



MALAYSIA

THE NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN

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THE NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN (Translation)

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CONTENTS

	Page
1. Preamble	1 - 2
2. The Objectives of The National Policy on Women	3
3. Major Principles And Guidelines	4
4. Strategies For Policy Implementation	5
5. Specific Strategies And Action Time-Frame	6 - 8
6. Plan of Action By Sectors	9 - 23
6.1 National Machinery for the Integration of Women in Development	
6.2 Health	
6.3 Education	
6.4 Legislation	
6.5 Employment	
6.6 Politics	
6.7 Media	
6.8 Religion	
6.9 Culture	



THE NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN

1. PREAMBLE

- 1.1 In accordance with the spirit of our independent developing nation, this National Policy On Women upholds the aspirations, to ensure loyalty, prosperity, justice, freedom and basic human rights for all its citizens.
- 1.2 In cognisance of the fact that women constitute an important potential resource, not yet fully recognized, the purpose of this Policy is to provide some guidelines and directions to all endeavours in the planning and implementing of the development programmes of the nation, so as not to overlook or neglect the interests and participation of women, both as targets of development as well as agents in the development process.
- 1.3 In realization of the fact that solidarity is the basis for achieving progress in our national development, this Policy emphasizes the need to draw up comprehensive and effective programmes for fostering a concept of unity amongst individuals as well as between governmental and non-governmental agencies.
- 1.4 Women have all along been involved actively as supporters in the political arena of the nation. The process of development necessitates the full involvement of both men and women. This Policy therefore reiterates the stand which emphasises the active and meaningful participation of women in the political arena.

- 1.5 This Policy takes into consideration the interest, endeavour and involvement of the Government, the needs of several organizations to support various international resolutions, the needs of various women's organizations, and the establishment of the Secretariat for Women's Affairs as the national machinery.
- 1.6 A number of important documents served as basic reference in the formulation of this Policy. These documents include :-
- (a) The Resolutions of the United Nations' End of Decade for Women (1976 -1985) Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985 with the theme "Forward Looking Strategies Towards the Year 2000".The resolutions as contained in this international documental have been fully endorsed and ratified by the Malaysian Government.
 - (b) The Policy Declaration of the Commonwealth Secretariat on Women and Development that has been signed by the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting in Nassau, Bahamas in 1985.
 - (c) "The Commonwealth Plan of Action" in support of the above Policy which was endorsed by the Malaysian Government at the meeting of the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1987 in Vancouver, Canada.

- (d) Resolutions that were made at the Conference of Ministers In Charge of Women's Affairs held in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1987. The resolutions urged every government to formulate a policy on women and development for integration into the national development programme.
 - (e) The basic working paper prepared by the National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) which was adopted at its meeting held on January 31, 1986.
- 1.7 At the national level, several consultations, seminars and workshop were organized by HAWA and the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) with a view to obtaining consensus and support on the various resolutions made at various international conferences. The involvement of the government was sought at all levels.

2. THE OBJECTIVES OF THE NATIONAL POLICY ON WOMEN

- 2.1 The main objectives of the National Policy On Women are:
- (a) To ensure an equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources, information, opportunities and benefits of development for men and women. The objectives of equality and justice must be made the essence of development policies which must be people oriented so that women, who constitute half the nation's population, can

contribute and realize their potentials to the optimum.

- (b) To integrate women in all sectors of development in accordance with their capabilities and needs, in order to enhance the quality of life, eradicate poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, and ensure a peaceful and prosperous nation.

3. MAJOR PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES

3.1 Major principles and guidelines of the Policy include the following:

- (a) That this National Policy On Women shall be aligned and coordinated with the National Development Policy, the provisions of the Constitution pertaining to the basic rights of citizens, the right of protection under the law, and the ideals of national unity and independence.
- (b) That the Policy shall place primary emphasis on the active participation and involvement of both men and women in the development process, at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages.
- (c) That this Policy takes into consideration the full potential of the nation's human resource, half of which comprises women. The nurturing and integration of female resource shall not only be confined to the traditional sectors but shall also extend into all sectors and all levels of the social, economic, political and cultural development.

- (d) That efforts to integrate women in development shall be the shared responsibility of the public and private sectors. The implementation of this Policy must be made the general duty of all concerned and shall not be the sole responsibility of any one gender, sector or agency.
- (e) That the special needs and interests of women and the special virtues of femininity shall not be jeopardized; the responsibilities of motherhood and family life shall neither be compromised nor neglected; and the dignity, morals and respect due to women shall not be sacrificed.
- (f) That the standard of education and knowledge of women be enhanced in accordance with their emergent roles and involvement in a dynamic and modern world and society.
- (g) That all forms of adverse discrimination on the basis of gender be eliminated in all matters of decision-making and subsequent action.
- (h) That information on target clientele and the impact of development programmes shall be gender categorized to enable appropriate assessment.

4. STRATEGIES FOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

- 4.1. In order to assist planners and implementors of development policy, the following strategies shall be developed to ensure the efficiency, effectiveness coordination and standardization of policy and action:-

- (a) Raising consciousness and understanding of all those concerned, and sensitizing them with issues and status of women;
- (b) Channelling women's issues through a central agency to various institutions and government bureaucracy in the form of administrative directives, programmes aimed at attitude modification and the building of commitment among those entrusted with the task of programme implementation;
- (c) Planning for the distribution of resource to the various sectors that are implementing programmes pertaining to women's issues; and
- (d) Securing the cooperation among the various governmental sectors, and between governmental and non - governmental agencies in the process of centralizing and coordinating all efforts aimed at enhancing the participation of women in development.

5. SPECIFIC STRATEGIES AND ACTION TIME-FRAME

- (a) **Strengthening the Women's Affairs Secretariat as the Machinery for Women's Development**

The national machinery for the advancement of women is currently the Women's Affairs Division (HAWA) of the National Unity and Social Development Ministry, which serves as the Secretariat for the National Advisory Council for the Integration of

Women in Development (NACIWID). Appropriate action should be taken to further strengthen HAWA and to up-grade its status by establishing channels of communication with every relevant ministry and appointing coordinating officers in every State. In this manner, HAWA would be able to function more effectively in matters of concern to women as well as initiate specific development programmes for women at all levels.

Time-frame for Action : Immediate and on -going

(b) **Orienting Policy and Action Programmes of Government Agencies in order to include the Processes of Planning, Implementing and Monitoring Programmes for the Integration of Women**

In the formulation of policy, legislation, regulations and programmes by any sector or agency, consideration must be given to ascertain its impact, contributions and implications for women; its negative impact and effects must be avoided. A comprehensive system for coordinating and monitoring of programmes shall be created to prevent negative effects as well as to identify obstacles and constraints to women's participation, whether this be from the legal perspectives or in practice, so that appropriate action can be taken to alleviate them.

All development programmes must have strategies that would benefit women; the involvement of women at all levels, from the planning to evaluation stages at both local and national levels, must be guaranteed.

Time frame for Action: Immediate and on-going.

(c) **Education and Training for Sensitizing Government Administrators on Women's Issues**

To promote awareness and commitment of government agencies and institutions, gender sensitizing training programmes on women and development shall be held continuously for all government personnel.

Time frame for Action: Immediate and on-going.

(d) **Involvement of Non-Governmental Organizations**

The Government shall attempt to involve all Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and voluntary bodies in programmes and measures concerning women's development. In this manner, national efforts for integrating women in development can be strengthened.

Financial, technical, advisory and institutional support shall be provided on an on-going basis to women's organizations in order to encourage and promote their services.

Time-frame for Action: Immediate and on-going.

(e) **Elimination of Discrimination and Affirmative Action**

Special measures shall be taken to eliminate discrimination against women where it exists. In this context, existing lacuna in legislation for the protection of women should be rectified through affirmative action.

Special focus shall be directed towards the less developed areas, handicapped and disabled women, women in employment, women in health and women in education.

Time frame for Action: Immediate and on-going.

(f) **Promoting and Coordinating Research on Women's Issues**

Recognizing the lack of accurate and comprehensive data and information on the status of women, the government shall encourage and assist research and studies on women. In addition, the government shall ensure that all data collection by various sectors and agencies are disaggregated according to gender so that women's needs can be identified for more accurate policy, programmes and project formulation.

Time-frame for Action: Immediate and continuing

(g) **Allocations**

The government shall ensure that the Ministries and Agencies concerned utilize the approved allocations and adjust these allocations accordingly to meet the needs of programmes for women in development.

Time frame for Action: Immediate and continuing

6. PLAN OF ACTION BY SECTORS

In order that this Policy be implemented effectively, comprehensively and integratively, a number of strategies are hereby listed, surveyed from various aspects which are closely related to the development and advancement of women:

6.1. National Machinery for the Integration of Women in Development

- (a) The establishment of HAWA as a Unit in the Prime Minister's Department and as the Secretariat for the National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) is a positive step. In accordance with the policy of decentralizing the duties and powers of the Central Government, it is therefore appropriate that the machinery for women in development be upgraded, so that it can function more effectively to initiate various programmes at all levels of development. With this wider involvement, the machinery will be able to identify priorities, areas and targets for specific intervention and plan appropriate actions accordingly.
- (b) HAWA shall also have functional relationship with all other Ministries. It shall function as a focal point for the coordinating, monitoring and processing of issues to be transmitted to NACIWID for its views, advice and recommendations for action to be undertaken by the government and other related agencies.
- (c) Efforts to strengthen HAWA shall include various training programmes for its officers and staff so that the Division will be more efficient and dynamic.
- (d) The appropriate allocation of funds in accordance with the expanded functions and duties of HAWA shall be determined.

6.2. Health

- (a) Women's health serves as an important indicator of their advancement and status. Not only is health important for women to achieve their rightful status, but as mothers and care-providers, they can influence the health of the family and community.

Besides needing protection from various common diseases, women need attention and care during pregnancy, child-birth and breastfeeding, assurance of obtaining nutritious food, protection from emotional and psychological stress, and protection from infection of dangerous diseases.

Women are also constantly exposed to experiments and medicine which may be dangerous especially those pertaining to contraception, abortion, and various infections. Cancer and various other communicable diseases further increase infant and female mortality and morbidity rates.

- (b) In Malaysia the disparities between the urban and rural sectors in terms of quality health services and health facilities still exist. In the rural areas the lack of such facilities has resulted in many women being deprived of the opportunities to benefit from proper medical treatment and care. In many kinds of work women are constantly exposed to various occupational hazards, such as dangerous chemicals. In addition, illiteracy and ignorance still prevail among poorer women, whether in the rural or squatter areas.

- (c) Actions that could be taken to improve women's health shall include the following:
- (i) formulating a National Health Policy which takes into account the status, needs and health of women. A comprehensive concept of health shall cover physical, mental and emotional aspects;
 - (ii) creating a mechanism to facilitate the participation of all sectors - (public and private) to ensure the equitable and just distribution of health services and facilities in all areas, and to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to remedy and improve the situations according to local priorities;
 - (iii) encouraging and developing the knowledge and practice of both modern and traditional medicine suitable to the needs and abilities of contemporary society;
 - (iv) implementing an effective policy for the prevention of drug abuse and addiction by involving all parties and levels;
 - (v) enacting laws that can provide protection to patients from irresponsible practitioners of medical and health care. Victims of rape and violence shall be protected from adverse and sensational publicity that could undermine their dignity and moral virtues; and
 - (vi) reviewing existing laws or formulating new laws with a view to providing protection to women in

occupations with health hazards.

6.3 Education and Training

- (a) The ultimate objective of this sector is to ensure that opportunities for education and training for all citizens, male as well as female, are guaranteed so that they may develop their individual potentials to the optimum and that they may be able to play a more meaningful role as productive and upright citizens.
- (b) The development of women's potentials must be given specific attention, since the present education system had evolved primarily on considerations and premises that place emphasis on men's needs and capabilities. The national system of education and training should integrate the concept of gender equality, whilst fostering appropriate attitudes and perspectives for respecting and recognizing the rights and capabilities of women as equal status with that of men.
- (c) Sexism and stereotyping of women's roles in text books, reference resources and any other forms of teaching and learning materials must be eliminated. Women have proven their capabilities in various fields of endeavour. This fact should be reflected in examples of contribution and development to society.
- (d) Further, there is a need to identify obstacles which still limit the full participation of women in basic education, vocational education, higher education, and in professional and specialized fields.

Likewise, the illiterate group and those lacking in knowledge and skills should not be neglected because a large proportion of them comprise women.

(e) Actions that could be taken to enhance the status of women in education and training shall include the following:

1. Improving and enhancing the quality of educational programmes at all levels.

A comprehensive review should be undertaken with a view to making adjustments, wherever necessary, to the curriculum, methods of teaching, provisions of facilities and the intake of students in order to:

- (i) eliminate references and illustrations in texts which are negative to the image of women;
- (ii) facilitate the participation of women in areas that are of interest to them;
- (iii) convince women that they should take up training opportunities that would enable them to go into science and modern technology;
- (iv) include family life education in all education and training programmes intended for both men and women;
- (v) review the admission policy and implementational functions of institutions to ensure that discriminatory practices towards women are not perpetuated;

- (iv) expand the vocational training opportunities for women and recognise the special skills of women in training and work; and
 - (vii) stress the importance of instituting a system of adult education and providing opportunities for lifelong education to enable women to continue developing their knowledge and skills.
2. Involving the participation of non-governmental agencies in developing educational opportunities.

Private educational institutions should be monitored to ensure that they do not perpetuate discriminatory practices or project a negative image of women. The National Women's Policy should cover all sectors and agencies, governmental as well as non-governmental.

6.4. Legislation

- (a) Every citizen has the right of protection under the law of the country. With the acceptance of the principle of equality of status of men and women, it becomes necessary to strengthen the laws to ensure that the rights of women with regard to ownership of property, citizenship, employment opportunities, and guardianship are safeguarded.
- (b) Protective legislation is necessary for women in employment, for women to fulfill their maternal and motherhood functions and obligations, for women who are

