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POPULATION, FOOD SECURITY, NUTRITION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

(Excerpts from Malaysia Country Statement at the 54th Session of the United Nations Commission on Population and Development, 19-23 April 2021, New York)

Malaysia's population currently stands at 32,760,284 and is increasing at the rate of 0.6 percent per annum. Increased population will increase food demand. Annually, Malaysia spends approximately USD8.33 billion (RM34.5 billion) on import of food supply, pointing to increased dependency on food import purchases.

Malaysia occupies a commendable position in the 2019 Global Food Security Index, jumping to 28th place as compared to 48th in 2018. The national level food availability data indicates that there are sufficient supply of major food commodities for the population. All major foods are available in sufficient quantities to meet the market demands. Food access is no longer an issue for most Malaysians, with better processing, transport and storage systems and distribution arrangements.

Malaysia has in place a National Plan of Action for Nutrition as a blue print to promote optimal nutritional well-being. The Plan underscores the importance of nutrition in enhancing population health and preventing diet-related diseases. Malaysia has made great strides in addressing the problems of undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies.

Director General
Abdul Shukur Abdullah

Deputy Director General (Policy)
Hairil Fadzly Md. Akir

Deputy Director General (Management)
Adzhar Ismail

Editorial
Irwan Nadzif Mahpul
Ahmad Hashimi Mohamad
Mohd Firdaus Mazalan
Ahmad Rasyidee Abdul Razak

Critical strategies and activities to reduce specific problems such as protein-calorie malnutrition and iodine deficiency disorders are also included in this Plan of Action. However, the government acknowledges that more needs to be done to address the issues of over nutrition, obesity and diet-related non-communicable diseases. 2019 Malaysia SDG's indicator showed decreasing trends in prevalence of overweight among children under 5 years from 7.1 per cent in 2015 to 6.0 per cent in 2016 and 5.6 per cent in 2019.

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Agriculture is fundamental in shaping food security and nutrition, where the food produced by farmers and fisherfolk sufficiently supply and satisfy the population. Realising this, the Malaysian government has taken steps to emphasise on self-sustainability. Agro-ecosystem management and agricultural planning has been revamped to ensure sustainability and to include green-friendly values.

To reflect the importance of sustainable agro-ecosystem, Malaysia has invested heavily in biotechnology to improve crop yield and increase its resistance to environmental stress. Adopting and integrating the IR4.0 technology is a way forward to optimise the production of agricultural system. This conforms to government's call for automation and modernisation in the agricultural sector through the efficient use of land and cultivation of cash crops to provide better returns and increase farmers' income.

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The recent social and economic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic has increased food and nutrition insecurity. The declining bulk demand from the hospitality and tourism sectors, and the disruption of the global supply chain have also affected the agricultural sector. To ease the economic burden of the people, the government has introduced initiatives that cover public health, social security, food and nutrition security in the shape of food bank and food basket in collaboration with non-governmental agency to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic outbreak. In order to protect the agricultural sector, various initiatives have been introduced for producers, small and medium enterprises and consumers.

Malaysia reaffirms commitment to the ICPD POA by focusing on sustainable population growth and optimising food production. To this end, the Government of Malaysia will continue to work towards creating policy prescriptions to ensure that all people have access to nutritious, safe and sufficient food.



MINISTRY OF WOMEN, FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



LEMBAGA PENDUDUK DAN PEMBANGUNAN KELUARGA NEGARA

For more information:

POPULATION AND FAMILY RESEARCH DIVISION
NATIONAL POPULATION AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development

12B, NPFDB Building, Jalan Raja Laut, 50712, Kuala Lumpur
Tel: 03 – 2613 7555 | Fax: 03 – 2698 8185
Email: penduduk@lppkn.gov.my



www.lppkn.gov.my



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@lppkn