised as being very vaguely worded and could be liberally interpreted. An underaged girl, if found in a dubious place or circumstances, may be interpreted to be “in need of protection” and may be detained in a corrective centre. Both Acts contain some aspects of discrimination, which could be damaging to victims.

### Box 1.2: Definition of Discrimination

Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states that “discrimination against women” shall mean:

“any **distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex** which has the effect or purpose of impairing, or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on **a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedom in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field**”

This definition implies that applying a neutral rule for women and men will constitute discrimination if the result is that women do not enjoy the intended benefit.

1.39 In 1995, prior to the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Malaysia ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with some reservations.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

1.40 Malaysian women have made significant progress since Malaysia gained independence in 1957. The progress is perceptible and near universal, with more Malaysian women, in both absolute and relative terms, being

involved in all key socio-economic areas than before: in education, in health, in the economy, and in power-sharing and decision-making. The quest for greater gender equality has been relatively successful, although improvements can still be made in certain sectors. It will be necessary for the Government, which has played a leading role in women's progress in the country, to continue providing the necessary assistance and legislative support to remove persistent barriers and to consolidate further the gains and progress already achieved.

1.41 The Government's commitment to improve the status of women has intensified over time. Mainstreaming gender into social and economic development plans is a continuous process to be undertaken by line ministries and state agencies (implementing women specific programmes and projects). Even so, Malaysia is an example of a country which has, since gaining independence, made great progress in improving the quality of life and status of women, particularly in providing them with ever-increasing opportunities to become stakeholders in the country's economic development.

**Box 1.3: Selected Relevant Declarations and Action Plans Signed by the Government of Malaysia**

- Equal Remuneration Convention (ILO No. 100), 1951;
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupational) Convention (ILO No. 111), 1958;
- First World Conference on Women 1975;
- International Women's Decade (1975–1985);
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1978;
- Third World Conference on Women, 1985;
- Declaration on the Advancement of Women in the ASEAN Region, 1988;
- Earth Summit Agenda, 1991;
- Geneva Declaration for Rural Women by the Summit on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women, 1992;

- World Social Development Conference, 1994;
- International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 1994;
- Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995;
- World Food Summit, 1996;
- Micro-Credit Summit, 1997;
- An Update to the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development: Advancing the Commonwealth Agenda for Gender Equality into the New Millennium (2000–2005);and
- Beijing Plus 5, Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century (Special Session of the Venereal Assembly, 5–9 June 2000).

## **Chapter 2**

### **EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN**

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#### **I.INTRODUCTION**

2.01 Article 12 (1) of the Federal Constitution which guarantees the right to education for all Malaysians regardless of gender has enabled Malaysian women to gain equal access to education and training. They have benefited from the increased access as indicated by the improvement in women's literacy rates and net enrolment at all levels of education since independence. Education, formal and non-formal has been vital for the personal, social and economic development of the women in Malaysia. An ongoing process, it has been the means for improving the knowledge, skills and attitudes of Malaysian women and their development capacity. With higher educational attainment Malaysian women are able to participate actively in the development of the nation, exercise their voice in the family, the community, place of work and the public arena of politics as well as enjoy greater economic independence. Despite the improved educational attainment of Malaysian women, gender differences still exist in enrolment in science and technical subjects, and the education they receive has gender stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality.

2.02 This chapter will trace the achievement of women in education and training, formal and informal, since independence. The advancement of women in formal education will be discussed in terms of the progress made with regard to accessibility to education as well as the gender-related concerns such as enrolment in science and technology education. Gender-sensitive indicators such as the trends in female enrolment, the proportion of male to female student enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels as well as transition rates will be used to assess women's access to education. The progress of women in non-formal education and training is also discussed with particular reference to the impact of non-formal education programmes on rural women. This will be followed by recommendations and conclusion.

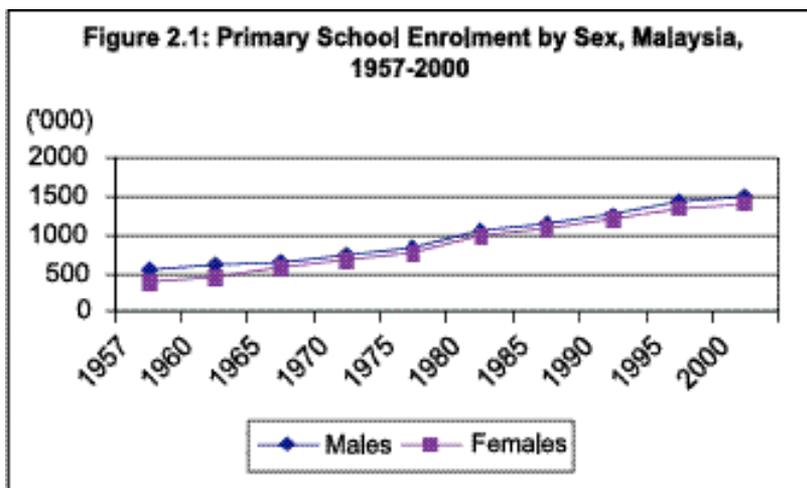
#### **II.FORMAL EDUCATION**

2.03 The achievement of women in formal education has been remarkable since independence as seen by the steady increase in participation rate at

the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Specific indicators such as the enrolment ratio, the proportion of female to male student enrolment and transition rates reflect the improvement in the educational attainment of women. Women have benefited to a large extent from the expansion of education facilities and the provision of increased educational opportunities.

### Enrolment in P rimary and Secondary Schools

2.04 Enrolment of women in primary and secondary schools progressed in tandem with the increase in access to education. The establishment of all-girls' schools such as Tunku Kurshiah College, Tun Fatimah Girls' School, Bukit Bintang Girls' School and Sri Putri Girls' School paralleled the establishment of the all-boys' schools to provide equal opportunities for

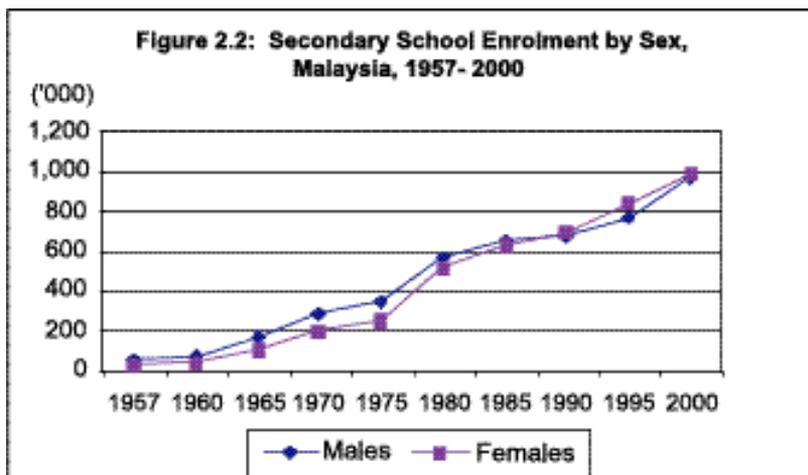


Source: Ministry of Education

girls to advance in education. Data on enrolment at primary and secondary levels indicated that there was a significant increase in the number and proportion of female students at all levels since independence. Figure 2.1 shows the primary school enrolment of male and female students during 1957-2000. Within a period of 43 years female student enrolment at the primary school level increased more than three and a half times from a total of about 390,000 students in 1957 to 1.42 million students in 2000. The ratio of males to females enrolled at the primary school level revealed that there was a higher proportion of males in primary school compared to females in the 1950s. Although the percentage of female students enrolled in primary

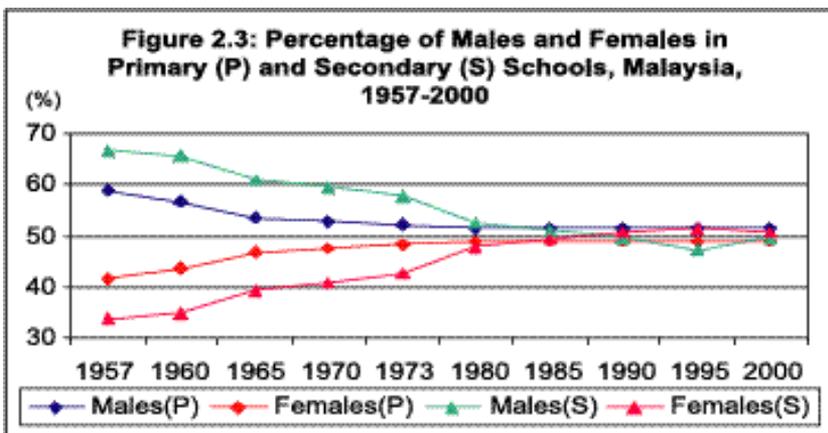
schools was still lower than that of male students in 2000, the progress made by female students is evident from the percentage improvement in female enrolment between 1957 and 2000.

2.05 The gap between the male and female student enrolment at the secondary level in the early 1960s was smaller compared to the gender gap at primary level. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the number of male and female students enrolled in secondary school was low but it progressively increased with time. The steady increase in student enrolment of both sexes continued into the early 1970s, with the increase being exceptionally high in the late 1970s as seen in Figure 2.2. In absolute terms, there were 965,054 male and 985,692 female secondary students in 2000 as against 53,974 male and 27,068 female school students in 1957.



Source: Ministry of Education

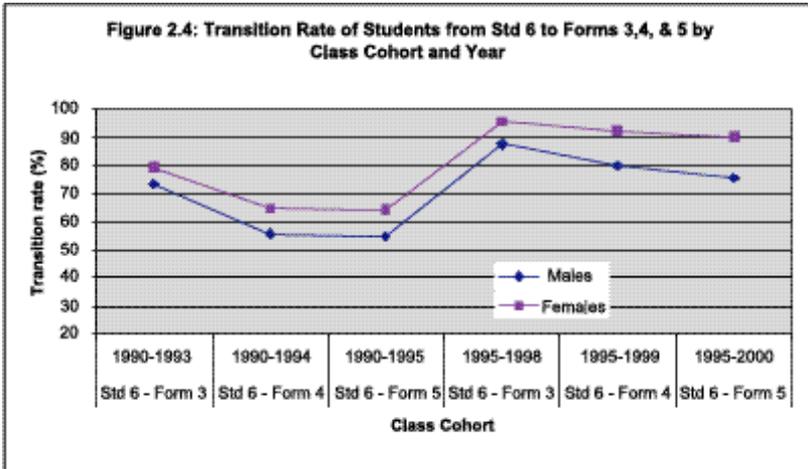
2.06 Figure 2.3 shows the proportion of male and female students enrolled in both primary and secondary schools during 1957-2000. The figure demonstrates again the progress made by females in education. The proportion of females enrolled in secondary schools was lower than that of males until 1990 when it accounted for 50.5 per cent of total enrolment. The proportion was the same in 2000. In contrast, the enrolment of female students in primary schools lagged behind that of male students during the whole period of 1957-2000.



Source: Ministry of Education

2.07 Malaysian females have access to education even at the pre-school level. The proportion of the population in the age cohort of 3-5 years who attended pre-school in 1997 was about 30 per cent. Pre-school education during the early years of independence was affordable only for the wealthy. However, affordable pre-school education is currently conducted both by public agencies as well as the private sector. In the 1980s and 1990s, female students comprised about 48 per cent of all children in pre-school, fairly close to the female-male ratio for the whole population.

2.08 The difference in the transition rates of female and male students at the secondary school level is another indicator of the achievement and educational attainment of women in Malaysia. Figure 2.4 shows the class cohorts of Standard Six students of 1990 and 1995 who remained in the school system till the upper secondary school levels during 1990-2000. In general, the transition rates of the female students were higher than their male counterparts at every secondary school level. In the 1990 class cohort of Standard Six students, 79.7 per cent of the female students progressed to Form Three compared to 73.5 per cent of the male students. More male students were leaving the school system compared to the female students. The transition rates declined after the *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* Examination (PMR) at the end of Form Three for both male and female students. Among the students of the class cohort of 1990 only 55.5 per cent of the male students and 65 per cent of the female students remained in school up to Form Four. However, the transition rates of both male and

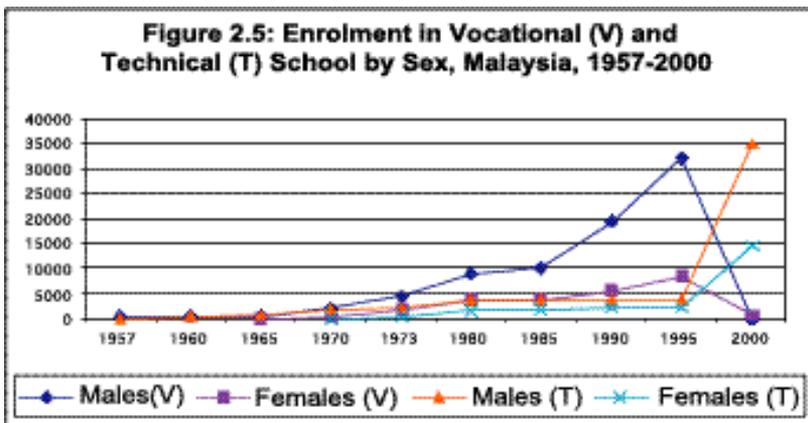


Source: Ministry of Education

female students of the 1995 class cohort improved significantly at all upper secondary school levels. 90 per cent of the female students and 75.6 per cent of male students were in Form Five, indicating that more students were staying longer in schools.

### Female Enrolment in Technical and Vocational Education

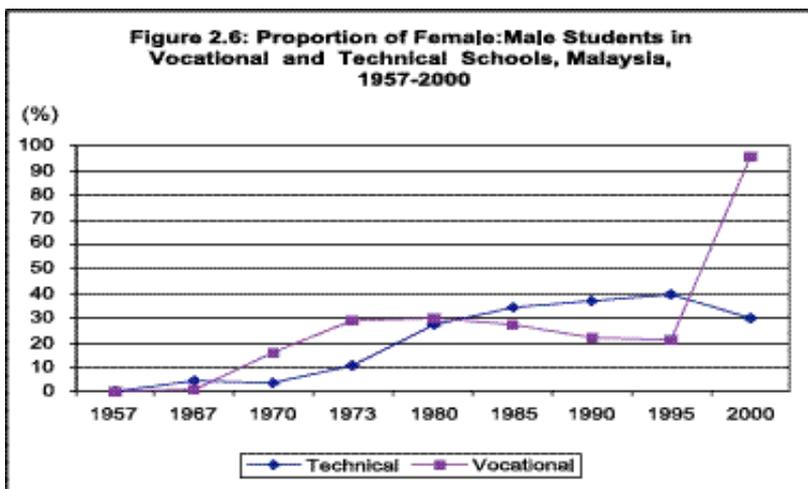
2.09 The number of male and female students in technical and vocational schools during the period, 1957-2000 has increased steadily although there were more males compared to females in the schools.



Note: There were 4 vocational and 77 technical schools in 2000

Source: Ministry of Education

Female students traditionally have shown a preference for the arts-based courses. Figure 2.5 shows the total number of students enrolled in vocational and technical education. Female students comprised 30 per cent of the total enrolment in technical and vocational schools in 2000, a rapid development compared to earlier years as seen in Figure 2.6. The first intake of female students in vocational schools was made in 1965, when 5 of the total of 558 total students enrolled were females, while for technical schools, the first batch of female students, 59 out of 1391 students was enrolled two years later in 1967.



Source: Ministry of Education

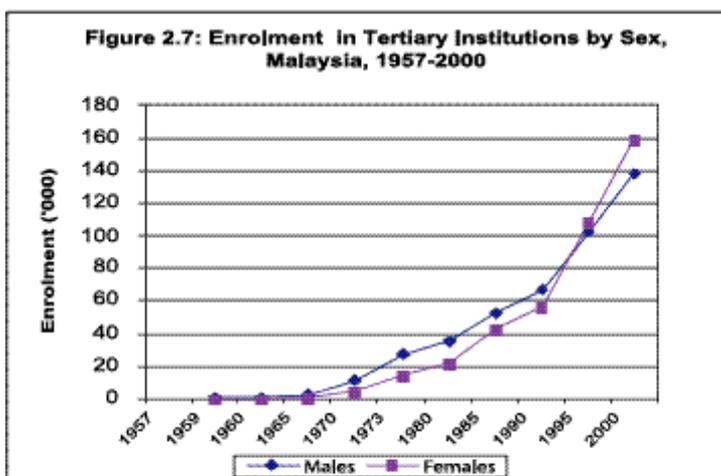
2.10 Gender preferences appeared to guide the selection of courses by students. The majority of the female students were enrolled in vocational institutes specialising in home economics courses, while the male students were dominant in the vocational and technical schools offering engineering trade courses. This gender gap and gender preferences in vocational and technical education persist until today. In the vocational and technical schools, the choice of optional courses also reflects gender preferences. The percentage of females pursuing agriculture and commerce courses was 76 per cent compared to only 12 per cent in mechanical engineering, 22 per cent in electrical engineering and 48 per cent in civil engineering trade courses. Overall, less than 10 per cent of the total female students were enrolled in the engineering trade courses while 80 per cent of them were pursuing commerce courses.

2.11 A similar trend was observed in the student enrolment in the polytechnics. Female students comprised about 30 per cent of the polytechnic students and they were mainly enrolled in the food technology, hospitality, and fashion and commerce courses. The percentage of female students in engineering was very small.

### Tertiary Education

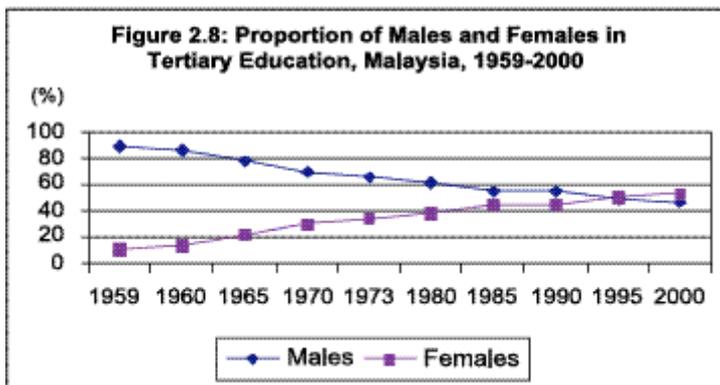
2.12 Women in tertiary education reflected the evolution of tertiary education in Malaysia, gradually expanding in number and in relative terms as tertiary education facilities expanded after independence, especially during the post-1970 period. During the early years after independence, the opportunity for post secondary education was limited. There was only one technical college and one university, initially located in Singapore and subsequently relocated to Kuala Lumpur. Many students continued their education up to university level overseas due to the lack of higher education facilities locally. Tertiary education facilities expanded rapidly during the post-1970 period arising from the establishment of new universities, technical colleges in both the public and private sectors, and the conversion of numerous colleges into universities after 1995. As tertiary educational facilities expanded, the enrolment of women in tertiary education also rose. This excludes those who studied overseas.

2.13 As shown in Figure 2.7, student enrolment at the tertiary level increased rapidly during the review period. In 1959, there were 77 female



Source: Ministry of Education

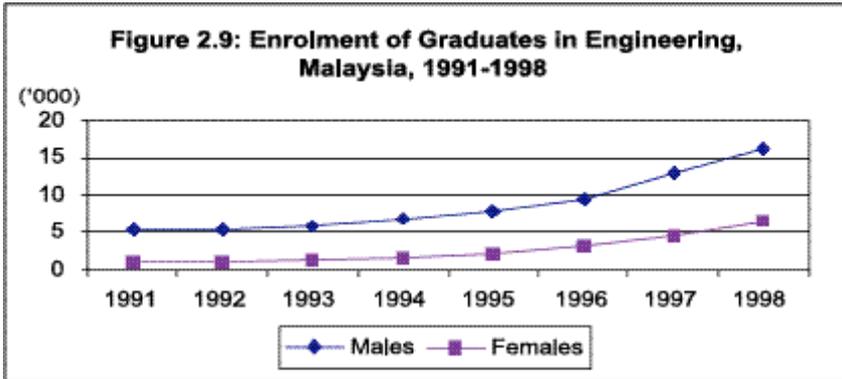
undergraduates comprising 10.7 per cent of the total student enrolment in the University of Malaya, which was the only university at that time. Male students consistently outnumbered female students in the local universities before 1995. The gap in the ratio of male to female students progressively narrowed, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, after 1995, female students exceeded male students in local institutions of higher learning, a sharp contrast to the situation 36 years earlier. Thus in 1996, there were 106 female students for every 100 males in tertiary education. The female enrolment at the tertiary level in 2000 has increased to 51.3 per cent of the total enrolment in universities. Figure 2.8 clearly illustrates the changing proportion of male and female students in tertiary education since independence.



Source: Ministry of Education

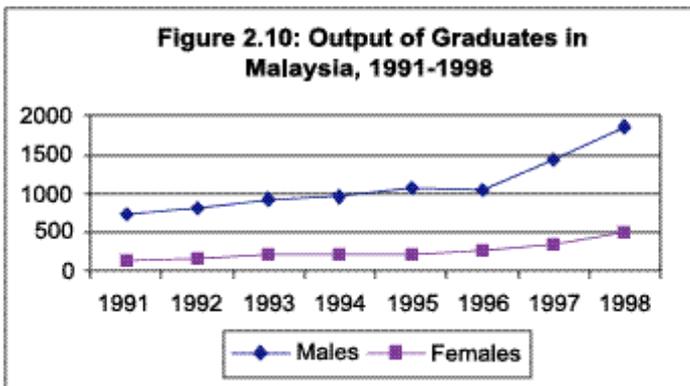
2.14 As the female student population increased, changes were also seen in the enrolment in the field of study by gender. Initially, there was a preponderance of female students in the arts faculty. In 1959, among the 77 female students enrolled in the University of Malaya only three of them were enrolled in the science faculty while the rest studied in the arts faculty. The University's faculty of engineering admitted its first female student in 1964, whilst the first female medical student was enrolled in 1963. Since then, the composition of female students enrolled in technical and science courses has changed. Figures 2.9 and 2.10 show the trends in enrolment of graduates in engineering courses in local universities for the period 1991-1998. The number of female students pursuing engineering courses has increased but the gender gap still exists despite the fact that there are more females enrolled in local universities than males. The majority of

female students do not enrol in technical courses, such as engineering, a world-wide phenomena. Consequently, the number of female students in engineering is small compared to male students. In contrast, the enrolment of female students in computer science and information technology (IT) courses was higher compared to that of engineering courses. Women comprised 51.4 per cent of total enrolment in IT courses in the seven local universities for the 1990-1991 academic year (Ng and Shanti,2000). While IT courses were popular among students regardless of gender, the same



Source: Ministry of Education

study revealed that there was a smaller percentage of female graduates enrolled in electronic/electrical courses. The entry of female students into ICT-related areas was also facilitated by the implementation of the Computer-in-Education Programme in schools; half of the members of

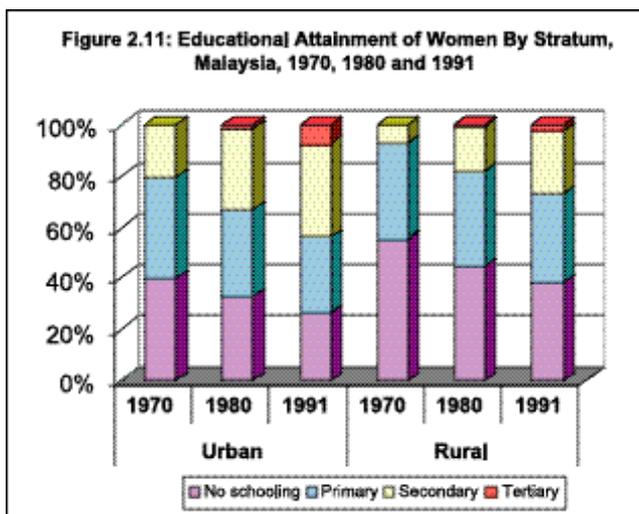


Source: Ministry of Education

computer clubs in schools were female students (Ng and Shanti,2000).

### Educational Attainment of Rural Women

2.15 The educational attainment of both rural and urban women improved as can be seen in Figure 2.11. The proportion of the female population in rural areas with no schooling declined from 55 per cent in 1970 to 27 per cent in 1991. The figure also indicated that the percentage



Source: Population Census 1970, 1980 and 1991

of both rural and urban female population with tertiary education had increased during 1971-1991. However, the progress of rural women in education was slower compared to their urban counterparts. These rural-urban differentials in educational attainment still exist for both sexes. Since rural women comprise about one quarter of Malaysia's population, they merit special attention in terms of their access to education.

### International Comparison in Educational Attainment

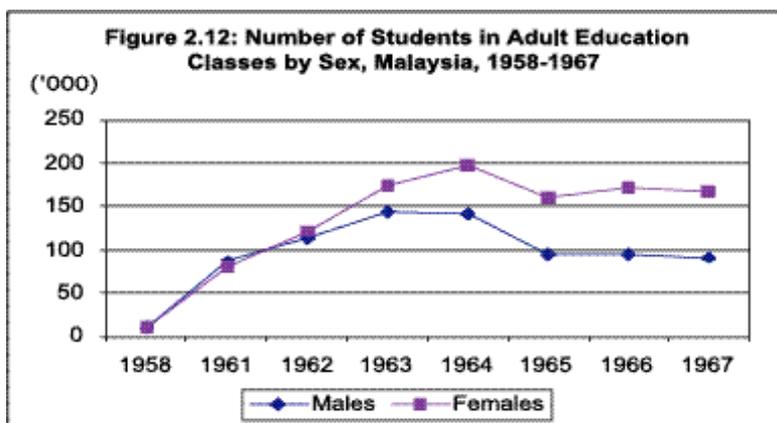
2.16 Increased access to education has resulted in a marked improvement in educational attainment for all Malaysians especially women. According to the United Nations Human Development Report of 1998, the primary enrolment ratio in Malaysia for both girls and boys in 1997 was 99 per cent, which was comparable to Japan. Furthermore, the same report reveals that Malaysia's achievement for secondary school enrolment at 115

female students for every 100 males was higher than that of Japan (100:100) and Singapore (98:100).

### III. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

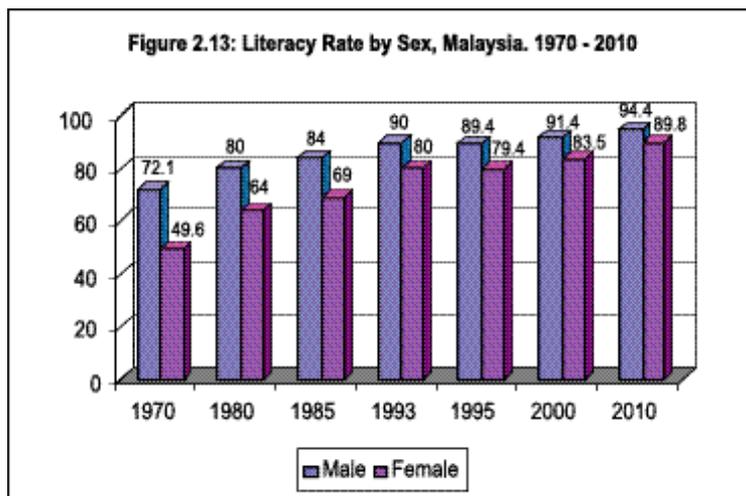
2.17 Malaysia recognises that non-formal education and training is as important as formal education is in disseminating information and imparting knowledge and new skills to women, especially to those who are no longer in the formal education system. In the early years of independence, non-formal education carried out in the country took the form of adult education classes and agriculture extension. These non-formal education programmes were usually offered by government agencies involved in rural and agricultural development.

2.18 One of the early and well-known non-formal education efforts was the literacy programme known as *Kelas Dewasa* (adult class) carried out by the Community Development Division of the Ministry of Rural Development. Figure 2.12 shows the number of students in the adult education classes during 1958- 1967. As the figure shows, the number of female students in adult education classes was lower at the beginning, but the trend reversed after 1962 when there were more female than male students. Initial interest in adult education classes was strong but its popularity appeared to decline after 1964. The adult education classes



Source: Ministry of Education, various years

focused on agricultural development and extension later expanded to include functional literacy covering three main areas, were economics, health and civic consciousness. Since the majority of students in the adult education classes were women, home economic courses (ERT) were subsequently introduced to provide women with homemaking skills. Historical data on the participation of women in these classes is not available but for the period 1981–1986, an increase of 46 per cent in the participation of women in these ERT classes was recorded. The 1996 KEMAS report indicates that



Source: UNESCO Literacy Projections, 1998

there were slightly fewer than 80,000 women actively involved in home economics and skill training classes offered by KEMAS.

2.19 Fragmentary evidence suggests that the adult education classes had been successful and beneficial to rural women. Apart from imparting useful knowledge and skills, it had also reduced the literacy rate among rural women and improved the overall literacy rate of all Malaysian women. As shown in Figure 2.13, the female literacy rate increased from 50 per cent in 1970 to 79 per cent in 1995. In terms of the rural-urban differentials, a literacy gap existed regardless of sex, but the literacy rate tended to be lower among females than among males. In 1991 the literacy rate among rural women improved from 42 per cent in 1970 to 74 per cent but this achievement by rural women was lower than that of urban women (86 per cent), rural men (86 per cent) and urban men (94 per cent).

2.20 More evidence on literacy levels is available from the UNESCO Report on Literacy Projections (1998). As shown in Figure 2.13 the literacy rate among Malaysian women increased from 79.4 per cent in 1995 to 83.3 per cent in 2000, and is expected to reach 90 per cent by 2010.

2.21 The home economics (ERT) and entrepreneurial training programmes conducted by the Department of Agriculture and other rural development agencies warrant special attention. These programmes were designed to enable women to acquire new knowledge and skills and develop motivation and leadership skills. The first ERT training was conducted in the Agriculture Training Centres in Chembong, Negeri Sembilan and Manong, Perak in 1961. The focus of the ERT training then was on improving the quality of life through improved nutrition, health and increasing the family income through home gardening. Cooking including home food processing and sewing were the most popular subjects taught in these training centres in the 1960s and 1970s.

2.22 In 1967, the ERT training for women offered by the Department of Agriculture was expanded into extension programmes and assigned to a special group of trainers, the women junior agricultural assistants. Traditional homemaking skills including cooking, sewing and food preservation were conducted by the women extension officers for groups of women. These groups, each of which numbered 2,000 had a membership of 30,000 women, and were subsequently named Women Extension Groups (WEG).

2.23 A major reorientation of the ERT programmes was again initiated in late 1980s, providing among others, entrepreneurial training for women who were involved in micro-enterprise. The initiative was rewarding because several Women's Extension Groups (WEG) were successful in either establishing or expanding their micro-enterprise. Courses offered under the new initiative focussed on enterprise development, enterprise management, financial management, good manufacturing practices, quality control, computer literacy and other business-related topics.

2.24 In addition to the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Rural Development and its agencies were also actively involved in providing non-formal education and training for women. Agencies such as the Rubber Industrial Development Authority (RISDA), Federal Land

Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) and several regional development authorities have community development programmes that encompass women-specific components such as family development, entrepreneurship, cooperatives, cottage industry development, and human resource development. In addition, the Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM), a non-government non-profit agency, focussed on providing micro-credit to aid rural women entrepreneurs. AIM provided micro-credit facilities to about 22,850 women to facilitate their involvement in small businesses, and conducted training programmes to assist single mothers in obtaining employment.

2.25 A report prepared for the Regional Steering Committee for the Advancement of Rural Women (RSC-AP) in 1998 revealed that the orientation of training and courses offered by the various agencies had shifted from the traditional homemaking skills to entrepreneurship, family development, leadership and motivation. Overall, more women especially full-time housewives were gaining access to these special programmes. These courses were often offered during office hours thereby inadvertently precluding the participation of women who were involved in regular jobs.

**Box 2.1: Scaling up Micro Enterprises, Department of Agriculture**

Research to investigate the profile of rural women who were involved in micro-enterprise, their problems and potential for expanding their enterprises was carried out in 1994. Three hundred and nineteen members of WEG all over Peninsular Malaysia were interviewed. The mean age of women in this study was 43 years old and the majority were married and had a low level of education. Though they were involved in micro enterprise, 47.5% of them indicated that they were full time homemakers. A majority of the respondents were producing snack food, followed by traditional cookies and fresh food production. Their involvement in micro enterprise contributed to about 30% of their total family income. They had attended courses offered by the Department of Agriculture. Courses attended included quality control (8 per cent), food processing (68 per cent), management (41 per cent), motivation (19 per cent) and community

*Continued on next page*

development (9 per cent). Training received improved their production skills and enabled them to venture into micro-enterprise. They received technical advice regarding their enterprises from the Department of Agriculture. There is a need to provide further training to enable them to scale up their projects, thereby contributing towards the development of small industries in the rural areas and providing job opportunities to others.

*Source: Jariah M. and Laily P. (1995) Rural Women's Involvement in Micro Enterprise: Problems and Potential for Scaling Up. Research Report Submitted to Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).*

2.26 The Ministry of Health had been providing health-related training to improve maternal and child health since independence. Improvement in the health indicators of the country can be partly attributed to the educational programmes carried out by the Ministry to improve sanitation, health status and food intake practices of the people. Though women were the initial target group of the health education programme, of late the programmes have been expanded to include men as well.

#### **IV. FUTURE CHALLENGES**

2.27 From the previous description and analysis the following issues and future challenges facing women in education and training are as follows:

- *low enrolment of women in science and technology courses at the tertiary level.* This is a major issue which needs to be addressed to bridge the gender gap in the labour market, especially in the high paying jobs. The challenge is to attract and encourage more females to venture into the sciences and the professional fields to narrow the gender gap in certain fields of study. Serious efforts have to be undertaken to eliminate any invisible gender bias in the school system as well as in the family. Data has shown that females usually opt to be in commerce and home economics courses while males choose to enter the technical and science courses. What, how and who influences this decision is still unclear. What is clear is that the streaming begins in school and in order to close the gap at the university level, the issue has to be addressed

at the primary level itself. Gender sensitisation among parents and all parties in the school system have to be carried out to ensure that the streaming of boys and girls will not be directed by the traditional gender role constructs;

- *limited skills and knowledge of working women.* This issue has to be addressed to enable them to take up new challenges and face competition. Non-formal education and training for women workers have to be flexible to accommodate the other roles women have to undertake. Gender sensitivity among the policy makers, programme planners and implementers will enable them to design non-formal education and training programmes that are more gender friendly for working women;
- *lack of a non-formal education policy in Malaysia.* The non-formal education programmes, particularly for rural women, that have been carried out by various agencies and ministries were planned and conducted independently within the scope of the functions of their respective organisations. A more concerted effort is needed to streamline the delivery of such programmes to ensure more effective implementation and greater success in upgrading the skills and knowledge of women;
- *absence of non-formal education programmes for urban women.* As the country becomes more urbanised, more women are living in urban centres. Many women from the rural areas have become part of the urban population as they migrate to the cities in search of better jobs and a perceived better condition of living. It is necessary to address their needs to enable them to adapt and cope with the challenges of urban living;
- *rigidity of non-formal training programmes.* To address this issue, non-training programmes should be dynamic, up-to-date and adaptable to the needs of women. Such programmes should address the strategic needs of women such as the ability to be involved in decision-making processes, or acquire managerial skills, computer literacy and competency in any newly emerging field. Those involved in micro-enterprise should be given the opportunity to scale up their enterprises and be trained in areas such as e-business;

- *the limited range of the educational delivery system.* Apart from the conventional channels of schools, colleges and universities, all other delivery system options should be used to upgrade the skills of women. Distance learning, self-study programmes or virtual classrooms are among the feasible options for women to further their educational attainment. The e-village program launched under the Second Rural Development Transformation Scheme can be a mechanism to get women to play an active role in the global economy;
- *limited scope of women-specific programmes.* While women-specific programmes are good, there is a need to gradually integrate these educational programmes into the mainstream training agenda. It was observed that women would discuss and participate actively in women-only meetings, but tended to be more reticent in mixed group meetings. Training aimed at developing self-confidence, communication and leadership skills is needed to ensure all women are equipped with skills to help them cope with the challenges of the new millennium;
- *limited participation of women in training programmes.* Although many training programs are available, the participation of women is still limited due to cultural, attitudinal, qualification, situational and institutional barriers (Evans, 1995). New strategies must be adopted to motivate, empower and enable women to avail themselves of the opportunities to boost their confidence, improve their skills and equip them for promotion or changing job needs as a result of globalisation. Childcare support facilities need to be provided to enable women to attend training. Family packages should be explored to attract women into attending training programmes;and
- *a dire lack of data* is a major obstacle to enabling effective monitoring and impact assessment let alone determining the current status of women. The unavailability of gender-disaggregated data constitutes one of the major constraints faced in analysing the progress of women, especially in the non-formal education and training programmes. This issue needs to be addressed particularly by the Ministry of Women and Family Development.

2.28 In general, the challenges to enhance the capability and capacity of women are as diverse as the issues confronting policymakers and educational planners. Gender sensitisation at all levels is a prerequisite to the development of gender-sensitive programmes. The ability and commitment of educational programme planners to identify gender constraints will determine the effectiveness of the efforts to integrate women into mainstream development. Gender sensitivity among teachers is imperative to discontinue the gender stereotyping of fields of study, which impact future career options for female students. Parents also need to be gender sensitive so that they can teach their children to be gender neutral.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.29 In view of the issues and challenges on gender equality in education, it is recommended that the following measures be taken to promote further the educational attainment of women:

- *encourage all government departments as well as NGOs to keep gender-disaggregated data for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation. The newly created Ministry of Women and Family Development can initiate this task;*
- *make efforts to gender-sensitised parents, teachers and school administrators to counter the traditional role socialisation of women vis-à-vis the men, and at the same time to address the gender gap in science and technology;*
- *make greater efforts to hire more male teachers to counter the larger proportion of female teachers in schools. Since Malaysia subscribes to the philosophy of partnership in development, special incentives and acknowledgement should be sought that will render the teaching profession more attractive to men to balance the number of male and female teachers in schools;*
- *formulate a policy on non-formal education to form the basis for enhancing the overall development of programmes to improve the knowledge and skills of the population. Since women have different needs compared to men, such a policy has to take into*

account the different needs of men and women in non-formal education. The non-formal education and training programmes being offered by several agencies should be coordinated;

- *develop special training programmes with the objective of assisting women to scale up their micro- enterprises.* It is imperative to target women as potential entrepreneurs and design gender-sensitive entrepreneurial training programmes to further motivate, nurture and expand the pool of successful women entrepreneurs;and
- *implement special distance learning programmes, open universities or education programmes* through the radio to reach out to the majority of women. This will facilitate non-formal learning among both rural and urban women.

## VI. CONCLUSION

2.30 Women in Malaysia have made significant progress in education. Increased literacy rates and enrolment in schools and tertiary institutions are indicators of their access to education. The number of participants in non-formal education programmes offered by various agencies reflects the accessibility of educational opportunities. While women have achieved significant progress in education, gaps still exist between the sexes as well as between the rural and urban population.

2.31 In formal education and training, gender gaps in certain fields of study still exist. The only area of women's educational advancement that Malaysia is not progressing satisfactorily in, relates to the selection of courses. Despite the increasing number of female students at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels, the concentration of female students in the arts, economics and business courses persists at all levels. Female students tend to dominate in the optional courses such as home economics and commerce, and are the minority in engineering courses. A similar trend was also observed in the vocational and technical schools. Although there was no 'intentional' segregation, the cultural practices and socialisation processes tended to perpetuate in the aspect of course selection. There have been considerable efforts made to encourage female students to venture into science and technology courses. Nevertheless, while improvements have been made, gender preferences for the arts and non-technical courses

continue to prevail even as the country enters the new millennium.

2.32 The lack of available data limits any quantitative analysis of the progress made by women in non-formal education. Available data, which is fragmentary and offers only rough orders of magnitude, suggests that the level of participation of women in non-formal education is low. Furthermore, since many agencies serve the rural communities at the same time, there is a tendency for some duplication of activities.

2.33 With the fast pace of development in the private sector and in the urban areas, the educational needs of rural and poor women and girls need to be given a special focus to prevent their marginalisation from mainstream development. In addition to addressing the practical needs of these disadvantaged groups, they also need to be gradually introduced to the new challenges of the global economy. Education and training should enable women to balance their role in the domestic domain as well as in the public domain. Skills in managing their families are as important as skills at the workplace. To optimise the contribution of women in the development of the country, educational programmes need to address the gender issues and constraints faced by women.

## **Chapter 3**

### **WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY**

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#### **I.INTRODUCTION**

3.01 Economic development and growth in Malaysia during the last four decades have created new employment opportunities benefiting both men and women. Structural changes in the economy had shifted the demand for labour to the manufacturing and service sectors. While employment expanded, the demand for female labour, both skilled and unskilled, increased in tandem with economic growth. Increased access to education leading to the improved educational attainment of women has enabled them to be gainfully employed in all economic sectors. The employment of women in all sectors of the economy has multiplied since the 1970s. More jobs, higher income and a better standard of living have substantially reduced gender inequality and raised the social and economic status of women in Malaysia.

3.02 In Malaysia today, women can be seen actively working alongside their male counterparts, in offices as diverse as that of the nation's policy-makers to the municipality and district public administration. Acknowledgement of women's capabilities and competencies by the Government of Malaysia has led to the appointment of women ministers as well as administrators joining the top echelons of the civil service. Furthermore, successful and enterprising rural women have been accorded recognition with the "Successful Woman Farmer" and "Successful Woman Entrepreneur" awards since the 1980s. Among other factors, appropriate government policies and cultural and tolerance have facilitated the participation of women in the nation's economy.

3.03 This chapter traces and highlights the participation of Malaysian women in the labour market especially with regard to changing work trends, occupational patterns as well as the employment status of women. The progress achieved will be assessed not only in quantitative terms but also the qualitative progress to reflect the narrowing gap between men and women as productive human resources available to the nation.

## II. TRENDS IN WOMEN'S ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

3.04 The participation of women in the labour force has been on a rising trend since Malaysia gained independence in 1957. They are engaged in paid employment in all the economic sectors or are employers, self-employed and unpaid family workers. Changes have been occurring in the employment pattern of women during the period 1957–2000 in line with a changing economic structure that saw the country transforming itself from an agriculture-based economy to manufacturing production, particularly after the 1970s.

### Women in the Labour Force

3.05 The female labour force continues to be an important component of the labour supply in Malaysia, accounting for 3.17 million or 33.1 per cent of the total labour force in 2000. This, however, is low compared to the proportion of women who are in the working-age group of 15–64 years, which was 48 per cent. The situation was different in 1957 when the size of the female labour force in Peninsular Malaysia was only 2.04 million or 24.3 per cent of the total labour force. In 1970, females accounted for 32 per cent of the total labour force in Malaysia although 50 per cent of them were in the working-age group. In terms of educational attainment the female labour force has become more educated since 1957, with 16.7 per cent of them having acquired tertiary education while 51.9 per cent had passed their secondary education. Only 8.6 per cent of them did not have any formal education. It is interesting to note that only 12.4 per cent of the male labour force had tertiary education, lower than that of females in 2000.

3.06 The participation rate of women has shown an increasing trend during the period 1957–2000 as shown in Table 3.1. The female labour force participation rate (LFPR) for Peninsular Malaysia in 1957 was only 30.8 per cent. In 1970, the LFPR for Malaysia as a whole was 37.2 per cent for females

**Table 3.1: Labour Force Participation Rate by Sex, Malaysia, 1957–2000**

Year	1957	1970	1980	1991	1995	2000
Labour Force Participation Rate (%)						
<i>Male</i>	88.7	79.3	84.8	85.3	84.3	83.3
<i>Female</i>	30.8	37.2	42.2	47.8	44.7	46.7

Note : Data for 1957 is only for Peninsular Malaysia.

Source : Census of Population and Housing 1957, 1970, 1980 and 1991; and Labour Force Surveys 1995 and 2000.

and 79.3 per cent for males. Although the LFPR for both males and females increased further by 2000, it can be seen that the growth in the female LFPR is higher due to a large extent by the expansion of employment opportunities in the non-agriculture sectors and women's improved educational attainment.

3.07 Although the trend of the female LFPR has been rising, the participation level of Malaysian women is still relatively low compared to developed countries. Statistics from the OECD (1999) indicate that among the developed nations, Sweden has the highest participation rate of 74.5 per cent; followed by the United States of America (74.3 per cent), Switzerland (69.4 per cent), the United Kingdom (66.8 per cent), Australia (64.7 per cent), Japan (63.7 per cent) and South Korea (54.8 per cent).

### Employment Status of Women

3.08 The employment status of women is an indicator to denote the level or quality of progress of women's participation in the economy. The female workforce can be classified into the employment status categories of "employer," "employee," "own account worker" and "unpaid family helper". An increase in the number of women working as employers, i.e. as sole proprietors of modern business or active business partners and entrepreneurs, indicates a higher level of achievement of women in the labour market. An increase in the number of women engaged as waged employees as well as a decrease in the number of unpaid family-helper workers and own account workers indicates an improvement in the status of women. Table 3.2 shows changes that have taken place in the employment status of women since 1957.

**Table 3.2: Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons by Employment Status and Sex, Malaysia, 1957–2000**

Employment Status	Male (%)					Female (%)				
	1957	1970	1980	1991	2000	1957	1970	1980	1991	2000
Employer	-	4.2	4.0	3.6	3.9	-	2.3	3.0	2.0	0.8
Employee	56.8	49.3	59.6	64.1	73.8	56.3	36.9	53.5	70.8	75.8
Own Account Worker	38.4	31.9	28.3	28.3	19.6	24.6	18.0	23.8	16.7	11.9
Unpaid Family Worker	4.8	14.6	8.1	4.0	2.7	19.1	42.8	19.7	10.5	11.5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note : Data for 1957 are for Peninsular Malaysia only and exclude the "employer" category  
 Source : Department of Statistics, Census of Population 1957, 1970, 1980 and 1991; and Labour Force Survey 2000

3.09 The percentage of females who were employers has declined, with 0.8 per cent in 2000 as against 2.3 per cent in 1970. Similarly, the percentage of males who were employers also declined in 2000 although they constituted almost 90 per cent of the total number of employers. In the employee category, there has been an improvement in the quality of women's employment as the percentage of women engaged as waged employees has risen over the period. In 2000, 75.8 per cent of the women were paid employees as against 56.3 per cent in 1957. Along the same line, the proportion of females who were own account workers declined from 24.6 per cent in 1957 to 11.9 per cent in 2000, an indication of improving the quality of women's employment. Women as unpaid workers also declined from 19.1 per cent in 1957 to 11.5 per cent in 2000 although they still comprised more than two-thirds of all unpaid family workers.

3.10 In terms of the distribution of employed women by age groups, the highest concentration of employed women was within the age group of 20–24 years, particularly after the 1990s. When analysed by marital status for the period 1975 to 1984, the proportion of single working-women was higher than married working-women, which ranged between 54.4 per cent in 1975 to 51.7 per cent in 1984. There was a lower participation of married women during the same period (which, in fact, showed a decline from 43 per cent in 1975 to 39.1 per cent in 1984). However, the proportion of married working-women underwent a significant reversal from the late 1980s, with the number of working-women escalating to 55.3 per cent in 1990 and 58.4 per cent in 2000. In 1990, about 76 per cent of the married working-women were concentrated within the reproductive age group between 30 to 34 years (Labour Force Surveys, 1990 and 2000, Department of Statistics, Malaysia). This also implies that the percentage of dual-income families has increased with the percentage increase of married working women.

### **Employment by Sector**

3.11 The employment of women in all economic sectors expanded during the period 1957–2000 in tandem with the country's economic growth. Overall, females accounted for 34.7 per cent of total employment in 2000 compared to only 24.5 per cent in 1957. However, as seen in Table 3.3, there has been a change in the distribution of employment by sector for both females and males during the same period. The manufacturing and service sectors have become the key drivers for employment creation and absorbers of labour. There has been a gradual shift of female employment from the

agriculture sector to these two sectors, similar to that of male employment. The proportion of female employment in the agriculture sector peaked in 1957, at 76.7 per cent of the female workforce and gradually declined throughout the 1970s to 1990s. By 2000, the agriculture sector accounted for only 14.1 per cent of total female employment.

3.12 The majority of female workers were in the *manufacturing sector* in 2000 unlike the situation in 1957 when only 7 per cent of the male employment and 4.3 per cent of the female employment were attributed to the manufacturing sector. The proportion of males in this sector gradually increased, but for females, the rate of increase was more rapid. In 1970, the proportion of females engaged in the manufacturing sector was 8.5 per cent, twice the proportion in 1957. By 1980, the proportion of females in the manufacturing sector was 16.3 per cent and had overtaken that of the males, which was 11.8 per cent. From then onwards, women's participation in the manufacturing sector increased rapidly, reaching a peak of 27.1 per cent in 2000.

3.13 Within the manufacturing sector, women were predominantly employed in the electronics and electrical, garment/textile and food processing industries while the men were employed in heavy industries such as iron/steel and car manufacturing. While women comprised 75 per cent of the workforce in the electronics and electrical industry they formed more than 90 per cent and 85 per cent of the workforce in the garment industries and textile industries respectively (Jamilah Ariffin, 1994). As of 1998 the trend of occupational segmentation and stratification by gender in the manufacturing sector, according to job categories, still persisted. Although the share of managerial and professional posts occupied by women in this sector had increased from 10.1 per cent in 1978 to 22.5 per cent in 1998, there existed a disproportionately high representation of men in the professional, technical and supervisory positions. On the other hand, women dominated in the category of directly employed skilled workers, mainly as production workers.

3.14 The *services sector* also registered an increasing share of female employment during the period 1957–2000. The sector covers a variety of sub-sectors, namely, wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants, finance, insurance, real estate, and community, social and personal services. The community, social and personal services sub-sector in particular had

the largest increase in female employment. In 1957, the proportion of women in this service sub-sector was only 11.2 per cent but by 2000, it became the largest sector absorbing women labour, accounting for 27.4 per cent of total female employment.

**Table 3.3: Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons by Sector and Sex, Malaysia, 1957–2000**

	1957		1970		1980		1991		2000	
	M (%)	F (%)								
Agriculture and Forestry	52.6	76.7	45.4	58.9	37.5	49.3	28.9	28.2	20.2	14.1
Mining and Quarrying	3.1	1.8	2.6	0.8	1.4	0.3	0.7	0.2	0.4	0.1
Manufacturing	7.0	4.3	9.5	8.5	11.8	16.3	15.2	24.3	20.5	27.1
Electricity, Gas and Water	0.7	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.7	0.2
Construction	3.9	1.0	3.0	0.5	6.4	1.0	8.7	0.7	12.3	1.5
Wholesale, Retail trade, Hotels and Restaurants	12.7	4.0	11.0	5.3	13.1	11.2	16.9	19.7	17.6	22.1
Transport, etc	4.5	0.3	5.0	0.5	5.0	0.7	5.9	1.5	6.1	1.7
Finance, Insurance, etc	0.4	0.1	1.0	0.5	1.9	1.6	4.0	3.9	4.5	5.9
Community, Social and Personal Services	14.0	11.2	17.7	16.4	22.7	19.5	18.8	21.4	17.2	27.4

Note : Data for 1957 and 1970 are for Peninsular Malaysia.

Source : Department of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 1957, 1970, 1980 and 1991; and Labour Force Survey 2000.

3.15 The government services sub-sector, which falls within the services sector, was an important employer, accounting for 10.6 per cent of total employment in 2000, of which 42 per cent were female employees. The proportion of females employed in the public sector increased by 50 per cent during the period 1980–2000. Although the majority of female government employees were in the C and D categories or support staff group, there was an increase in the number of women occupying posts in the managerial and professional categories. In 1968, only 1.1 per cent of female employees and professionals were in this category, by 2000 the percentage rose to 15.9 per cent.

3.16 The wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants sub-sector emerged as the third largest sector offering employment to women, accounting for 22.1 per cent of female employment in 2000. As seen in Table 3.4, in 1998, employees in hotels and hospitality management services comprised 41 per cent women. Although women occupied 32 per cent of the managerial and professional posts, they represented only 7 per cent of total females in this industry. In addition, women in technical and supervisory positions represented only about 13 per cent of total females in the industry. The majority of women worked as general workers such as telephone operators, waitresses and chambermaids. A substantial proportion of women, 52 per cent, were also employed in tourist and travel agencies, where more than half of the supervisory and technical workers comprised women while 39 per cent of the managerial and professional personnel were females. However, 66 per cent of all the females employed in these agencies worked as clerical and support staff. Women's participation in these industries could be further improved by increasing the number of female managerial, professional and supervisory personnel.

3.17 At the beginning of 1980, Malaysian women also ventured into another service industry, namely, finance, real estate, insurance and business services. The proportion of women in this sub-sector increased from 1.6 per cent in 1980 to 5.9 per cent in 2000. The real estate industry under this sub-sector (Table 3.4) offered wide opportunities for women to be involved in professional businesses. This type of service requires highly qualified and knowledgeable workers, irrespective of gender. Hence, the opportunity is wide open for women to participate not only as professional workers but also as proprietors and business partners. Their participation has increased steadily over the years. In 1998, about 48 per cent of all employees

in the real estate industry were women, of whom 9 per cent were engaged as professionals in managerial or executive positions and 8 per cent were employed as technicians and supervisors. The majority, however, were employed as support staff.

**Table 3.4: Distribution of Employees in Selected Service Industries by Gender, Malaysia, 1998**

Types of Service Industries	1998		
	Total Employee	Male %	Female %
<b>Hotels and other Lodging Places</b>	67,031	59	41
Managerial and Professional	6,061	68	32
Technical and Supervisory	11,397	69	31
Clerical and Related Occupations	9,635	43	57
General Workers	39,938	59	41
<b>Real Estate Agents</b>	2,014	56	44
Managerial and Professional	319	74	26
Technical and Supervisory	309	75	25
Clerical and Related Occupations	1,212	46	54
<b>Tourist and Travel Agencies</b>	9,939	48	52
Managerial and Professional	1,924	61	39
Technical and Supervisory	1,388	43	57
Clerical and Related Occupations	4,639	28	72
<b>Stock, Commodity and Foreign Exchange Brokers</b>	9,250	54	46
Managerial and Professional	2,203	62	38
Technical and Supervisory	2,799	53	47
Clerical and Related Occupations	3,836	47	53

Source : Department of Statistics, Census of Selected Service Industries, 1999

3.18 Similarly, 46 per cent of the employees in the stock, commodity and foreign exchange brokers industry were women. While women occupied 38 per cent of the managerial and professional posts, they represented only 20 per cent of the total number of women employed in this industry. The majority of them, 48 per cent, were in the clerical and support staff posts.

### **Employment by Occupational Category**

3.19 An analysis of female employment by occupational category over the years from 1957 to 2000 confirms the rising trend of women moving into occupations which require post-secondary education. In 2000, the proportion of females in the professional, technical and related workers category was 44.6 per cent compared to 28.2 per cent in 1957 (Table 3.5). Female employment in this occupational category was increasing at a faster rate than male employment, particularly from the 1980s onwards. According to the Dictionary of Occupational Classification, this category not only accounts for the highly qualified professionals such as lawyers, engineers, accountants and doctors but also includes other professionals such as teachers, nurses, technicians, religious workers, performing artists and social workers. The rapid increase in this category was largely due to the entry of a large number of female teachers and nurses who had attained post-secondary educational qualifications and training.

3.20 The share of female employment within the administrative and managerial occupational category also registered a perceptible improvement, rising from 2.0 per cent in 1957 to 20.2 per cent in 2000. The increase is attributed partly to the rise in the employment of female diploma-holders and degree graduates, as the labour force participation rate of females with tertiary education had been increasing and was 61 per cent in 2000. Among the females in gainful employment in 2000, at least 16 per cent had tertiary education while 51.6 per cent had completed secondary education. With higher levels of educational attainment, 2.3 per cent of all employed females were holding jobs in the administrative and managerial occupational category, compared to 4.9 per cent of all employed males as shown in Figure 3.1. It is interesting to note that only 12.5 per cent of the total number of males employed had acquired tertiary education in 2000.

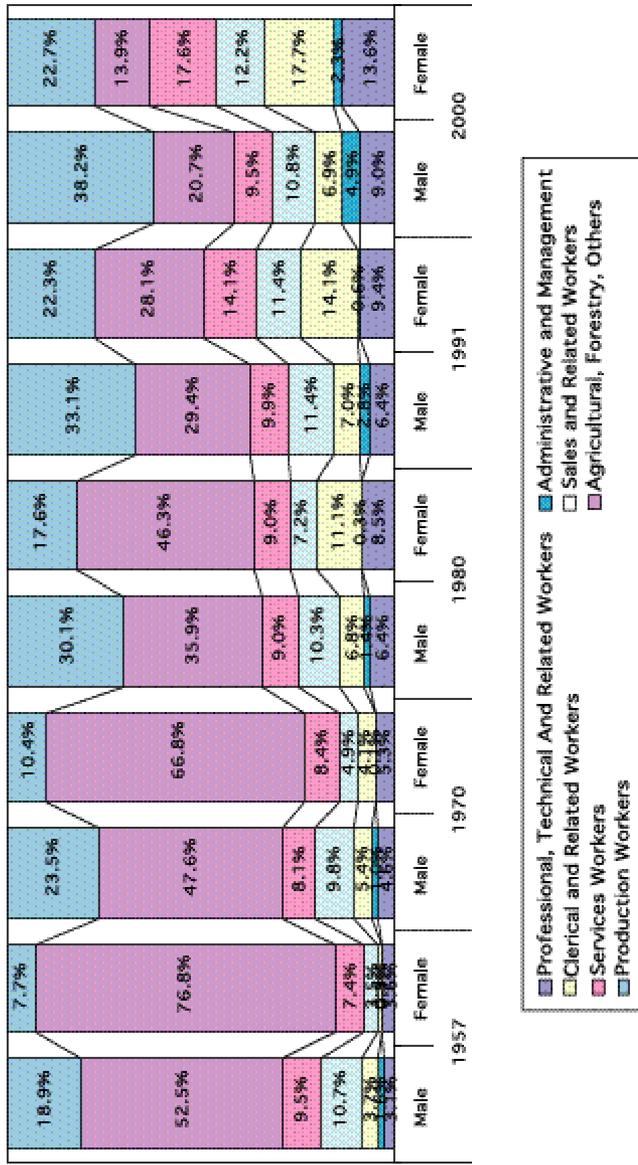
**Table 3.5: Share of Employment by Gender within Occupational Categories, Malaysia, 1957–2000**

Occupational Category	1957		1970		1980		2000	
	Males (%)	Females (%)						
Professional and Technical	71.8	28.2	66.1	33.9	61.8	38.2	55.4	44.6
Administrative and Managerial	98.0	2.0	96.9	3.1	91.7	8.3	79.8	20.2
Clerical	92.6	7.4	74.7	25.3	56.7	43.3	42.3	57.7
Sales Workers	90.1	9.9	81.8	18.2	75.2	24.8	62.3	37.7
Service Workers	79.2	20.8	68.2	31.8	67.9	32.1	50.5	49.5
Agricultural Workers	66.9	33.1	61.5	38.5	62.6	37.8	73.7	26.3
Production Workers	88.9	11.1	83.4	16.6	78.4	21.6	76.0	24.0
Total	75.5	24.5	67.4	32.6	68.0	32.0	65.3	34.7

Source : Department of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 1957, 1970 and 1980; and Labour Force Survey 2000

3.21 Female workers had become dominant in the three occupational categories of clerical and related workers, services workers, and sales workers, accounting for 57.7 per cent, 49.5 per cent and 37.7 per cent of total employment respectively in 2000. The situation was different in 1957 when the male share of the employment in these categories was higher, 93 per cent of total employment in the clerical and related workers category, 90 per cent in the sales workers category and 79 per cent in the service workers category. As more women acquired at least a secondary education they could compete with the men for employment in these occupational categories. In addition, the growing importance of the manufacturing and service sectors in employment creation since early 1980 had changed the nature of tasks associated with these occupations, which required different skills and more feminine traits. Employers were recruiting more women as they were more suitable for these occupations, thus contributing to the increased share of female employment. In 2000, nearly half or 47.5 per cent of all females employed were working in these three occupational categories.

Figure 3.1  
Percentage Distribution of Employed Persons by Occupation and Gender, Malaysia, 1957-2000



Source: Department of Statistics, Census Population & Housing 1957, 1970, 1980, 1991, and Labour Force Survey 2000

3.22 Within the production and related workers occupational category, the share of employment by females was 11.1 per cent in 1957 but by 2000, it had increased to 24 per cent, implying that the share of employment by males had declined by more than 10 per cent. Among the employed females, 7.7 per cent were working as production workers in 1957 and in 2000 it was 22.7 per cent.

3.23 The employment of women as agricultural workers declined in tandem with the overall fall in economic and employment growth of the agriculture sector. Female workers accounted for 33 per cent of the total 1.71 million agricultural workers in 1957. By 2000, females accounted for only 26 per cent out of a total of 1.26 million workers in this category. In the 1950s, the majority of the agricultural workers were males and this scenario still prevailed in 2000. However, among employed females the percentage who were employed as agricultural workers declined rapidly particularly after 1980 as seen in Figure 3.1. In 1957, more than three-quarters of employed females were in the agricultural workers category and the proportion declined to 46 per cent in 1980. It dropped further to 13.9 per cent in 2000. Besides the slower growth of the sector, the use of labour-saving techniques in production and processing in the agriculture sector further reduced the requirements for manual workers. Female workers with secondary education were also recruited as clerks, service workers and production workers in the manufacturing and services sectors.

### **Potential Growth Areas: Women in Business and Professional Services**

3.24 The number of women who are working as employers or proprietors and business partners is still relatively low compared to men. In 2000, only 10.4 per cent of the 3.23 million working females were employers while more than a third of them were paid employees in all economic sectors. As more women acquire tertiary education they have the ability to operate their businesses. Potential exists in the services sector where Malaysian women can further enhance their economic participation and employment status.

3.25 An increasing number of highly-educated professional Malaysian women are entering business and modern professional services. They work as proprietors, active business partners, or practicing professionals in private organisations such as legal firms, accountancy firms, business services, private hospitals, or medical centres. The gender gap seemed to

have narrowed tremendously among male and female professionals in selected services. In 1996, about 54 per cent of professional staff in legal firms were females while in accountancy services establishments, the male-female ratio for professionals was 5.1: 4.9 and in dental clinics the male-female ratio for dentists was 5.6:4.3. In medical clinics, females accounted for 30 per cent of professional staff. There were still very few professional women in the male-dominated engineering, survey and architectural firms, implying a lucrative potential growth area for women to expand their economic activities.

### **Women Entrepreneurs: Progressing From Micro-Enterprises to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)**

3.26 Malaysian women have long been involved in business as petty traders, unpaid helpers in family business enterprises, or as operators of micro-enterprises, both in rural and urban areas. The challenge now is to upgrade the level of entrepreneurship, venturing into business in areas that offer opportunities such as educational and training services, food business, health care, financial services, personal services or in new services such as information and communication technology (ICT). Although limited in terms of numbers and industries, Malaysian women entrepreneurs currently are either owners or have control over businesses providing services such as training and consultancy, child-care and pre-school, beauty and skin care; with the range of business extending into the production of rattan furniture, property management, construction, the oil and gas industry, and insurance.

3.27 The development of women entrepreneurs has received active Government support during the last two decades. In rural areas, the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry of Agriculture offer programmes to scale up women's micro-enterprises into small-scale enterprises. In urban areas, credit facilities are available to women professionals to set up businesses. However, data from a case study (Jariah and Laily, 1997) indicated some undesirable developments where micro-enterprises which were scaled up to bigger enterprises were subsequently managed and taken over by the husbands or other male family members.

3.28 There are abundant opportunities for women to venture into business using their existing skills and inclinations. The task ahead is to add professionalism to what used to be cottage industries and take advantage

**Box 3.1: Datuk Muhaiyani Shamsuddin, Founder and Managing Director of Muhaiyani Securities Sdn.Bhd . and Deputy Chair person of Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange**

Datuk Muhaiyani Shamsuddin is an example of a new breed of Malaysian women who has made her mark in the financial services and corporate world. She is a clear testimony of the rise of women power in the corporate world in Malaysia.

After completing her post-secondary education in Penang, Datuk Muhaiyani secured a scholarship to pursue a degree in Knox College, a liberal arts college in Indiana, USA despite parental objections. Her next academic stop was Cornell University where she studied for her MBA and was initiated into the world of finance and politics. This academic introduction to the financial services world marked the start of an illustrious career of a talented and visionary lady.

Upon her return in 1975, she joined the Urban Development Authority (UDA), a statutory government organisation, which provided her the opportunity to develop and enhance her managerial and organisational skills. A six-year stint in the Amanah Chase Merchant Bank saw Datuk Muhaiyani rise to the second highest position in the bank - the highest attained by women at that point.

In 1985, this talented and assertive lady was ready to spread her wings and put to test her entrepreneurial and business skills. With her husband as a business partner, she founded and became the Managing Director of Muhaiyani Securities, a stock broking firm in Petaling Jaya, Selangor. The economic-political environment was booming then and Muhaiyani Securities steadily grew to its present strength of 120 staff and 100 remisiers. Datuk Muhaiyani's business acumen and prudence were well-tested during the economic downturn in 1997–1998, and unlike most brokering firms, her business remained stable and came out unscathed.

Like all successful entrepreneurs and leaders, Datuk Muhaiyani's talents have not gone unnoticed and at the national level, she is one of those individuals who have been handpicked to serve in several high-level policy and decision-making bodies, notably the Malaysian Economic Action Committee (MTEN), the High-Level Committee on Corporate Governance,

National Economic Consultative Council II (MAPEN II), the Advisory Council on Capital Market, and she is also a committee member of the Strategic Capital Market. She is the current Deputy Chairperson of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange.

Datuk Muhaiyani also assumes a leadership role in various women centred entrepreneurship associations, notably PENIAGAWATI, NAWEM and FEM. She is also a member of the National Council of Women and Development (NACIWID). Datuk Muhaiyani firmly believes that Malaysian women have the capability and commitment to advance in any field. However, she also admits that women have to struggle harder to be recognised in their work and for their contributions due to what she termed as a "perception based on religious-cultural environment, which perpetuates the attitude that women are second class citizens" (Interview with the New Straits Times, 8 March 2001).

Datuk Muhaiyani attributed her success to the Government's New Economic Policy (1970–1990) that gave her the opportunity and facilitated her entry into the business world. She spoke warmly of her husband, another successful corporate player, for his support right from the start of her remarkable career. He is, she asserted, her mentor. His emotional, moral and intellectual support keeps her reaching for the sky.

*Source: Personal interview, July 2001*

of the support and credit facilities available from the Ministry of Entrepreneurial Development, and some 40 other schemes that offer capital loans, services and consultations for business and entrepreneurial development. In Malaysia, Government support is a cornerstone of women's entrepreneurial development especially for rural women. Risk-taking by women in business in Malaysia is not unknown but is an attribute that requires sustained Government support and guidance.

### **III. FUTURE CHALLENGES**

3.29 Despite the progress made by Malaysian women in all the key economic sectors, issues and challenges still exist which retard women's full and effective participation in the economy. The majority of women workers are concentrated in low-skilled and low-waged jobs and in

certain occupations. Women are also under-represented in top managerial and decision-making posts. The constraints faced by women, whether at work or within the family and community, are often based on by gender constructs on the role, behaviour, decision-making processes and the relationship between men and women. The gender-specific issues that have slowed down women's progress are as follows:

- *Attitude towards women and work:* The attitude of the majority of Malaysian society towards women at work can be considered to be benign. Working women from poor families contribute significantly to family income and survival. However, there are still some Malaysians who uphold the belief that a woman's primary duty is to carry out domestic and child-rearing duties although this belief is gradually breaking down with the onslaught of education and cultural globalisation. Husbands are the main breadwinners in the family. Women are rarely acknowledged as "co-providers" to the family economic well-being. Women's role is therefore perceived by society to be supportive to men or to their husbands. This is a manifestation of the traditional gender constructs which places women in subordinate positions. The concept of women as marginal workers is also reflected in the behaviour of a majority of women employees whose careers are secondary to family responsibilities once they embark on marital life. Very few pursue a career path to become successful professionals, especially when they have to juggle their time between work and family. Many opt for early retirement once their husbands can financially afford a comfortable family life.
- *Sex role stereotyping and gender division of labour* reinforce the classification of jobs as a male or female job and underpin wage differentials. Based on their "feminine" attributes, women stereotyped as soft, gentle, nurturing, caring, patient, disciplined, emotional, unpredictable, etc. On the other hand, men's attributes are stereotyped as strong, unemotional, risk-taking, objective and rational, aggressive, etc. A woman's feminine attributes are perceived as desirable and suitable for certain jobs such as teaching, nursing, or work in factories that demand long hours of concentration and dexterity. This has led to large numbers of women being employed in the teaching and nursing professions

while less educated women tend to find employment in the “female industries”, i.e. the electronic, textile/garment and food processing industries. Such trends in turn result in gender profiling of occupations in selected manufacturing and service industries.

- *The multiple roles of women* either as workers or employers, and as wives, mothers and healthcare givers have implications on their mental and physical health. The increased workload, especially in the case of women from dual-income families with small children, produces strains and stresses that can affect their health, work productivity and family harmony. Sharing of family responsibilities and reproductive tasks has yet to be accepted by Malaysian society at large, especially in older cohort groups. Among educated dual-income couples, steps toward gender equality are taking place amongst young families in urban areas. Unfortunately, the changing role of fathers is building up stress among men due to the inter-role conflicts, when they have to face the dilemma of allocating time to fulfil family and work demands; while at the same time face society's disapproval with regard to the manifestation of their changing role.
- *Gender segmentation and stratification* pose as barriers to women's entry and promotion into occupations considered to be male dominated. As documented by numerous researchers in Malaysia, most of the female-dominated factories in the industrial zones offer low wages and very little prospects for upward mobility. The wages offered to employees are comparatively lower than wages in male-dominated industries. Even wages for mid-level positions differ between male and female workers.
- *Gender discrimination at the workplace*, which exists to some extent in Malaysia, can be subtle and refers to an invisible barrier often termed “glass ceiling”; that exists in organisations. Women often encounter this glass ceiling in promotion exercises to higher management level. It is a gender-based barrier formed as a result of negative attitudes towards women, sex stereotyping, and at times, prejudices against women. Such attitudes are often present at the workplace and of course produce adverse effects

for promotion (or any other work assignments) affecting women's interests. With regard to women in the higher levels of the corporate ladder as well as premier posts in the government service, several issues have been identified from the trends in women's employment. First, there is an overwhelmingly disproportionate under-representation of women in top leadership positions (between 15 per cent and 17 per cent only). It was also observed that the waiting period for women to be promoted to top management is longer than men. There were cases in the public service where frustrated women who had been stalled from reaching very senior management positions took optional retirement. The few women who have managed to break the glass ceiling in Malaysia are exceptional.

In a study by Tan (1991) on women in the government service, the respondents, who were high-level officials in the public sector, strongly expressed their belief that no special preference should be given to gender when evaluating candidates for promotion. But they also stated that certain promotion positions might not be "suitable" for women for various reasons, such as the level of complexity and responsibility of the job requirements. Thus, it can be said that pre-judgement has taken place before women candidates have the chance to participate. Such censure limits to some extent chances for women to develop their potential and show their capabilities.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.30 Taking into account future opportunities given by a changing and expanding economy, more concrete steps are required to enable women to move at a faster pace in economic participation and gain greater gender equality. The following recommendations are proposed to further increase the progress of Malaysian women:

- *increase gender awareness* and incorporate women into mainstream human resource development programmes in both the public and private sectors, by giving gender awareness and sensitivity training to policy-makers and decision-makers at all levels;

- *equip the majority of women workers with relevant IT skills* required by the industry in view of the future direction and change in Malaysia's industrialisation and ICT policy. Technical and industrial training should be targeted at new female employees and re-training be given to current employees to fit into the requirements of higher technology industries. With increased gender sensitivity, gender segmentation and division of labour according to sex could be eliminated at the workplace;
- *emphasise equal partnership between husbands and wives in carrying out tasks and responsibilities* in the home to lighten the work burden of women, while dissemination on the practice should be undertaken by the Government through the media and other appropriate means;
- *encourage more employers to provide the necessary support* (such as day care centres for the young and after-school care arrangements for school-going children) and alternative work arrangements (flexi-time, compressed work-week, etc) as well as other facilities needed by husbands and wives from dual-income families.
- *make special efforts to monitor and protect women in rural and informal sectors*, especially those in home-based work, from exploitation and to develop some form of social safety net (perhaps group insurance) for them to fall back on in times of crisis;
- *further expand and target gender-sensitive entrepreneurial development programmes* and business opportunities for women, especially female heads of households, as well as provide supporting facilities including women-friendly credit (for low-income and non-poor women) to operate, market and scale up their micro-enterprises;
- *develop programmes on ICT for women from various socio-economic classes* and geographical locations so that they can utilise the new technology to access information that can improve and enhance their work, business and family life, thereby enhancing their quality of life; and

- *ensure that sex-disaggregated data*, particularly on employment and work patterns, be collected by all agencies in the public and private sectors. Such information can be used to evaluate the differential effect of policies and programmes on women's participation in employment.

## V. C ONCLUSION

3.31 It cannot be denied that since independence, with greater access to education, Malaysian women have progressed remarkably as economic participants, in line with the direction of the country's economic development. The rapid increase of women's participation in the labour force and in various sectors of the economy testifies to the progress achieved as women diversified their activities, from agriculture to non- agriculture and the service industries, in both the formal and informal sectors. However, the quality of women's involvement in the labour market and corporate world would be more significant and meaningful if the share of female employment in high-level managerial and professional occupations as well as chief executive posts could be increased to a level compatible with their educational level. To close the gender gap in the workplace, the mindset of employers and policy-makers needs to be changed through more aggressive gender awareness programmes via the media. The full potential of women as a critical economic resource, which can contribute to the growth and development of the country would have to be widely publicised and promoted in the such programmes.

3.32 In this new millennium Malaysia will face many challenges ahead, especially relating to rapid changes in the socio-economic and technological environment. Malaysians, and especially women, have to prepare and equip themselves with the necessary and relevant marketable skills needed by both the manufacturing and service industries. Globalisation, trade liberalisation, the k-economy and k-workers, the ICT revolution, and the high technology production/manufacturing processes require workers with a different set of skills and qualifications. These developments will have long-term implications on the role of women in the economy.

## Chapter 4

### WOMEN AND HEALTH

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

4.01 Malaysian women today are healthier, live longer and have a better quality of life compared to their counterparts in the 1950s. Access to quality health services, increases in nutrient intake, and better sanitation and water supply have contributed to the improved health status of women in Malaysia since independence in 1957. The increasing life expectancy at birth and the declining maternal mortality and morbidity rates are indicators of improvements in the health condition of Malaysian women. The rise in life expectancy of women is higher than that of men. With a maternal mortality rate of 0.2 per 1,000 live births in 2000, the health status of women in Malaysia is comparable to that of developed countries. Improvements in the Malaysian women's health status during the last four decades have been the key to their well-being and active participation in the country's economic and social development. Efforts to expand and develop health services targeted at women and the family had been successful in reducing the incidence of death arising from communicable and non-communicable diseases as well as promoting healthy families, even in rural areas.

4.02 Although health care for women has expanded since 1957, it assumed a new significant and perspective in 1994 when the notion of reproductive health was introduced. Reproductive health, as defined in the next paragraph, subsequently formed the basis of a plan of action initiated by the Government to manage women's health in the country. The new health perspective was to strengthen and expand the range of services and facilities, and enhance the quality of healthcare available to women.

4.03 This chapter traces the health status of women from the onset of independence in 1957 through to the end of the millennium. It focuses on "reproductive health" which is seen within the scope of the physical, mental and social well-being of women and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity, and all matters relating to the reproductive system and its functions and processes. It also highlights women's access to reproductive health services which include family planning, prenatal care, safe delivery

and postnatal care, prevention and treatment of infertility, abortion, and treatment of reproductive tract infections and sexually transmitted diseases. Basic health indicators such as nutritional status, morbidity and mortality rates are used to indicate the progress achieved in improving the health status of women, while factors which impinge on women's health are also examined in terms of policy implications.

## **II.GENERAL HEALTH STATUS**

### **Indicators of Health Status**

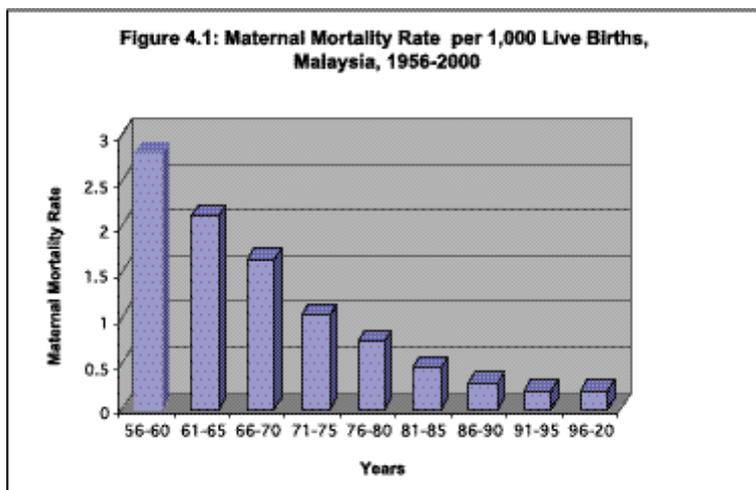
4.04 Since independence, Malaysia has made impressive gains in the standard of living, many of these gains have accrued to women. There has been a steady improvement in the health status of Malaysian women as indicated by the rising life expectancy at birth and declining maternal mortality and fertility rate. The average life expectancy of women increased from 58.2 years in 1957 to 75 years in 2000, an increase of 29 per cent. Men, however, have a shorter life span, with a life expectancy of 70.2 years in 2000 as compared to 55.8 years in 1957. The difference in the life expectancy between males and females is mainly due to the lower crude death rate among females. The male death rate was 13.4 per 1,000 compared to only 11.5 per 1,000 for females in 1957. An improved quality of life and better healthcare services lowered the male and female crude death rates to 5.2 and 3.9 per 1,000 respectively in 2000.

### **Maternal Mortality**

4.05 One of the direct indicators of the reproductive health of women, has been declining since 1957. The maternal mortality rate has decreased more than tenfold to 0.2 per 1,000 live births after 43 years of independence. From a high of 2.8 per 1,000 live births between 1956 and 1960, the maternal mortality rate declined by 25 per cent to only 2.1 per 1,000 live births five years later and then to 1.6 one decade after independence (Figure 4.1). Between 1957 and the early 1980s the decline averaged 27.8 per cent every five years and the mortality rate maintained its rapid fall through the 1980s and 1990s. Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994, efforts have been made to dispel the perceived notions that the reproductive health services provided are meant only for women. The Ministry of Health (MOH) has made several adjustments to its reproductive health programmes. One of them is the adoption of the Family Health Programme, a broader set of activities than

the previous Maternal and Child Health Programme.

4.06 The expansion of maternal and child health services and facilities (including those in the rural areas) and the introduction of special healthcare programmes were pivotal in lowering the maternal mortality rate. Since 1984 these health care programmes incorporated the risk approach strategy, which was aimed at reducing maternal morbidity and mortality. The programmes also included the confidential enquiry on maternal deaths approach, which was introduced in 1996. Every maternal death is analysed and potential preventive measures are identified for future actions. The establishment of breast cancer screening clinics in government hospitals and alternative birthing centres in rural areas provided additional health support facilities. The current maternal mortality rate of 0.2 per 1,000 live births is relatively lower than that of the other ASEAN countries with the exception of Singapore. This may be further compared with the maternal mortality rates for the world and Asia, which were 4.60 and 4.10 respectively in 1997.<sup>1</sup>



Source: Department of Statistics: Vital Statistic

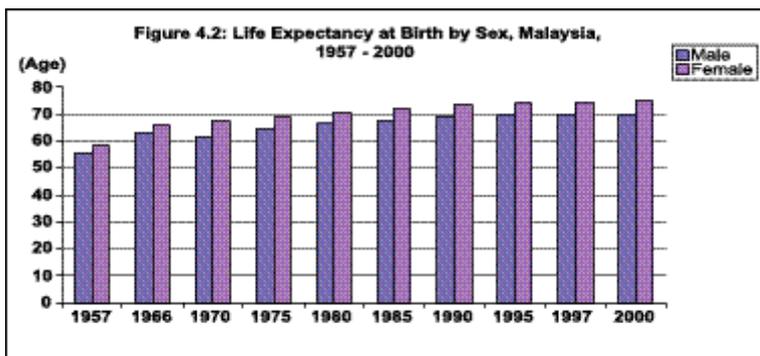
4.07 In analysing the deaths of women recorded between 1991 (with the introduction of the confidential enquiry approach) and 1994, Jegasothy (1998) found that the major causes of death were postpartum haemorrhage, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, obstetric pulmonary

<sup>1</sup> Source: World Health Organization (2000), "Priority Issues in Women's Health and Social Welfare: Global Perspectives, Comparisons and Case Studies," April, Japan

embolism and other associated conditions. According to his study, 20 per cent of the mothers who died had haemoglobin levels of less than 11.0 gm percentage (the level acceptable by the MOH for pregnant mothers). Maternal mortality was also found to be higher under the following circumstances:

- when the maternal age of mothers was below 19 and above 35;
- when the parity was five and above ;
- when deliveries were performed by untrained persons at home; and
- where there was substandard care including poor clinical management, inadequate resuscitation and delayed surgical intervention.

4.08 The decline in mortality rates in the post-independence period could also be attributed to better control over infectious diseases (Kwok, 1982; Noor Laily et al., 1982 and Hasan, 1987 in Leete, 1996). A healthier living environment resulting from better disease control has indirectly improved mortality rates and lengthened life expectancy. Like all countries, life expectancy of women in Malaysia has consistently been higher than that of men (Figure 4.2).



Source: Population Census 1957, 1970, 1980 & 1991 and the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001 - 2005)

### Nutritional Status of Women

4.09 Assessing the nutritional status of women in Malaysia is difficult, mainly because of the lack of data and the apparently low recognition of

its importance to health. Available data is found only in occasional reports and specific studies. Assessment of the study here will be undertaken primarily from the standpoint of specific nutritional deficiencies or problems. The nutritional status of women is often related to sufficient caloric and iron intake, both of which are important determinants of good health. As young girls move through the transition into adults, menstruation itself increases their need for iron. Pregnancy and childbirth with the accompanying increased need for iron intake often push women over the threshold into pseudo-anaemic states. More importantly, anaemia has also been identified as a contributing cause of maternal deaths (Jegasothy, 1998). It has also been known to increase the risk of miscarriages, premature births as well as prenatal morbidity (Taylor and Anthony, 1983). Nutrition reports of the Department of Health in 1956 cited iron deficiency, anaemia and caloric deficiency as problems faced by many pregnant mothers as well as young children. Various studies and data collected from maternal and child health clinics also indicated that antenatal mothers were generally anaemic.

4.10 According to a study by Tee (1995, p.154), in the 1950s and 1960s about 77 per cent of pregnant women were found to be lacking in iron and anaemic. Microcytosis, attributed to iron deficiency, was seen in 76 per cent of the cases and macrocytosis, attributed to folic acid and vitamin B12 deficiency, in most of the remaining cases. Studies in the 1980s also found low levels of serum float in approximately 60 per cent of pregnant women and low levels of RBC float in about 30 per cent of them. The prevalence of anaemia ranged from 30 per cent to 60 per cent depending on the ethnic group. Anaemia continued to be prevalent in the 1990s, and according to the Second National Health and Morbidity Survey of 1996 (NHMS2), the presence of anaemia among pregnant women varied across the states of Malaysia, ranging from 1.4 per cent to 10.2 per cent. The national average was 4.6 per cent in 1998, an increase from 4.4 per cent in 1995 (MOH, 1999). Meanwhile, a 1994 study by the Institute of Medical Research on 1,417 adolescent schoolgirls found that 19 per cent of them were anaemic.

4.11 A nutritional problem that frequently affects more women than men is endemic goitre, which has been documented since the 1930s in 12 of the 25 districts of Sarawak. The main causes of goitre include low levels of iodine in drinking water and salt intake as well as low consumption of seafood, especially in the inland areas of Sarawak. Another cause is the

presence of goitrogens in cassava, which is consumed in large quantities by hill tribes when rice supplies are exhausted. Studies done in Sabah in recent years have also found a high prevalence rate and that only 3 per cent of the people used iodised salt (Tee, 1995). In Peninsular Malaysia, goitre has also been reported in some areas of Kedah, Terengganu, Perak and Pahang, affecting 25 to 35 per cent of women aged 15 years and above. In fact, in 1993 an overall prevalence of 37 per cent was found in Kelantan, 45 to 93 per cent in Sarawak and in the remote areas of Keningau in Sabah it was 75 per cent (National Plan of Action for Nutrition, 1996–2000, MOH).

4.12 An emerging problem of the 1990s affecting both men and women is an increase in nutritional problems attributed to bad eating habits, a problem of “over nutrition”. Tee (1995), in his study, noted that while a low prevalence of “overweight” subjects was the scenario in the 1980s, it was different in the 1990s, especially among the urban population. He cited a study of 3,000 urban subjects by Ismail and Zawiah (1991), which revealed that 28 per cent of men and 34 per cent of women were overweight. Changing eating habits and sedentary lifestyles were said to be the main causes of over nutrition among the urban middle-income population. Meanwhile, the NHMS2 reported that the number of overweight people (BMI of 25 to 30) was significantly higher in urban (17.4 per cent) compared to rural (15.5 per cent) areas, and among females (22.67 kg/m) compared to males (22.26 kg/m). It is thus evident that Malaysia is already beginning to experience the nutritional problems which are prevalent in developed nations.

### **Fertility Trends**

4.13 The total fertility rate among Malaysian women is declining, which is currently at 3.06 per woman. Urbanisation, late marriages and increased access to education as well as more employment opportunities have contributed significantly to the decline in fertility. In 1970, the total fertility rate for Peninsular Malaysia was 5.02 per woman. A study by Wong (1999) indicated that the total fertility rate in Peninsular Malaysia declined by 47 per cent from 6.2 to 3.3 per woman during the period 1957–1990. Although the decline was evident for all ethnic groups it was highest among the Chinese and Indians where fertility levels declined by more than 50 per cent. Leete (1995) noted that in the case of the Chinese, the decline in fertility began in the late 1950s while that of the Indians was evident in the mid-1960s and the Malays in the late 1960s. However, overall fertility

declines were lower in the 1980s. This is largely due to the stalling of the decline in the Malay fertility rate. Leete (1995) and Wong (1999) observed that while Chinese and Indian fertility rates declined during the 1980s, that of the Malays levelled off at around 4.5 children per woman and even rose to 4.8 in 1985, while that of the Chinese and Indians were 3.4 and 3.6 respectively. This upsurge has been attributed to Islamic religious influences and possibly to the positive response of the Malays to the New Population Policy (NPP) enunciated in 1984 (Hamid Arshat et al., 1988 and Tey, N. P., 1992 in Wong, 1999).

## **II. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES**

4.14 The steady improvement in the health status of Malaysian women since 1957 is largely due to the provision of reproductive health services by the Government. Easier and wider access to appropriate health care has enabled Malaysian women to have safe pregnancies and childbirth as well as provide them the best chance of having healthy infants. The provision of health services includes family planning, antenatal and postpartum care, and management of breast and cervical cancer.

### **Family Planning**

4.15 Family planning was first made available through the initiative of a group of doctors who were appalled at the maternal deaths in hospitals because women had no access to contraception. The first non-government organisation (NGO) in family planning, the Selangor Family Planning Association, was formed in 1953. It was only 13 years later, in 1966, that the Government formed the National Family Planning Board (which was later renamed as the National Population and Family Development Board) to provide similar services to a wider cross-section of the population. In an effort to make family planning accessible to the rural population, family planning was integrated into the rural health services in the 1970s in Peninsular Malaysia, and extended to Sabah and Sarawak in the 1990s.

4.16 Despite its easy availability throughout the country, the adoption of contraception varied widely, with ethnicity being the most important determinant. Wong (1999, p. 168), quoting from the 1984/1985 Malaysian Population and Family Survey (MPFS) pointed out that "within any given marriage cohort, Chinese and Indian women have much higher levels of

“ever-use” of contraceptives than Malay women.” The Second Malaysian Population and Family Survey also found no change in the pattern of usage of contraceptives. This study also revealed that rural Chinese women were twice as likely as rural Malay women to use an efficient method of family planning. This is not surprising because Tey et al. (1997) in their study on contraceptive choice in the rural areas of Peninsular Malaysia found that among the women studied, Malays were more likely to express the desire for another child despite having the largest family size. They were also more apt to use less reliable methods including the traditional herb or jamu. Tey et al. (1999) in their study of rural women found that more Chinese than Malays or Indians were worried about the adverse effects of contraception on their health and this was also true of the methods which were deemed unpleasant to use. They also found that Malays were less favourable of methods which were considered to be irreversible (tubal-ligation), against their religion (condom, intra-uterine contraceptive device or IUCD, permanent methods, etc), costly (IUCD), and not easily available or which required examination by a male doctor or surgery. Breastfeeding – practised by almost all Malay mothers – is also sometimes considered to be a method of family planning.

### **Antenatal and Postpartum Care**

4.17 Under the MOH maternal and child health programme, antenatal and postpartum care has been made available even before independence. However, access has improved tremendously through the expansion of health centres, alternative birthing centres as well as mobile clinics. It is, therefore, not surprising that antenatal coverage through public health facilities is in excess of 60 per cent although the coverage is declining due to the availability of private healthcare services. In fact, one study by Huang (1995) on rural farming communities in Sabak Bernam, Selangor, revealed that antenatal coverage was almost 100 per cent (the mothers of 504 children studied had received antenatal care). In 1998, the average antenatal visits per mother increased to 8.1 from 7.5 in 1994 (Annual Report, 2001, MOH). The same report also revealed that postnatal coverage was 74.6 per cent in 1998.

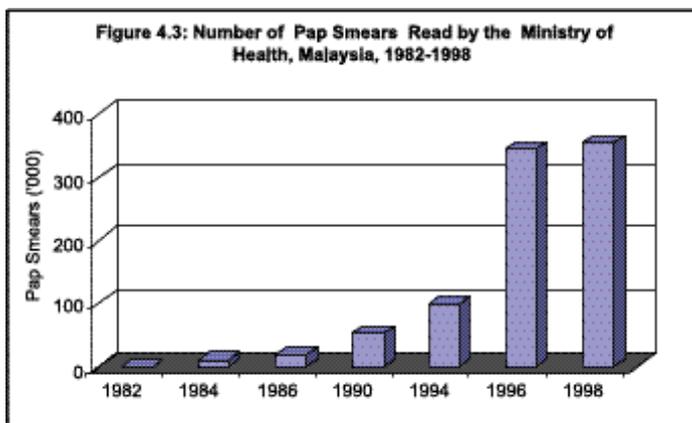
### **Management of Cervical and Breast Cancer**

4.18 Of an estimated 50 million deaths which occur annually worldwide, 10 per cent or 5 million are attributed to cancer. Breast cancer by itself accounts for 5 to 25 per cent of total deaths due to cancer (Abu Bakar, 1994).

In Malaysia, the discharge rates for the top three cancers in 1991 were cancer of the trachea, bronchus and lungs, breast and cervix. Among the cancers which affect women, breast and cervical cancers account for about half of total cases. As survival rates depend on early detection, the screening for breast cancer has been incorporated into the Family Development and Primary Health Care Programme (Narimah et al. 1997). While breast examinations by health workers are available in government health premises, the more thorough mammography examinations are available in government hospitals.

4.19 At the same time, pap smears are taken regularly as part of the postpartum services offered at maternal and child health clinics. Reports of the MOH showed that the number of pap smears taken and read increased from a mere 8,213 in 1982 to 354,930 in 1998 (Figure 4.3). The National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) as well as the Federation of Family Planning Associations Malaysia (FFPAM) through their network of clinics also offer both breast and cervical cancer detection programmes.

4.20 Despite the availability of services the National Health and Morbidity Survey of 1996 reported a screen rate of only 46 per cent based on any methods of breast examination with differences in prevalence rates by ethnicity, rural/urban localities, age groups, educational and household income levels (Narimah et al., 1997). The same study also reported that only 26 per cent of the 16,232 women studied had undergone a pap smear examination and that women who used the comprehensive reproductive



Source: Ministry of Health Report: Family Violence (1999)

services centres were most likely to have had a pap smear. Some women sought alternative traditional treatment, thus delaying the treatment of these cancers, and eventually losing their lives.

### **III.HEALTH CONCERNS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

#### **Health Needs of Elderly Women**

4.21 The longer life expectancy of women has and will make the health needs of elderly women a major concern for the country in the new millennium. With a life expectancy of 75 years in 2000, the average Malaysian woman actually lives almost one third of her life in the menopausal state. In addition, the proportion of women who fall within the age group 50 years and above is increasing, based on the trend for the age group 65 years and above which constitutes 4.2 per cent of the total population or 501,000 women in 2000. The profile of women in these categories is different and requires different healthcare services. A study by Tengku Aizan (1996) indicated that the proportion of elderly women would continue to increase. Between 1970 and 1980 the number of women in the age group of 65–74 years increased by 43.4 per cent, and by 1991 the number had increased by 95.4 per cent. Meanwhile, the proportion of those aged 75 years and above increased by 155.5 per cent between 1970 and 1991. Many of the women in the older age groups had lower educational achievement than their male counterparts. Nazileh (1992) also reported that the health status of the aged differed by gender. In this instance, more females reported poorer health status than males. She also pointed out that most of the elderly were widows. Another study by Tengku Aizan found that in 1991, 80.6 per cent of the elderly males aged 65 years and above were married compared to only 36.2 per cent of the elderly females. In the same year it was pointed out that while 4 per cent of the females in the same age-group were divorced or separated, only 1.6 per cent of the male counterparts were divorced or separated. It would thus be necessary to provide appropriate health services for this group of people, considering that psychiatric morbidity is also significantly higher among females than males, higher among widowed than married persons, and also higher among divorced than married persons (Second National Health and Morbidity Survey, 1996).

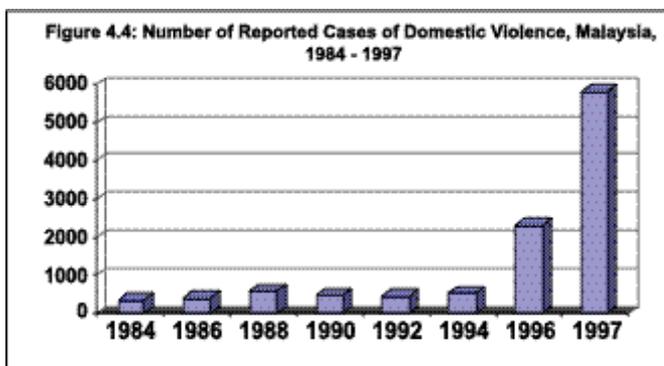
4.22 These facts only reinforce the need for special healthcare services to tide women over the change of life into the menopausal state. Menopausal

health services have been made available by FFPAM, private hospitals and clinics. These health service providers have embarked on the provision of hormone replacement therapy and other menopausal health services to women in this age-group. In addition, menopausal clinics are also provided by NPFDB, government hospitals and some health clinics manned by family medicine specialists. In 2000, the MOH also implemented health services in the form of health education, exercise sessions, clinical screening for specific diseases as well as hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for older women in 351 of its 843 health clinics.

4.23 Older women are also afflicted with degenerative diseases and illnesses. A WHO study conducted in 1986 found that the common health problems among the older persons included eyesight problems (67 per cent) with some evidence of cataracts, difficulty in chewing food (48 per cent), hearing problems (16 per cent) and foot problems (8 per cent). An MOH study (1995) also found that the older persons were also experiencing chronic joint pains as well as hypertension, heart disease and diabetes. Mental health problems among the older persons include sleep difficulties, anxiety, loss of interest in life, tiredness and poor memory retention. Thus, MOH will need to expand the various geriatric services in order to meet the needs of the senior women citizens.

### **Domestic Violence**

4.24 Like other societies, Malaysian women are also subject to domestic violence, which includes physical battery, incest, rape, sexual abuse, and psychological bullying and exploitation. The victims suffer from physical and mental injuries, and could also be infected with contagious and fatal diseases. Figure 4.4 illustrates the number of domestic violence cases reported to the police during the period 1984–1997. The average number of cases reported were about 500 in the 1980s and early 1990s but rose sharply after 1996 following the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in 1994 which came into effect in 1996. The Act and the publicity initiated by various women's groups provided the mechanism to disseminate information on women's rights and encouraged them to make reports on domestic violence. As of 1998, about 88 per cent of government hospitals had one-stop centres where victims could make reports as well as receive treatment including counselling from relevant agencies without having to go through excessive bureaucratic procedures.



Source: Ministry of Health Report: Family Violence (1999)

4.25 Battered women run a high risk of suffering from depression, attempted suicides, other psychiatric morbidities and increased somatic complaints as well as serious injuries. Wong (1999) quoting from Rashidah et al. (1995) reported that a 1990 study carried out by the Women's Aid Organisation (WAO) revealed that it was estimated that 39 per cent of women aged 15 years and above suffered spousal abuse. In a study of 60 battered women they found that the types of abuse included being slapped, kicked, punched, strangled, stabbed or threatened with a knife or sharp instrument. In addition, they found that 68 per cent had been beaten during pregnancy and more than half of these women had experienced physical force during sexual intercourse.

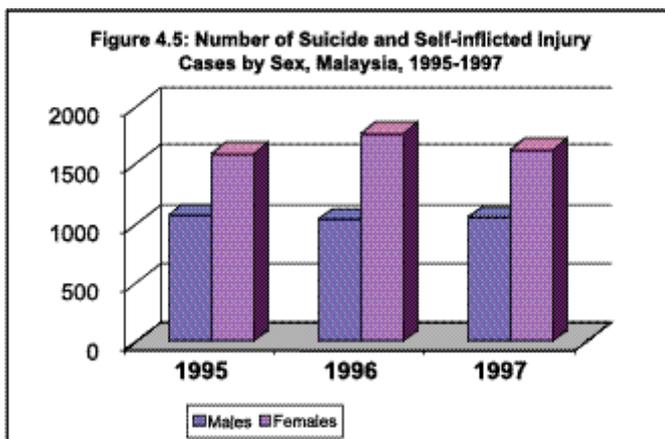
### Mental Health

4.26 The overlap between a woman's reproductive and career roles can affect the mental health of women. An MOH annual report showed that in 1960 there were 158,364 female outpatients seen for mental, psychoneurotic and personality disorders. Meanwhile, the NHMS2 reported that psychiatric morbidity among adults aged 16 years and above was significantly higher among females (12.7 per cent) than males (8.5 per cent). The same report showed that neurotic depression, the most common mental disorder, was three times more prevalent among females than males.

4.27 The NHMS2 also revealed that 11 per cent of the women in the age group 16 years and above had psychiatric illnesses. The common psychological symptoms included sleep difficulties (18.8 per cent), feeling unhappy and depressed (11.8 per cent) and constantly under strain (11.7

per cent). The study also showed that although the prevalence of emotional disorders by state and by urban/rural was not significantly different, prevalence was significantly higher among females (12.7 per cent) than males (8.5 per cent) by 1.5 times.

4.28 Another indicator of mental health is suicides and para-suicides, both of which are more prevalent among women than men as seen in Figure 4.5. In general, suicide rates for Malaysia are lower than most developed countries. Lee (1981) reported that the rate of suicide for both sexes in 1981 was only 3 per 100,000 population compared to 24 for Denmark, 9 for Singapore and 47 for Sri Lanka in the same period. Data collected by MOH showed that in 1996 there were 2,823 suicides. Furthermore, while the number decreased to 2,695 in the following year, the number of deaths from attempted cases rose from 7.5 per cent of total admissions for suicides in 1996 to 9.1 per cent in 1997. At the same time suicide figures were higher among women (59.9 per cent in 1995, 63.3 per cent in 1997 and 60.8 per cent in 1999) than men. A study of 167 para-suicides at the University Hospital in 1992 also revealed that 72.5 per cent of the suicides occurred among women. Incidentally, para-suicides, which are prevalent among those who suffer from personality disorders, interpersonal relationship problems with spouses, parents or others, generally occur among young females. On the other hand, suicides are more common among the older persons, particularly among those who suffer from mental illness and chronic physical disorders.



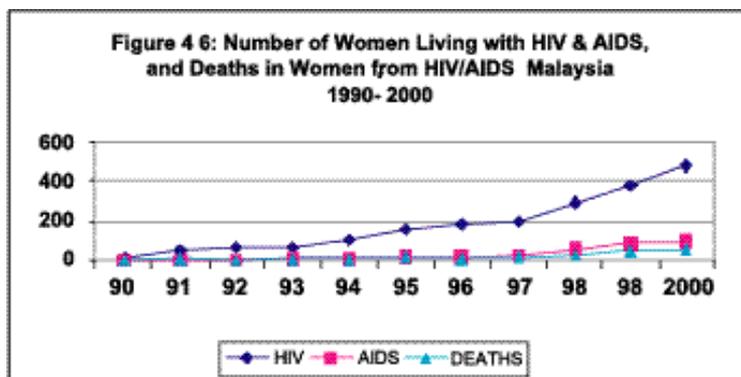
Source: Second National Health and Morbidity Survey

### The HIV/AIDS Epidemic

4.29 The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) has in the last decade brought hardship and misery to the world. Up to the end of 2000 a total of 36.1 million people worldwide been infected, making it the fourth leading cause of death in the world. While Africa bears the brunt of the epidemic at the present time, UNAIDS has predicted that Asia will be the next epicentre of the epidemic in the new millennium. Women now form 47 per cent of all infected adults.

4.30 Since the epidemic was first detected in 1986, the number of infected cases in Malaysia has increased to 38,044 by the end of 2000 (MOH, 2001). From data collected over the years, 94.9 per cent of HIV infections and 93.1 per cent of AIDS cases were detected in males, of whom 81.8 per cent were in the age group of 20–39 years. Records of routine testing of all known drug addicts and those sent to prison and drug rehabilitation centres indicated that 75.4 per cent were found to be infected through the sharing of hypodermic needles.

4.31 However, the rate of infection among women has been increasing as seen in Figure 4.6. In 1990, nine women were infected with HIV. This figure increased by 17.8 times to 161 in 1995 and by the end of 2000 it had almost tripled that of 1995. A similar increase in the number of AIDS cases among women was also recorded. In 1991, two cases of AIDS were detected but by 1995 it had gone up to 15 cases. In 2000, there were 98 cases of AIDS among women. This sevenfold increase in AIDS cases between 1995 and 2000 is due to the fact that in women, the presence of the virus is detected



Source: Ministry of Health

later than in men when secondary infections become apparent. Concurrently, the number of women who have died from HIV infection has also increased from nine in 1991 to 15 in 1995 and 58 in 2000. Deaths from HIV/AIDS are expected to increase in the coming years, considering the fact that there is no known cure at present and that the costs of medication (a combination therapy) are beyond the means of most Malaysians.

## V. FUTURE CHALLENGES

4.32 The majority of Malaysian women have benefited from a comprehensive health services system and the implementation of programmes to safeguard the reproductive health of women. The reproductive health status of Malaysian women ranks among the best in the developing countries, and in the ASEAN region it is only second to Singapore. However, it cannot be assumed that all Malaysians have been able to benefit from the availability of services. In the mind of the average woman, availability does not guarantee accessibility of reproductive health services, especially women who have been marginalised by social as well as economic factors and who need special attention. In view of this, affirmative actions have to be taken to address the following issues and challenges on women's health:

- *unequal power relationship* between Malaysian men and women often limits women's ability to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS. The increase in HIV infection among females from 4.3 per cent in 1995 to 5.1 per cent in 1999 is a major area of concern;
- *the culture of silence* which makes it difficult for women to be informed about the risks of contacting contagious diseases. This culture also stigmatises women who seek treatment for sexually-transmitted diseases;
- *women's economic dependence* on their husbands increases their vulnerability to HIV infection as they are less likely to be able to negotiate safer sex and are less likely to leave a relationship that they perceive to be risky;
- *stigma and discrimination against Persons Living with HIV/AIDS*

(PLWHAs) prevent women and men from being tested, thus perpetuating the infection if they were positive, and preventing early detection and treatment;

- *maternal mortality is higher among women in rural areas and teenage mothers who have a higher risk of dying;*
- *the adoption of contraception is higher among Chinese and Indian women than Malay women who have higher fertility rates. Rural Chinese women were twice likely as rural Malay women to use more efficient methods of contraceptives;*
- *breast and cervical cancer account for half of total cancer cases among women and the survival rates depend on early detection, yet the majority of women do not undertake early cancer detection via self-examination or at reproductive health service centres;*
- *medical problems of elderly women are increasing and appropriate geriatric services in public hospitals will have to be provided and existing services expanded, as the number of women aged 65 years and above is projected to increase in this decade;*
- *the prevalence of suicides and mental disorders are higher among women than men due mainly to increased urbanisation, the breakdown of the extended family system, and mental stress arising from the need to balance career with family life;*
- *teenage mothers who give birth at an age deemed to be detrimental to their health is causing concern among policymakers. Births by mothers aged below 17 years represented 3 per cent of the 12,976 live births in 1997;*
- *tendency of the majority of male spouses to let their wives shoulder the responsibility for family health concerns and well-being even if their wives are career women. This does not augur well for the policy to develop healthy families and promote gender equality;*
- *increased occurrences of lifestyle diseases among women requires*

more educational programmes to inform women on how to assert their rights to health and a healthy environment as well as to avail themselves to reproductive services, such as family planning, maternal care and cancer screening services;

- *prevalence of domestic violence against women, which is still a problem* in Malaysia, is frequently rooted in the unequal power relationship between men and women, and can be countered by ensuring continued empowerment of women through education, economic independence and greater decision-making power; and
- *insufficient gender-disaggregated data on women's health and their perceptions* of available health services hamper efforts to improve the planning, monitoring and evaluation of health and health-related programmes, especially for chronic diseases.

## VI.RECOMMENDATION

4.33 In general it can be seen that Malaysian women's access to healthcare services are satisfactory and this has contributed to the improved health status of women since independence in 1957. However, economic development and increasing urbanisation have implications on women's health and the following measures are proposed to address the emerging issues and challenges:

- *encourage male spouses to attend reproductive health clinics* and programmes through specifically-designed programmes. Health information directed at husbands will encourage them to jointly discuss and make informed decisions, which will safeguard the reproductive health of their wives;
- *increase the family development programmes* aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles especially in urban areas in view of the increasing incidence of lifestyle diseases and HIV infection;
- *make more concerted efforts to provide support* to women who are the primary caregivers to the sick and elderly;
- *provide affordable drugs which can sustain the health of those affected*

with HIV/AIDS, especially women who have to shoulder the responsibility of caring and maintaining a family and children;

- *introduce reproductive health education in schools* so that young people can grow into adulthood, empowered with adequate knowledge on reproductive health including sexually transmitted diseases;
- *ensure easy access to healthcare services* to meet the health needs of senior citizens, especially of females as life expectancy at birth has extends beyond 70 years;and
- *improve the database on the health status of Malaysian women.* Efforts should be made to prevent under-reporting as well as to ensure the availability of gender-disaggregated data so that planning, monitoring and evaluation of programmes can be undertaken to improve the efficiency of delivery of the health services.

## VII. CONCLUSION

4.34 Considerable progress has been made in improving the health status of Malaysian women during the period 1957–2000 due mainly to the development and availability of health services. Improvements in infrastructure, education and other social services also all contributed to the increase in women's access to health services. Female maternal mortality and crude death rates have declined to levels comparable to some developed countries during the last 50 years. As a result the life expectancy women in Malaysia has increased and women are participating effectively in the economic, social and political development of the country.

**Box 5.1: Dato' Sharizat A bdul Jalil – An A dvocat e and Solicitor ,  
an Eminent Cor porat e Figure and a Cabinet Minister**

Dato' Sharizat Abdul Jalil, the Member of Parliament for Lembah Pantai in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, was elected as the first minister of the newly-created Ministry of Women and Family Development on 17 January 2001. Her appointment as a minister is viewed as a major milestone in the political participation by women at the Cabinet level. Trained as a lawyer, she blazed through her career path to become a prominent corporate figure and a judicious political leader achieving the position of a minister within a relatively short time span.

Dato' Sharizat, the eldest in a family of four, was born in Penang. She studied at some of the best schools – the St. Georges' Girls' School in Penang and thereafter at the prestigious Tuanku Kurshiah College in Seremban, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. She read law at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, graduating with honours in 1976. Her career in the public sector commenced with her appointment as a magistrate and she subsequently rose to the position of Assistant Treasury Solicitor at the Ministry of Finance. In 1979, she resigned to practise law as an advocate and solicitor, and in 1993, she started her own law firm.

In the corporate world, Dato' Sharizat was among the first Malaysian woman to become chairperson of two public-listed companies on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. She also sat on the boards of several other corporations.

Her career in politics started in 1981 when she became an UMNO member and was chosen to head the women's wing of the Kepong Baru Branch, Selangor. That marked the start of a meteoric rise which saw her election to the UMNO Supreme Council in 1996. In the 1995 General Elections, Dato' Sharizat was the first woman to be fielded as the Barisan Nasional's candidate for the Lembah Pantai constituency, which she won. She created history by winning the same constituency for two consecutive terms. After her first election victory, she relinquished all her corporate positions in the private sector to accept her appointment as the Parliamentary Secretary at the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports. She was appointed Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's Department in December 1999. In May 2000, she was elected Deputy Head of Wanita UMNO. On 17 January 2001,

*continue next page*

Dato' Sharizat became the first minister of the Ministry of Women and Family Development.

Despite her hectic schedule, Dato' Sharizat has never lost sight of her role as a mother and wife. She firmly believes that in order to succeed, there must be a strong family foundation, family bonding and support. This she gets from her husband and three children, and her close-knit extended family, who have been her pillars of strength throughout her professional and political career.

She was decorated with the Darjah Indera Mahkota Pahang by His Majesty the Sultan of Pahang in 1998, which carries the title of Dato'. In May 2001, she was conferred the prestigious "A Woman of Distinction" award by the National Women Entrepreneur Malaysia, being one of the three recipients of the award. The milestones she charted in her professional, political and public life make her an ideal role model for the younger generation of professional women who aspire to follow in her footsteps.

*Source: Citation from "Woman of Distinction", May 2001. NAWEM.*

## **Chapter 5**

### **WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING AND POWER SHARING**

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#### **I. INTRODUCTION**

5.01 The economic progress and improved standard of living since the country's independence have enabled women in Malaysia to enjoy greater access to education, healthcare facilities, employment opportunities as well as greater participation in politics. They have enjoyed more autonomy than before and this is reflected by their progressive participation in the once male dominated political and professional arenas. The Malaysian women of today are projecting a positive and assertive image as they make inroads into various professions and decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors. In the political arena, a new profile of woman leaders and activists has emerged. They are more educated, more vocal in expressing women's needs and interests, more aware of national development, and more sensitive to current development issues especially those which work against women.

5.02 Although Malaysian women have through the years demonstrated considerable leadership abilities in public office as well as in community and informal organisations at the grassroots, they still remain far behind the men in terms of access to high-level positions and participation in decision making. The majority of women remain very much within the confines and demands of their family life, while the men pursue their career aspirations, enabling them to have access and control in the power structure and decision-making processes. More concerted efforts should be made to close the gender gap and increase the participation of women in decision-making positions.

5.03 This chapter provides an overview of the progress of Malaysian women in the areas of decision-making and power sharing since independence. The progress achieved by Malaysian women in leadership and power-sharing positions will be assessed by examining their role and status in political parties, the Government, public service, trade unions, employer organisations, the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It will also discuss their participation in the decision-making process in these organisations. Finally, the report will present

issues and obstacles that slow down women's progress and propose recommendations to address these issues and challenges.

## **II. TRENDS IN LEADERSHIP AND POWER SHARING**

5.04 Women's involvement in power-sharing and decision-making positions in politics and the economy has been on an upward trend since independence. There has been a continuing incremental increase in women voters and membership in political parties as well as in the number of female political candidates. The same positive signs of advancement are seen in the number of women in elected and appointed offices. In the government service and corporate sector women's participation in managerial and key positions have also been increasing as more female graduates enter the labour market. However, the occupancy of top management posts by women in both the government service and corporate sector is still relatively low.

### **Political Membership and Leadership**

5.05 The trend in women's participation in politics since independence indicates they are gradually playing a significant role as voters, party candidates and party workers/campaigners in determining the success of their parties during general elections as well as being leaders and representatives on women's issues. Today, women constitute half of the registered voters. There are women who are Members of Parliament, senators, cabinet ministers and deputy ministers, parliamentary secretaries, state assembly representatives and state executive councillors, board members of companies, leaders of women's groups, and members of the Village Consultative and Security Council (or JKKK). They are also gradually making their presence felt though they are still few in numbers compared to men.

5.06 There has been a steady increase in women membership in the three major component political parties of the Barisan Nasional (or National Front) since 1957. Malay women through Kaum Ibu dominated the scenario of women in politics during the first decade of independence, so that by 1983 women comprised 54 per cent of the total membership of the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). In 1975, the national women's wing – Wanita MCA – of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) was established, followed by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). Women members in the MCA had increased from 18 per cent of total membership in 1983 to 36 per cent in 2000. In contrast, efforts by two opposition parties, Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS)

and the Democratic's Action Party (DAP), to organise women supporters have been minimal. Women's membership in these parties is still small. Even for the other component parties of the Barisan Nasional, such as Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan), the women's sections remained relatively undeveloped in the early years.

5.07 Despite stepped-up efforts by political parties to increase the proportion of women actively involved in politics, the results have not been encouraging. Following the formation of Puteri UMNO in early 2001, the current focus of the major political parties is to step up their recruitment of young women supporters from all walks of life.

5.08 The participation of women as political leaders has undergone considerable change and growth over the four decades since independence. Malaysian women have progressed from a situation where they did not hold any positions in political parties to a situation where they have been elected as heads of party divisions and members of the respective party's supreme council or central executive committee. In 1956, all the 43 UMNO divisions, which filed reports, had no women as chairpersons or secretaries. Subsequent party records for 1957, 1958, 1961 and 1967 showed that two women headed UMNO divisions, one of whom was Tan Sri (Dr) Aishah Abdul Ghani who led the Kuala Lumpur Bandar Division for 18 years (1964–82). However, no women headed UMNO divisions in 1983 and fewer than 25 led any of the 8,000 UMNO branches. The UMNO Supreme Council had, at the most, three to four women members out of 35. Prominent women who had sat on the UMNO Supreme Council during the 1980s were Tan Sri (Dr) Aishah Abdul Ghani, Dato' Seri Zaleha Ismail, Dato' Seri Rafidah Aziz and Datin Paduka Rahmah Osman. In the late 1980s, Kaum Ibu took the name of Wanita UMNO, which led to the emergence of new women political leaders who became members of the UMNO Supreme Council. Among these were Dato' Napsiah Omar, Dato' Dr Hajjah Siti Zaharah Sulaiman and Dato' Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

5.09 As for the women's section of MCA, its role within the party was minimal in the early years, as reflected by the lack of women's representation in the party's highest policy-making body, the General Assembly. MCA's record for the 1960s showed that women held no leadership positions within the party (Danz, 1987). Today, women MCA members are visible at the state level as well as the national level. Dato' Dr Ng Yen Yen's election as

the national Wanita MCA Chairman in 1999 represented a milestone for women MCA members. She became the Deputy Minister of Culture, Arts and Tourism after the country's general elections in 1999.

5.10 The MIC was the last to organise and establish a national women's wing and this was soon followed by the establishment of the first National Women's Council for Indian women in 1975. The women's section of MIC did not play a visible role in the party affairs as it is still new compared to the women's wings of UMNO and MCA. The MIC women's section, which has a relatively low profile, remains very much under the control of the party's central leadership.

5.11 In the case of Gerakan, it decided to set up a women's wing in 1979, which was finally launched in 1982. Dato' Kee Phaik Chen is a key woman leader and politician in Gerakan, having risen through the ranks in the party to the state-level office, and gaining national political prominence. Her appointment as the national Chairman of the Gerakan women's wing was followed by her appointment in the Penang State Executive Council as a senior member. This post places her third in the state government hierarchy, after the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister. Like the MCA's women members, the women Gerakan party leaders are stepping up their role in contributing towards the progress of their party.

### **Political Candidacy**

5.12 Women's candidacy in the country's general elections has increased steadily, albeit very slowly, over the years both at the federal and state level elections as depicted in Table 5.1. In the 1959 general elections, 806 candidates contested for 292 seats at the state level and only 15 were women. At the federal level, five women competed with 254 men for 104 parliamentary seats. In the 1964 general elections, the increase in the number of women candidates was slight. At the state level, there were 753 male candidates as compared to 16 female candidates. Likewise, at the federal level, of the 281 candidates only six were females. In the 1969 and 1974 general elections, out of 105 parliamentary seats being contested there were only seven women as compared to 220 men, and of the 678 candidates for 282 state assembly seats, only 16 were women. The last 1999 general elections saw the largest number of female candidates ever fielded by political parties at both state and federal levels. A total of 31 and 22 women candidates contested the parliamentary and state assembly seats respectively.

**Table 5.1: Women Political Candidates in State and Federal Elections , Malaysia,1959–1999**

Year	States Assemblies		Total Seat	% of Women	Parliament		Total Seat	% of Women
	Men	Women			Men	Women		
	1959	791			15	806		
1964	753	16	769	2.1	275	6	281	2.1
1969	662	16	678	2.4	220	7	227	3.1
1974	845	21	866	4.8	282	8	290	2.8
1978	703	19	722	2.6	370	14	384	3.6
1982	695	17	712	2.4	433	11	444	2.7
1990	843	21	864	2.4	374	13	387	3.4
1995	869	19	888	2.1	403	25	428	5.8
1999	800	22	822	2.7	391	31	422	7.3

Source: Danz,1987 (\*pp 143,145,2 02 and 203) and The Election Commission,2000

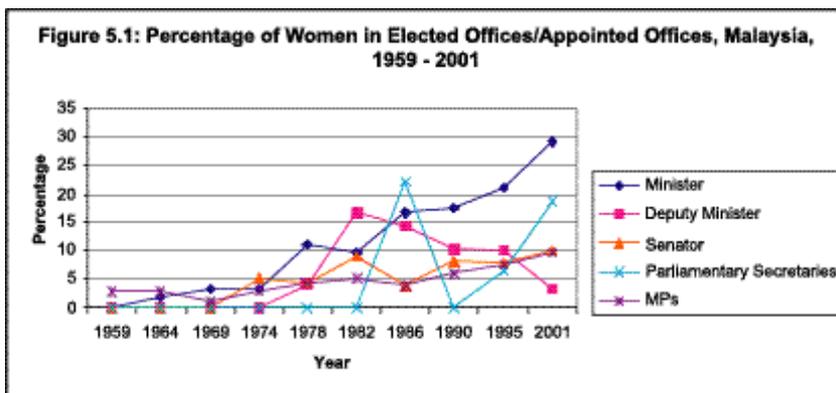
5.13 For the Barisan Nasional component parties, the female candidates performed significantly well in the general elections despite some who lost their seats after 1991. In the 1982 and 1986 general elections, all the female candidates from the major political parties won their seats.

5.14 Despite the lower representation of women in key political posts, Malaysian women have in effect achieved some progress since independence. Most of the major component parties of the Barisan Nasional now have active women sections with considerable membership. Generally, the women sections of UMNO, MIC and MCA tend to play the conventional supporting role to the main political parties; but they are increasingly becoming more vocal. Most political parties have initiated affirmative action to increase the number of female candidates in general elections and in elected/appointed offices. Malaysia is a signatory to the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which pledges to have at least 30 per cent female participation in the Government.

### **Elected Offices and Appointments**

5.15 The political scenario for women saw healthy signs of progress in 1983. For the first time, the country had two women ministers, four deputy

ministers, four senators, six Members of Parliament (MPs) and a federal court judge. This encouraging trend continued and in 2000, Malaysia had three women ministers, one deputy minister, 11 senators and 19 MPs. In 2001, another woman was appointed minister of the newly-created Ministry for Women and Family Development. Generally, the percentage of women in various positions in elected offices has increased after each general election as shown in Figure 5.1.



Source: Secretariat for the Parliament, Malaysia

5.16 The steady increase of women MPs from a sole representative in 1955 to an encouraging 19 in 2000 was not without some setbacks, notably after the 1969 general elections and again in 1986. In the Upper House of Parliament, women's representation as senators increased from 17.5 per cent in 1990 to 29.2 per cent in 2000.

5.17 The percentage of Malaysian women MPs of 9.8 per cent in 2000 is still below the average figure of 14.1 per cent for Asian countries. Based on the 1995 Human Development Index (HDI), Malaysia ranked 73 among 180 countries for women representation in Parliament and 60 out of 174 countries for the proportion of women occupying ministerial and sub-ministerial posts. Malaysia's ranking has risen to the 56th. position among 162 countries based on the Global UNDP Development Report 2001. However, Malaysian women's share of parliamentary seats has not yet surpassed the acceptable level of 30 per cent, which is perceived as a critical criterion in impacting decision-making processes, set by members of the Inter-Parliamentary Union of Commonwealth Countries. So far, only non-Commonwealth countries like Sweden (40.4 per cent), Norway (39.4 per cent),

Finland (33.5 per cent) and the Netherlands (31.3 per cent) have achieved and surpassed this international standard.

### **Representation in the State Assemblies**

5.18 As in Parliament, the gap between the number of men and women in the state assemblies shows a similar picture. Overall, the percentage of women state assembly representatives has been increasing but women politicians at the state level are still lagging behind in numbers compared to the number of women representatives in the Parliament.

5.19 In Malaysia, the state administration is headed by a chief minister (or *menteri besar*) and an Executive Committee (Exco) or a state cabinet as in the case of Sabah and Sarawak. The Exco members are selected from among the Assembly members belonging to the ruling party. Over the last three general elections, there has been a steady increase in the percentage of women Exco members and state ministers but the number remains low. In 1995, of the total 150 state Exco members nationwide, only 10 or 6.3 per cent were women. Some states – Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu and Melaka – do not have women Exco members.

### **Share of Leadership and Decision-Making Positions in the Public Sector**

5.20 Existing trends in the mainstream public sector display similar pyramidal structures as in politics, with male executives at the apex and the base comprising mostly female employees (typists, clerks and secretaries). This indicates that public sector female employees are mostly in lowly-paid jobs and that there are too few women in the upper echelons of public service or public corporations. This section attempts to examine the trends of women's leadership positions at various levels in the public sector.

#### *Key Management Positions in the Public Sector*

5.21 The Administrative and Diplomatic Service (PTD), formerly known as the Malaysian Civil Service, is the single most influential service provider in the country by virtue of its key role in the overall administration and management of the government machinery. Under its portfolio lies key positions including the Chief Secretary to the Government as well as top ministerial and state posts. In 1964, the first batch of women were recruited into the PTD. In 1980, there were no women occupying the top and middle management posts but the situation changed subsequently as more women entered the civil service. Various reasons can be attributed to the

minimal progress made by women in the Administrative and Diplomatic Service, the most important probably being the perceived prejudices with regard to women's abilities in a field which is traditionally regarded as being "suited to men" because of the nature of and the demands that come with the position and the job.

5.22 The recent appointment of a few highly qualified and professional women with good public record and standing in key institutions, including Tan Sri Dato' Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz as the first woman Governor of Bank Negara Malaysia, P. G. Lim as the first Malaysian woman ambassador to the United Nations and Rafiah Salim as the first Malaysian woman UN assistant secretary general, are significant milestones in the history of women's progress and advancement in Malaysia. Table 5.2 shows the distribution of posts in the public service and a breakdown by gender. Even at the premier C post, the number of women is comparatively smaller than men and the disparity becomes progressively more visible at each ascending level. Optimistically speaking, it is expected that as more women become eligible for promotion into the premier posts in the future, more of them will be expected to occupy the higher key positions.

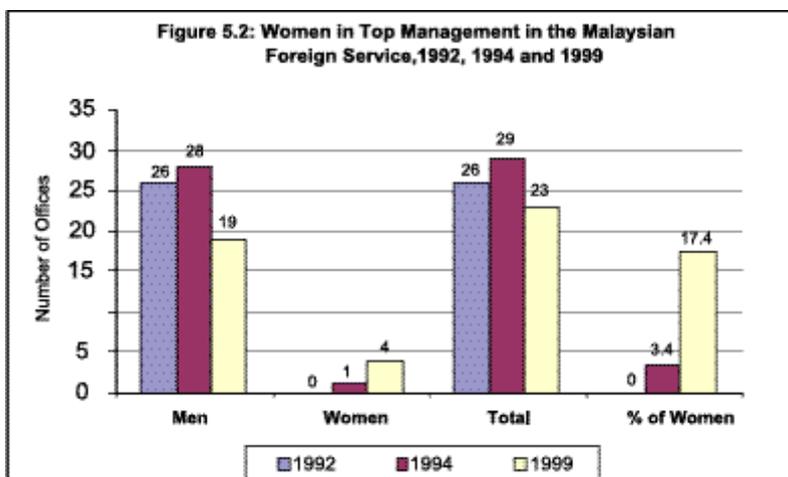
**Table 5.2: Number of Personnel in the Public Sector by Sex and Grade, Malaysia, 1980 and 2001**

Service Group	1980			2001 (May)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Chief Secretary	1	0	1	1	0	1
Staff 1	1	0	1	4	0	4
Staff 2	4	0	4	2	0	2
Staff 3	7	1	8	9	0	9
Premier A	25	0	25	25	0	25
Premier B	51	0	51	56	4	60
Premier C	155	1	156	346	78	424
Managerial/ Professional	246,008	118,909	364,917	48,240	47,268	95,508
Supporting staff	343,900	124,407	468,307	343,656	250,703	594,359
<b>Total</b>	<b>590,152</b>	<b>243,318</b>	<b>833,470</b>	<b>392,339</b>	<b>298,053</b>	<b>690,392</b>

Source : Malaysian Public Service Department, 2001

### *Appointments in the Foreign Service*

5.23 The number of women officers in the Malaysian Foreign Service has significantly increased over the years. At the end of 1998, out of the 273 diplomatic officers, 42 or 15.4 per cent were women, six of whom were of ambassadorial rank. In addition, there were also four female deputy heads of missions, one consul-general, two counsellors, one first secretary, and six second secretaries assigned to various Malaysian missions abroad. As of May 2001, there were six females (34 per cent) in the lower management level (M2 grade) as compared to 52 men. The increase in the number of Malaysian women in top management in the Foreign Service is depicted in Figure 5.2.



Source: Public Service Department, Malaysia

### **Representation in Local Authorities**

5.24 It is worthwhile to draw attention to the under-representation of women in local authorities. The Kuala Lumpur City Hall and the Selangor local councils are used as examples because they cover larger areas and population, and hence have a wide scope of work and responsibility.

5.25 The woman-man ratio in the Advisory Board of the Kuala Lumpur City Hall during 1988–1991 ranged from 1:12 to 1:13. There was no female representation from 1992 until 2000 when a woman was elected as a member of the Advisory Board.

5.26 In Selangor, during the period 1988–1989 (Selangor State Government Records) there were only 19 women out of the 241 councillors in the 12 local government committees. The participation of women in local government bodies did not increase during the period 1990–1991; wherein out of 241 only 20 (8.3 per cent) were women councillors. The percentage dropped to 6.9 for the subsequent service term. However, in Sabah, Datuk Dayang Adeline Leong became the first woman President of the Kota Kinabalu Municipal Council, which became the first local authority in Malaysia to be headed by a woman.

5.27 Overall, the number of male councillors outnumbered female councillors in all district and municipal councils as shown in Table 5.3 – with women's representation ranging from 0 to 12.5 per cent in 1997. Women's participation and input in policy and decision making in local authorities, state councils or committees is important because planning for development without incorporating gender perspectives can have an adverse impact on women's progress and advancement, and on the well-being of families and communities in the long run.

**Table 5.3: Members of District /Municipal Councils by Sex, Malaysia,1997**

Municipality/District	Total	Male	Female	% Female
1 Johor	345	316	29	8.4
2 Kedah	103	94	9	8.7
3 Kelantan	284	267	17	5.9
4 Melaka	75	71	4	5.3
5 Negeri Sembilan	188	174	14	7.4
6 Pahang	243	219	24	9.9
7 Perak	331	301	30	9.1
8 Perlis	24	20	4	16.7
9 Pulau Pinang	48	42	6	12.5
10 Selangor	296	270	26	8.8
11 Terengganu	161	144	17	10.6
12 Wilayah Persekutuan	24	24	0	0
13 Sabah	359	328	31	8.6
14 Sarawak	548	515	33	6.02
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3029</b>	<b>2785</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>8.05</b>

Source : Information Resource Centre, HAWA

### *The Grassroot Level*

5.28 At the lowest rung of the government administration hierarchy is the Village Consultative and Security Council (JKKK). In most parts of rural areas, women are under-represented in important village committees such as JKKK and other village associations or organisations. The sole woman representative in JKKK is usually the head of Wanita UMNO in the village. As women are less visible in the village committees, their opinions are often not reflected in the important decision-making process. Their sphere of participation and activity is generally confined to the role of organising social and welfare events and providing the support needed. Because of role stereotyping, women generally end up at the sidelines, missing out on the important information and knowledge needed to make effective decisions.

5.29 Aside from JKKK, the Area Farmers' Organisation (AFO) constitutes another rural institution that can tap on women's potential and hone their leadership abilities. However, despite the encouragement given by the Farmers' Organisation Authority, women comprised only 21 per cent of the total membership (1996). The representation of women in the AFOs' board of directors is even smaller, representing only 6 per cent of the total number of directors. Thus, rural women's participation at the grassroots level is still very modest especially in a mixed group setting (Khaled, 1997). As an observation, women's status within the AFOs is usually confined to the Women Farmer Groups and Cooperatives, which are auxiliary organisations through which they are actively involved in a variety of economic and social activities. In these all-women groups, rural women are exposed to, and assume, leadership roles as office bearers, committee members, secretaries and treasurers.

5.30 Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that there are rural women who have risen to the occasion and have proven themselves as good leaders in the village committees. Still, they tend to be more active as leaders in their own informal women's groups or associations or in government-sponsored women's groups which have socio-economic objectives like the Women Farmers Group, notably the Women Extension Groups (WEG) sponsored by the Department of Agriculture (DOA), the Women Settlers' Coalition (GPW) of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), and the women's groups of the Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority (FELCRA), Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) and the Community Development Division (KEMAS).

5.31 These women's groups have developed considerable membership strength and formed the basis for nurturing micro-enterprises among the rural women. As a case in point, the WEG from DOA, from its modest beginning as an extension group has expanded its functions to facilitate transfer of technology in agriculture and home food processing. According to DOA, the WEG has grown into a network of 1,307 groups throughout Peninsular Malaysia, with a total membership of over 34,000 women and a total turnover of RM72.6 million netted by 1,551 micro-enterprises nurtured therein. FELDA's GPW has a total membership of over 100,000 in 2000 as shown in Table 5.4.

**Table 5.4: FELDA GPW Women Group Membership , Malaysia, 1960–2000**

Year	Number of Members
Up to 1960	2,772
1979	20,718
1980	64,063
1990	119,180
2000	103,001

Source : FELDA, 2000.

FELDA and FELCRA are examples of agencies that work towards having women representatives at the area and national levels. Indeed, some rural women have become board members of some FELDA and FELCRA corporations.

5.32 In general, most agencies involved in rural development have implemented women-specific programmes which have provided the initial and much needed opportunity for women to be exposed to decision-making and leadership responsibilities. Some women have been able to make the leap into leadership roles in the "mixed" groups facilitated by gender-sensitised sponsoring institutions.

### **Management Positions in the Private Sector**

5.33 In the private sector, the majority of women are concentrated in the middle management and support staff levels. Similar to the employment pattern in the public sector, men still predominate in the private sector, particularly at the higher executive management level. A few highly qualified

women have succeeded in climbing the corporate ladder and have broken the "glass ceiling." It is no longer a novelty to encounter women who are chief executive officers or presidents of corporations. An example of successful women corporate figures is Datuk Khatijah Ahmad, the Chairman of KAF Group (KAF Discount Berhad) and Director of Sime Darby Berhad, who has received local and international recognition. In 1997, she became the first Malaysian to receive the Leading Woman Entrepreneurs of the World award. Another successful businesswoman, Josephine Premila Sivaretnam, a lawyer by training, has made a presence in the business arena. She is currently the Director of Kuala Lumpur City Corporation Berhad and Malaysian Plantation Berhad. Yet another woman in the league of successful Malaysian businesswomen is the Chairman of Oriental Holdings Berhad, Datuk Loh Cheng Yean. She has taken over her father's legacy and has fared well in managing the family business empire, which encompasses many types of business ventures.

### **Non-Government Organisations , Trade Unions and Cooperatives**

5.34 The non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trade unions and cooperatives are important non-mainstream organisations which are recognised for their complementary, activism and advocacy role in the community, society and nation.

#### *Participation in NGOs*

5.35 The last decade has witnessed a rapid growth of NGOs and voluntary associations in Malaysia. Women are active in both mixed and women-specific organisations. However, men mostly dominate the leadership positions (that is, the office bearers) of the mixed groups. The breakdown of women's participation in non-profit organisations in 1999 is shown in Table 5.5. Initiatives from women leaders in NGOs have been effecting significant changes in government policies and programmes towards women.

5.36 One of the earliest NGOs and perhaps also one of the most successful is the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO), formed in 1963 with the support of various women's groups. Among its founders were women leaders, educationists, reformists and activists such as Rasamma Bhupalan and Tan Sri Fatimah binti Hashim. The main aim of NCWO is to unite the women's organisations and raise the status of women and children through the improvement of their legal, political, social, economic, moral and educational status. At the same time, it also aims to

encourage the participation of women in nation building and development. The NCWO still maintains its characteristic as a non-political, non-religious and non-communal entity. Its membership consists of educated middle and upper class women, and it is an umbrella body with over 40 affiliates drawn from diverse groups, such as unions, women's sections of political parties and government agencies, religious organisations, professional associations, bodies and institutions, welfare and women councils, congresses and associations. Besides NCWO, there were 220 other women NGOs in 1997, of which 145 were registered with the Registrar of Societies. With respect to non-profit organisations, there are 15 types of non-profit organisations totalling 183 in number (based on the Directory of Development-based Non-profit Organisations in Malaysia).

**Table 5.5: Women Participation in Non-profit Organizations , Malaysia, 1999**

Types of Organization	Number of Women Leaders
Women's Organizations	16
Welfare	12
Senior Citizen	1
Religion and Culture	3
Health	8
Environment	1
Education	1
Economic and Women's Social Development	4
Children and Juveniles	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>

Source : Directory of Development-based Non-profit Organizations in Malaysia published by the Asian Institute for Development Communication (AIDCOM) in 1999, Kuala Lumpur.

### *Participation in Trade Unions*

5.37 The number of employees who became trade union members increased to 729,037 by 2000 with a female membership of 265,722 (36.4 per cent). However, these figures do not include membership in the Federation of Trade Unions or employees' associations or organisations. Women membership in trade unions increased by 6.6 per cent during 1994–2000 as seen in Table 5.6. The table does not include membership in trade unions and the Federation of Trade Unions.

**Table 5.6: Membership in Trade Unions by Sex, Malaysia, 1994–2000**

Year	Number of Unions	Membership		
		Total	Male	Female
1994	501	699,373 (100%)	450,047 (64.4%)	249,326 (35.6%)
1996	516	728,246 (100%)	465,098 (63.9%)	263,148 (36.1%)
1999	537	725,302 (100%)	461,938 (63.7%)	263,364 (36.3%)
2000	563	729,037 (100%)	463,315 (63.6%)	265,722 (36.4%)

Source : Department of Trade Unions Affairs, Ministry of Human Resources

5.38 Generally, most women do not actively participate in trade unions because of their domestic responsibilities. Thus, there are very few women who are active as union leaders. Besides training and retraining, Malaysian employers should provide child-care facilities so that married women employees in industries and the services sector are not besieged by unequal career advancement opportunities. The low membership of women in trade unions would, in turn, further reinforce the dominance of men in the unions and make it all the more difficult for women workers to define their own agenda and to champion their needs as well as deal with issues which affect their career advancement. The general absence of women at the top has, to some extent, impacted issues relating to women such as the work environment.

5.39 In an effort to improve the quality of work life and ensure that the needs of women members are met, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) established its women's section in 1960. The present chairperson of the MTUC women's section is Noor Laila bt Asiah (2001). As shown in Table 5.7 there are more male than female members in the MTUC.

**Table 5.7: Membership in MTUC by Sex, Malaysia, 1996 and 2000**

Year	Total	Female	Male
1996	448,144	185,112 (41.3%)	263,032 (58.7%)
2000	548,941	225,036 (41%)	323,905 (59%)

Source : MTUC, 2000.

5.40 Women's representation in the governing bodies of MTUC is disproportionate to their membership size. In 2000, while women accounted for 41 per cent of the membership, their representation in the governing bodies was disproportionately low as seen in Table 5.8. Out of the 16 posts in the working committees there was only one woman representative, while in the general council women constitute only 7 per cent. This reflects the under-representation of the women who form 41 per cent of the total union membership.

**Table 5.8: Female and Male Representation in Governing Bodies in MTUC, Malaysia, 2000**

Governing	Total Number	Female	Male
Working Committees	16	1 (6%)	15 (94%)
Executive Council	30	1 (3%)	29 (97%)
General Council	205	7 (3%)	198 (97%)

Source : MTUC, 2000.

#### *Representation in Cooperatives*

5.41 The cooperative movement seems to have fared better in terms of women's participation and involvement at the upper levels. According to the Department of Cooperative Development, there were 2,601,439 male members and 1,519,660 females in 1999. There were approximately 13,775 women who held positions in cooperatives during the same year. Women's participation is also commendable in ANGKASA (The National Malaysian Cooperative Limited), an apex cooperative which is administered according to the cooperative concept but is not involved in business activities like other cooperatives. As at 11 April 2000, ANGKASA has 2,510 cooperatives under it, of which 53 are women cooperatives. The Deputy President of ANGKASA is a woman, Hajah Rahaiah Baheran, an ex-senator. She was also elected in 1997 as a member of the International Cooperative Alliance Working Committee (ICA – Central Executive Committee). The current principal of the Cooperative College is also a woman, Armi Zainuddin.

### **III. FUTURE CHALLENGES**

5.42 It cannot be denied that Malaysian women have made considerable strides in the political and public arena. The few Malaysian women who have made it to the top have proven their capabilities and shown that the

policies of the Government are not overtly discriminatory. Despite the Government's supportive policies for the advancement of Malaysian women in all areas, women are under-represented in many areas, particularly in the decision-making and power-sharing corridors of political, public and corporate entities due mainly to the following gender barriers and issues:

- *cultural and institutional factors* interfere to form barriers to the advancement of a woman's career and upward mobility in an organisation. It is a common observation that a working or career woman is faced with a difficult situation of having to perform and cope with multiple roles as a wife, mother and worker. Traditionally, she will give priority to her domestic concerns above her career. Gender and role differences are learnt from as early as infancy and further perpetuated by cultural beliefs that are maintained and adhered to in social institutions and organisations over time;
- *society has been socialised in ways that promote stereotypical images of women* as followers and supporters and not leaders or equal partners in their homes as well as outside their homes. This role stereotyping which brings about unequal power sharing at the household level, is the starting point of inequalities at the societal level. Consequently, women have little opportunity to develop their leadership and decision-making skills in the public domain ;
- *gender roles and ethnicity* have been found to impact women's political participation. In the construction of gender role, each ethnic group in Malaysia is influenced by Asian values which determine that the role of women is in the domestic/private sphere while men dominate the public sphere which happens to be the locus of political activities. The Malays are influenced by the customs or "adat" and religious (Islamic) teachings. Likewise, with the Indian community. The Chinese, on the other hand, determine gender roles through customary rather than religious practices;
- *women leaders do not champion women's issues*. It is a common observation among scholars that women political leaders, despite their high prominence and visibility in public life, tend to be tacit on many issues which relate to women's rights or gender equality

in public and private spheres of life;

- *the political behaviour of women is moulded by the political culture and tradition of the political party which defines women's role in politics in a particular way, which is one within the circumscribed 'appropriate' female behaviour. Hence, women politicians cling to the 'right image' as approved and endorsed by both men and women in the party and society at large. In this way, controversy or instability is avoided with the main political party itself. The women politicians in UMNO, MCA, MIC and Gerakan are in the ruling class league and their views or public posture reflect the ideology of the party ruling class. In view of this perception on the appropriate political behaviour, the majority of female political leaders are generally not active sponsors of change for women;*
- *the limited platform for women in the main political party to launch pertinent women issues induces other non-mainstream organisations such as the NGOs or trade unions to take up the issues. Hence agitation for change or reform to safeguard or protect the interests of women as workers in the work place are often staged outside the party or political arena;*
- *lack of a critical mass is another factor identified as a stumbling block in moving the gender agenda speedily forward. Due to the fact that there are only a few women in leadership positions in key institutions like political parties, top ministries as well as executive and legislative bodies, women are viewed as not only lacking the political clout but also the 'critical mass' or collective bargaining power in key positions to effectively influence the decision-making process and shape the party or government agenda;*
- *gender-blind elements in the recruitment, posting and promotion in the public service often results in the under-representation of women at the decision-making level. At almost every level, female managers face more obstacles than their male counterparts in career mobility particularly at the managerial level. The multiple roles of being a wife, mother and career women also hamper the upward mobility of women.*

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.43 Increasing opportunities for advancing women's participation in decision making is one of the future challenges that needs to be taken up by the Government. The equal participation of women and men in the decision-making processes, be it in government, public and private organisations, NGOs and trade unions, reflects the level of democracy in a society. To address the issues and challenges for enhancing women's equality in the decision-making processes at all levels, the following strategies are proposed:

- *initiate and enforce affirmative action* to eliminate discriminatory policies, practices and procedures which have gender dimensions in all sectors. This calls for "gender-sensitising" training for key management personnel at decision-making levels in all organisations;
- *ensure a balanced representation* by men and women in political parties, boards of directors, councils, committees, local government and trade unions;
- *increase opportunities to allow women access* to full participation in internal policy-making structures and appointive and electoral-nominating processes;
- *incorporate gender issues* into the political agenda by increasing women's participation in the leadership of political parties to narrow the gap between men and women;
- *provide a gender-friendly environment* for equal opportunities in training, promotions, recruitment and appointments in the public service for women, and encourage the same in the private sector;
- *provide a gender-sensitive social and educational environment* to promote the concept of gender equality in society at large;
- *take positive action to build a critical mass* of women leaders, executives and managers in key decision-making positions;
- *ensure fair practice and create an appropriate mechanism* to monitor

women's access to senior levels of decision-making;

- *review all existing concepts* or institutional framework relating to women's participation in the decision-making processes at all levels;and
- *take steps to ensure that the Affirmative Action Agenda* be implemented at all levels, especially by the Public Service Department so as to rectify the gender inequality at all levels of the political,public and corporate sectors. The new Ministry of Women and Family Development is the appropriate ministry to monitor the implementation of this policy and should be empowered to take the necessary steps to handle recalcitrant organisations.

## **V. C CONCLUSION**

5.44 The most important changes in the Malaysian women's status and leadership role since independence have come from their increased participation in political parties, elected and appointed offices, women's organisations and legislation. Women and women's organisations have played a significant role in changing the laws or the interpretations of laws to protect women's legal status entitling them to equal pay for equal work, equal educational opportunities, equal employment and equal rights to vote and hold public office. The trend towards higher aspirations in politics can be further supported by the already highly visible trend in women's participation in the economy, education and health industries.

5.45 Engendering policies and procedures to enable greater participation by women in decision-making processes require the transformation of existing concepts and institutional framework where gender bias pervades all levels. The achievement of the 30 per cent target requires the political will and commitment of the Government and all relevant parties. The recent creation of the Ministry for Women and Family Development and the establishment of Puteri UMNO are major steps that will boost efforts to increase women's participation in decision making and power sharing.

**Box 5.3: Tan Sri Datuk Nuraizah A bdul Hamid –  
A Woman of Distinction in the Public Service**

Tan Sri Nuraizah Abdul Hamid was honoured as a Woman of Distinction in Malaysia for the year 2001. The award conferred on her was a special recognition and appreciation for being one of the most successful and prominent, high-ranking woman administrators in the public service. Spanning over 29 years of service, Tan Sri Nuraizah blazed through her career with a track record of great achievements and excellent service rendered to the Government and the people of Malaysia.

During her school days, Tan Sri Nuraizah, the youngest of six siblings, had shown her leadership capability and strength of character when she became the female Head Prefect of Anderson Secondary School in Ipoh, Perak. She graduated from the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur with a BA Honours in History and proceeded to acquire a Diploma in Public Administration. Subsequently, she obtained her Master's degree in Public Administration at the American University, Washington D.C. She attended a number of training programmes, which included an advanced management programme at the Harvard Business School in 1997.

From the time of her first appointment as an Administrative and Diplomatic Officer, Tan Sri Nuraizah has carved her own niche in her career path, with the encouragement of a very supportive husband. As a devoted wife and mother of two girls and a boy, she has shown her skill in managing her multifarious roles at home and at work. Her two-year involvement as a Project Officer with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok, Thailand, provided exposure which further developed her global expertise.

She spent 11 years serving in the Public Services Department, holding positions as Deputy Director (for eight years) and Director, Salaries and Allowances Division (for three years). It was then, in 1991, that she led the team that developed the new remuneration system for the public sector. She moved up the career ladder and joined the top echelon of the Civil Service with her appointment as the first woman Deputy Secretary-General of the Ministry of Education from 1992 to 1996.

*continue next page*

Tan Sri Nuraizah reached the apex of her career when she became the first woman in Malaysia to assume the post of Secretary-General with the Ministry of Energy, Multimedia and Communication in 1996. It was with this ministry that Tan Sri Nuraizah led the team in formulating the world's first convergent law – the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. She also directed the national Y2K team and initiated the setting up of the Malaysia Energy Centre, a non-profit research and development institution. In the field of energy, Tan Sri Nuraizah has also participated in the creation of the ASEAN Centre of Energy, and has chaired the assemblies of INTELSAT towards its privatisation in July 2001.

She retired from the Public Service in 1999 but was contracted to carry on as Secretary-General for another two years. From 1 November 2000 to date, she assumes the chairmanship of the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission .

In retrospect, Tan Sri Nuraizah believes that her father, the greatest influence in her early life, inculcated in her the value of work: "to excel in whatever work undertaken". She strongly believes that women can excel in any field of work that they choose, if given an opportunity. Her success in working with male colleagues is attributed to her "non-conformist attitude", especially with regard to gender and culture.

She has received several Federal and State awards in recognition of her contribution to the country, the highest being the "Tan Sri" award, which was conferred in June 2000.

*Source: Citation from "Woman of Distinction"; May 2001. NAWEM.*

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### Chapter 2

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