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The Role of the State in Empowering Family: Malaysia Experience

(Excerpts from Malaysia Presentation at the Side Event of 52nd Session of the Commission on Population and Development, 1-5 April 2019, New York: Positive Parenting and Social Inclusion: Vulnerability of Families with Children)

Malaysia is a multi ethnic country with a total population of 33 millions. The number of family consist of 7.9 millions with an average of 4.2 members as of 2018. Malaysian families today are facing numerous challenges related to changing of population and family structure as well as pressures of complex family responsibilities. The advent of modern lifestyle has witnessing the issues on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, changing attitudes towards marriage, work-life balance and intergenerational between elderly parents and young children.

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In view of the above trends and challenges, a National Family Policy will continue to be empowered. This policy will address the need for prioritizing family perspectives in all socio-economic development.

SUSTAINING THE STANDARD OF LIVING

Government acknowledged the difficulties faced by families following the increase in price of

essential good. The Social Safety Net (SSN) Scheme was widened to include various types of support with particular attention was given to vulnerable families such as single mother, family with disabled person and the elderly.

In 2018, the Government has introduced a new initiative to homemakers for their long term saving plans and they are entitled for several benefits including annual dividends on retirement savings, incapacitation and death benefit. Family with disabled person is also one of the concerns of the Government. Hence, through Social Welfare Department, the Government has introduced Economic Empowerment Programs (EEP) for person with disabilities to ensure their sustainability in labour market to become financially independence.

As Malaysia moves towards being a developed high-income country, the Government must ensure that Malaysia family institution is not adversely affected with the rapid transformation especially to low income families. Hence, the Malaysian Government has allocated a total of RM5 Billion (USD1.2 Billion) in 2019 National Budget which will benefit 4.1 Million households as a financial assistance.

To sustain the standard of living, the government strongly believe education is one of the catalysts. Therefore, the Government will strongly support the early childhood care and education (ECCE) and the importance of Technical and vocational education and training (TVET).



FAMILY PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

The Malaysian Government acknowledges the needs to collaborate with private sectors, NGOs and the community to ensure inclusive development happens.

Pre-marriage and marriage enrichment programmes will be promoted to inculcate family values, parenting skills and prudent financial management to strengthen the family institution. Besides parenting skills, the Government is also improving the existing counselling services, family support system and diversified mechanism in delivering the family services via mobile family centres to ensure the accessibility for all.

Under the current National Development Plan (2016-2020), focus is being given on empowering communities to enhance inclusiveness by addressing the needs of the community including family.

To address the issue on adolescent sexual and reproductive health, The National Population and Family Development Board (NPFDB) has

established the youth friendly centres known as kafeTEEN to assist young people between the ages of 13-24 years. This centre provides information, knowledge and skills as well as counselling services on adolescent sexual and reproductive health.

FAMILY WELL-BEING INDEX

Malaysia acknowledges that there is a need to develop a comprehensive set of indicators to evaluate and monitor the well-being of family in the country. Hence, NPFDB has taken the initiative to introduce the Family Well-Being Index (FBWI) as a barometer of Malaysian families well-being.

FBWI measured the level of family well-being through a household's assessment of the father or mother regarding the well-being of their families. This index examined the level of well-being in terms of Family Relationships, Family Economy, Family Health, Family Safety, Family and Community Involvement, Religious and Spiritual Practices, Housing and the Environment, and Family and Communications technologies. The obtained score will assist the policymakers and programmers to design appropriate and holistic intervention programmes for each domain and family well-being indicators identified in FBWI.

In 2016, the overall score of Malaysian FBWI was 7.33 (moderate level) a maximum score of 10.00. From the 8 domain, the Family, Role of Religion and Spiritual Practices domain showed the highest score of 8.04, followed by the Family Safety domain (7.96), Family Relationship domain (7.90), Family and Community Involvement domain (7.84), Family and Communication Technology domain (6.38) and the Housing and Environment (6.24).



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