MALAYSIA
COUNTRY REPORT

“Strengthening Family Resilience: Moving From Policy to Action”

3rd East Asia Ministerial Forum on Families 2008
17-19 November 2008
Bali, Indonesia

National Population and Family Development Board
Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Social policies and programmes affecting families have been revised and improved from time to time since Independence in 1957 to adapt to new challenges and needs of families. The importance of the family as a foundation for a strong Malaysia was first given prominence when Vision 2020 (now renamed the National Vision Policy–NVP) was announced in 1991 which strived to make Malaysia an industrialised nation by the year 2020. This vision recognizes that PEOPLE are the center of development and the critical element of this Vision is to produce citizens of good character embedded with an appropriate balance of suitable knowledge and skills and the inculcation of positive moral values, ethics and innovativeness. It particularly identified a “social system in which society will come before self, in which the welfare of the people will revolve not around the state or the individual but around a strong and resilient family system.”

Subsequently, the National Social Policy was launched in 2003 and the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development acts as its secretariat. The policy provides the framework for the planning and implementation of social development programmes involving the public and private sectors together with NGOs. The objective of the policy is to ensure that every individual, family and community regardless of ethnic group, religion, culture and location is able to participate and contribute towards the development of the nation as well as enjoy a self-sustaining quality of life. To ensure the successful implementation of the strategies under this policy, a National Social Council chaired by the Deputy
Prime Minister was formed, involving 14 Ministries and several agencies. To further operationalise the NVP, the National Integrity Plan (NIP) was launched by the Prime Minister in April 2004. Of significance was the recognition of the role of the family institution in the Government’s efforts to bring back values in society.

While social assistance in Malaysia has mainly been towards poverty alleviation, most recently, a comprehensive Social Safety Net has been outlined in the 2009 Budget to help families worst affected by the current global financial crisis. For this purpose, a sum of RM 500 million is allocated which would help the lower income group and other vulnerable groups cope with the higher cost of living. Other benefits include increased pensions for government pensioners, aid for families who are victims of calamities (e.g. floods and fire) and increased allowances for foster parents who provide a family setting for less fortunate children.

Recognising the need to adopt an integrated approach to family strengthening and resilience, several pertinent laws and regulations are being reviewed and formulated. These include the review of the Islamic Family Law Act, the Law Reform (Marriage and Divorce) Act for non-Muslim families and the Child Act 2001. The National Family Policy which is in its final stage of formulation will give a family perspective to social and economic development.
## 2.0 POPULATION – A SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Population</strong>&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt; (million)</td>
<td>18.36</td>
<td>23.49</td>
<td>26.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Group</strong>&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-14 (%)</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-64 (%)</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>62.8</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 and above (%)</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Population Density</strong>&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt; (per sq.km.)</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Median Age</strong>&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt; (years)</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dependency Ratio</strong>&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt; (%)</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>59.2</td>
<td>58.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex Ratio : Population</strong>&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt; (every 100 females)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urban Population</strong> (%)</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural Population</strong> (%)</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Life Expectancy at Birth</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male (years)</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>70.2</td>
<td>71.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female (years)</td>
<td>73.7</td>
<td>75.0</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crude Birth Rate</strong> per ('000)</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Crude Death Rate</strong> per ('000)</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Infant Mortality Rate</strong> per ('000)</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maternal Mortality Rate</strong> per ('000)</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Fertility Rate</strong> (per woman)</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Household Size</strong>&lt;sup&gt;6&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear family households</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended family households</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Statistics, Malaysia

<sup>1</sup> Projected:
- 2010: 28.91 (million people)
- 2020: 34.87 (million people)

<sup>2</sup> Median age is the age that divides the distribution of the population into two, such that half the population is below this age and half is above it.

<sup>3</sup> Dependency ratio (usually expressed as per 100 persons) is the ratio of the number of persons is below age 15 and the number of persons aged 65 years and over to the number of persons in the working age group of 15-64 years.

<sup>4</sup> Sex ratio is the ratio of the number of males for every 100 females.

<sup>5</sup> Household is defined as a person or group of related and/or unrelated persons who usually live together and make common provisions for food and other essentials of living.
Chart 1: Percentage Distribution of Population by Age Group, Malaysia, 1970-2020

Source: * Department of Statistics
** Population projection based on Population Census 2000
3.0 TRENDS IN FAMILY FORMATION, FERTILITY AND MARITAL DYNAMICS

Currently, data from the Population Census 2000 shows that young adults tend to marry at a later age. Consequently, the proportion of never married (single) person aged 20-34 years continued to increase between 1991 and 2000 from 43.2% to 48.1%. Among females aged 20-24 years, 68.5% were single in 2000 compared to only 60.2% in 1991. Similar patterns were also observed for females in the 25-34 age groups, as well as among males. The mean age at first marriage has been rising for men and women. Between 1980 and 2000, the mean age at first marriage for men increased from 26.6 years to 28.6 years. For women, the mean age at first marriage increased from 23.5 years to 25.1 years.

The number of households has increased at a higher rate than population growth (3.9% per annum compared to 2.5% per annum). Hence, from 4.8 million households in 2000, there are more than 6 million households in 2007 (in this context, also taken as an indicator of families). About 66% are nuclear families as compared to 60% during the 1991 Census. There was also a slight increase in other types of families, such as single households and unrelated-persons households.

The average household size has dropped from 4.8 persons in 1991 to 4.6 persons in 2000. Family size has declined due to many reasons. Many women are seeking tertiary education and therefore out-migrating and also delaying age at first marriage.
Furthermore, more couples are delaying the birth of their child until they are well established professionally and secure economically. The fertility level has declined for all age groups, from a high of 6.0 children per woman in 1960 to 2.8 in 2004, partly the consequences of increasing age at first marriage. Women are also entering childbearing later and are stopping at a younger age. Malaysia is projected to reach replacement level by the year 2015.

4.0 STRESSORS AFFECTING FAMILIES AND THEIR ADAPTATION AND COPING STRATEGIES

Family stress and problems within the family are common issues that confront families. The important question is how to cope/manage them, i.e, exhibit family resilience in situations of stress, crisis or adversity. Stressful events and issues can bring families closer together or they can divide and shatter them.

The Malaysian Population and Family Survey Four (MPFS 4) conducted by National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) in 2004 indicated that finance and problems with adolescent children are two major problems confronted by parents. The survey further revealed that, in order to cope with such problems, most of the parents tended to solve the problems on their own.

However, a recent study conducted by the NPFDB in July 2008 on the effects of inflation on the family, revealed that many families were willing to change their lifestyles to suit the current economic
downturn. Many resorted to cutting back on non-essential household expenses such as vacations and utilizing public transportation. As a measure to address rising food and fuel prices, 38% of mothers were prepared to join the work force to boost the family income. Towards this end, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, through the Department of Women, have initiated a “Home Managers” training programme for women. Although some indications of increase in family conflict were evident in the above study, the ability of families to adjust their lifestyles and spending habits bore well for the average Malaysian family.

In response to the needs of lower income families and other vulnerable groups especially in view of the global economic crisis, the 2009 Budget is focused on enhancing the well-being of all Malaysians. With the theme “A Caring Society” and in line with the five thrusts of the National Mission, the 2009 Budget has outlined a comprehensive Social Safety Net (SSN). SSN is a term used to describe a collection of services provided by the state. These services can be in the form of welfare, homeless shelters, universal health care and subsidised services such as public transportation which protect people from the worst effects of low income and poverty. Its role is to redistribute income and resources to the needy in society, helping them to overcome short term poverty. SSN is needed mainly because the impact on the poor and other vulnerable groups such as the elderly and disabled are more often immediate and threatening than those faced by others in society.
Beginning January 2009, the SSN provided are as follows:

i. Raised the eligibility criteria for welfare assistance under the Welfare Department, from a monthly household income of RM 400.00 to RM 720.00 for Peninsular Malaysia, RM 830.00 for Sarawak and RM 960.00 for Sabah. With this increase, the number of eligible recipients is expected to double from 54,000 households to 110,000. This includes an increase in the number of eligible senior citizens from 14,000 to 40,000. For this purpose, an additional RM 500 million is allocated.

ii. Government pensioners who had served at least 25 years upon retirement will receive a pension of not less than RM 720.00 per month, effective 1 January 2009. This increase will involve an additional allocation of RM 140 million for 2009 and will benefit 75,000 retirees including those receiving derivative pensions.

iii. Set up a special fund of RM 25 million to channel timely financial assistance to families deprived of their sources of income, particularly arising from accidents to breadwinners as well as assist victims of calamities such as floods and fire.

iv. Together with the corporate sector, the Government has set up several homes under the concept of *Rumah Tunas Harapan* to provide upbringing in a family setting for less fortunate children. Under this initiative, the corporate sector provides the houses, while the Government bears the
operating expenses. Given the heavy responsibility of the caregivers in these *Rumah Tunas Harapan*, the Government will increase their allowance from RM 600.00 to RM 1,000.00 per month, effective 1 September 2008. This is in line with the country’s move towards greater Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).

v. As for the disabled, in the 2008 Budget, the Government has already increased the monthly allowance from RM 200 to RM 300 for the disabled who are receiving monthly incomes not exceeding RM 750. Starting from July 2008, the eligibility has been increased from monthly earnings of RM 750 to RM 1,200. This is to encourage the disabled to utilise their skills and capabilities as well as to encourage them to be employed. The Government also realises that some disabled are unable to work. To help this group, the 2009 Budget provides a monthly allowance of RM 150 per person. In addition, the monthly allowance of RM 50 given to children with disabilities who attend special primary and secondary education will be increased to RM 150. Teaching assistants in these schools will also be provided with an incentive payment of RM 200 per month.

vi. Subsidy of RM 180 per child to civil servants whose monthly household income is RM 3,000 and below to help working parents overcome the difficulties faced in sending their children to child care centres and to enjoy quality and better child care services. Previously, the eligibility criteria was those earning RM 2,000 and below.
5.0 PARENTING AND FAMILY EDUCATION

Family development programmes aimed at building a stable, healthy, happy and harmonious family have been implemented since the early 1990s. These programmes consist of training modules on preparation for marriage and marriage enrichment, parenting skills for parents with young children and teenagers, fatherhood and adolescent development and counseling services for families and adolescents.

Recognising the increasing participation of women in the labour force, actions have been taken to create awareness and provide knowledge to parents on the importance and need to balance work and family. Therefore, the Parenting@Work programme was launched in 2007 to provide guidance on parenting skills, ensure stable and resilient family units and to equip families to face modern day challenges and work-life balance issues. To date, 123 Government Ministries and agencies from the Federal and State level have sponsored these courses at their work place. Beginning October 2008, the programme has been expanded to the private sector.

Although findings from MPFS 4 (2004) survey revealed that almost 99% of husbands and wives perceived their family relationships to be strong and cohesive, the need to address increasing numbers of divorce resulted in the Government taking affirmative action to further strengthen the marriage institution and promote strong resilient families. The SMARTSTART pre-marriage course conducted for couples intending to get married and those married
less than 5 years aims to provide them with the relevant information, knowledge and skills to equip them to face challenges in married life. Grants are given to NGOs to conduct this course in four main languages i.e Bahasa Malaysia, English, Tamil and Mandarin to cater to the diverse backgrounds of Malaysians.

6.0 IMPACT OF FAMILY RESILIENCE ON SOCIAL POLICY AND PROGRAMME RESPONSES

The Government is concerned with emerging issues that threaten our family and social structure as families struggle to cope with the fast tempo of development. To address these issues, there is a need for a comprehensive policy that addresses prevention, intervention and rehabilitation strategies. Towards this end, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is responsible for planning, monitoring, implementing and evaluating programs for core target groups such as families, elderly, children, women and the disabled in collaboration with civil society and NGOs.

Women’s role in national development and as the backbone for family stability has been recognised since the late 1980s when the National Policy for Women was formulated in 1989. Currently, this policy and its Plan of Action are being reviewed. Policies and programmes affecting Malaysian women especially in mainstreaming women in development have been implemented, reviewed and amended, one of which was the establishment of a Cabinet Committee on Gender chaired by the Prime Minister.
Malaysia has also acceded to CEDAW especially in ensuring gender equality, eliminating violence in the family and increasing male responsibility.

One of the greatest challenges for the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is to identify effective strategies to assist married women balance work and family life. Although measures have been taken to encourage employers to provide greater flexibility at the workplace, flexible working hours and the general upgrading of skills of women employees and bringing the workplace to homes, responses to this arrangement has not been fully optimized.

It is generally perceived that family matters are personal and private. However, when families breakdown, the effects reverberate across society. When a marriage breaks up or a family becomes dysfunctional, there are often social repercussions. Hence, it is necessary for both the government and the community to become involved in advocating for the centrality of the family. It is believed that with strong commitment and continued action, Malaysian families could withstand the challenges of social issues and problems accompanying the current shaping of post industrial society.

Towards this end, the Malaysian Government has taken the initiative to draft a National Family Policy and a Plan of Action on Family to bring the importance of the family to public consciousness. In the final stages of its formulation, it aims to galvanize commitment and support of all stakeholders and
beneficiaries, to promote a family first concept, as a means to develop and enhance the family institution. Specifically, it hopes to incorporate family well being, based on universal values, in all development programmes for nation building, so that the family institution could be strengthened by providing family friendly policies, legislations, programmes, services, facilities and a conducive environment.

To address the needs of children, a National Plan of Action for the Survival, Protection and Development of Children (2006-2020) has been formulated. The Child Act 2001 is also being reviewed to take consideration of the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Children (CRC).

7.0 IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON THE FAMILY

Over the past decade, rapid transitions in family have taken place due to globalisation and socio-economic development in Malaysia. At present, Malaysia has an urban population of about 60%, a reversal of the situation 20 years ago. This is due to a shift in the Malaysian economy from agriculture-based to industrial based.

We recognize that families have undergone and continuously experience change in response to the globalisation process. We have to admit that with the impact of globalisation, we are able to communicate with our family members anytime and everywhere. However, never have changes been so rapid as we now live in a
borderless world where development in the external environment can immediately impact on the personal lives of families. Globalisation, in general brings advantages to families but also creates risks and conflicts that must be anticipated and adapted too.

The spread of globalisation will undoubtedly bring changes to the countries it reaches, but changes are an essential part of life. The complexities of modern living can make people change their perceptions towards marriage and family. Families have to confront the social trends and drastic changes that affect their lives. Changes taking place among Malaysian families today are numerous. More Malaysians are remaining single, delaying marriage and having fewer children. Nuclear families are the norm and this has implications on the family system and the care of older persons. With rising age at marriage, many retirees are still supporting children who are studying in institutions of higher learning.

The influences of globalisation have been instrumental to changes in family values and social norms. The family system and its structure have undergone conspicuous changes and indirectly caused the erosion of noble values. Western values are now replacing traditional ones, indicating that “social filters” in Malaysian families are becoming more fragile. Family values are now being challenged by the concepts of sexual and free lifestyles. New ways of living have been introduced. Results from the 2004 MPFS show that almost 16% of adolescents are not against the lifestyle of a homosexual. Even though the percentage is relatively
small, it reflects changing perceptions among the young generation in Malaysian society.

In dealing with these issues, a multi-sectoral approach utilising various government department, agencies, NGOs, electronic and printed media as well as workshops, conferences, campaigns and education programs is adopted to promote the cultivation of noble values. The NPFD has integrated noble values into its education programmes. The KASIH module package aimed to educate parents and instill values among adolescents has since been adapted into a new Living Skills Programme for those who undergo the National Service. Beginning 2009, schools leavers aged 18-19 will be trained on living skills which include topics on gender, family relationships, reproductive health and sexuality as well as tips on living without violence. This landmark programme targets some 100,000 school leavers annually.

The progress in ICT has also generated new challenges. ICT does not only govern the administration and management system, trade, technology development, research and development, but also influences the culture, life style and relationship patterns in the family. ICT has hit our country with great impact and the information explosion is already here. Internet addiction and cyber infidelity is the latest phenomenon to strike the family.
8.0 MEASURING FAMILY RESILIENCE

The goal of family resilience is to ensure that the families are able to cope with any kind of challenges. In Malaysia, various measures and programmes to support families are already in place as a preventive measure to assist those finding difficulty in building their resilience.

However, research on current and emerging population and family related issues including the needs of special groups such as the elderly, single parents and adolescents need to be undertaken. Results of these research activities will contribute towards the formulation of relevant social policies and intervention programmes especially in strengthening the family unit. A strengths based approach based on the premise that every family has inherent strengths and resources will be able to empower families to cope with challenges without being dependent solely on external assistance. In this regard, family development indicators will also be identified to assess the impact of programmes on family well-being.

The NPFDB is currently embarking on the establishment of a National and Sub-National population information system for planning at the national, state and local levels. Concurrently, the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) is developing a data base system to provide the necessary information to the community regarding services and facilities to accommodate their needs. More in depth studies on traits of strong and resilient families need to be undertaken so that more information is available to understand
family dynamics and functioning and develop appropriate interventions.

The forthcoming Population Census in 2010 will be able to provide the latest demographic trends and assist policy planners in developing family-centred programmes and services.