

Chapter 20

Women In Development

20

WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

20.01 Women continued to make tangible contributions to national development during the Sixth Plan period, while playing a significant role in the development of their families. The National Policy for Women formulated in 1989, which reflected the Government's commitment towards the advancement of women, guided Government's efforts and strategies during the Plan period to promote the role and position of women in society. It also provided an impetus for women to achieve greater progress.

20.02 The Seventh Plan will continue with ongoing efforts to address women's concerns and provide the appropriate enabling environment for women to participate more effectively as partners in social and economic development. Legal as well as institutional and other constraints that inhibit the fuller participation of women will be reviewed to promote women's active involvement in the development process. The Government will implement, where relevant, programmes under the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 as agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995.

II. PROGRESS, 1991-95

20.03 Women continued to make strides in various fields of national development, including greater participation in the economy and labour market as well as improved access to education and health. These improvements were made possible generally due to the rapid growth of the economy which created more and new opportunities for women and, more specifically, as a result of the implementation of gender-sensitive programmes undertaken by the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In addition, changes to the legal and institutional framework further facilitated their involvement in the economy.

Population, Labour Force and Employment

20.04 Current estimates indicated that the size of the female population increased from 8.9 million in 1990 to about 10 million in 1995, a growth of 2.4 per cent per annum during the Plan period. Women accounted for about one half of the Malaysian population. Of an estimated total population of 18.4 million persons recorded in the 1991 Population Census, about 9.1 million were women. The age-structure of the female population was similar to that of the male, with about 56 per cent of the female population in the age-group 24 years and below. The median age of the female population was 22.2 years in 1991 compared with 19.9 years in 1980, the increase being due to declining fertility and increasing life expectancy. An interesting trend observed in the 1991 Census was the increase in the proportion of the female population in the age-group 65 to 74 years, from 2.0 per cent in 1980 to 3.0 per cent in 1991, which was mainly due to improved female life expectancy.

20.05 About 48 per cent of females were in the working-age population, that is, in the age-group 15-64 years, indicating the size of the potential female labour force. However, women accounted for only one third of the labour force. There was a significant increase in female labour force participation, from 45.8 per cent in 1990 to 47.1 per cent in 1995. As a result, the size of the female labour force increased from about 2.5 million in 1990 to 2.9 million in 1995, or an average annual increase of 3.1 per cent. The relatively low participation of women despite the increase in their educational attainment and buoyancy of the job market was to a certain extent due to the lack of affordable and quality child-care services, and flexible working conditions for women. Although the female labour force participation rate for Malaysia was lower than rates experienced in developed countries, it was significantly higher compared with some developing countries.

20.06 The number of women employed during the Plan period increased from 31.4 per cent of total employed in 1990 to an estimated 33.7 per cent in 1995, as shown in *Table 20-1*. An interesting trend observed during the period was the decline in the proportion of women relative to men working in the primary and secondary sectors, and the progressive increase in their participation in the tertiary sector, particularly the distributive trade and financial sectors. Overall, the manufacturing sector continued to absorb the largest share of employed women, accounting for about 30.1 per cent of all female workers in 1995 compared with 29.5 per cent in 1990. This was followed by the other services; wholesale and retail trade, hotels and restaurants; and agriculture sectors, as shown in *Table 20-2*.

TABLE 20-1

EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION BY INDUSTRY AND SEX, 1990 AND 1995
(%)

<i>Industry</i>	<i>1990</i>		<i>1995</i>	
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock & Fishing	65.6	34.4	71.6	28.4
Mining & Quarrying	87.1	12.9	88.1	11.9
Manufacturing	53.6	46.4	56.6	43.4
Construction	93.1	6.9	87.6	12.4
Electricity, Gas & Water	95.7	4.3	92.2	7.8
Transport, Storage & Communications	61.4	38.6	88.8	11.2
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotel & Restaurants	88.9	11.1	62.4	37.6
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	65.8	34.2	59.7	40.3
Other Services ¹	62.1	37.9	60.8	39.2
Social and Related Community Services	47.2	52.8	44.9	55.1
Personal and Household Services	47.0	53.0	49.4	50.6
Public Administration	81.5	18.5	78.4	21.6
Total	68.6	31.4	66.3	33.7

Note: ¹ This category comprises six sub-categories and only three major sub-categories are shown.

TABLE 20-2

EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION BY SEX AND INDUSTRY, 1990 AND 1995
(%)

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

20.07 In terms of occupational structure, women made advances into higher-paying occupations during the period. The proportion of women in the professional and technical as well as the administrative and managerial occupational categories increased significantly from 9.4 per cent and 0.6 per cent in 1990 to 13.5 per cent and 1.9 per cent in 1995, respectively, as shown in *Table 20-3*. Women were mainly employed as production and related workers, accounting for 26.5 per cent of total female employment. The share of women employed as agricultural workers declined in line with the weakening prospects for employment in the sector.

20.08 Various measures were undertaken by the Government during the Plan period to address the low participation of women in the labour market. These included the provision of tax exemptions to employers for the establishment of child-care centres or creches near or at workplaces to enable working mothers to look after their children during off-time periods. Institutions such as the Women's Institute of Management (WIM) provided training in small business and entrepreneurial activities. Other efforts by both the public and private sectors included the provision of job training, better career prospects, as well as improved recreation, transport and welfare facilities. Employers were also urged to provide proper housing and hostel facilities, particularly for the benefit of rural migrants, many of whom were women. The Government as well as the NGOs, through the promotion of a caring society, encouraged the growth of

Occupation Category	1990		1995	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professional, Technical & Related Workers	6.4	9.4	8.4	13.5
Administrative & Managerial Workers	2.8	0.6	4.4	1.9
Clerical & Related Workers	7.0	14.1	7.3	17.6
Sales & Related Workers	11.4	11.4	10.9	11.3
Service Workers	9.9	14.1	9.9	13.4
Agriculture Workers	29.4	28.1	20.9	15.8
Production & Related Workers	33.1	22.3	38.2	26.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

the extended family system whereby the elderly helped young couples in caring for their children. This was aimed at releasing more women to seek employment and undertake income-generating activities.

20.09 With respect to earnings, male-female wage differentials continued to exist in private sector establishments. However, these differentials were narrowing steadily, particularly in labour-intensive industries where women were well represented. For example, in the electronics subsector, the wage differential between male and female production operators narrowed considerably such that average female monthly earnings as a percentage of male earnings increased from 82.7 per cent in 1990 to 92.5 per cent in 1993. Average monthly earnings of female thread and yarn spinners as a percentage of their male counterparts also increased from 93.8 per cent in 1990 to 97.9 per cent in 1993. In the public sector, there were no gender differences in pay for the same job.

Educational Attainment

20.10 Women continued to receive equal access to educational opportunities, a factor which has contributed to their economic and social advancement. Female enrolment at the primary and secondary levels was about half of total enrolment, while at the upper secondary level, female students accounted for about 52.3 per cent of total enrolment. Female intake into universities expanded rapidly from 37.2 per cent in 1990 to 49.5 per cent in 1994.

20.11 Although female students continued to be dominant in the arts stream, accounting for about 65 per cent of total enrolment in arts courses, females made further inroads into science and technical courses. This trend was clearly evident in vocational courses, where female enrolment doubled from 22 per cent of total enrolment in 1990 to 40.4 per cent in 1994.

20.12 The improved educational status of women was reflected in higher educational attainment of the female labour force. For instance, the proportion of the female labour force with secondary and tertiary education was about 50 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively, in 1993 compared with 45.1 per cent and 9.9 per cent, respectively, in 1990. On the other hand, the proportion of the female labour force with no formal education or primary education dropped from 15.7 per cent and 29.3 per cent, respectively, in 1990 to 12.6 per cent and 26.4 per cent, respectively, in 1993.

Health Status

20.13 The health status of women continued to improve during the Plan period. The maternal mortality rate, which is an indicator of the health status of women, declined from 0.6 per 1,000 in 1980 to 0.2 per 1,000 in 1995. The average female life expectancy further improved from 73.5 years in 1990 to 74 years in 1995 compared with 68.9 years and 69.3 years, respectively, for males. The reduction in female mortality was largely a result of better medical and health services, increasing age at first marriage and reduction in family size. The mean age at marriage increased from 22.3 years in 1970 to 24.1 years in 1991, while the proportion of women with seven or more children declined from 22.3 per cent to 8.3 per cent, respectively.

20.14 During the Plan period, the maternal and child health (MCH) programme, which was aimed at reducing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, improving perinatal health care and providing health and nutrition education, continued to be implemented. MCH services were provided through MCH clinics and health centres in rural and urban areas and hospitals in urban areas. For the inaccessible rural areas, these services were provided through mobile maternal services and village health teams.

20.15 MCH clinics, health centres and hospitals also provided health and nutrition education such as information on health promotion and disease prevention, nutrition, immunization, healthy lifestyle and family planning. Adolescent young women were provided with specific health education and counselling to help them develop relationships based on mutual respect, reduce risk-taking behaviour as well as prevent or control major health hazards. Since young women are in the high-risk category in terms of vulnerability to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), information on AIDS awareness and education was also emphasized.

Supportive Legislation

20.16 While the Federal Constitution guarantees the equality of all Malaysians, the review of existing legislation and the enactment of new ones to protect the rights and dignity of women in both public and private life attest to the Government's commitment to enhancing the status of women. This commitment was reflected in the adoption of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value since 1969. Women also enjoy similar rights under the Pensions Act, 1970, the Employees Provident Fund Ordinance and the Workmen's Compensation

Act. The Employment Act, 1955, although equally applicable to both men and women, contains protective provisions specifically for women in the workplace. The Act includes provisions that prohibit women from working underground or on midnight shifts without permission from the authorities and provides maternity leave for up to five births for a period of sixty days with full benefits. To underscore the importance of women's contribution in the workforce, the Income Tax Act, 1967, was amended in 1978 to allow a woman employee to have her income assessed under her own name.

20.17 In the effort to strengthen the rights and protection of women, the Women and Girls Protection Act, 1973, and its 1987 amendments were adopted. The Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act, 1976, applicable to non-Muslim women, abolished polygamy, prescribed a minimum age of 16 years for marriage and provided for the compulsory registration of all marriages. With regard to Muslim women, the Islamic Family Law Enactment also endowed more rights and benefits to protect the welfare of divorced Muslim women and their children. In addition, the Islamic laws of inheritance also provided for the care and protection of Muslim women and their families with respect to property distribution.

20.18 As part of the continuing efforts to protect the rights and dignity of women, the Domestic Violence Act, 1994 was passed in Parliament to provide more protection for women against wife battering and other forms of domestic abuse. Measures were also taken to increase public awareness with regard to the rights of women under the law. The media played an important role in facilitating the dissemination of information pertaining to the rights of women in areas such as marriage, divorce, employment and property. This enhancement of legal literacy among women heightened awareness of their legal rights as well as of the means of enforcing their rights.

National Machinery for the Advancement of Women

20.19 The national machinery for the advancement of women in Malaysia comprises Government and NGOs which work together for the common purpose of improving the status of women. During the period, an action plan for the implementation of the National Policy for Women was initiated. The Government and NGOs collaborated with the academia and the private sector to enhance the status of women in the country. The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID), which is the coordinating,

consultative and advisory body on women's affairs, promoted women's issues at the national level through its linkages with policy-makers. As the focal point for women's affairs in the country, the Women's Affairs Division (HAWA) of the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development played a significant role in advancing the interests of women through its activities and projects, both at the Government and non-governmental levels. During the period, HAWA appointed liaison officers at the state and district levels to monitor the implementation and impact of projects for women. It also undertook gender analysis training and sensitization for policy-makers and programme implementors in the public sector and initiated similar programmes for the private sector.

20.20 To complement the efforts of government agencies, about 220 women's NGOs were established throughout the country. These NGOs implemented a wide range of activities and programmes aimed at promoting the interests of women, as shown in *Table 20-4*. The National Council for Women's Organizations (NCWO), the umbrella body for women's NGOs, organized courses on parenting skills, family health care, counselling and leadership development. Other NGOs implemented activities, such as seminars and workshops, to enhance the knowledge and skills of their members. Several professional NGOs contributed towards making the legal system more relevant to the needs of women, while others initiated activities to harness public opinion against injustices on women. In addition, the women's section of several political parties implemented various programmes to improve the position of women.

TABLE 20-4

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS
FOR WOMEN BY ACTIVITY, 1995**

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Number</i>
Sports	28
Welfare	66
Education	15
Religious	16
Social ¹	64
Professional	22
Political	9
Total	220

Note: ¹ Includes associations at State and Federal levels.

Commitments at the International Level

20.21 The Government continued to demonstrate its commitment to uphold the rights and dignity of women at the international level. In 1995, the Government accepted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, *albeit* with certain reservations. Malaysia's participation at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action further manifested the Government's commitment to advance the status of women. Many of the commitments agreed upon were areas where Malaysia had made good progress. These areas included the eradication of poverty, illiteracy, and inequality in education, training and employment. Other areas were increasing access to comprehensive and affordable health care, eradication of all forms of violence against women, and the creation of more flexible and convenient working environments. In 1995, Malaysia was elected as Chairperson of the Regional Steering Committee on Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia Pacific for a duration of three years. The functions of the Steering Committee include the preparation and implementation of specific regional and sub-regional activities such as training for rural women, as well as research and the exchange of information on rural women.

III. PROSPECTS, 1996-2000

20.22 The Seventh Plan period will continue with strategies and programmes undertaken thus far to enhance the role, position and responsibilities of women in the social and economic life of the country. As more women are expected to enter the labour force, efforts will be undertaken to provide women with skills for family development in areas such as parenting and family health as well as ways to cope with the twin responsibilities of family and career.

20.23 In implementing the overall programme of action for the advancement of women, the Government will ensure that strategies are consistent with Malaysian values, religious beliefs and cultural norms. The strategic thrusts for the further advancement of women during the period are:-

- o promoting greater female participation in the labour market through the provision of more flexible working arrangements and support facilities;*
- o providing more educational and training opportunities for women to improve their upward mobility in the labour market;*

- o improving further the health status of women;*
- o reviewing laws and regulations that inhibit the advancement of women in the economy;*
- o strengthening the institutional capacity for the advancement of women;*
- o operationalizing the National Policy for Women through the implementation of an action plan; and*
- o forging closer linkages at the international level through effective participation at international fora and implementation of commitments for the advancement of women.*

Promoting Greater Female Participation in the Labour Market

20.24 The Government will continue to promote a higher level of female participation in the labour market not only in the modern sectors of the economy but also in higher-paying jobs. The shortage of labour faced currently necessitates a review of employment strategies with a view to increasing female participation and better utilization of the skills of women. An increase in female participation rates is expected to add further to the supply of labour and contribute towards enhancing the growth of the nation's output. About three-quarters of the working-age population who are outside the labour force are women, and about 75 per cent of them are housewives. The twin responsibilities of family and career are constraints to greater female labour force participation, particularly married women. In this respect, the private sector, being the largest employer, will be encouraged to facilitate greater entry of females into the labour force through women-sensitive personnel policies. Measures that will have to be implemented include the setting up of creches as well as the provision of housing and transportation facilities between the home and place of work. In addition, the collection and analysis of data on women's participation in the economy and labour market will be strengthened in order to integrate women's issues in development planning. Towards this end, HAWA's capacity to assist in developing programmes that promote women's economic self-reliance will be further enhanced with the availability of an integrated database.

20.25 The private sector will also have to consider providing more conducive working arrangements for women that take into account their multiple roles and responsibilities. The provision of flexible working hours, career breaks and other

flexible work practices will enable women to integrate work with household duties. Attention will have to be given to providing assistance such as advisory and counselling services, particularly for those who require such assistance. Recognizing that one of the main factors constraining women's participation in higher-skilled and better-paying jobs was the lack of marketable skills, further efforts will be taken by the public and private sectors to enhance human capital formation among women through technical, vocational and other relevant training programmes. Greater access to labour market information will further facilitate easier entry of women into wage employment by providing women with knowledge of job availability and their requirements in various sectors of the economy. It is also expected that advances in information technology will assist women to increase their productivity and efficiency at the workplace.

20.26 To encourage greater participation of women in business, entrepreneurial training programmes will continue to be implemented. Training in business-related areas such as marketing, financial management, budgeting and planning will be undertaken by the Government and NGOs to enable women to be better trained and more knowledgeable in these areas. Institutions such as WIM will further expand their programmes for the training of women in business and entrepreneurial activities. In addition, to ensure a more coordinated approach, a special programme for the development of women entrepreneurs will be developed. This programme will include, among others, identifying potential areas for business and training requirements, developing a directory of consultants and trainers, and providing financial assistance. Micro-enterprises, small and medium businesses and cooperative enterprises will be promoted and strengthened to widen opportunities for women's participation in these areas.

Providing Increased Educational and Training Opportunities

20.27 More intensified efforts will be undertaken to provide educational and training opportunities to women to facilitate their upward mobility towards higher value-added activities and higher-paying occupations. More women will be encouraged to enter into areas such as the civil service and the judiciary as well as in activities such as R&D. In this respect, women will be offered more places in professional and technical fields at institutions of higher learning. In order to encourage women to pursue non-traditional fields of study such as engineering, business administration and science and technology, programmes to instil greater awareness among female students and parents regarding career opportunities in the professional and technical fields will be implemented.

20.28 In the area of training, greater initiatives will be taken to equip women with necessary skills and knowhow, especially in technical fields. Public training institutions are expected to increase the intake of women in industrial training programmes. The private sector is also expected to provide increased skill training opportunities for women, including in new technologies. With the economy moving towards higher capital intensity, there will be an increased demand for higher-level skilled manpower. To respond to this development, women will be provided with opportunities to acquire new and advanced skills that are relevant to the needs of the industry. Retraining of women will also become necessary due to rapid changes in technology which require constant upgrading of skills.

Improving Health Status

20.29 Efforts will be undertaken to further expand and improve health services to simultaneously address the needs of women and families. Integrated services under the family health programme, which will be provided at MCH clinics, health centres and hospitals, will comprise comprehensive, integrated and continuing care for all members of the family. With regard to women's health, the family health programme will give special attention to HIV prevention, sexually-transmitted disease prevention, family planning, as well as the identification of risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular diseases. In addition, health education including promotion of healthy lifestyle and nutrition will be conducted by health and health-related agencies as well as the mass media.

20.30 In the field of curative care, a study will be undertaken to examine the feasibility of establishing a special hospital for women with a view to providing higher quality inpatient care in respect of illnesses peculiar to women such as osteoporosis and those related to reproductive health. Emphasis will also be given to biomedical, socio-behavioural and clinical research on various aspects of women's health. In this regard, health data specific to women will be necessary to elucidate women's specific health needs and responses to various patterns of diseases at different stages of the life cycle so that appropriate preventive and curative services could be provided.

Reviewing Laws and Regulations

20.31 The Government will continue to review existing laws and regulations as well as their implementation with a view to eliminating provisions that discriminate or have adverse effects on women. Legislation that will be reviewed

include those pertaining to family law, distribution of property, guardianship and immigration laws. In addition, steps will be undertaken to ensure stricter enforcement of laws and court decisions so as to provide for the protection and welfare of women.

20.32 The Government will amend the Employment Act, 1955 to permit women to be gainfully employed in part-time employment while allowing them flexibility to look after their homes. Amendments to labour legislation will also aim at allowing employers to introduce flexible working hours. These amendments will encourage greater female labour force participation, thereby increasing the supply of labour.

Strengthening the Institutional Capacity for the Advancement of Women

20.33 During the period, efforts will be made to enhance the effectiveness of the national machinery for the advancement of women consistent with the stated goals of the National Policy for Women. This will be undertaken through strengthening the capacity and capability of HAWA in order to enable it to carry out its multifarious functions more effectively. In addition, the linkages between the Government and NGOs will be enhanced.

20.34 As NGOs are expected to play a more significant role in the advancement of women, the management of NGOs will be strengthened through appropriate training schemes. The NGOs will continue to be encouraged to provide counselling and other support services to those women who are subject to injustice.

Implementing the National Policy for Women

20.35 During the Plan period, the Government will expand programmes to facilitate the role of women both within and outside the family. To further increase the involvement of women in national development, an action plan to operationalize the National Policy for Women will be formulated for implementation. The action plan will cover, among others, the following areas:-

- o strengthening the national machinery for the integration of women in development;*
- o increasing public awareness and sensitivity towards issues relating to women;*

- o mobilizing NGOs to increase efficiency and effectiveness in undertaking socio-economic programmes;*
- o encouraging positive action for the advancement of women in various fields; and*
- o promoting the role of women in family development.*

Implementation of International Commitments for the Advancement of Women

20.36 The Government will continue to participate actively in international fora on the advancement of women. At these meetings, Malaysia will share with participating countries its experiences especially in the areas of poverty reduction, health improvement and educational advancement. With respect to the Fourth World Conference on Women, areas of concern contained in the Platform for Action which will be addressed include promoting the economic potential and independence of women, increasing the participation of women in decision-making, strengthening mechanisms at all levels to promote the advancement of women, and eradicating violence against women. As chairperson of the Regional Steering Committee on Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia Pacific, Malaysia will actively participate in initiating programmes for the advancement of rural women.

IV. CONCLUSION

20.37 During the Sixth Plan, women continued to make further advances in various fields of national development. The National Policy for Women guided efforts to address women's concerns and promote their advancement. The provision of increased educational and training opportunities, the enhancement of their health status and the promotion of greater female participation in the economy, will constitute important components of the strategic thrust for women's advancement in the Seventh Plan. Relevant programmes in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women will also be implemented.