

## **Labour Force Participation of Women in Malaysia**

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### **Abstract**

*This article analyses the women labor force participation in Malaysia. The rapid absorption of women into the labor market has been influenced by several factors. The rapid economic growth was due largely to important growth in the manufacturing and services sectors, where substantial and proportionally larger increase of female workers has been registered. Among all sectors of the economy, the manufacturing sector has recorded the highest growth rate during the last decade. The rising in the female labor force participation may also be attributable to improving economic incentives in employment and policies favoring the employment of women. In addition, the combined effects of the increase in years of schooling, access to family planning services, improved maternal and availability of child care, leading to arise in the average age at marriage, have allowed women to take advantage of the increased employment opportunities.*

**Keywords:** *Labor force, labor force participation, labor market.*

### **Abstrak**

*Artikel ini menganalisis penyertaan guna tenaga wanita di Malaysia. Penyerapan pantas kaum wanita dalam pasaran buruh dipengaruhi oleh beberapa faktor. Kadar pertumbuhan ekonomi yang deras disebabkan pertumbuhan yang signifikan dalam sektor pembuatan dan perkhidmatan menjadikan penyertaan pekerja wanita adalah besar. Sektor pembuatan mencatatkan kadar pertumbuhan yang paling tinggi sepanjang dekad yang lalu berbanding sektor lain. Peningkatan dalam penyertaan guna tenaga oleh kaum wanita mungkin juga disebabkan oleh insentif ekonomi yang lebih baik serta dasar kerajaan yang memihak kepada kaum wanita. Selain itu, kesan kombinasi daripada pertambahan tahun persekolahan, kemudahan perkhidmatan mengenai perancangan keluarga, kehamilan dan kesediaan penjagaan anak yang lebih baik membawa kepada peningkatan purata umur untuk berkahwin dan ini membolehkan wanita mengambil peluang terhadap pertambahan dalam peluang pekerjaan yang disediakan.*

**Kata kunci:** *Guna tenaga, penyertaan guna tenaga, pasaran buruh.*

### **Introduction**

Human resource is one of the main contributing factors for economic growth and for social, political, and technological development. In the era of globalization, economic liberation and fast growing ICT, strengthening the national competitive advantage is the concern of the policy makers. Subsequently, various human resource development planning and strategies are formulated and action plans are outlined at various phases of development. Human resource development continued to be given priority in support of the implementation of a productivity-driven growth, which required highly skilled, trainable and knowledge able manpower. Emphasis continued to be given to increased accessibility to education at all levels in line with the democratization of the education policy.

The high growth rate of the economy was achieved with price stability and since 1995, with virtually full employment before the currency crisis erupted in the late 1997. The rapid expansion in manufacturing increased employment in the sector sharply during the Sixth Malaysia Plan period, and dramatically altered the employment structure. The achievement of virtually full employment in 1995 marked a new landmark in the country's socioeconomic progress. The unemployment rate decreased from 2.8 per cent in 1995 to 2.6 per cent in 1996. However, the situation was different after the currency crisis which occurred in 1997.

### **Labour Force Participation Rates**

Malaysia has a very large population of productive potential work force. In terms of age structure, in 1999, about 35 per cent of the population were below the age of 15, while 4 per cent were in the age group of 65 and above. The remaining 61 per cent were in the working age group that is the age group between 15 to 64 years. In 2000, there were 9,194 people in the labour force and employments were 8,920 people (*Malaysian Economic Report 1999/2000*, 1999). 55.3 per cent of the labour force was in urban areas. The labour force participation rate (LFPR), which measures the people in the labour force as a percentage of the non-institutionalized population, increased from 65.3 per cent in 2001 to 65.5 per cent in 2002; attributed mainly by school leavers in the 20-24 years age group. Male LFPR increased marginally from 85.3 per cent in 1995 to 85.4 per cent in 2000, while female LFPR increased from 43.5 per cent to 44.5 per cent.

### **Employment by Sector**

During the 1991-1995 period, the employment rate expanded at an impressive rate of 3.4 per cent. A total of 1.2 million jobs were created during the period

where the manufacturing sector was the highest contributor to the total employment, accounting for about one quarter of the total employment and almost 60 per cent of the net employment creation (Table 1).

Table 1

*Employment by Sector, 1990-2005 ('000 Persons)*

Sector	1990	Per cent	1995	Per cent	2000	Per cent	2005	Per cent
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Fishing	1738	26	1428.7	18	1423.0	15.3	1405.7	12.9
Mining and Quarrying	37	0.6	40.7	0.5	41.7	0.4	42.7	0.4
Manufacturing	1333	19.9	2051.6	25.9	2565.8	27.7	3132.1	28.7
Construction	424	6.3	659.4	8.3	752.2	8.1	759.6	7.0
Electricity, Gas and Water	47	0.7	69.1	0.9	75	0.8	93.0	0.8
Transport, Storage and Communication	302	4.5	395.2	5.0	461.6	5.0	631.2	5.8
Wholesale and Retail Trade, Hotels and Restaurants	1218	18.2	1327.8	16.8	1582.9	17.1	1927.2	17.7
Finance, Insurance, Real estate & Business services	258	3.9	378.5	4.8	500.2	5.4	732.3	6.7
Government services	850	12.7	872.2	11.0	986.0	10.6	1052.8	9.7
Other services	479	7.2	692.2	8.7	891.2	9.6	1118.2	10.3
Total	6686	100	7915.4	100	7274.6	100	10894.8	100
Labour force	7042		8140		9571.6		11290.5	
Unemployment	356		224.6		297.0		395.7	

Source. Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000 (1996) & Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010 (2006).

Meanwhile, the service sector accounted for about 47 per cent of the total number of jobs created during 1991-1995. The construction sector grew at an average of 9.2 per cent per annum and accounted for about 19 per cent of the total job creation. The share of the construction sector to total employment increased from 6.3 per cent in 1990 to 7.0 per cent in 2005. While the share of agricultural employment to total employment fell from 26.0 per cent in 1990 to 12.9 per cent in 2005. This sector continued to face labour shortages as local labour moved into other economic sectors because of better prospects and higher wage rates.

### **Women's Labour Force Participation Rates in Malaysia**

Women are highly important contributors to the country's economic and social development. Over the years women participation in the economy has increased rapidly and they constitute almost half of the total population. Since

1990, women's participation in the labour force has increased enormously. Even though Malaysia is a newly industrialized country, its female labour force participation rate compares favourably with those of the industrialized countries of the Asia and Pacific regions. Women's labour force participation rate has increased over the years, but is still significantly lower than that of men. In 1999, the women's labour force participation rate was 44.2 per cent compared to men, with 83.4 per cent. However in 2004, the women's participation rate in the labour force increased to 47.3 per cent (Table 2). In 2006, a total of 2,575.3 ('000) or 70.1 per cent of employed women lived in urban areas.

Table 2

*Labour Force Participation Rates by Gender 1995–2006*

Gender	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2004	2005	2006
Total	64.5	65.8	66.6	64.3	64.3	65.4	64.4	63.3	63.1
Male	83.8	84.8	85.7	83.4	83.4	83.0	80.9	80.0	79.9
Female	44.3	45.8	47.4	44.2	44.2	47.2	47.3	45.9	45.8

*Source.* Malaysian Economic Report 1999/2000 (1999); Malaysian Economic Report 2003/2004 (2003) & Malaysian Economic Report 2006/2007 (2006).

Obviously, it can be seen that employment rates among the three ethnic groups are different: in 1984, 65.2 per cent of employed women were Malays, 21.9 per cent were Chinese and 12.3 per cent were of Indian origin. The ethnic composition of female employment rates varies between urban and rural sectors. In 1984 (Peninsular Malaysia), the female labour force participation rates in the urban sector were 53.7 per cent among the Chinese, 35.7 per cent among the Malays and 10.2 per cent among the Indians, whereas in the rural sector the Malay women had the highest employment rate followed by the Chinese and the Indians.

**Women Employment Patterns by Sector**

Economic growth has been accompanied by the greater participation of women in the formal workforce and in a range of other activities. Female labour force participation rate has kept pace with population growth and the number of female and male workers doubled between 1970 and 1995, while the labour force participation rate remained relatively unchanged after 1980. The labour participation rate increased in the upper thirties for women between 1970 and 1980, and has remained between 44 and 46 per cent between 1990 and 1995. The rapid absorption of women into the labour market has been influenced by several factors. The rapid economic growth was due largely to important growth in the manufacturing and services sectors, where a substantial and

proportionally larger increase of female workers has been registered. Among all the sectors of the economy, the manufacturing sector has recorded the highest growth rate during the last decade.

The manufacturing sector has created about 0.6 million new jobs between 1990 and 1994. In 1994 the sector provided employment to 1.9 million people. The growth of this sector has led to the mobilization of female labour and increase in employment, with about 46.4 per cent (1990) and 43.4 per cent (1995). The financial services and the government are the main employers of women and it accounts for about 60 per cent of the total labour force in these sectors. Agriculture is no longer the major employer of women and the proportion of female labour in agriculture has declined as from 40 per cent in 1970 to 30 per cent in 1995. Women workers have been able to move into relatively better paying opportunities in other sectors. Table 3 shows the percentage of distribution of the female labour force by sector from 1970 to 2000.

Table 3

*Percentage of Distribution of Women Labour Force by Sector (1970–2000)*

Sector	1970	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Fishing	38.0	39.0	38.4	34.4	28.6	26.8
Mining and Quarrying	12.6	10.3	10.5	12.9	17.9	13.0
Manufacturing	28.1	40.1	43.1	46.4	42.8	41.1
Construction	5.3	7.5	3.4	6.9	6.5	6.0
Electricity, Gas and Water	6.7	7.1	5.6	4.3	9.6	9.5
Transport, Storage and Communication	18.2	29.3	37.4	38.6	12.1	13.1
Wholesale and Retail trade, Hotels and Restaurants	4.3	6.3	10.4	11.1	38.7	39.3
Finance, Insurance, Real estate and Business services	-	29.5	35.1	34.2	39.9	39.9
Community, Social and Personal services, Public Administration, and Other services	-	29.4	36.8	37.9	40.0	45.3

Source. Sixth Malaysia Plan 1991-1995 (1991) & Eight Malaysia Plan 2001-2005 (2001).

The proportion of females in the total labour force in manufacturing peaked at nearly 50 per cent in 1990, however it showed a decline in the female percentage of the total labour force in 2000 (41.1%). This can be explained by the trend towards increasing technology-intensive new investments to the concomitant demand for skilled labour, and provides early warning of the need

to train female workers in sunset industries to prepare them for redeployment. Furthermore, the majority of women remained in low-skilled, labour-intensive jobs in agriculture, and in semi-skilled assembly work in the industry. The importance of women in the industrial labour force can be analysed in relation to the new development in world economies linked with export-oriented industrialization. An increase in the export-oriented zones has systematically linked the nation to international markets, thus expanding the demand for labour force in the industrial sector, especially the manufacturing sector. The industrialization process has benefited Malaysian women more than the men. The establishment of export-oriented zones in the 1970s provided more employment opportunities in the manufacturing sector. For example, more than 75 per cent of its workforce consisted of women in the manufacturing sector.

Likewise, over 90 per cent of the workers, employed by the clothing and textile industries were mainly females. Furthermore, with the proportion of women in manufacturing (27.3%), it became the largest sector of employment for women in 2000 (Table 4), and is the single largest employer of women.

Table 4

*Percentage of Employment Distribution by Sectors and Gender*

Industry	1990		1995		2000	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Agriculture, Forestry, Livestock and Fishing	24.8	28.5	21.6	16.9	20.2	14.1
Mining and Quarrying	0.7	1.2	0.5	0.2	0.4	0.1
Manufacturing	15.6	29.5	20.2	29.4	20.6	27.3
Construction	8.6	1.4	11.3	1.5	12.1	1.5
Electricity, Gas and Water	1.0	0.2	0.9	0.2	0.7	0.1
Transport, Storage and Communication	4.0	5.6	6.2	1.7	6.1	1.7
Wholesale and Retail trade, Hotels and Restaurants	23.6	6.4	16.6	20.5	18.1	22.3
Finance, Insurance, Real estate and Business services	3.7	4.2	4.3	5.6	4.5	5.7
Other services	18.0	24.0	18.4	24.0	17.3	27.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Source.* Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996-2000 (1996) & Eight Malaysia Plan 2001-2005 (2001).

### Analysis of Women's Labour Participation

Economic theory indicates that family decisions regarding labour supply, quality childcare quality, birthrates, and other relevant factors are likely to be affected by the childcare policies. A number of researchers have attempted to estimate the behavioural effects on various family decisions (i.e. women's decision to participate in the labour market) of changes in income, wage rates, and the price of childcare. A sampling of earlier studies includes Heckman (1974); Robin and Spigelman (1978); Stolzenberg and Waite (1988); Leibowitz, Waite and Witsberger (1988); Berger and Black (1991); Blau and Robins (1988), (1989), (1991a) and (1991b); Connelly (1992); Hofferth and Wissoker (1992); Leibowitz, Klerman and Waite (1992); Ribar (1992), (1995); Michapolos, Robins and Garfinkel (1992); Kimmel (1993), Averett et al. (1997); Powell (1997) and Anderson and Levine (1999). The more recent research includes Han and Waldfogel (2001); Baum II (2002); Oishi (2002); Doiron and Kalb (2005); Viitanen (2005); Kimmel and Powell (2006) and Lockshin and Fong (2006).

For our econometric analysis, we employed the model by Connelly (1992) in which the decision of a woman to participate in the labour market is modelled as the outcome of maximizing her utility over goods. Specifically, we estimated a probit model relating employment to wages and childcare costs such that:

$$L^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 W + \beta_2 P_{cc} + \beta_3' A + \varepsilon_h$$

$L = 1$  (participates) if  $L^* > 0$

$L = 0$  (does not participate) otherwise

where  $L^*$  is the labour supply of women,  $W$  is the market wage rate,  $P_{cc}$  is the hourly cost of childcare, and  $A$  is a vector of other observed determinants. For other observable determinants  $A$ , we used age, years of education, working experience, husbands' incomes, number of children, and dummy variables showing the marital status, urban/rural areas, health, and whether or not they lived in the areas they were born. The problem is that  $W$  is not observed in the samples that are not employed. Similarly  $P$  is observed only in the sample of those who left children in formal care. Therefore, we made an estimation of the market wages and the price of childcare.

The sample size used for the estimation was 600 married women. The summary of the statistics of the variables used are as shown in Table 5.

Table 5

*Summary of Statistics*

Variable (n= 600)		Frequencies	Percent
Location	Rural	251	41.8
	Urban without industrial area	235	39.2
	Urban with industrial area	114	19.0
Age (Minimum= 18, Maximum= 63, Mean =38.1)	< 20	3	0.5
	20 – 29	162	27.0
	30 – 39	165	27.5
	40 – 49	158	26.3
	50 – 59	90	15.0
	60 and up	22	3.7
Race	Malay	536	89.3
	Chinese	32	5.3
	Indian	27	4.5
	Others	5	0.8
Education achievement	No formal schooling	21	3.5
	Primary education	43	7.2
	UPSR	60	10.0
	Lower secondary education	10	1.7
	PMR	49	8.2
	Secondary education	9	1.5
	SPM	229	28.2
	STPM/ Diploma/Matriculation	98	16.3
	University/College	81	13.5
Area of specialization	Art	499	83.2
	Science	73	12.1
	Technical/Vocational	10	1.7
	Others	18	3.0
Marital status	Married	555	92.5
	Widow	24	4.0
	Divorced	21	3.5
Health	Satisfactory	580	96.7
	Non-satisfactory	20	3.3
Residential status	Rented	137	22.8
	Owned with bank-loan	188	31.3
	Owned privately	200	33.3
	Stayed with parents/not-rented	75	12.5

(sambungan)



Variable (n= 600)		Frequencies	Percent
Working status	Not working and not actively looking for jobs	254	42.3
	Not working but actively looking for jobs	27	4.5
	Working	319	53.2
Income (monthly) n= 319	RM100 – RM1,000	168	52.7
	RM1,001–2,000	120	37.6
	RM2,001–3,000	20	6.3
	RM3,001–4,000	6	1.9
	RM4,001–5,000	4	1.2
	RM5,001–6,000	1	0.3
	RM100–RM1,000	213	42.9
Husband's income (monthly) n= 496	RM1,001–2,000	187	37.7
	RM2,001–3,000	62	12.5
	RM3,001–4,000	15	3.0
	RM4,001–5,000	13	2.6
	RM5,001–10,000	6	1.2
Cost of childcare (monthly)	RM0	498	83.0
	RM1–RM100	12	2.0
	RM101–RM200	66	11.0
	RM201–RM300	21	3.5
	RM300–above	3	0.5

Of the sample size of 600 married women at the working age of 15-65 years old, 319 or 53.2 per cent were working during the survey. Almost 30 per cent of the respondents had at least one child at the age of less than 6 years old. Table 6 shows the estimation results from the specification of the participation probits. This estimation uses years of education as a proxy for wage rate. Based on the fact that analyses using cross-sectional data are prone to the problem of heteroscedasticity, this model is estimated using White's heteroscedasticity-consistent variances, or also called heteroscedasticity-robust estimator.

Table 6

*Probit Model of Married Women's Participation*

Variable	Coefficient	P> t	Marginal Effect
-Intercept	-.6134476	0.719	
<i>Personal Characteristics</i>			
Urban	.5138713	0.001	.2027676
Age	.0034044	0.970	.0013581

(sambungan)

Variable	Coefficient	P> t	Marginal Effect
Age squared	-.0010542	0.409	-.0004206
Years of education	.0985829	0.000	.0393281
Status	-1.106121	0.174	-.3789177
Health	.1493478	0.752	.0594067
Birth origin	-.0660808	0.688	-.0263574
Experience	.1995302	0.000	.0795994
Exp squared	-.0013316	0.059	-.0005312
<i>Husbands' Characteristics</i>			
Age	.0173206	0.446	.0069098
Years of education	.0015676	0.847	.0006254
Income	-.0001693	0.026	-.0000676
<i>Children</i>			
0-6 years old	-.3405044	0.000	-.1358389
7-12 years old	-.122623	0.262	-.0489185
13-17 years old	-.2570529	0.024	-.1025472
18 years old	-.0330402	0.811	-.0131809
Cost of childcare	.0076897	0.000	.0030677
<i>Log likelihood</i>			-178.68154
<i>Pseudo R2</i>			0.5691

As the theory predicts, years of education and working experience are significantly positive indicating that higher education or having more experience raise the probability of participation. As a proxy to wages, having more education means greater possibility of getting better jobs, hence obtaining higher wages. The negative impact of husbands' income and having children at the age of 0-6 years old are also significant. High incomes of other household members, raise the reservation wage of mothers, thus lowering the probability of participation when the objective of working is to help the family's financial need. The impact of childcare on mothers' labour force participation is significant but not as the theory predicted. The probability of participation in the labour force is significantly higher for women who live in the urban areas where job opportunities are greater compared to the rural areas.

### Factors Influencing the Increase of Employed Women

The increase in the labour force participation rate of women in Malaysia could to a certain extent be explained by the decline in fertility rate from 3.9 in 1982 to 3.3 children per woman in 2001. The decline in fertility rate could in turn be traced to the rise in the average age at marriage thus reducing the span of active reproductive life. In 1980, women were marrying at an average age of 23.5 years, and in 1991 their average age at marriage increased to 24.7. This

means age at first marriage continued to increase as in 2000 it was 25.1 and 25.3 in 2004. The postponement of marriage among women to a later age led to the postponement of giving birth to the first child.

The most important determinant of fertility is women's education. As primary education is becoming universal and more women are pursuing higher education, family size can be expected to drop further. Therefore, the highest female labour force participation is within the age group of 20 to 24, coinciding with the end of schooling age and before the age of marriage. Hence the age of marriage together with fertility bears a relationship with female labour force participation.

The increase in the female labour force participation may be attributable to improving economic incentives in employment and policies favouring the employment of women. In addition, the combined effects of improved maternal and child health care, access to family planning services, increased years of schooling, and an increase in the average age at marriage, have allowed women to take advantage of the increased employment opportunities. Postponement of marriage from age 22.3 in 1970 to age 24.7 in 1991, and longer intervals between children have enabled more women of all ages to enter and remain in the workforce (Table 7). While the participation rate for the age group 15-19 years declined between the years 1980 and 1985 due to increased enrollments in secondary school, the other age group of 20-24 years increased its participation. The decline in the participation rate after the age of 24 is related to marriage and the start of an active reproductive life. There are no significant additional incentives for women to re-enter the labour force at a later age, which is why there is no rise in participation among women over 40 years.

Table 7

*Labour Force Participation Rate by Gender and Age Group 1980-1990*

Age Group	Participation Rates (%)					
	1980		1985		1990	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
15 – 19	47.9	33.5	43.7	28.2	44.1	31.4
20 – 24	91.1	54.0	90.7	58.3	89.1	63.9
25 – 29	92.4	44.6	98.1	49.2	97.4	53.9
30 – 34	98.0	40.5	98.8	47.3	98.4	50.2
35 – 39	98.2	42.7	98.9	48.5	98.8	47.8
40 – 44	97.9	43.8	98.3	50.4	98.5	48.8

(sambungan)

Age Group	Participation Rates (%)					
	1980		1985		1990	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
45 – 49	96.6	41.4	97.9	48.7	97.2	48.5
50 – 54	92.7	36.5	93.5	40.0	93.3	40.9
55 – 59	77.4	30.8	76.6	32.6	71.3	29.4
60 – 64	68.6	25.0	67.1	23.9	59.9	24.0
15 – 64	86.6	39.3	84.6	44.6	84.4	46.8

*Source.* Seventh Malaysia Plan 1996–2000 (1996) & Eight Malaysia Plan 2001–2005 (2001).

Another factor that might induce more females to get involved in the labour force is related to the attitude of the family towards women. A study of selected successful career women in Malaysia, for example, revealed that changing attitudes of parents and husbands towards a more positive trend were perceived to be related to the higher educational attainment of women which in turn could influence women's participation in the labour force.

An overall increase in women's education level appears to be one of the main factors for women's contribution in the labour force. Education is essential for the improvement of women's living standards and to allow them to take a more active part in the decision making process within the family, the community, the place of paid work and the political area. In 1995, women made up 49.5 per cent of the enrollment of students at government-assisted universities. Half of the women labour force possessed secondary education and 11 per cent had tertiary education in 1995, while 12.6 per cent did not receive any formal education.

However, several factors are identified as problems faced by working women in Malaysia. (a) lack of technical and managerial skills or training for women. Although the gender gap in lower education enrollment has been closed, there is gender stereotyping in course selection in higher education, leading to gender segregation in occupational sectors and the gender hierarchies in occupational distribution. This is largely linked to the cultural ideology, which associates women with their reproductive role. (b) there are disadvantaged positions of women farmers in terms of access to resource and services. Despite their significant role in agriculture, they have been largely ignored in the government's programmes until recently, and the effects of the current programmes focusing on income-generating activities such as food processing and handicrafts remain to be seen. (c) women's low earning can be attributed to lifetime choices between work and family (from the viewpoint of labour supply) and to employment discrimination (from the viewpoint of labour demand). Since women usually have a greater role than men in caring for the family, they may invest less in their own education and may work for

shorter periods and in occupations that require fewer hours or less effort than men. These combined with interruptions in labour-force participation limit women's access to better jobs and promotions. Furthermore, employers, in turn, may invest less in nurturing women's skills through training or education because women are expected to drop out of the labour force while they are raising young children or, in many circumstances, stop all work outside the home once they are married.

### **Conclusion**

Much progress has been achieved in the past few decades in narrowing the gender gap in Malaysia. It can be seen in the development of women's roles, both in absolute and relative terms, in the major socioeconomic aspects of the country's development: increasing rates of female labour force participation, gains in productive activities of women and their strengthened economic standing and their increased participation in education. Malaysia's impressive economic growth has been accompanied by the greater participation of women in the formal workforce and in a range of other activities.

There are equal opportunities for employment for both men and women workers in Malaysia. Based on the Labour Force Survey, in the first quarter of 2002, women made up 35.5 per cent of the labour force. Policy statements in the Government's Second Outline Perspective Plan (1991–2000) also provide women with opportunities for economic participation as well as participation in education and training. The National Labour Policy reinforces the government policy of gender equality at all levels of employment. The policy also emphasizes that women be provided with opportunities for training and advancement, be paid equal for work of equal value and be integrated into the mainstream of development as well as in increasing their participation rate in employment. To meet future challenges, Malaysia has to prepare its labour force to suit the needs of a knowledge-based economy (K-based economy). A number of programmes in human resource development were initiated with the emphasis on the inculcation of new skills. These programmes ranged from the implementation of new approaches in basic education via the use of computer and information technology (IT) in primary and secondary schools to Special Schemes involving programmes on training in IT, mathematics and languages. Training serves as one of the means of developing human resources. In this regard, one of the major insights of human capital theory is the observation that individuals can increase their productivity not only through investment in formal education but also by learning important work skills outside the formal school system. Viewed from this perspective, women as active actors in both the private and public spheres should be trained with their male counterparts focusing not only on their domestic role but also on their productive role.

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