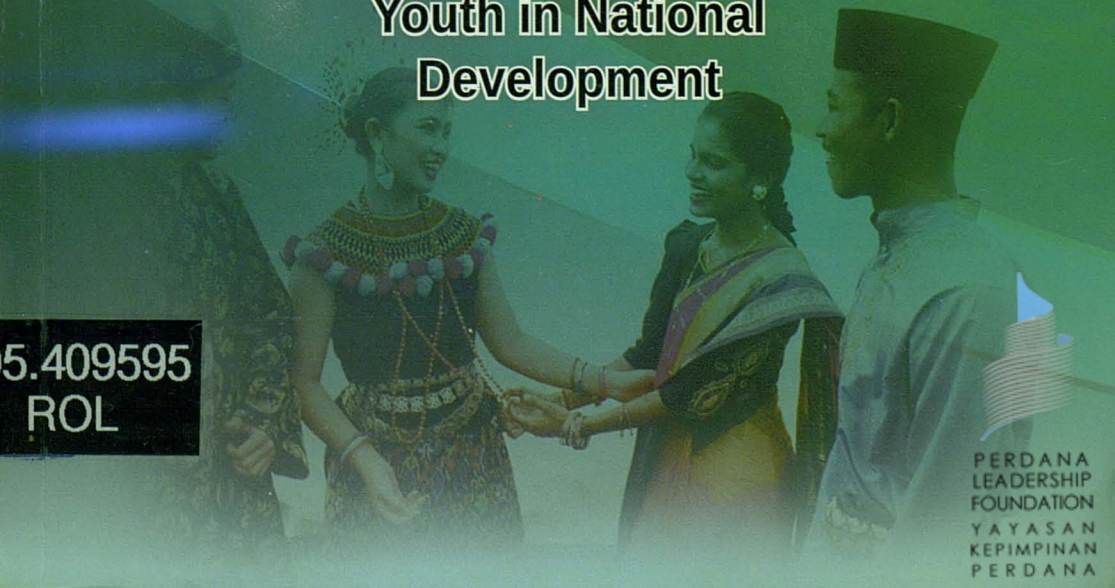


PERDANA DISCOURSE SERIES NO.10/2010



The Role of Women and Youth in National Development

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THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



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TUN DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND YOUTH IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF)
Putrajaya, 2010

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PREFACE

Women and youth play a special role in the overall development of the country. Both the women and youth should come forward to take part in the process of nation building, because the future of Malaysia is in their hands. “I think that the educated women and youth have to play an important role in creating an atmosphere of equality and dispelling darkness of ignorance,” they would have to work in the interests of the nation, giving up their narrow self-interests. They need skills training, jobs and a means of participating in shaping their country’s future. Women on their part are demanding the promotion of “women’s rights through gender awareness campaigns and training”. Generally, women and youth have been treated “as passive objects rather than participants in shaping the society.

The term ‘nation building’ or ‘national development’ is usually used to refer to the constructive process of engaging all citizens in building social unity, economic prosperity and political stability in an inclusive and democratic way. A nation is built out of the human intellect. This means that a nation cannot be built without the recognition and the collective efforts of all citizens, skilled and unskilled, young and old. We have often heard of countries with limited mineral resources developing at a speedy rate. This is usually attributed to the fact that such countries have developed a mechanism for making maximum use of its people and labor force, thus making its human resource its most precious and priceless resource. Nation building is a process. Its benefits are

never rewarded to the present generation of builders, but to its future inhabitants.

There is no other resource that matches the human being because mankind is the foundation or the corner stone of every civilization. Women and Young people are a crucial segment of a nation's development. Their contribution, therefore, is highly needed. Young people are social actors of change; and as the saying goes, "The youth are not only the leaders of tomorrow, but also the partners of today." The government and society at large have equal responsibility to provide the women and youth with an environment that is conducive to bringing about a mature and responsible population for the coming generation to lead a better life. This means a brighter tomorrow depends on how well today's generation is emotionally, culturally, academically, morally, spiritually, skillfully and vocationally prepared. In as much as the Government owes a platform to the women and youth, they also have a responsibility to this nation. It is well known that the most vibrant section of every society is the women and the youth. Therefore, they have the responsibility of being at the fore-front of any national exercise. They also have to realize the opportunities made available to them, making the best use of them will provide beneficial result that may lead to their own social and economic growth, hence, the growth of the nation.

Several interesting perspectives were highlighted during the tenth discourse series held on 4th November 2009, co-organized by the Perdana Leadership Foundation together with the Institute of Quality and Knowledge Advancement (InQKA) of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). The discourse was a vibrant discussive platform participated by academicians, students and members of various women and youth associations.

Editors

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the Board of Trustees of the Perdana Leadership Foundation (PLF), the Executive Director of PLF, Tan Sri Nik Mohamed Nik Yaacob, and the Former Vice Chancellor of University Technology MARA (UiTM) Tan Sri Dato' Seri Professor Dr Ibrahim Abu Shah for their continued support and confidence in PLF and Institute of Quality and Knowledge Advancement (InQKA), for yet another chapter of the series of joint publications. In this 10th discourse, we are very honoured to have Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who shared his ideas and opinions on the topic of 'The Role of Woman and Youth in National Development'. We are also grateful to have with us distinguished personalities of their respective fields: Ms. Zuraidah Hj Musib, Ms. Dina Zaman, Tengku Zafrul Aziz, and Associate Professor Saliha Hassan, who further contributed to the development of knowledge on this topic. Our gratitude goes to Associate Professor Dr Shireen Haron, the UiTM Assistant Vice Chancellor for her support and direct involvement in this series. We express our appreciation to all the participants who have further enriched the knowledge gathered. We would also like to thank the staff of PLF, fellows and staff of InQKA and UiTM, for their tireless effort in making this discourse a success. Last but not least, we acknowledge the contributions made by the transcribers of PLF, and friends of InQKA and the University Publication Centre (UPENA) of UiTM, who have helped us with this 10th issue of the Perdana Discourse Series.

PROLOGUE

Women and youth are keys to development and are crucial to the goal of sustainable development. There is a widely held adage that young men are the nation's hope and young women the nation's pillar. To this effect, the government has established various nation-building programs and policies so that women and youth can participate in the process. Today, women's roles are not limited to merely molding happy families but they also participate actively in the labor market. Statistics show that almost half of Malaysia's labour force consists of women, and there are growing trends seeing women and youth as agents and beneficiaries in all sectors and at all levels of development process. Women and youth are actively engaged in all facets of social, religious, cultural, political and economic life of the nation. They have become ubiquitous as entrepreneurs, lawyers, doctors, directors, ministers, and in other top positions. They have continued to advance in various fields of development, largely due to their access to education and training, healthcare as well as improved employment opportunities. In short, women and youth are considered agents of change through which they are empowered and transformed in terms of socio-economics status and position.

Despite the progress that has been made, debates about gender differences still persist particularly in the context of feminization of labor, gender inequality and discrimination. There is also the notion of gender as a manifestation of patriarchy or male

dominance over women. In many situations, women are poorly represented in the structure of decision-making and planning which contribute to the lack of information regarding issues and problems confronting women. Related issues such as gap in wages, insecurity in employment, work-family conflict, sexual discrimination practices, and domestic violence further heighten this debate.

Youth studies, on the other hand, drawn from around the world, demonstrate how youth marginalization links with demographic stressors (such as illegal demonstration, gangsterism, bullying, etc) to serve as catalyst and exacerbating factor in conflicts usually embedded in terms of class, religion and ethnicity.

To that extent, a few questions need to be answered to address the issues, challenges, and future direction of women and youth in national development, namely:

1. What are the factors that influence women and youth to participate in national development?
2. What are the significant events that have made great impact on the role of women and youth in national development?
3. What are the strategies that government should adopt for closing the gap between policies and practices on issues pertaining to women and youth?
4. How can government and NGOs encourage greater levels of involvement of women in the implementation of gender-sensitive operations or activities?
5. What are the recommendations that can be forwarded to address issues and challenges faced by women and youth in sustaining national development?



SUMMARY

The topic of the Tenth Perdana Discourse Series' keynote address by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad is, *The Role of Women and Youth in National Development*. He divided his speech into two parts: women and youth. He began by talking about the population of women and men in Malaysia. He touched briefly on the topic of polygamy and then elaborated on the subject of women who tend to work harder and become more independent than men. Women are better able to acquire knowledge and skills compared to men; as a result, there are now more women than men studying in universities and colleges. Next, he talked about the role of youth in national development, and admitted that youth nowadays are more intelligent and can contribute many ideas for the development of this country. Dr. Mahathir said that youths must acquire knowledge and skills and must have the necessary qualifications to prepare them to lead other youths and the nation.





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Keynote Address by Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad
Perdana Leadership Foundation
Putrajaya · November 4th, 2009

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Yang Berbahagia, Tan Sri Datuk Azman Hashim; Yang Berbahagia, Tan Sri Datuk Sri Professor Ibrahim Abu Shah; *Dif-dif kehormat, Puan-puan dan Tuan-tuan sekalian.* I am very conscious that I am in the minority as there are more women than men in this hall today; so, I will address the women first.

Puan-puan and Tuan-tuan; I would like to thank Tan Sri Ibrahim Abu Shah for his remarks on the beginnings of UiTM; my relationship with the institute was what we may call a “love-hate” relationship. One of the experiences that I went through before I became a minister was when I was still Chairman of the Higher Education Council. There was a meeting one day, and I was warned that there would be a demonstration, and they wanted to shift the meeting to some other place. I disagreed and continued with the meeting, and when it ended, I was “arrested” by students and subjected to a “kangaroo court” trial where they asked many questions, which I answered; until they didn’t know what else to ask and instead complained about the bad condition of the canteen furniture in ITM (now UiTM). So, I agreed to go and see, and agreed with them that the furniture was indeed old and needed to be replaced. The demonstration took place in Universiti Kebangsaan’s (UKM) campus; but, the student leader was from ITM. He was unhappy because he felt that he could not pass his English exam, and what he actually wanted, was for ITM to exempt him from this exam as he had been busy being a

student leader. That was a good excuse; but, I was happy that ITM did not exempt him. Subsequently, he stood against me in the election in my constituency of Kubang Pasu. He lost and I won. That was my first involvement with ITM.

Of course, when I was Minister of Education, I had more problems with ITM. I had to close the Institute for a short while; I couldn't really go there when it was closed. When it reopened, the students held a demonstration; they performed well, but unfortunately not in their academic activities. I must say that I had been very harsh, perhaps; some of the students, including the son of a friend in my own constituency, were not allowed to come back. His father appealed to me; I apologized to him and told him that I would stick to the decision I had made. You can see how strict and unrelenting I was, and now I am asked to talk about women and youth.

The two are always mentioned together. However, each has different attributes; so, it is quite difficult to discuss these two groups, as if they are one. Women have certain attributes and youth, which also includes girls, have got different attributes. So, throughout my discussions, there would be times when I would talk only about women; at other times, I would talk only about youth, and where they have things in common I will talk about both together. I will begin by discussing about the two groups together. As far as I am concerned, they make up the numbers in a country like Malaysia, which is relatively a small country. In fact, when I became the Prime Minister, the population of Malaysia was only 13 million. Today, with 27 million in the country, the number is more than twice that in 1991. In a country where the population is small, we need to make use of everyone. If you exclude women, then the figure becomes 6.5 million men including the youth of course.

I have less faith in men than in women. I have found that men are invariably lazy while women work hard. So, their contribution, in terms of numbers, is about the same as the men, because

in any human society, you may have noticed that the numbers of men and women are about 50-50. You may not have noticed then, but I have studied figures of population, and I found that there are invariably fewer men than women, but there is never a situation where you have 20 percent men and 80 percent women. It will never happen anywhere, even after a war. Perhaps in those days during the wars, they killed the men so the women were left without prospective husbands; the numbers of women were increased [relatively], which is the reason why we [Muslim men] are allowed to marry more than one.

When the numbers of men and women are unequal, if there are fewer men and more women, you can marry more than one; but if you can not be fair to them, please marry only one, that's what the Quran says. I want to point out to you that if the numbers of men and women are about the same, and if one man takes more than one wife, there would be another who would not have a wife. It is a mathematical calculation. Now, if a man takes four wives; for every man who does that, there will be three without a wife. That will create social problems. See, the Quran does not ask us to take four wives; it is only under certain and very specific circumstances that you may marry two, three or four. But if we cannot be fair to them, marry only one, and it goes on to say that men cannot be fair to women; therefore, it is quite obvious that the Quran is telling us to marry only one. I'm saying this because I have one wife. But the people who teach religion, they are keen on having more than one wife, and they will tell you that it is alright to do so. It is self interest, really.

I have diverged from the subject, and I would like to go back to the question of numbers. We cannot do without women simply because it will reduce our numbers. When we had 13 million people, if you exclude the women, then the total work force of men will be 6.5 million and of course not all are able-bodied; therefore, only about 40 to 50 percent would be able to work. So, only 40 percent of 6.5 million would contribute to the work force of the country. We cannot afford that. Thus, we must bring the women





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