

## **Chapter XVI**

# **Women In Development**

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### I. INTRODUCTION

16.01 The Government has long acknowledged the significant contribution by women to overall national development. As such, it has actively and consistently promoted the participation of women in development through facilitating their access to social, economic and political opportunities. The formulation of the National Policy for Women (NPW) reflects the Government's commitment towards optimizing the potential of women in the social and economic development of the nation.

16.02 In cognizance of the multiplicity of women's roles in the family, society and economy, the Government also recognizes that specific strategies must necessarily be formulated to effectively incorporate women in the process of development. Towards this end, concerted efforts will be made to progressively reduce existing constraints and facilitate the assimilation of women into the mainstream of social and economic activities. These measures are in line with the NPW's objective to integrate the contribution of women in national development efforts.

### II. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

16.03 In view of the increasingly active role of women in development, the Government formulated NPW in 1989. Its overall objectives are:

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

NPW essentially articulates the Government's commitment towards facilitating the participation of women in the social and economic life of the nation. It also establishes guidelines for the integration of women's contributions in the process of national development.

### **Family Development**

16.04 In view of the important role of women in family development as well as their increasing involvement in the various economic sectors, efforts were made to educate the Malaysian public on the benefits to society when both men and women share family responsibilities. In addition, the significant role mothers play towards moulding future generations of progressive citizens brings to the forefront the need to equip women with sufficient resources and skills. Towards this end, the National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) conducted courses on family life, parenting and counselling techniques as well as implemented programmes related to the promotion of happy families through family togetherness.

16.05 The non-formal education system was also utilized to inculcate positive values and attitudes within the family through programmes specifically geared towards women. An important element of such programmes was leadership training aimed at preparing women to be more progressive and receptive to changes.

### **Labour Force Participation and Employment**

16.06 Women constitute about one half of the population, but currently only account for one third of the labour force. The *labour force participation rate* for women increased from 37.2 per cent in 1970 to 46.7 per cent in 1990. Their participation rate, however, continued to lag behind that of men who registered rates of 81.3 per cent and 85.6 per cent over the same period.

16.07 The *employment trends* between sexes reflected a similar pattern. While the average percentage distribution of men decreased from 69 per cent to 65 per cent between 1970 and 1990, that of women increased from 31 per cent to 35 per cent during the same period, as shown in *Table 16-1*. The overall female employment remained low compared to male, largely attributable to the lack of appropriate skills and competing demands of the home.

TABLE 16-1  
PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF  
EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR AND SEX, 1970-90

Industry	1970		1980		1985		1990	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture & Forestry	62.0	38.0	61.0	39.0	61.6	38.4	65.6	34.4
Mining & Quarrying	87.4	12.6	89.7	10.3	89.5	10.5	87.1	12.9
Manufacturing	71.9	28.1	59.9	40.1	56.9	43.1	53.6	46.4
Electricity, Gas & Water	94.7	5.3	92.5	7.5	96.6	3.4	93.1	6.9
Construction	93.3	6.7	92.9	7.1	94.4	5.6	95.7	4.3
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	81.8	18.2	70.7	29.3	62.3	37.7	61.4	38.6
Transport, Storage & Communications	95.7	4.3	93.7	6.3	89.6	10.4	88.9	11.1
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	-	-	70.5	29.5	64.9	35.1	65.8	34.2
Community, Social & Personal Services	71.1	28.9	70.6	29.4	63.2	36.8	62.1	37.9
Average Percentage Distribution	69.0	31.0	67.3	32.7	65.4	34.6	65.0	35.0

16.08 Over the last two decades, the *employment status* of women improved significantly in line with the expansion of employment and structural changes in the economy. The proportion of women as unpaid family workers in the traditional and informal sectors fell from 39.7 per cent in 1970 to 21.6 per cent in 1990. The decline was largely due to the absorption of this group of women into the modern sectors, particularly the estate subsector and the industrial and services sectors. Consequently, the proportion classified as employee rose from 38.9 per cent to 62.9 per cent during the same period, indicating the growing significance of formal female employment.

16.09 In terms of the *occupational structure*, women were largely concentrated in low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs in the agriculture sector and in low-paying, semi-skilled, assembly-type production operations in the industrial sector, as illustrated in *Table 16-2*. In 1990, even though 9.4 per cent of women were in professional and technical occupations, the majority of them were in teaching and nursing. Their participation in administrative and managerial occupations was also less than 1 per cent.

TABLE 16-2  
EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION BY OCCUPATION AND SEX, 1970-90  
(%)

Occupational Category	1970		1980		1985		1990	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Professional, Technical & Related Workers	4.6	5.3	6.4	8.5	6.8	9.1	6.4	9.4
Administrative & Managerial Workers	1.0	0.1	1.4	0.3	3.2	0.6	2.8	0.6
Clerical & Related Workers	5.4	4.1	6.8	11.1	7.4	14.2	7.0	14.1
Sales & Related Workers	9.8	4.9	10.3	7.2	11.1	11.0	11.4	11.4
Service Workers	8.1	8.4	9.0	9.0	10.1	13.7	9.9	14.1
Agricultural Workers	47.6	66.8	35.9	46.3	28.7	33.7	29.4	28.1
Production & Related Workers	23.5	10.4	30.2	17.6	32.7	17.7	33.1	22.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

16.10 Overall, agricultural activities continued to absorb the largest proportion of women, employing 28.2 per cent of all female workers in 1990, followed by manufacturing, and community, social and personal services, as shown in *Table 16-3*. The proportion of women employed in the electricity, gas and water sector declined over the Fifth Plan period.

TABLE 16-3  
EMPLOYMENT DISTRIBUTION BY INDUSTRY AND SEX, 1970-90  
(%)

Industry	1970		1980		1985		1990	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture & Forestry	49.6	67.9	37.5	49.3	28.6	33.7	28.9	28.2
Mining & Quarrying	2.3	0.7	1.4	0.3	1.1	0.2	0.7	0.2
Manufacturing	9.3	8.1	11.8	16.3	13.0	18.9	15.2	24.3
Electricity, Gas & Water	1.0	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.1
Construction	3.1	0.5	6.4	1.0	10.7	1.2	8.7	0.7
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotels & Restaurants	11.6	5.8	13.1	11.2	16.8	19.1	16.9	19.7
Transport, Storage & Communications	5.0	0.5	5.0	0.7	5.9	1.3	5.9	1.5
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services	-	-	1.9	1.6	3.8	3.9	4.0	3.9
Community, Social & Personal Services	18.1	16.4	22.7	19.5	19.3	21.2	18.8	21.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

16.11 *Agriculture Sector.* Although agriculture continued to be the major employer of women, the proportion of women employed declined from 67.9 per cent in 1970 to 28.2 per cent in 1990, consistent with the structural transformation of the economy. Within *Keluarga Tani*, women played an important role as the decision-maker in financial matters, provided the labour for the family farm and were the driving force in terms of family development. It is clear that women remain an important factor in the rural agriculture sector.

16.12 *Manufacturing Sector.* Female employment in the secondary sector increased significantly. The manufacturing sector accounted for 24.3 per cent of total female employment in 1990 compared with 8.1 per cent in 1970. However, a survey of manufacturing industries in 1988 indicated that more than half of the female workers were in low-paying, semi-skilled jobs in production operations, compared with only 17.7 per cent in technical and supervisory occupations and 10.9 per cent in managerial and professional positions. In the labour-intensive industries, such as textiles and electronics, women comprised as high as 57 per cent of all workers in a majority of establishments.

16.13 *Services Sector.* Female employment in the services sector, particularly community, social and personal services, increased from 16.4 per cent in 1970 to 21.4 per cent in 1990. In the wholesale and retail trade, as well as the hotels and restaurants subsector, female employment increased from 5.8 per cent to 19.7 per cent over the same period. Despite this increase, the majority of them were employed as domestic workers, general workers, sales personnel and hawkers. They were under-represented in the higher levels of the occupational ladder.

16.14 In the public sector, female employment increased from 29.3 per cent of the total employment in 1985 to 32.9 per cent in 1990. They were largely concentrated in the lower categories, namely, the C and D categories. Women in these two categories accounted for 82.3 per cent of the total female employment in the public sector. In the C category, women essentially served as primary school teachers, nurses, office and clerical workers, while in the D category, they primarily comprised unskilled general workers. In the teaching profession, 51.3 per cent of teachers and education service officers were women in 1990, an increase of 5.6 percentage points since the beginning of the Fifth Plan period. A substantial proportion were primary school teachers.

### *Female Earnings*

16.15 In the public sector, there was no discrimination against women in employment, either in terms of recruitment or remuneration. In the private sector, however, male-female wage differentials, although narrowing, continued to exist for certain production occupations. This is indicated in *Table 16-4*.

TABLE 16-4  
AVERAGE FEMALE MONTHLY EARNINGS AS A  
PERCENTAGE OF MALE EARNINGS IN SELECTED  
OCCUPATIONS IN THE MANUFACTURING SUBSECTOR,  
1974-90

	1974	1980	1990
<i>Rubber Products</i>			
Production Supervisor & Foreman	57.9	52.5	86.2
Rubber Moulding Press Operator	45.1	53.1	72.4
<i>Printing And Publishing</i>			
Production Supervisor & Foreman	-	70.4	75.1
Hand Compositor	61.3	59.9	111.1
Book Binder	60.1	47.2	-
<i>Plywood And Particle Board</i>			
Production Supervisor & Foreman	30.8	56.6	67.0
Veneer Cutter	-	75.5	-
<i>Textiles</i>			
Production Supervisor & Foreman	66.2	69.7	75.2
Thread and Yarn Spinner	85.6	101.7	93.8
Fibre Rover	88.5	87.0	103.0
Machine Cloth Weaver	126.9	74.7	111.0
<i>Electronics</i>			
Supervisor & Foreman	55.5	62.1	82.8
Production Operator	-	97.4	82.7
<i>Rubber Latex Processing</i>			
Rubber Processing Worker	72.3	72.2	73.1
Sheet Rubber Maker	-	77.3	102.3
Rubber Sheet Clipper	75.3	-	-



### *Unemployment*

16.16 The incidence of unemployment among women was higher than that of men in every age group in both the rural and urban areas. Female workers were particularly vulnerable during the economic downturn in the mid-80s as they were concentrated in industries that were severely affected by the recession. At the height of the recession, about two-thirds of retrenched workers who were predominantly female were from the textile and electronic industry.

### **Education**

16.17 Women benefited from equal access to educational opportunities as shown by the enrolment rates of male and female students at the primary and secondary levels of education. Gender differentiation was, nevertheless, apparent by the preference of female students for non-technical and non-vocational disciplines, as indicated in *Table 16-5*. However, over the 1970-90 period, female enrolment in the technical stream increased markedly from 4.3 per cent to 35.9 per cent.

16.18 Female intake into universities constituted about 44 per cent of the total intake during the Fifth Plan period, with female students making increasing inroads into areas like medicine, dentistry, engineering, architecture and accountancy. Although more female students enrolled in science and technological courses, there continued to be a preponderance of female students in the arts and applied arts courses.

### **Government and Non-Government Organizations**

16.19 A number of institutions were created to integrate women into the mainstream of development. The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) was set up in the Prime Minister's Department in 1976 to translate the world plan on women in development within the national context. In 1983, a Secretariat for Women's Affairs (HAWA) was established to monitor and evaluate services for women provided by the public and private sectors. In addition to being the primary information centre on women's affairs, HAWA also functions as secretariat to NACIWID.

TABLE 16-5

PERCENTAGE ENROLMENT OF FEMALE STUDENTS  
ACCORDING TO LEVEL AND STREAM OF EDUCATION,  
1970-90

	1970	1980	1990
<i>Level of Education</i>			
Primary	46.8	48.6	48.6
Secondary	40.6	47.6	50.5
Post Secondary	42.6	45.5	59.3
University	29.1	35.5	44.3
<i>College</i>			
Polytechnics	13.2	21.5	25.2
Teacher Training Institutions	41.9	48.3	56.1
MARA Institute of Technology	32.4	42.9	45.8
Tunku Abdul Rahman College	23.5	33.9	37.2
<i>Stream</i>			
Arts	47.4	61.0	64.8
Science	24.5	36.3	44.7
Vocational	24.2	30.4	22.0
Technical	4.3	27.1	35.9

16.20 The delivery system for various woman support services further benefited from activities of Government organizations like *Kemajuan Masyarakat* (KEMAS), Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA), Rubber Industry Smallholders Development Authority (RISDA) and various Regional Development Authorities. Activities targeted at women were not only economic-based, but also covered a broad spectrum of educational, social and religious programmes.

16.21 The establishment of *Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia* (AIM), a non-government trust agency, further facilitated the increasing involvement of women in economic activities. Preliminary studies indicated that not only did women account for the majority of the clientele of AIM's credit scheme, but they were also better debt payers. In the process, the participation of women, particularly in non-farm activities, enabled household incomes to increase substantially.

16.22 Other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also played significant roles in promoting the participation of women in economic and social activities. NGOs, such as the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO), Women's Institute (WI), Islamic Women's Action Organization (PERTIWI), Women's Aid Organization and the Islamic Women's Welfare Board, instituted various self-help development programmes and provided support facilities.

### **Legal Status**

16.23 The Federal Constitution guarantees the equality of men and women. In addition, various legislations have been enacted to preserve, reinforce and protect the rights of women.

16.24 The Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act, 1976, designed to protect non-Muslim women from weaknesses within previous laws on marriage and divorce, abolished polygamy, prescribed a minimum age of sixteen 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.

16.25 In order to safeguard the interests of women and to protect them from abuse, laws relating to rape and molestation were amended by Parliament in April, 1989. Mandatory sentences of not less than five years and up to a maximum of twenty years were also imposed to serve as an effective deterrent to crimes against women.

16.26 The status of women as economic agents was further enhanced with the improved provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1967. Under the new provisions, women could file separate assessments as well as incorporate income from all sources for tax purposes. The new provisions, therefore, provided for equal treatment of women under the existing tax laws.

### **III. PROSPECTS, 1991-95**

16.27 Women play an important role in national development. As wives and mothers, they are the primary force behind the development of future generations of caring and progressive Malaysians. Outside the

home, they are an important economic resource. However, in the face of a rapidly tightening supply of labour in certain sectors and locations, it is a matter of concern that the involvement of women in economic activities continues to be inhibited by a number of constraints such as:

- *the dual and, often, competing responsibilities of family and career restrict the mobility and increased participation of women in the labour market;*
- *gender differentiation in schools not only transforms into occupational differentiation later, it also limits the adaptability and participation of women in the labour market;*
- *social mores 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, 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 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 working 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 which preclude prolonged female participation in the labour market.*

16.28 In view of the various problems constraining women in development, the major thrust of the Government's efforts will be towards ensuring that future development policies are designed to facilitate the more effective participation of women as partners in social and economic development. Within the framework of NPW, greater emphasis will be placed on the promotion of skill-enhancement activities.

## **Family Development**

16.29 The capabilities and capacities of women towards providing a conducive and harmonious family environment will continue to be strengthened through comprehensive and multi-sectoral programmes organized by NPFDB and other public agencies. Activities that contribute towards the increased well-being of women will also be promoted in order to facilitate their active participation in economic activities outside the home.

16.30 The non-formal education system will continue to be effectively utilized to enhance the involvement of women in economic and social activities as well as to ensure the formation of future generations of quality citizens. Programmes pertinent to family development, such as parenting, marital stability, nutrition, reproductive health, management of family resources and counselling, will be incorporated into the training curriculum.

16.31 Research projects will also be undertaken and surveys will be conducted to provide for a greater understanding of the factors which would facilitate the role of women in the family and their participation in the work environment. The findings will assist the Government in the formulation of more appropriate programmes in the future.

## **Labour Force Participation and Employment**

16.32 Recognizing the economic potential of women, the Government will promote human capital enhancement programmes aimed at improving their occupational status. Skill training and retraining programmes will be expanded to increase their employability in the market-place. Prospects for women in the economy will also be greatly improved with the opening up of opportunities in non-traditional occupations. A larger intake of female students in vocational and technical education will ultimately contribute to their greater involvement in higher-skilled and better-paying jobs in the labour market.

16.33 The Ministry of National Unity and Social Development will focus on the needs of disadvantaged women, particularly in female-headed households. Towards this end, studies will be initiated to assist future planning efforts. Special programmes to equip women with marketable skills will also be formulated to improve their human capital

and facilitate access to employment and income-generating opportunities. The provision of support facilities, such as child-care centres and creches for employees' children, will also be encouraged to facilitate higher and more sustained participation of women in the labour market.

### **Women in Business**

16.34 Women must also be equipped with entrepreneurial and business skills in order to encourage greater self-employment and diversify their participation in the economy. Taking into account the special needs of women, they must be provided with economic resources, such as credit facilities and licences, as well as adequate representation in existing trade and business associations. In this context, efforts will be made not only to provide facilities for the upgrading of managerial skills, but also to lay the groundwork for more effective participation of women in the business arena. In addition, the development of a Bumiputera Commercial and Industrial Community (BCIC) will also be facilitated by promoting Bumiputera women in business.

### **Non-Government Organizations**

16.35 With the implementation of NPW, the role of related NGOs and voluntary organizations will no longer be confined to community development and social activities. Equally important will be their active and effective involvement in programmes and activities designed to bring women into the mainstream of development. NGOs and voluntary organizations will also act as catalysts for the development of programmes or schemes that would serve as vehicles of change for rural women. Within this context, women's organizations will focus their activities on the mobilization of rural women to improve the output from both agricultural and non-farm activities by providing advice on production, processing, marketing and other related economic activities.

16.36 A more functional and viable mechanism between the Government and NGOs will be established with a view to enhancing the complementarity of efforts and avoiding the duplication of functions. The proposed establishment of Consultative Committees at the state and district levels will strengthen both the networking and feedback systems. In addition, it will also ensure the participation of individuals, NGOs and other interest groups in the formulation, monitoring, review and appraisal of relevant policies, programmes and activities.

16.37 Women's NGOs will also be encouraged to provide counselling and other support services, particularly in cases of domestic violence and violence against women. The welfare of women will be further safeguarded through the establishment of crisis centres and shelters for battered women, the provision of subsidized legal aid as well as the establishment of other intervention centres for women in distress. This is crucial towards enabling women to regain their sense of self-worth and facilitating their re-entry into productive activities.

#### **National Policy for Women – Plan of Action**

16.38 HAWA will formulate a *Plan of Action* in order to put into effect various recommendations enshrined in NPW, which will include proposals to:

- *strengthen the national machinery to address women's issues;*
- *reorientate the institutional process for the planning, implementation and monitoring of Government policies and programmes to accommodate women's concerns;*
- *raise public awareness and sensitize the Government bureaucracy with regard to women's concerns;*
- *activate NGOs in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of socio-economic programmes; and*
- *redress problems of discrimination and promote affirmative action for the benefit of women in particular.*

16.39 HAWA will also review related legislation and make recommendations to the Government so that the existing legal and institutional framework both accommodates and promotes the participation of women in national development.

#### **IV. ALLOCATION**

16.40 The Government has set aside an allocation of \$20 million in the Sixth Plan to support programmes and projects to be implemented by HAWA.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

16.41 The Government is committed towards increasing the effective involvement of women in overall national development. In recognition of the crucial role women play in family development and their increasing participation in economic activities, the Government will continue to support programmes that strive to facilitate the role of women both within and outside the family. As women constitute a vital economic resource, the Government's goal is, therefore, to integrate women as equal partners in nation building.