

Be 'game changers', PM's wife urges women
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Society's perceptions on gender roles may be among the reasons why there are few women 'game changers' in business, said the prime minister's wife Rosmah Mansor today.

"It is often said that when a woman is assertive she is viewed as difficult. She can sometimes even be accused of controlling her husband.

"When a man does that, he is credited for being self-assured," Rosmah told an audience of about 250 representatives from the corporate world in her keynote speech at the Women in Leadership Forum.

She cited this as an example of cultural reasons why there weren't many women 'game changers' in business, despite women making up half the world population, going on to say such people included Apple co-founder Steve Jobs, Microsoft founder Bill Gates and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg.

"These people have transformed the global business landscape and even our way of life. What strikes me most, is that nearly all these game changers are men," she lamented.

In particular, she said, Time magazine and The Huffington Post recently had a special feature on 'game changers' and there was only one female entrepreneur among them - the founder of Code for America, Jennifer Pahlka.

Other reasons given include women being stuck in a 'productivity trap' due to lack of access to infrastructure, training and capital, or for being intimidated by technology.

Rosmah urged that women should not allow themselves to be constrained by cultural factors, overcome risk-aversion and suggested that women stuck in the productivity trap should be identified and given help to enter mainstream business.

"By so doing we could perhaps break through some women entrepreneurs who may fear the notion of 'big businesses'. This fear could be the veil that holds them back from becoming a business game changer," she said at the grand ballroom of Royale Chula Hotel, Kuala Lumpur.

She also suggested that business leaders take advantage of the government's transformation programmes to create female game changers.

"These initiatives have open opportunities for women to become business game changers.

"And so we must ask ourselves, as business leaders and decision makers in our respective fields whether we have done our fullest to help create women business game changers?" she said.