



**MDG 3**  
**Promote Gender**  
**Equality and**  
**Empower Women**

For much of the post-Independence era, Malaysian women and girls have enjoyed equal opportunities with men and boys in access to basic social services. Equality in access to services, promoted since Independence, is reflected in marked improvements in education and health outcome indicators for both women and men. Even in 1970, the gender disparity in primary education had largely disappeared. With these gains, women have been mainstreamed into development processes and by playing a variety of roles at the family, community, and society levels, they have been able to contribute to national development and prosperity.

The single target of MDG 3 is to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment and to eliminate disparities in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education no later than 2015. Of course, investments in girls' education lead to high returns in a broad range of sectors that contribute towards the development of the country. However, by also specifying indicators in the spheres of employment and participation in political decision making (Box 3.1), it is recognized that eliminating gender disparities in education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for eliminating other gender inequalities, as well as for fully empowering women.

Starting from the Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–90), the crucial role of women in development has been increasingly reflected in national development plans. Gender sensitive policies and programmes that accompanied sustained economic growth have helped to promote gender equality and women empowerment.

### Box 3.1 INDICATORS FOR MONITORING GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Four key indicators are used to monitor progress of the MDG to promote gender equality and empower women, with its related target to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education no later than 2015. These are (i) *ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education*; (ii) *ratio of literate women to men, 15–24 years old*; (iii) *share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector*; and (iv) *proportion of seats held by women in national parliament*.

The *ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education* is defined here as the ratio of enrolment rates of female students to male students (separate indicators are given by levels of education). The ratio of rates rather than numbers is used, to standardize for difference in the sex ratio at birth. It is a measure of the equality of opportunity of the education system.

The *ratio of literate women to literate men aged 15–24 years* is the ratio of the female literacy rate to the male

literacy rate for the age group 15–24. This indicator measures progress towards gender equity in literacy and learning opportunities for women in relation to those for men. It also measures a presumed outcome of attending school and is an important indicator of women's empowerment.

The *share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector* is the share of female workers in the non-agricultural sector (which includes industry and services) expressed as a percentage of total employment in the sector. This indicator measures the degree to which labour markets are open to women in industry and service sectors, which reflects both equal employment opportunity for women and economic efficiency through flexibility of the labour market.

The *proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments* is the number of seats held by women expressed as a percentage of all occupied seats. Women's representation in parliaments is one aspect of women's opportunities in political and public life, and is therefore closely linked to women's empowerment.

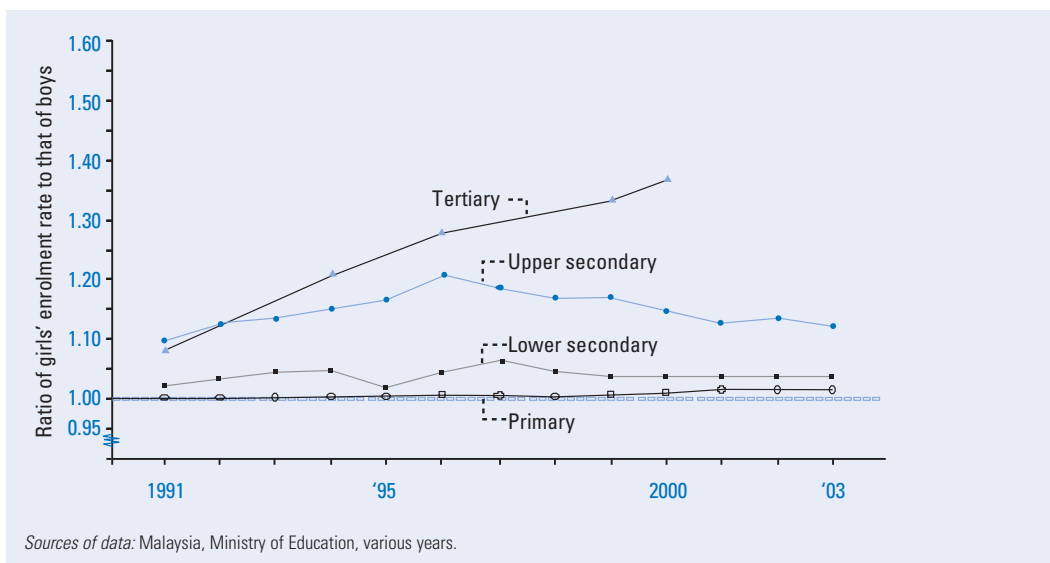
This chapter reviews the extent to which Malaysia has achieved the goal of gender equality and women’s empowerment. It begins by reviewing the evidence of progress in the spheres of education, employment, and political life. It next considers the enabling environment and the policies, strategies, and programmes implemented to overcome constraints in gender equality. It concludes with an assessment of some of the key challenges that remain for achieving the goal.

## Trends in gender equality

### Gender equality in education

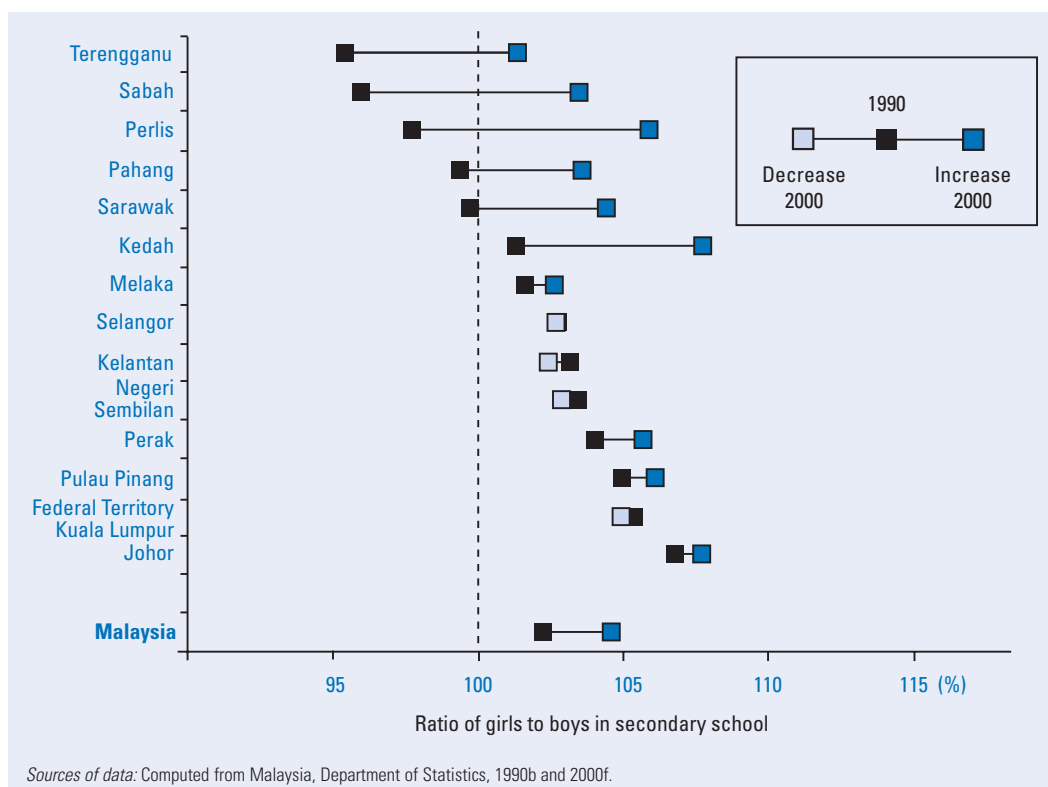
Since the beginning of the 1990s, enrolment rates of girls have been equal to, or have exceeded, those of boys at all levels of education (Figure 3.1). At the primary level, where enrolments are universal for boys and girls (see Chapter 2) there is gender parity. At the lower and upper secondary level, enrolment rates of girls were higher than those of boys throughout the period 1991–2003. At the tertiary level, there has been an increasing trend in enrolment rates of girls, reflecting in part the much greater number of girls than boys seeking tertiary qualifications. This in turn is attributable to girls performing better than boys in public examinations. Gender gaps prevail in terms of the selection of courses. Girls tend to dominate in the arts, economics, and business courses but are in a minority in technical and science-based courses such as engineering.

**Figure 3.1** Ratio of Girls to Boys Enrolled by Educational Level, Malaysia, 1991–2003



During the decade 1990–2000, the ratio of girls to boys in secondary schools increased in almost all states in Malaysia. By 2000, even the four less developed states of Terengganu, Sabah, Perlis, and Pahang had reversed the situation where secondary enrolment of boys was greater than that for girls in 1990 (Figure 3.2). Given investments made to achieve universal primary schooling, further progress could be made in encouraging girls in Malaysia to enrol in subjects where they are under-represented.

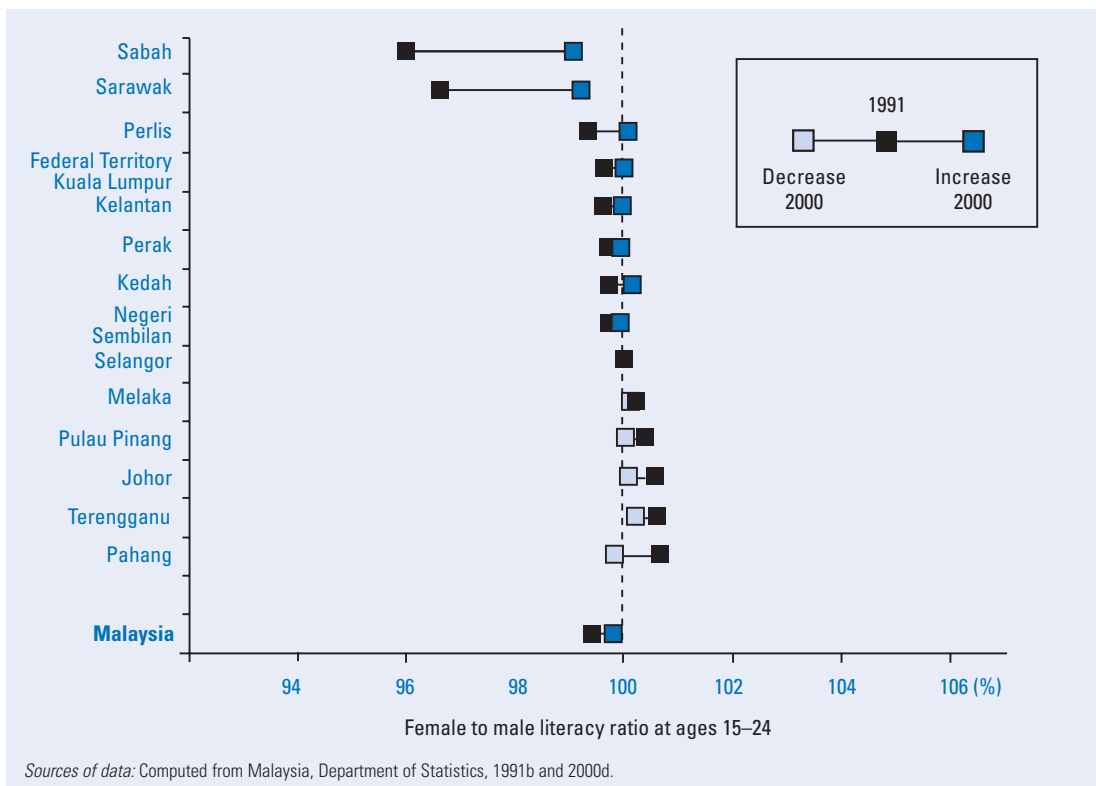
**Figure 3.2** Ratio of Girls to Boys in Secondary School, Malaysia, 1990 and 2000



An important outcome of the spread of educational opportunities for girls has been a closing of the gender gap in literacy levels among youths aged 15–24. This achievement has also been made possible with mandatory schooling of up to 11 years for all children. By 2000, only in Sabah and Sarawak, where marked improvements had taken place during the 1990s, were literacy rates of young women lagging behind those of young men (Figure 3.3).

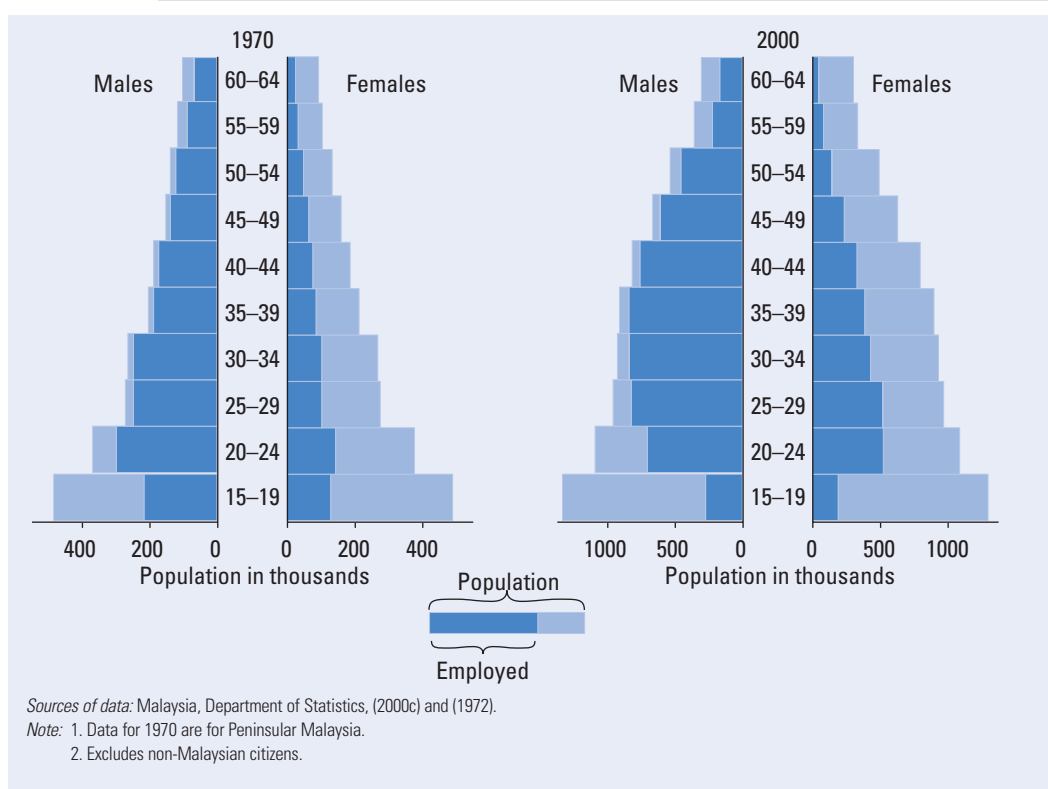
We turn next to consider to what extent gender equity in education has resulted in equality in employment and political life. This is analysed by using sex-disaggregated data on economic activities of the population and the level of representation of women in political decision making.

**Figure 3.3** Ratio of Female Literacy Rates to Male Literacy Rates at Ages 15–24, Malaysia, 1991 and 2000



### Gender equality in employment

While the number of persons in the labour force has risen sharply over the past three decades, the distribution between males and females has remained stable. The female labour force participation rate at ages 15–64 has remained at around 47 per cent throughout much of the period between 1975 and 2002 (Table 3.1). By contrast, the labour force participation rate of males, although falling slightly, has been consistently above 80 per cent over the corresponding period. The tendency for a sizeable proportion of women to stop work after they have their first birth, and not return once their childbearing is complete, has been a continuing feature of Malaysia’s labour market, and this pattern holds for each of the ethnic communities (Figure 3.4). For example, age-specific participation rates generally decline sharply after ages 20–24 (Malaysia, Department of Statistics, 2000). This is in contrast to the situation of many industrialized countries where women either do not leave the labour force during childbearing or re-enter once their childbearing has been completed.

**Figure 3.4** Employed Population by Age Group, Malaysia, 1970 and 2000**Table 3.1** Labour Force Participation, Malaysia, 1975–2002

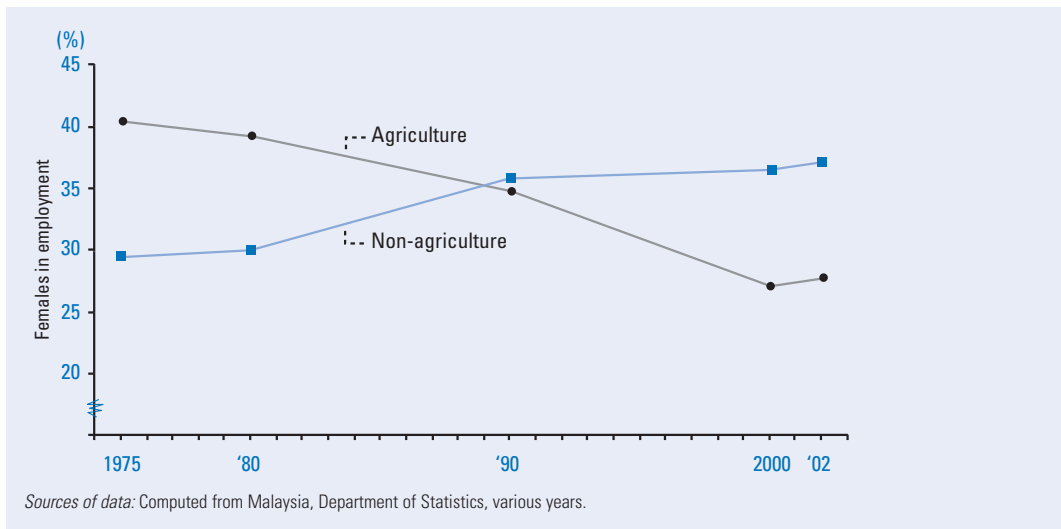
Category	1975*	1980	1990	2000	2002
<b>Labour force distribution, ages 15–64 (%)</b>					
Males	65	66	67	65	64
Females	35	34	33	35	36
Both sexes ('000s)	3,823	5,064	7,042	9,616	9,886
<b>Labour force participation rates, ages 15–64 (%)</b>					
Males	86.0	85.9	85.3	83.1	81.5
Females	47.3	44.1	47.8	47.2	46.7
Both sexes ('000s)	66.7	64.9	66.5	65.4	64.4

Sources of data: Malaysia, Department of Statistics, *Labour Force Survey Report*, various years.

\* Data for 1975 are for Peninsular Malaysia.

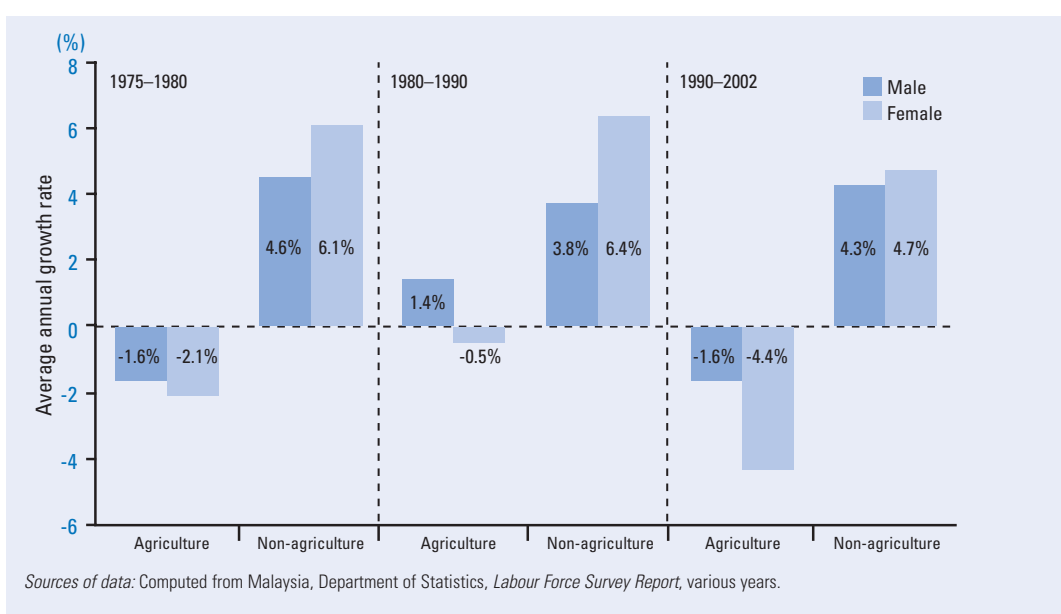
Despite relatively constant female labour force participation rates, there has been a considerable shift in the nature of female employment. An ever-decreasing proportion of women are engaged in the agricultural sector (Figure 3.5). Thus the share of Malaysian women employed in agricultural activities fell from 41 per cent in 1975 to just 28 per cent in 2002. Conversely, their share in non-farm employment, mainly industry and services, rose from 29 per cent to 37 per cent over the corresponding period.

**Figure 3.5** Females in Employment by Agriculture and Non-agriculture Sector, Malaysia, 1975–2002



The different sectoral employment growth rates of women and men reflect the declining female share of employment in agriculture and the rising female employment share in the non-agriculture sector. Throughout the period 1975–2002, women have increasingly left employment in agriculture (Figure 3.6). By contrast, there has been a rapid growth in female employment in non-farm activities over the corresponding period, a growth that was especially marked during the decade of 1980–90 when the expansion of the manufacturing sector was at its peak.

**Figure 3.6** Average Annual Growth Rate of Employment in Agriculture and Non-Agriculture Sector, Malaysia, Selected Periods



In general terms, the evolution of female employment has followed the structural changes in the Malaysian economy. As the economy has shifted from its reliance on agriculture to a greater emphasis on industry and services, so too has the distribution of employment shifted from the primary, agricultural sector to the secondary, industrial sector. Within sectors, the female proportion in manufacturing grew rapidly during the decade 1980–90, but has since declined (Table 3.2). Since 1990, there has been a particularly rapid increase in the share of female employment in both the wholesale and retail trade, hotels, and restaurants sector and the financial services sector (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2** Share of Females in Employed Population Within Each Industrial Sector, Malaysia, 1975–2000 (%)

Sector	1975*	1980	1990	2000
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock & Fishing	40.5	39.3	35.0	27.0
Mining & Quarrying	12.9	12.5	13.6	11.7
Manufacturing	38.8	38.3	46.8	41.3
Construction	6.6	5.9	4.2	6.2
Electricity, Gas & Water	3.3	4.9	5.8	7.1
Transport, Storage & Communication	5.8	7.7	12.3	12.9
Wholesale & Retail Trade, Hotel & Restaurants	26.6	27.7	39.1	39.6
Finance, Insurance, Real Estate & Business Services		29.7	34.9	40.2
Other services	37.5	39.2	38.5	45.6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34.1</b>	<b>33.5</b>	<b>35.5</b>	<b>34.7</b>

Sources of data: Malaysia, Department of Statistics, Computed from *Labour Force Survey Report*, various years.

\* Data for 1975 are for Peninsular Malaysia.

In tandem with the sectoral changes of the economy, the composition of employed females by occupation has also changed markedly (Table 3.3). By 2000, just 15 per cent of employed women had agricultural occupations, compared with 43 per cent in 1980. By contrast, the proportions in clerical and service occupations were 35 per cent in 2000, compared with 22 per cent in 1980. Among employed females, significantly higher proportions are currently in clerical and service occupations, as compared with employed males (Table 3.3). If the professional, managerial, and clerical occupations are combined, as the three groups of occupation that tend to employ the better educated workers, the proportion of females in these occupational categories rose sharply between 1980 and 2000, whereas the proportion of males did not.

Over time, although women are least represented in administrative and managerial occupations, this group of female workers is on an increasing trend (Figure 3.7). Similar trends can be seen in almost all occupational categories with the exception of the agriculture and production and related occupational categories.

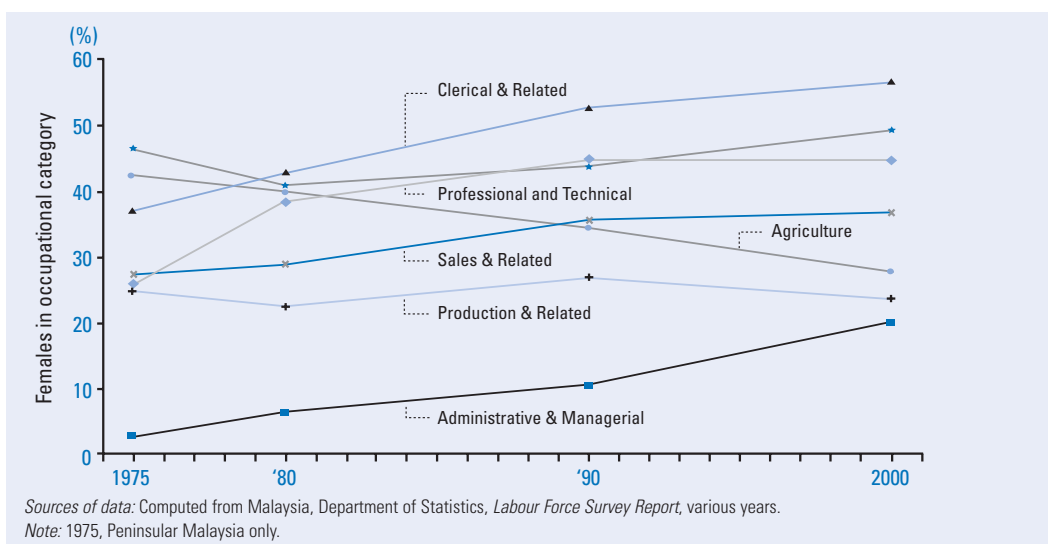


**Table 3.3** Distribution of Employed Females and Males of Total Female and Male Labour Force by Occupational Category, Malaysia, 1980 and 2000 (%)

Occupational Category	1980		2000	
	Females	Males	Females	Males
Professional, Technical & Related Workers	7.7	6.2	13.5	8.9
Administrative & Managerial Workers	0.4	2.6	2.2	4.7
Clerical & Related Workers	10.7	7.2	17.5	7.1
Sales & Related Workers	8.4	10.4	12.1	11.1
Service Workers	11.1	8.1	17.4	9.5
Agriculture Workers	42.5	32.4	14.8	20.4
Production & Related Workers	19.2	33.2	22.6	38.4
All categories	100	100	100	100

Sources of data: Computed from Malaysia, Department of Statistics, *Labour Force Survey Report*, various years.

**Figure 3.7** Share of Females in Employed Population by Occupational Category, Malaysia, 1975–2000



From Table 3.4, the vast majority of women workers in the professional and technical occupational category are in the teaching profession. The next largest group of women workers in this category are the assistant engineers and nurses. By contrast, significantly fewer women are employed as surveyors, engineers, and scientists. There is thus considerable scope for women to be more widely represented in the higher paid professional occupations.

### Gender equality in political life

The representation of women in legislative bodies is one of the indicators of society's commitment to women's empowerment in MDG 3. Strong participation of women in

political decision-making processes can enhance women's empowerment and promote gender equality. Since Independence, the number of female candidates elected to political decision-making bodies in Malaysia has increased, but only at a moderate rate. In 1990, just 5 per cent of parliamentarians were women (Table 3.5). This proportion doubled to 10 per cent in 1999 but remained at that level in the 2004 general election. While the proportion of women elected to state assemblies almost doubled between 1990 and 2004, their representation remains low at just 6 per cent. By contrast, in the Senate where members are appointed to represent various groups in the society, the proportion of female senators has increased sharply from 18 per cent in 1990 to 33 per cent in 2004.

**Table 3.4** Share of Females in Employed Population in Each Group of the Professional and Technical Occupational Category, Malaysia, 2000 (%)

Professional Group	Number ('000s)	Female (%)
Engineers	57.9	10.4
Asst. Engineers	162.2	8.5
Scientists	18.9	20.9
Doctors	18.4	33.3
Architects	7.8	32.1
Surveyors	4.4	1.2
Economists	0.9	31.5
Lawyers	16.5	39.3
Accountants	35.1	48.3
Nurses	54.4	96.7
Teachers	390.7	62.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>767.3</b>	<b>45.8</b>

Source of data: Malaysia, Department of Statistics, 2000a.

**Table 3.5** Representation of Women and Men in Political Life, Malaysia, 1990–2004

	1990	1995	1999	2004
<b>Elected Members of Parliament</b>				
Females	9	13	20	22
Males	162	166	173	197
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>193</b>	<b>219</b>
Female (%)	5.3	7.3	10.4	10.1
<b>Appointed Members of House of Senate</b>				
Females	10	11	14	19
Males	45	57	48	38
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>57</b>
Female (%)	18.2	16.2	22.6	33.0
<b>Elected Members of State Legislative Assembly</b>				
Females	15	24	28	36
Males	428	474	443	531
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>498</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>567</b>
Female (%)	3.4	4.8	5.6	6.3

Sources of data: Malaysian Election Commission, various years.

## Enabling environment

Malaysian women's rights as citizens to participate in the political and administrative aspects of the nation are recognized and safeguarded in the Federal Constitution. Malaysian women have had the right to vote and to hold office since Independence. Table 3.6 provides an overview of relevant strategies as well as major legislation and programmes related to women's development.

The success of women-related policies is dependent on the political will and leadership of the government, as well as decision makers in the private sector, to make conscious efforts to effect change. Malaysia's successes in promoting gender equality and empowering women have involved many parties, both local and international. They include the government, private sector, civil society, and international agencies, especially within the United Nations system. During the preparatory process in the formulation of gender-related strategies in the national development plans, the views of these various partners are considered. The continued commitment to promote gender equality and empower women is evidenced by the announcement made by the government in 2004 that 30 per cent of decision making positions in the public sector are to be filled by women.

### Women-related policies

**Employment options.** As Malaysia's economy moved from dependence on the export of primary commodities to import-substitution and export-oriented industrialization, which began in the 1970s and 1980s, more and more women were employed in labour-intensive manufacturing industries. These industries, typically located in export-processing zones, focused mainly on electronics and garments. Female labour was considered more suitable for such work that frequently required keen eyesight and manual dexterity. While, with hindsight, the working conditions at these factories were often less than optimal, they provided many women with what was often their first opportunity for paid employment, and encouraged the migration of rural women, especially Bumiputera, to urban areas.

**National policies and plans.** Gender as a development focus was first mentioned in the Third Malaysia Plan (1976–80), which encouraged the active participation of women in development and their contribution to the economy. Later five-year development plans gave greater prominence to gender issues and since the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–5), a full chapter has been devoted to policies and programmes that promote women in development.

The National Policy for Women (NPW), formulated in 1989, was a major initiative affecting gender equality and women's empowerment in Malaysia (Box 3.2). Its contents were incorporated into the Sixth Malaysia Plan and have formed the basis for many of the subsequent policies relating to women in development. The NPW's primary objectives are to ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and information, opportunities and benefits of development for men and women; to integrate

women in all sectors of national development in accordance with their capabilities and needs in order to eradicate poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, and ensure a peaceful, harmonious, and prosperous nation.

## Box 3.2

### MALAYSIA'S NATIONAL POLICY FOR WOMEN AND THE ACTION PLAN FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN

The close of the 1980s saw a major policy advance for women in development in Malaysia. This was the adoption of the National Policy for Women (NPW) in 1989, reflecting the Malaysian government's realization that women were unable to participate equally with men in the national development process, as there were constraints on their full integration into development.

Following the Declaration of the Women's Decade (1975–85), which added impetus to ongoing efforts to integrate and increase the role of women in the development process, and Malaysia's adoption of the Forward Looking Strategies of the First United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975 and the Second United Nations Meeting in 1980, both of which deliberated on the need to mainstream women into development process, the NPW was adopted in December 1989. A visible impact of the NPW was its inclusion of a chapter on Women in Development in the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–5). The chapter identifies constraints on women's participation and states that concerted efforts will be made to progressively reduce existing constraints and facilitate the assimilation of women into the mainstream of social and economic activities.

In support of this position, the primary objectives of the NPW are:

- to ensure equitable sharing in the acquisition of resources and 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 of the nation's population, can contribute and realize their potential to the optimum; and
- to integrate women in all sectors of national 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, harmonious, and prosperous nation

These objectives provide the basis for integrating women's contributions in all national development efforts, with the aim of focusing on areas where support facilities have not yet

been adequately provided, and the role of women not yet fully acknowledged. The main areas covered in the NPW are health, education and training, law, employment, power sharing, sports, media, religion, and culture.

Following the NPW, an Action Plan for the Advancement of Women (APAW) was formulated in 1992 to operationalize the NPW. The Plan was reformulated, subsequent to the Beijing Conference, to integrate strategies and programmes contained in the Platform for Action. Under the APAW, various strategies and programmes were identified for implementation by government agencies, the private sector, and civil society. The Plan outlined critical areas of concern and proposed the following:

- strengthen the national machinery for the advancement of women
- raise public awareness and sensitize the government bureaucracy towards issues related to women
- reorientate the institutional process for planning, implementation, and monitoring of government policies and programmes to accommodate women's concerns
- activate NGOs to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of socio-economic programmes, and
- redress problems of discrimination and promote affirmative action for the advancement of women in various fields.

The progress in the implementation of the Plan is monitored by the Women's Development Department, a key department primarily responsible for integrating gender issues in development planning and policy formulation under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. The process is undertaken through an Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee.

The NPW and the Action Plan are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that women are provided with the necessary skills and knowledge to enhance their participation in and contribution to the social and economic development of the nation. Emphasis is also given to further improving and strengthening the national machinery for the advancement of women and ensuring greater coordination and collaboration in the implementation of activities for women.

**Table 3.6 Overview of Women’s Development, Malaysia, 1971–2010**

1971–90	1991–2000	2001–10
<b>New Economic Policy (NEP) OPP1</b>	<b>National Development Policy (NDP) OPP2</b>	<b>National Vision Policy (NVP) OPP3</b>
Second Malaysia Plan (1971–5) Third Malaysia Plan (1976–80) Fourth Malaysia Plan (1981–5) Fifth Malaysia Plan (1986–90)	Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–5) Seventh Malaysia Plan (1996–2000)	Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–5)
<b>Strategies Related to Women’s Development</b>		
Crucial role of women reflected in development plans (first started in the Fifth Malaysia Plan). Gender-sensitive policies and programmes to promote gender equality and women empowerment.	Identification of constraints to women’s participation. Efforts to reduce existing constraints and facilitate the assimilation of women into the mainstream of social and economic activities.	Opportunities in employment, business, and social activities will be made available without gender bias. Greater access to training and retraining to promote employment opportunities and greater occupational mobility. Information pertaining to the labour market and opportunities for advancement in education and business to be made more accessible through ICT. Participation of women in the labour market to be enhanced through use of flexible working hours, provision of crèches at workplaces, and working from home.
<b>Major Legislation and Programmes Related to Women’s Development</b>		
<p><b>Legislation</b> Women and Girls Protection Act 1973. Marriage and Divorce Act 1976. Income Tax Act 1967 (Amended 1978).</p> <p><b>Programmes</b> National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) (1976). National policy for women formulated (1989).</p>	<p><b>Legislation</b> Women and Girls Protection Act 1973 (Amended 1987). Employment Act 1955 (Amended in 1998 to encourage greater labour force participation among women). Domestic Violent Act 1994. Code of Ethics for Sexual Harassment Prevention (1999). Guardianship of Infants Act 1961 (Amended 1999).</p> <p><b>Programmes</b> Women’s Affairs Secretariat (HAWA) established (1983). Action Plan for the Advancement of Women formulated (1992).</p>	<p><b>Programmes</b> Women Entrepreneurs Fund established. Various education and training programmes carried out—business management, marketing, sales, packaging, and labelling. Courses in good manufacturing practices and business networking conducted. <i>InfoDesa</i> programme set up to provide basic IT training to women in rural areas. A campaign entitled ‘Women Against Violence’ (WAVe) organized to raise awareness on domestic violence. <i>Nur Bestari</i>, a training programme to enhance the capacity of women, implemented.</p>

**Administrative and institutional framework.** The implementation of policies, strategies, and programmes requires supportive institutional and administrative machinery. Significant progress has been made in identifying and establishing an appropriate machinery to plan, coordinate, implement, and monitor development programmes for women.

**Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (formerly known as the Ministry of Women and Family Development).** The establishment of this ministry in February 2001 marks the culmination of efforts to assign women’s development issues

to a specialized ministry. The ministry's mission is to mainstream women into national development and to strengthen the family system. To realize its vision, the ministry has adopted a two-pronged strategy, firstly it assists women and families facing pressing day-to-day problems and secondly, it identifies and implements developmental strategies that will benefit women. The major thrust in assisting women would be to disseminate information and coordinate support services provided to women and families in need, both by the public sector and NGOs.

The ministry also ensures that developmental strategies integrate gender and family perspectives into policy formulation. It also undertakes to enhance opportunities for women to improve their socio-economic status through capacity-building, motivational and entrepreneurship programmes. To improve planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the progress of women, the ministry has set up a gender disaggregated database that will assist its Research and Development Division to be more effective as a national clearing house of information on women. As data form an integral part of the gender mainstreaming effort, the ministry is working with the government machinery to ensure that all data collected are disaggregated by sex.

The National Advisory Council on the Integration of Women in Development (NACIWID) was formed in 1976 in accordance with the UN Resolution, the Declaration of the Women's Decade, (1975–85) on integrating women in the mainstream of the development process. It was set up as a multisectoral body comprising representatives from the government and non-government bodies. It functions as the main coordinating, consultative, and advisory body on women's affairs through which women's issues are channelled to policy makers. Following the establishment of NACIWID, the Women's Affairs Secretariat (HAWA) was set up in the Prime Minister's Department in 1982 to administer capacity-development programmes and projects for women, gender sensitization and awareness programmes, and planning courses for policy makers and implementers. HAWA expanded and subsequently grew into a full-fledged department that came under the purview of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development when it was established in 2001.

**National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO).** Since 1960, the NCWO, a non-political, non-religious, and non-communal organization, has functioned as an umbrella body for non-governmental women's organizations. One of the first tasks of the NCWO was to advocate the establishment of a Women's Bureau in 1964 that would seek to improve women's status in terms of equality of opportunities for education and access to legal aid. To date, the NCWO has more than 200 welfare, political, and labour organizations affiliated to it. The NCWO's main role is to be a consultative and advisory body to women's organizations with the aim of bringing them together to raise the standard of living of women.

**International Commitments for the Advancement of Women.** In 1975, the UN declared a Women's Decade which was to take effect from 1976 to 1985. The main objective of this declaration was to recognize the value of the role of women and to upgrade the status of women in society. In support of the Women's Decade, Malaysia formed national institutions and allocated funds to enhance the role and status of women in national development.

In 1995, the government accepted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Malaysia's participation at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and its adoption of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action mirrored the government's commitment to advance the status of women in the country.

**Other organizations.** Various major organizations implement programmes for the development of women. They include the Community Development Department (KEMAS), National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB), Department of Agriculture (DOA), and the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA). While KEMAS focuses on women as part of family development, NPFDB and the Federation of Family Planning Associations, Malaysia (FFPAM) focus on population and family development programmes. DOA and FELDA carry out agriculture-related programmes that enhance the financial position of families for the benefit of women.

In 1995, Malaysia was elected Chairperson of the Regional Steering Committee on Economic Advancement of Rural and Island Women for Asia Pacific for three years. The Steering Committee was responsible for, among other things, the preparation and implementation of specific regional and subregional activities, such as training for rural women, as well as research and exchange of information on rural women.

### **Budget allocations**

With the specific integration of women issues into the five-year national development plans, an allocation of RM20 million was made under the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–5), to support programmes and projects to be implemented by HAWA. In the National Budget of 1999, RM50 million was allocated to HAWA. In addition, since 1997, the government has been allocating RM20 million annually to NGOs to carry out projects and programmes for women in line with the government's Vision 2020. In the National Budget of 2002, RM59 million was allocated to finance programmes: this was increased to RM105.4 million in 2004. The Ministry of Women and Family Development, was allocated RM59 million in 2002; this was increased by 68 per cent to RM99.1 million in 2003.

Measures have been undertaken to facilitate the involvement of women in business through the provision of easy access to capital. The Women Entrepreneurs' Fund, for example, was established in 1998 with an allocation of RM10 million. Another RM10 million has been allocated to this Fund under the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001–5). In addition, various special assistance schemes for women entrepreneurs are available under the Small and Medium Industries Development Corporation (SMIDEC) such as Industrial Technical Assistance Fund (ITAF), Financial Package for SMIs (PAKSI) and E-Commerce. From August 1999 until April 2003, a total of RM7.9 million was disbursed.

In order to encourage more women to become entrepreneurs and to upgrade their skills, the Special Assistance Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs was reviewed and expanded to be more flexible and easily accessible. Under this scheme, assistance was provided for technology acquisition or upgrading, relocation of businesses, equipment purchase and training. Companies that are qualified to obtain assistance under this scheme must have a minimum of 51 per cent equity being held by women. In instances

where women do not hold the majority equity, the largest single shareholder has to be a woman or where the managing director or the chief executive officer is a woman, she has to own a minimum equity share of 10 per cent. Special preference is given to companies that are involved in the manufacturing and services sectors.

Thus far, a total of 21 companies have benefited from this scheme and successfully obtained approval for the purchase of high-technology equipment. In addition, soft loans were also provided to assist companies or enterprises owned and operated by women in modernizing and automating their operations. In this regard, both existing as well as start-up companies are eligible to apply for project, fixed assets, and working capital financing. A total of 58 companies have been successful in obtaining soft loans through this programme.

In an effort to further assist women to become entrepreneurs, various training courses have been offered. These include courses in business management, marketing, sales, packaging and labelling. In addition, courses in good manufacturing practices and business networking are conducted for women who are interested in venturing in the manufacturing sector.

To supplement the income of women, embroidery and handicraft workshops were established and training provided to assist women in setting up small businesses. A total of 362,139 women, including single mothers, have benefited from these programmes. In addition, the Micro-Credit Scheme of *Bank Simpanan Nasional* (BSN) was launched to provide training and guidance to new women entrepreneurs. A total of 1,500 women have benefited from this scheme.

**Gender budgeting.** To mainstream a gender perspective into the national budget, a pilot project of Gender Budget Analysis has been introduced in five key ministries, namely the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Rural and Regional Development, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, and Ministry of Human Resources. Gender budget analysis will create awareness of gender perspectives in policies and budgets by taking into account the differences in status, role, and contribution of men and women. Its objective is to cope with the different demands of women and men, so that their respective potential can be realized. The focus of gender budget analysis is not merely on budgets. It is an analysis of policies and provides input to government policies and programmes. A Steering Committee, chaired by the Secretary-General of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, was set up to monitor and co-ordinate the implementation of the pilot project (Box 3.3).



**Box 3.3 NATIONAL BUDGETING: MAINSTREAMING GENDER ANALYSIS**

The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, in partnership with UNDP, launched a pilot project on mainstreaming gender analysis in national budgets in July 2003 aimed at incorporating a gender perspective into the existing national budget. The programme will build capacity and provide support to the four pilot ministries of the Ministry of Human Resources, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Rural and Regional Development. The project is implemented in phases with the ultimate objective of operationalizing a gender-sensitive national budget. It will build on the existing budget format and guidelines to ensure that gender issues are incorporated into both the operating and development budgets. It will also ensure that gender analysis becomes part of the existing results-oriented budget format.

**Expected impact**

- A report on budget submission format for the operating and development budget that provides for gender analysis with gender outputs and outcomes
- Capacity building and training in a number of pilot ministries, Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, key implementing agencies, and sectoral gender experts.

Development of training programmes and materials for government officials on gender budget approach.

- On advocacy, the gender budget approach will be promoted to interested civil society stakeholders, the output of pilot projects will be launched, and the report will be published and distributed to share best practices within and outside Malaysia.

**Status of the project**

The project is ongoing and is expected to be completed in late 2004. A Gender Budget Analysis Workshop was held in January 2004 to provide comprehensive training to officials in the pilot ministries in analysing the operating and development budget. Representatives of pioneer ministries, consultative groups, and central economic agencies participated. Further workshops will be held again in the third quarter of 2004 to train more officials, in particular, trainers from the National Institute of Public Administration and the Ministry of Finance, to ensure sustainability of the project. As a start, all pioneer ministries will take the gender perspective into account when evaluating the 2005 National Budget and formulating the development budget for the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-10).

## Programmes

Measures to promote gender equality and the empowering of women can be categorized into programmes to improve the political and legal status of women; increase their access to employment, education, and health opportunities; and improve the infrastructure to ensure that women are mainstreamed into the development process. The specific efforts include programmes to review laws affecting women; improve health care, education, and training; and improve the national machinery for incorporating women in development.

### Reviewing laws affecting women

**Employment rights.** To provide a more conducive working environment for women, a number of new laws as well as amendments to existing laws have been made. At the workplace, women have had to overcome a number of constraints to achieve equal status with men. Women were admitted into the Malayan Civil Service, now known as

the Administrative and Diplomatic Service from 1964. Prior to 1966, women civil servants were not accorded permanent status and appointments of married women were on a monthly basis. A woman was also not eligible for pension even if she was appointed to an established post. In the early 1960s, women's groups, led by the Women Teachers' Union, began to lobby for equity at work. The government finally adopted the principle of equal pay in 1967 and in 1971, permanent employment tenure was accorded to women employees.

The Employment Act 1955, a major law which regulates all labour relations, was amended in 1998, providing, among others, flexible working hours. Women in the public sector were also accorded maternity leave up to 60 days (from 42 days) for up to a maximum of five children. In 2003, paternity leave was extended from three to seven days.

The Income Tax Act 1967 was amended in 1971 to allow women wage earners to elect for separate tax assessments, unless they chose not to be assessed separately. In addition, provisions were also made for tax deductions to be provided to employers for the purpose of establishing childcare centres near or at the workplace.

In 1999, the government launched the Code of Practice on the Prevention and Eradication of Sexual Harassment at the workplace. The Code contains guidelines to employers on the establishment and implementation of in-house preventive and redress mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment. Prior to this, women workers who faced sexual harassment at the workplace had no means of recourse under law.

**Economic protection.** To ensure the economic protection of women, the Pension Act was amended to allow widows of workers in the public sector to receive pensions even after they have remarried. The Land Act 1960 was also amended to entitle both husband and wife to have rights to the land in a group village development scheme like FELDA, thereby providing security to women, who have worked on the land alongside their men.

**Guardianship rights.** The Guardianship of Infants Act 1961 was amended in 1975 to allow both parents to be the legal guardian; previously, the law only recognized the father as the legal custodian of a minor. In 2000, the law was subsequently amended to enable mothers to sign all documents involving their under-aged children.

**Protection against violence.** An important legal landmark for women in Malaysia was the Domestic Violence Act 1994. What started off as a campaign to raise public awareness on violence against women in 1985 by the Association of Women Lawyers in Malaysia finally culminated a decade later in legislation which allowed for cases of domestic violence to be dealt with as criminal offences with appropriate penalties. To date, support personnel such as police and hospital staff dealing with abuse cases are being trained. One-stop crisis centres have also been set up in a number of government hospitals with the cooperation of women NGOs.

## Health care for women

Women's health, in particular their reproductive health (including maternity care), has long been given priority, especially in the rural health network of clinics. The rural health service infrastructure has provided a comprehensive range of services and information for women, with a special focus on maternal and child health services. The provision of maternal health care facilities and services caters even to the more remote and disadvantaged groups. The ready access to family planning services has enabled women to choose freely the number and spacing of their children.

Health care for women has now been expanded beyond health concerns of women in the reproductive age to include broader aspects, such as early detection of cancer, menopause, health needs of working women, and environmental issues affecting women. In addition, gender-based programmes targeting women and children, in particular the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV Programme, has improved the chances of HIV-positive mothers delivering healthy babies.

## Gender analysis training and sensitization

**Policy makers and programme implementers.** Gender-sensitization training and programmes have been provided to government officers since 1990 to ensure that women are mainstreamed into development. The first gender-sensitization training was held in 1990 with the support of the Asian Development Bank. This was followed by a number of ad-hoc courses organized by HAWA for various groups of government officers at all levels of seniority. Today, the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN), a training institute that provides training for all government officials, integrates gender perspectives into all training course modules and provides specific gender-sensitization and gender-analysis courses.

In addition, gender-awareness training today incorporates religious perspectives so as to further align it with religious beliefs. A gender expert roll has been prepared by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development as a reference to trainers in both public and private institutions that intend to include gender-analysis and gender-sensitization training in their courses.

**Law enforcers.** As violence against women increases, there is a necessity to create gender-sensitive officers of the law such as police officers and other enforcement officers. Progress has been evident in this regard with gender-sensitization courses incorporated into their training. In 2002, for example, the Judicial and Legal Training Institute started introducing gender-sensitization courses in its modules.

## Bridging the digital divide

Efforts have been made to improve women's access to information and communications technology (ICT), as well as to bridge the digital divide between women and men. An ongoing Technical Working Group on Women and ICT was established to design strategies and programmes on ICT for women aimed primarily at rural women and urban poor women, single mothers, disabled and aged women, as well as women who are involved in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

## Insights gained

### Women's central role in development

Malaysia has acknowledged that women, who make up half the population, are central to development. Women form a distinct and important group that can have a great impact on development and should not be marginalized. Women, in many instances, have generational impact. In recognition of this, the framework for planning should cater to the specific needs of women while understanding the interaction and interdependent relationship with men's needs. Further, the provision of micro-credit has helped mainstream poor women in development (Box 3.4).

#### Box 3.4 EMPOWERING POOR WOMEN: AMANAH IKHTIAR MALAYSIA (AIM)

**E**conomic empowerment of poor women through the provision of micro-credit was made possible when *Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia* (AIM), a non-governmental trust agency, was established in 1987. AIM has emerged as one of the more successful strategies for bringing poor women, in particular those who head households, into the mainstream of economic activities. AIM provides women with the financial means to participate in non-farm activities and to start small businesses; it also affords them access to training programmes to make them more employable. Not only have household incomes increased after assistance from AIM, the project provided evidence that women was credit-worthy with loans achieving an impressive recovery rate of close to 100 per cent. As at June 2003, AIM had provided micro-credits totalling RM863 million to some 490,000 borrowers, 90 per cent of whom were women.

##### How does AIM work?

- AIM focuses its strategies on highly motivated individuals from hard-core poor households who are committed to earning an honest living and eventually moving out of poverty.
- It provides interest-free loans for income-generating projects, with loans being repaid on a weekly basis.
- Once fully paid, bigger loans are offered, with the first loan normally restricted to RM999 and subsequent loans provided up to a maximum of RM4,898.

- Poor borrowers form themselves into groups of five who in turn guarantee each other's loans.
- Participants undergo a one-week compulsory training of one hour per day to make them understand their rights and obligations to ensure good repayment and to promote self-esteem and self-reliance among the poor.

##### Why are the programmes effective and efficient?

- Exclusive focus on the very poor—household income of not more than RM251 was a criterion in the period 1986–94 increasing to RM285 (1995–2000) and RM342 since 2001.
- Specialized delivery system—no collateral, guarantor, or legal action; simple procedures; use of group-dynamics support approach in credit delivery and repayment system; small loan and weekly repayments; close supervision; availability of subsequent loan; open conduct of all business at a meeting centre.
- Rigorous practical staff training.
- Supportive national policy framework that precludes political interference.

##### Challenges

Creative and innovative strategies to deal with the poorest and possibly higher allocations will be necessary if AIM is to continue to play an effective role in accessing and reducing poverty in female-headed poor households.

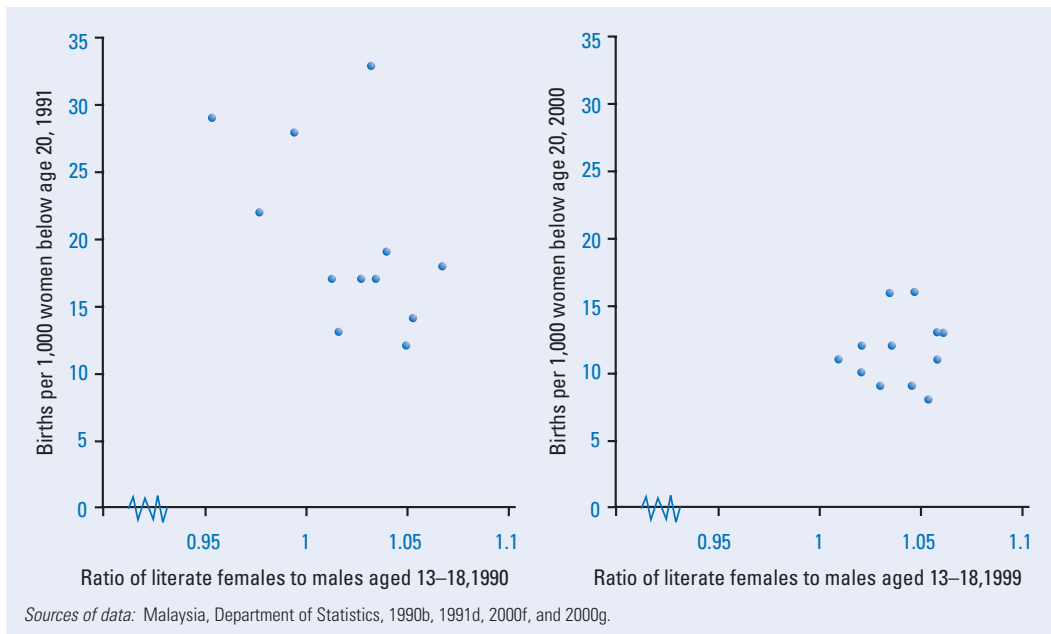
### Providing access to education

From the outset of the development process, Malaysia provided access to education for all children. This enabled Malaysia to achieve gender parity, especially at the primary schooling level. As a result of this, Malaysia was also able to close the gender gap in

literacy levels among youths aged 15–24.

With better education, women tend to enter into their first marriage at a later age and have a smaller family size (Figure 3.8). With more education, young women have increasingly been attracted to, and absorbed into, the modern sector labour market.

**Figure 3.8** Ratio of Literate Females to Males Aged 13–18 and Adolescent Fertility, Malaysia, 1990 and 1999



## Future challenges

A number of constraints continue to inhibit women’s active participation in mainstream economic activities. These include women’s competing responsibilities at home and at work, the choice of courses at schools, and inadequate access to credit and market information. Some ongoing programmes, as described above, are being implemented to address these constraints, including improving education and training for women, removing discriminatory legislation, and enhancing the legal status of women.

### Women’s dual roles

Many women are educated and hold permanent jobs, and their monetary contribution ensures a better standard of living for their families. Yet they are expected to be primarily responsible for the reproduction and care of the next generation. The competing responsibilities of family and career restrict women’s mobility and participation in the labour market. One way around the conflict for many middle-class working wives has

been to employ maids, usually foreign. But this is likely to be only a temporary solution. In addition, the working environment generally does not adequately cater for women's needs, including their reproductive and family roles.

To enable women to participate more fully in national development, existing policies should be enhanced to enable women to combine work, childcare, and household duties. These include safe, high-quality childcare facilities, along with flexible time arrangements at work. While the government has provided tax incentives for employers to provide crèches for young children of employees, few employers have complied. In addition, men should be encouraged to share family responsibilities.

Although Malaysia has 7.4 million women aged between 15 and 64, only 47 per cent are in the labour force. This problem persists despite the greater number of females compared to males enrolled in secondary and tertiary educational institutions. To address this challenge, the government is promoting "teleworking" and "home office" concepts as an alternative work option for women. This move is likely to increase the proportion of women participating in the labour force.

### **Professional skills and access to credit**

A lack of managerial and professional skills tends to restrict women's progress to the higher professional positions. Greater education and vocational training opportunities for women are needed to encourage their participation in areas that lead to higher-paying jobs in all sectors.

Women generally lack access to credit and market information to sustain their businesses. The government, the corporate sector, and NGOs have an important role to play in providing credit and building a market information network for women.

### **Protection against violence**

There are increasing media and anecdotal reports of gender-based abuses and violence, both physical and psychological. This suggests the need for further studies into this problem to determine its extent and causes.

### **Leadership role for women**

With their increasing level of education, it is expected that women will participate more fully at all levels of decision making. In order to ensure their effective participation, it will be necessary to provide more opportunities for women to take up leadership positions in political, economic, and social fields.

Presently, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is looking into the possibility of establishing a Unit for Women's Leadership under the Social Institute of Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur. The focus of this unit is to provide leadership training and consultations to women who want to contribute effectively to the development process. This unit will also maintain a national network of women from corporations, emerging businesses, NGOs, and the public sector.

### **Disaggregation of data by sex**

In order to better formulate and monitor development plans and policies affecting women, greater attention needs to be given to the disaggregation of data by sex. This applies not only to government agencies but also to researchers and NGOs.