

CAP Seminar on Consumer Education for Women
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"THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN NATION BUILDING"

by

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I wish, first of all, to thank the Consumers' Association of Penang for inviting me to this Seminar. I wish also to express my appreciation to the organisers of the seminar for their efforts in bringing about the successful convening of this meeting. I have been informed that the aim of this seminar is:

'to bring together women from the various professions and walks of life to highlight and discuss the problems and issues that women as consumers are confronted with, and how women as mothers, managers of the home and as consumers themselves can bring about a better quality of life for their children, their families and themselves.'

Within this context I have been asked to prepare a paper on the topic of "The Role of Women in Nation Building" in which the following points or aspects are to be included: _

1. The role of women in the work force, in industry, in agriculture, professions, etc. Their contribution in these fields.
2. Women's dual role as workers and homemakers and how they can contribute to better environment, health, nutrition within the home (family) and the nation.

I shall try my level best to comply to these specifications. However, constraints of time and facilities available at my disposal will not permit me to do justice to all the issues that can be raised, discussed and evaluated. Therefore rather than being exhaustive, I shall highlight a few points and in your deliberations the issues closest to your hearts can

be brought out and suggestions and ideas proposed for appropriate action by CAP or other authorities.

The Role of Women in the Work Force

I shall not be so presumptuous as to usurp the work of the Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Labour by gathering the data or giving you a detailed breakdown of the figures pertaining to the employment of women in all the sectors of our economy. These figures are not easy to come by. The 1981 Census Report is still being awaited, and any data that can be gathered from various sources may be grossly inaccurate or out of date. Suffice to say that both the NCWO and NACIWID have urged the appropriate authorities that breakdown of figures according to sex should be a normal procedure in reporting any statistics involving both men and women. Unless this is done any discussion on the integration of women in development or on the role or progress of women in nation building would be meaningless or frivolous.

From my study for the ILO entitled "Income Generating Skills for Women" (1979), I have compiled from published sources some statistics which show the percentage participation of women in various occupations. These data were based on the 1971 Census and the Labour Department Report for 1974. There may have been more up-to-date figures since then, but I have not been able to secure them in time for this seminar.

These transparencies will show you the percentage participation of women in certain job categories as found in the Malaysian Dictionary of Occupations. Women figure quite prominently in the medical and teaching professions, the clerical, stenographic and typing services, machine operators, the service workers categories, farmers, textile workers, tobacco product manufacturers, electronic workers and in the "unclassifiable" occupations.

In the manufacturing sectors, I have selected 25 industries which have a sizeable proportion of women workers. It is interesting to note that women exceeded the number of men in the pineapple canning industry, biscuit manufacturing, tobacco products, electrical industrial equipment, the assembly of electrical apparatus, and in medical and pharmaceutical preparations. Thus women's participation or if you like, contribution, is not insignificant. They comprise a substantial portion of the labour force while at the same time maintaining their traditional role as mothers, wives, daughters, or self supporting women with or without dependants.

In some occupations and industries the participation of women is still not in proportion to the number of women who have the skills, the capability and the training and the inclination to contribute. These areas are mainly in the non-traditional occupations for women, in high level jobs and appointments, in senior positions and in well paid occupations. There are still many adherents to the view that when it comes to these jobs, women have other responsibilities, their homes will be jeopardised, their womanhood and their femininity make them unsuitable and other such arguments. Women may work outside the home, as long as they work in low income jobs, backbreaking and monotonous chores, and in unhealthy and crowded surroundings but they may not work in the well paid and choice occupations!

According to E. Byrne (Men's Work, Women's Work - New Perspectives for Change, 1980) there are six areas of work which persist as predominantly or exclusively female both in unpaid (home and family) and in paid work which is an extension of these functions. These areas are:

- childbearing in order to safeguard the population's future;
- food production and food preparation for others;
- clothing people;
- caring for the sick, dependent or disadvantaged in the society;
- education and nurture of the young of both sexes and of older girls
- homemaking - providing, furnishing, maintaining a comfortable and clean living environment both for themselves and for others.

These areas all share with their feminine label major characteristics of disadvantage; lower pay, lesser training entitlement, fewer skilled posts for promotions.

The Fourth Malaysia Plan gives no breakdown of employment figures by sex. There are however references that hint of a proportionate or even an increased growth in women's participation in all sectors of development. Page 74 of the FMP states:

"The labour force is estimated to have increased from 3.7 million in 1970 to about 5.4 million in 1980, growing at an average rate of 3.9% per annum. In 1980 37.6% of the labour force is estimated to comprise those in the 25 - 39 age group compared with 36.3% in 1970 Another important feature is the rapid increase in the participation of females in the labour force, particularly in the non-agricultural sector"

Page 84: "Unemployment as a percentage of the labour force declined from 7.8% in 1970 to 5.3% in 1980 . . . By sex male unemployment declined from 5.8% in 1974 to 5.4% in 1978, while female unemployment declined more substantially from 9.8% to 7.9%.

... Despite this, unemployment rates among females with lower and upper secondary education remained considerably higher than those among males.

The above statistical presentation is intended to highlight the increasing importance of the role of women in all sectors of economic growth over the past ten years. Today women constitute 33% of the total labour force of which 53% are in the agricultural sector. Statistics also showed that 45% of women are in the category of 'housewives' only. These are women employed by 'house bosses' and perform a spectrum of services from childcare, cook to chauffeuring and receive remuneration in kind, words and affection and sometimes loyalty. They clock in but seldom clock out. These functions are also performed by many women who are employed by other bosses in the economic sectors mentioned above. Thus giving us the 'dual role' of women in our society.

Women's Dual Role

I feel that this issue needs no emphasising or analysis in a gathering among women. I will applaud the day when a man is invited to speak at a seminar on the nature of "Man's Dual Role" or one who will speak objectively and unemotionally on the contributions of women on the two fronts - the Home and the Nation. Too much has been taken for granted about women's maternal and societal obligations which tended to be all inclusive, leaving paternal obligations to the mere biological and subsistence. When subsistence is shared by the women, there is seldom any reciprocal sharing in the other obligations.

What is needed is a reeducation in the area of family life responsibilities and relationships for both boys and girls. This is needed so that we may clearly identify the complementary roles of men and women in the home and family, within the wider context of women's emergence in the working life outside the home. Traditional views regarding women's complementary role are no longer applicable - unless one chooses to ignore present trends and facts about women's participation in the national economy and growth.

We need to develop a national philosophy or framework of national development in which the role of men and women are equally recognised. I present here some alternative theoretical views based on J. Goodluck for

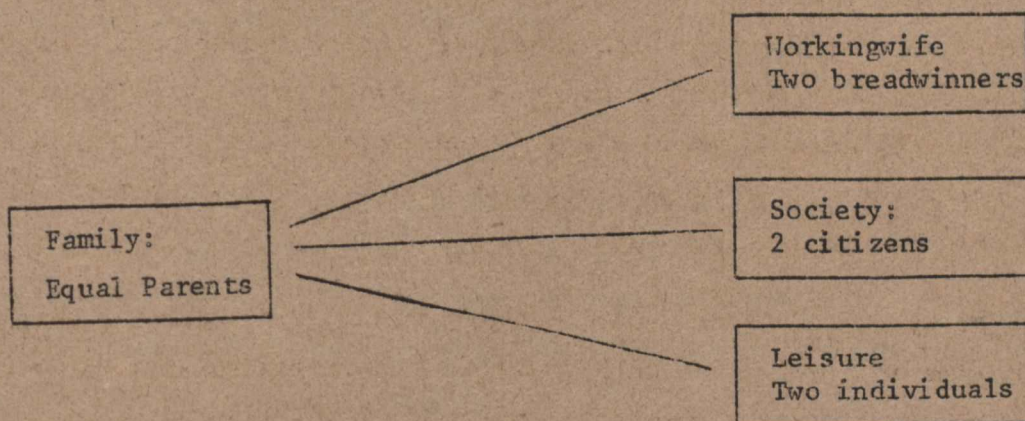
your consideration and contemplation.

The proper integration of women in the development process requires certain structural changes both in the home and outside the home. In the home greater sharing of parental responsibilities with regard to children's education and upbringing; sharing of household chores and maintenance; more home labour saving devices and better home security; and in community involvement, etc. Outside the home social amenities such as child care centres and cooperatives, home cleaning agencies, child and health clinics at or near places of employment, services such as laundromats, children's playgrounds (with adult attendant), safe transportation, network, family restaurants, etc.

Some provisions that will require our considerations include:-

- (a) Provision for maternity and motherhood "break of service" and job recruiting after a suitable period of maternity and child-rearing leave of absence.
- (b) Part-time work or job sharing where full-time employment is not possible for women with other responsibilities. Parents of small children should be allowed to reduce their working day without loss of income.
- (c) Creation of new job opportunities such as baby-sitting agencies, household cleaning services, family lunch cafeteria, holiday camps for children during school vacations, recreational directors, supervisors and attendants for public parks and recreational centres.
- (d) Home based employment in the form of work delivered to homes by manufacturers, contractors, etc.
- (e) Training opportunities for women in non-traditional occupations to increase their work efficiently and to cope with ever increasing demands on their time.

Women's Contribution to Improve the Quality of Life and Environment



A woman's contribution to better environment, health, nutrition and family life depends to a large extent on the educational level she has attained. Access to education is therefore a requisite factor; the ability and opportunity to exercise her acquired knowledge and skills both at home, at place of work and society are preconditions for her successful role as a mother and a healthy and concerned citizen.

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