

# QUESTIONNAIRE TO GOVERNMENTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

COUNTRY: MALAYSIA

## PART ONE

### OVERVIEW OF TRENDS IN ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT IN MALAYSIA

#### 1. Country's Commitment

- 1.1. At the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Malaysia has explicitly expressed commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

*" The fact that we are meeting at this Fourth World Conference affirms our commitment and preparedness to change....The Platform for Action is a means for us to operationalize the commitment to lead to fundamental change.....The Malaysian Government is committed to equal rights and responsibilities, equal opportunities and equal participation.... We must rise above the differences to constructively and creatively chart this Beijing Platform for Action".*

- 1.2. Prior to Beijing, Malaysia has formulated and approved the National Policy on Women based on the principles and strategies contained in the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies of 1985. The National Policy for Women endorsed the objectives of gender equality, eradication of poverty, integration of women in all aspects of national development as equal partners with men as milestones to be

achieved in the process of the nations towards a modern, industrial and politically stable society.

1.3. With the commitment to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, the following actions have been taken by the Department of Women's Affairs (HAWA).

- a) to disseminate widely the National Policy for Women;
- b) to work in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and line ministries to prepare for the National Plan for Action focussing on the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Beijing Platform for Action;
- c) to strengthen the National Machineries and Institutions for the advancement of women;
- d) to formulate strategies for sensitizing government personnel and NGOs on gender issues and women's perspectives;
- e) to seek cabinet approval on the draft Plan for Action for the advancement of women. The draft Plan of Action was approved by the Cabinet in 1997. A copy of the Plan is attached as Appendix "A".

## 2. Major Achievements in Implementing the National Plan for Action

2.1. The integration of the goals and gender equality and advancement of women is a priority in the National Development Policy (1991-2000) and Vision 2020. The main thrusts of these policies are national unity, economic growth with equity, social justice and improved quality of life for all.

2.2. The adoption of strategies for further advancement of women. These include:

- Greater participation of women in the labor force;
- More education and training in support of women;
- Upgrading women's health status;
- Reviewing laws and regulations that discriminate against women;
- Strengthening and consolidating capacities for the advancement of women;
- Increase allocation for programs and projects that benefit women
- Measures to create environment that are more women friendly;
- Collecting sex disaggregated data for all impact assessment studies

### 3. **Situation of women and girls in sectors not covered by National plan for Action**

3.1. The National Plan for Action is a comprehensive document that covers rural and urban, suburban areas, minority groups especially the indigenous peoples, older women, single parents and migrant workers.

3.2. In assessment, the situation of all women and girls can be said to have been better now than in 1995. For example, the rate of poverty among the hard-core poor, the majority of whom are women, has drastically been reduced each year. The government is determined to eradicate the incidence of poverty among hard-core poor when it sets the target to reduce the figure to 0.5% by the year 2000. For a relative poor, the target is set for 5.5% reduction by the year 2000.

#### **4. Gender Equality and priority in relation to other public policy goals**

4.1. In retrospective Malaysia has not pursued gender discriminatory policies in its development goals. All efforts are being made to integrate women as fully as possible - both as actors as well as beneficiaries. However, as women are "late comers" or "late starters" in the development process, their participation rates especially at higher decision-making levels are less than that of men. The disparities are gradually narrowing down as women have access to education opportunities and better health standards, as the economy diversifies and grows. .

#### **5. Country's Priorities in terms of the Critical Areas of Concern**

5.1. Generally, Malaysia recognizes the Platform's critical areas of concern as important priorities. The National Plan for Action notes that these 12 areas are important to women's further advancement and therefore need to be given focus in all national development programs. These 12 areas become what normally considered "the women's perspectives".

5.2. The National Plan for Action, however, identified 13 action sectors, namely:-

- Actions to strengthen national machineries and institutions;
- Actions to increase public awareness and commitment of government bureaucracy to women's related issues;
- Actions to mobilize non-governmental organizations to enhance effectiveness of socio-economic programs;
- Actions to improve conditions related to women and their family;
- Actions to promote women's health status;
- Actions to improve women's status in the economy especially enterpreneurship in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), women affected by economic crisis, status of domestic workers and informal sectors;

- Actions to improve the rate of women in education and training (in practice in science and technical field, including Information Technology and Vocational Retraining);
- Actions to improve women's legal literacy and to review existing discriminatory laws and enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act;
- Actions to improve women's participation in decision-making bodies;
- Actions to counter negative impact of women in media;
- Actions to improve the status of women in religion;
- Actions to increase the participation of women in the Culture and Arts; and
- Actions to increase opportunities for women in sports.

5.3. The National Action Plan has not specified "the girl child" as a separate priority area of concern. However, there are actions to address incidences such as:

- Involuntary child labor;
- Drop out rates among school children, in particular girls;
- Denial of the child's rights to education and care;
- Child marriages; and
- Child abuse.

5.4. Malaysia prohibits the practice of female genital mutilation and there has been no known cases of female genital mutilation among any of the communities and indigenous people of Malaysia.

## **PART TWO**

### **FINANCIAL AND INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES**

#### **1. The National Budget**

1.1. Recently, the National budget allocates annually the sum of approximately RM 50 million for women specific programs under the Department of Women's Affairs, (only 20 million was provided during the Sixth Plan - we are now in the Seventh Plan). The recent budget allocation includes funding for NGOs to carry out government approved projects as identified in the National Plan for Action for the Advancement of Women. In addition to this allocation, various other ministries have women specific programs, namely:

- Ministry of rural Development for poverty eradication projects;
- Ministry of Entrepreneur Development;
- Ministry of Health; and
- Ministry of Human Resources.

1.2. HAWA as the central agency for women's advancement monitors the impact of various policies and programs on women.

#### **2. Structures and Mechanisms**

2.1. The organizational chart of the basic institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women is attached (See Appendix "B"). The Division of Women's Affairs under the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development has been upgraded to a department. Its functions include the co-ordinating and monitoring of the implementation of government's policies and projects to ensure that women's interests and concerns are taken into consideration in these policies

and programmes, and that development programmes do not have negative impact on women.

- 2.2. HAWA is also involved in sponsoring and facilitating courses, seminars, workshops and meetings aimed at increasing the knowledge and skills of women in specific areas and enhancing their awareness concerning their roles and responsibilities in the development process. HAWA collaborates with other agencies in organising "gender sensitisation" training for government officials and planners to provide skill as to how women's needs and concerns could be integrated into the development projects and programmes.
- 2.3. HAWA monitors and receives feed backs on the implementation of programs and activities carried out by various ministries through its liaison officers and Technical Working Committees or focus groups. At the state and district levels, Consultative Committees have been appointed.
- 2.4. At the international level, HAWA serves as a focal point for international co-operation and collaboration between the government and various international bodies that deal with women's programs. Through similar mechanisms HAWA receives feed backs of the implementation or follow-up progress of any treaties, conventions and resolutions. Regular meetings with other relevant agencies are co-ordinated by the Ministry before any national report is submitted to international bodies/ committees.

### **3. Role of Non-Governmental Organizations**

- 3.1. The NGOs, in particular the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) which was formed in 1962 has played an active and effective role in advocating equality of status for women and equal opportunities for participation of women in development. NCWO was instrumental in advancing the cause for

equal pay for women and similar conditions of service as men in the 60s and 70s; in the establishment of the National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) in 1976; in securing a special day for the observance of women's contribution or achievements, that is *Hari Wanita* (Women's Day) in 1963 which is celebrated yearly on the 25 August; and for obtaining women's representation in many policy making bodies. NGOs are also involved in making review and recommendations in such areas as education, law, health, media, environment, consumerism, religion, culture, economy, employment and welfare. NCWO has set up *WOMEN WATCH* in 1998 to monitor the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. The trust and concerns of the NCWO are implemented through the following commissions:

- Economic Commissions;
- Education and Training Commissions;
- Welfare and Development Commissions;
- Finance and Consumer Commissions; and
- Law and Legislation Commission.

3.2. Other than NCWO, there are various women NGOs that are very active in carrying out programs and projects for the benefit of women. All Women Society of Malaysia (AWAM), Women's Aid Organization (WAO), and Women Crisis Center are examples of committed and active women NGOs in Malaysia. These NGOs have set up shelters for battered women, providing services to women who suffered from AIDs and are active in helping and supporting the abused, including children. The NGOs work closely with international agencies (in particular the donors) and government agencies, such as the police and the Ministry of Health.

3.3. After 1995, mandate for NGOs has been further strengthened to enable them to be more effective in fulfilling their roles as partners in implementing programs to



integrate women in development. To facilitate effective communication and on-going working relationships between the government and NGOs, the representatives of NCWO serve as members of NACIWID, Inter-Ministerial Committee, Technical Working Committee (TWGs) and State Consultative Committees. NGOS are provided with sufficient fund to enable them to carry out their activities for the benefit of women.

#### **4. Arrangements to Coordinate Follow-up to Global Conferences**

4.1. The Ministry of National Unity and Social Development working together with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinate follow up actions to global conferences. These include:

- The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)
- The World Summit for Social Development
- The United Nations Conferences on Women
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

4.2. The Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, in particular the Women's Affairs Department, however, has not been involved actively in the Vienna Conferences on Human Rights, or the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Educational Summit (Education for all) and the Environment Summit Conventions. Comments and feed backs as well as interventions and statements with regards to issues related to women in these conferences were submitted through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is hoped that as HAWA grows in strength and stature, it will seek to be involved in these and other conventions and global conferences.

## PART THREE

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL AREAS OF CONCERN OF THE BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION - OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED AND MEASURES TAKEN

#### 1. Strengthening of National Machinery

- 1.1. Two years after the Beijing Conference and a year after the National Plan of Action was endorsed, the Division of Women's Affairs (HAWA) was upgraded to a full fledged department, within the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development directly under a senior Minister. As a Government national machinery, the Department of Women's Affairs continues to strengthen and enhance its capacities and capabilities in terms of human resources, expertise and linkages.
- 1.2. As a catalyst and a resource centre for government on gender issues, HAWA continues to enhance its capabilities to co-ordinate the implementation of gender responsive policies and plans, and to ensure gender accountability of programmes undertaken by other government agencies through effective monitoring, evaluation and reporting.
- 1.3. The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) has been revived and strengthened. A new mandate has been given to the Council which include access to various Ministries and active participation in national and international fora. The Council reports directly to the Minister in charge.
- 1.4. At the state and local level, parallel agencies have been set up. The State Liaison Committee, which brings together state level NGOs and government agencies report to the State Members in charge of women's affairs. Close linkages with

HAWA and Consultative Committees members at the state and district level is maintained.

- 1.5. The revamping of the National Machinery was initiated by a study undertaken by Asian Development Bank (ADB) commissioned by the government through bilateral agreement between Canada and Malaysia.

## **2. Data Collection, Dissemination and Utilisation**

- 2.1. In our attempt to address the paucity of gender disaggregated data in all sectors of development, Resource Centre on Women in Development was set up under the Department of Women's Affairs. The Resource Centre idea was initiated by members of the ASEAN Women's Program (now ASEAN Sub-Committee on Women) with studies being undertaken on a Regional level to develop a common thesaurus on women in development for the region. In spite of earlier weaknesses and lack of direction, the resource centre has continued to build its capacity to collect, analyse and disseminate information, and to provide gender training and technical advisory support to other ministries that have the responsibilities to implement the Plan of Action on the advancement of women. Since its establishment, statistical reports on the women in development in each sector in Malaysia has been produced and updated. The resource centre also produces Bulletins and other publications on women in development for local use. The department is now in the process of establishing an adequate management information system (MIS) and the mechanisms for data analysis at the resource centre. Plans are underway to develop a web-site and E-Community to promote linkages and innovation.

### 3. Women in Decision Making and Power Sharing

- 3.1. Despite the improvements in women's educational levels, employment opportunities and successes attained by women, their representation at the decision-making level is still very low as compared to that of men. In the arena of politics, the number of women candidates standing for elections has slightly increased with time and the proportion of victorious candidates have somewhat improved. The number of women in politics and public sector is shown in Appendix "C" and "D".
- 3.2. Problems, barriers and constraints that inhibit the full participation of women at the decision-making level have been raised in several fora organized by the Department of Women's Affairs and NGOs and have been targeted in the National Plan of Action. Measures such as the setting up of family and women friendly work environment such as child care facilities and the introduction of flexible working hours in the public and private sectors have been undertaken and some progress have been achieved.
- 3.3. The Government continues to pay special attention to the obstacles that have hindered women's advancement to this level. More effective measures are being taken by the Government to create and increase a gender-positive environment in which the organizational climate is supportive of both genders and be part and parcel of good human resource management. Gender sensitivity training with the objective to raise the overall level of consciousness amongst planners, policy-makers and implementers is being enhanced. There is still a need for persistent efforts to modify the prevailing stereotyping and perceptions on the role of women. Gender-sensitivity modules which have been developed will be tested and assessed to suit the ever-changing management environment.

- 3.4. To create the enabling environment for the upward mobility of women leadership, management training and others skills development have been further enhanced to enable women to advance in their careers. Attention has be given to the issue of gender in the development training programmes so that women with family responsibilities will be able to attend as many training courses as possible to enhance their skills. With such measures, it is hoped that women will be recruited and promoted at a higher rate to hold important positions both in the public and private sectors.
- 3.5. Recognising that formal training for new comers is a major part of the socialisation process, the introduction of gender modules concerning women in development into the pre-service training programme or any other orientation programmes for new employees are being taken up to foster consciousness about the new roles of women and their contributions to the development of the country. In order that women's issues can be integrated into the main stream of management training, HAWA, in collaboration with the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) is in the process of incorporating gender-sensitisation programmes into the main training programmes of INTAN.
- 3.6. A study has been carried out by HAWA to find out the number of women representatives in the various Advisory Council in the Federal and at the State level, how they have been selected, and whether gender balance exist as criteria. The study is on-going and more revealing details are being discovered. A campaign to bring about changes in attitude towards women's role will be planned in the near future.

#### **4. Women in Education**

- 4.1. On the whole, it can be said that educational opportunities in Malaysia have succeeded in generating more educated women, and helped in reducing the

educational disparity which exists between men and women. The enrolment of girls and boys in school and universities is shown in Appendix "E". However, gender stereotyping is still very much alive in the technical and professional fields. In view of the fact that women and girls are still being socialized in socio-cultural norms that are not in favor of their association with science and technology, hence their limited representation in these areas, greater efforts have been undertaken to mainstream the importance of women's representation in those areas into higher institutions and other training programs.

- 4.2. A number of institutions of higher learning has set up women's/gender studies units within their faculties/departments. Four of the Universities in Malaysia have their respective centers which focus on women's/gender studies and research programs. In addition, motivational and counseling programs to encourage girls to choose careers in the sciences and technological fields will continue to be undertaken so as to increase the participation of female students in science, advance technology, engineering, and technical education which will eventually increase the number of female participation in related labor market. Career vocational guidance aimed at encouraging female students to choose technical and non-technical vocational training will be made.

## 5. Promoting Legislation on Women's Rights as Human Rights

- 5.1. The Constitution of Malaysia lays down the minimum standards of the human rights of its citizens. As multi-racial society, the human rights standards are within the spirit of national values, accommodating the various traditions, religions, customs, social and economic conditions in the country. In promoting and protecting human rights in Malaysia, the government has agreed to establish an independent Commission on human rights at the national level. The Commission constitutes an essential mechanisms for the implementation of human rights.

5.2. By virtue of the Article 8, the Federal Constitution has clearly embodying the spirit of Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reads:

*"All are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination".*

5.3. The Article 8(5) of the Malaysian Constitution, however, allows for the relaxation of this principle based on the grounds of any of the following provisions:

- a) regulating personal law;
- b) or practice restricting office or employment connected with the affairs of any religion, to professing that religion;
- c) protection, well being or advancement of the aboriginal people;
- d) prescribing residence in a state or part of a state as a qualification for election or appointment to any authority having jurisdiction in that state;
- e) of a constitution of a state, being or corresponding to a provision in force immediately before *Merdeka Day*; and
- f) restricting enlistment in the Malay Regiment to Malays.

5.4. Malaysia has acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. Since 1998 most of the earlier reservations made have been withdrawn, with the exception of those pertaining to existing laws that have not yet been changed. The first national report to CEDAW Committee is now in the process of being prepared. This report will serve as a baseline for future actions to be taken to improve the Human Rights of women under the law.

5.5. The legal status of Malaysian women has been the subject of considerable debates. Some of the existing legislation that protect women are the adoption of the principle of equal pay for equal work value (1969); similar rights under the Pension's Act (1970); the Employee's Provident Fund Ordinance and the Workmen's Compensation Act (1955), which applicable to Malaysian citizen's only; Workmen's Compensation Act (1955), which covers all foreign workers except housemaids; the Employment Act (1955) which provides a comprehensive legal framework governing matters such as payment of wages, rest days, hours of work, holidays, termination and all other matters pertaining to employment which apply to both men and women; the Occupational Safety and Health Act (1994), and the Factories and Machinery Act (1967) both of which are to promote high standards of health and safety at work for workers from both sexes; the Income Tax Act (1967) amended in 1978 to allow a woman employee to have her income assessed under her own name; Girl's Protection Act (1973) amended in 1987; The Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce Act (1976) which prescribed 16 years as the minimum age for marriage among females and provided for compulsory registration of all marriages.

5.6. While most laws are not discriminatory in intent, they are so in practice. Although existing supportive legislation have helped protect women's interest, in practice many women still found it difficult to apply the laws for their benefit. To further address matters pertaining to women and law, HAWA, in collaboration with University of Malaya have conducted a study on the effectiveness of existing laws in providing protection to women. The study shows that although the existing laws are sufficient in protecting women's rights and interests, it has been found that most implementers of the laws are not fully sensitive to the different needs of women. In addressing this problem, measures are being taken to educate both the implementers of the law and women themselves so that they would be better aware of women's rights under the existing laws. To this end, HAWA, in collaboration with NGOs will continue to organize legal literacy program. Women's Complaint Bureau which was set up by an NGO will be further strengthened. Dissemination



of information will be carried out by the local mass media to increase awareness amongst men and women of their rights under the various laws.

## **6. Women and Health**

- 6.1. The issue of women and health has been recognized as one of the main priority areas in development. A Plan of Action on Women and Health has been formulated to ensure that women's health becomes part of the national agenda. The Maternal and Child Health Services continue to carry out antenatal care, domiciliary delivery, post natal care, child health care, pre school and school health services, family planning, health education, nutrition activities including nutrition education and nutrition surveillance. To reduce maternal deaths, (safe motherhood) Malaysia has also adopted additional methods, i.e. develop and apply the risk approach strategy whereby cases identified as priority or requiring special care are managed according to set criteria and more intensively. A color coding system is used to identify high-risk mothers and new-born, with red for high risk cases, white for low-risk, and yellow and green for those in between. Malaysia is one of the first countries in this region to develop this approach.
- 6.2. A series of seminars on women and AIDS have been launched both by the Ministry of Health and NGOs. Majority of the AIDS cases are men, but the proportion of women infected with HIV is on the rise from 4.30% (1986-1996) to 5.08 in 1997. The percentage of women reported having HIV from 1989 to 1997 is as shown in Appendix "F".
- 6.3. Health education and health promotion is the main strategy for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS. Mass awareness campaign, individual and small group approaches to motivate people with high-risk behaviors to modify their behavior and adopted to healthy lifestyles, and inclusions of AIDS knowledge in teachers training and school curriculum are examples of measures that have been taken.

- 6.4. The government will continue with the on-going efforts to promote access to women of all ages to quality and affordable health care and family planning services, in particular to those from the low income groups living in the rural areas.

## 7. Violence Against Women

- 7.1. In the area of violence against women, Government agencies in collaboration with NGOs have succeeded in making significant progress towards eliminating domestic violence. The Domestic Violence Act was passed in 1994 and since have been effectively enforced. Domestic violence is now dealt with as a criminal offence with appropriate penalties imposed and provision is made for interim protection order and the imposition of penalty for the breach of the protection order. Realizing that legislation may only remove the more blatant discriminatory practices, the government and NGOs in Malaysia continue to push for greater transparency of procedures adopted by police personnel and have urged the appropriate training and sensitization of the relevant parties.
- 7.2. At the highest advocacy level, all agencies have been urged to refrain from trivializing the issue of domestic violence and seek positive avenues and measures for effective and speedy redressal. A one stop-crisis center has also been set up in almost all hospitals in Malaysia to provide treatment for victims of violence. This is an inter-agency co-operation bringing together the police investigation and medical procedures in one place, that is at the hospital. The interrogation of the victim will be conducted in the hospital instead of the police station, and all procedures, police and medical take place in the hospital in a specially designated place as it is seen as a more neutral and gender friendly place.
- 7.3. Another innovation is the standardized special rape investigation kit which gathers medical and legal evidence throughout the country. This has reduced the

need to train the doctors as the kit is self-explanatory. The whole procedure has made the process more victim-friendly and increased the efficiency of the investigation.

- 7.4. Shelter homes and counseling services are now provided to battered and abandoned wives. HAWA is arranging for the setting up of Women Crisis Centers in all 14 states in Malaysia which will be placed under the supervision of the State Consultative Committee. Financial assistance and support will be provided for this purpose.

## 8. Women and the Economy

- 8.1. The Government continues to support programs carried out to improve the economic well-being of women, particularly in the rural areas. Problems that women faced in the economy such as lack of direct access to land, unequal access to farm inputs, technology and extension services and inability to obtain bank credit will continue to be addressed. Special programs targeting women (Women Only Program) will continue to be carried out by the various government agencies. Several government departments, particularly those involved in rural and agricultural development implement specific women's projects.
- 8.2. The Community Development Division of the Ministry of Rural Development, popularly known as KEMAS has been running programs for the rural community particularly women since 1961. KEMAS's programs include skill training, family development, upgrading of home-economics skills and income-generating activities. Agencies under the Ministry of Agriculture such as Farmers Organization Authority, Agricultural Departments as well as agencies under the Ministry of Land and Cooperative Development such as Federal Land Development Authority ( FELDA), Federal Land Consolidation Rehabilitation Authority (RISDA) also offer almost similar programs that focussed on women as

their clients with the aim of developing women to become better wives and household managers. More programs are now formulated to encourage female participation in productive activities and to provide opportunities for related education and skills training, especially in new technologies, to enable the women farmers to contribute and benefit from modern agricultural and rural development programs.

- 8.3. To increase the number of women entrepreneurs, more training opportunities will be provided to women and will be conducted on continuous basis. The Ministry of Entrepreneur Development has launched a series of training programs to assist women to become self-employed in small and medium scale industries. The target group in this program are rural women and women retrenched by the current economic crisis. Women Entrepreneurship Development Program will be further enhanced to increase women's capability in using modern technology in producing goods which are high in quality as well as competitive and innovative. The Rural women's participation in the micro-enterprises will be further scaled up. Business aid or micro credit scheme and other credit assistance which are more "gender friendly" will continue to be provided to promote the development of small scale women entrepreneurs.

## 9. **Modifying Stereotypes and Prejudices**

- 9.1. Although the principle of gender equality between men and women has official endorsement, yet inequality tend to perpetuate itself because it is internalized and legitimized through a social perception of what is appropriate for men and women. Changing these perceptions is, of course, not an easy task, as stereotyping and negative assumptions towards women are complex factors that have their roots in both historical and cultural processes. Stereotypes held by any society are difficult to change. Therefore, any attempt at changing perceptions of women should begin with the re-examination of cultural and traditional norms. Where

these are no longer valid or justifiable, efforts must be made to make these redundant, and therefore removed.

9.2. Persistent effort to modify the prejudices in the organizations is now being undertaken by the government, particularly in improving the number of women in decision-making and managerial positions. We realized that for a change in women's position to take place, a culture that values the concept of human capability and worth should become an integral part of organizational practice. In this regard it is believed that pursuing an officially 'gender blind' policy is not the best way. Rather, it is necessary to put in place specific policies, firstly to ensure that individual women are not penalized by stereotypical assumptions about the characteristics of women as a group, and, secondly, to respond to the challenge that the new generations of women are more robust, versatile, and ambitious - the characteristics that have been appropriate and effective for managerial positions.

9.3. The present gender awareness and sensitization training is being directed to address the need to change negative attitudes towards women, to reorient thinking, and to change the mind-set of the policy makers, implementers, and public service personnel. Given the existing recognition of the importance of in-service and pre-promotion training, and the resources already allocated to this, efforts are being made to incorporate the requirement of gender equality in all training courses for the public personnel.

## 10. Gender Mainstreaming

10.1. Many agencies do not really understand the meaning of gender mainstreaming. In this respect two approaches, have been used, namely Women in Development and Gender and Development approach. At the moment, the national machinery has been entrusted with the responsibility for ensuring mainstreaming. Inter

ministerial committees and consultative committees have been set up to further carry out mainstreaming activities, particularly in incorporating gender perspectives into their planning, policy making and implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, Commonwealth Plan of Action, ICPD and other international conventions and declarations endorsed or ratified by Malaysia.

- 10.2. While inter-ministerial and consultative committees have been set up, they have not been able to carry out mainstreaming activities seriously, due to the lack of resources (financial and manpower). Moreover, officials appointed by the Ministries as liaison officers are burdened with their routine work, thus fail to carry out the mandate given to them as expected by the national machinery. Since the national machinery is also part of the implementing agency, it does not have authority over other ministries. A clear mandate will have to be provided to relevant departments and ministries for implementation and for establishing accountability. There is also a need for reorganizing in terms of procedures, processes, practices and work methodologies, particularly in ensuring that plans and targets are included as an integral part of the overall sectoral plan and provide the enabling conditions where necessary.

## 11. Conclusion

Although, due to some difficulties, some activities in the Beijing Platform for Action have not been fully implemented, it is believed that with full commitment from the government, particularly in providing sufficient funds to carry out programs and projects as stipulated in the national plan of action, and with the support from NGOs and relevant agencies, Malaysia would be able to carry out the mandate on improving the status of women more effectively in the years to come.