

Brunei Darussalam's Review and Assessment of Progress Achieved in Implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action.

The total population of Brunei Darussalam is estimated to be 322,900 people in 1998 of which 151,763 or 47% are women. The median age range of the female population is 23 years.

The status of women has significantly improved over the past decade. There has been a noticeable increase in the participation of women in all areas of national, social and economic activity. Women in Brunei Darussalam have benefited a great deal from the country's progress and development, despite evidence that there is no specific policy on women. The Bruneian women have managed to make an impact on policy making. Efforts on National Development are being pursued for the betterment of all Bruneians.

In the effort to implement the Platform of action of the Fourth World Conference on Women, strategies and plans of actions for the advancement of women in the country was prepared. Several issues had been identified which include:

1. The need to create A National Commission on Women.
2. The need to establish focal points for the advancement of women in all Ministries, NGO's and private organisations.
3. The need to strengthen the National machinery for Women.

4. To improve under representation of women in decision making level.
5. Inadequate data on women.
6. The integration of gender issues in all national policies, plans and programmes.
7. Legal Illiteracy in order to promote and defend women's rights and outlaw all violence against women and girls.
8. The need to address the increasing number of domestic violence cases.
9. The need to revise some of the legislation in the protection of women and children, and
10. The need to ensure that women have access to information in relation to all areas of concern.

Immediately after the 4th World Conference on Women the Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports as the focal point has organised a meeting with women leaders from various relevant agencies to take forward on issues related to the advancement of women in the country taking into account the National Plan of Actions mentioned above.

One of the major actions taken is the appointment of A Drafting Committee for the Advancement of Women. One of the functions of this Committee is to prepare the terms of reference for the proposal to establish a Brunei Darussalam National Commission

on Women. The members of this committee consists of representatives from various government agencies and women NGO's. The Drafting Committee has completed its working paper and has submitted to the relevant authority for approval.

Despite the fact that there is no specific policy on women at present, Brunei women have manage to make an impact on policy making. In 1997, 2 senior female Education officials were appointed as Permanent Secretaries. Another appointment was the position of an Ambassador At Large at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one appointment as a Lady Ambassador. The profile of women's representation in the higher rung in the diplomatic positions has been favorable. This significant development has indeed show us that the recognition of women's role as decision-policy makers are slowly being accepted. In the country's efforts to increase the involvement of women in the development process, further progress is being made in providing women with equal opportunities to hold critical decision making position in the public and private sector.

In Brunei Darussalam, men and women are given equal access to education opportunities. The education policy aims to create the most effective system of education for the country. Education is seen as an on-going endeavour which seeks to develop the all-round potential of the individual, in order to bring into being an educated and devout, as well as dynamic, disciplines and responsible people.

More women are now seen in institution of learning including at the tertiary level. The equal access to education has enabled nearly 85% of the female population to be literate, and today illiteracy is primarily confined to the older generation.

With better education and due to labour-shortage at all levels, employment opportunities for women as well as men are always available in the public and private sectors. Now more women are joining the labour force and have full time career. The labour force participation rate of women has now increased from 46% in 1991 to 54% in 1995. We are now witnessing an increasing number of them in positions of executives, managerial and professional categories.

Another factor which has contributed significantly towards development of the country as a whole is good health. Women have equal access to comprehensive and accessible medical and health care services. The provision of maternal and child health care is a priority. On going health promotion activities are conducted to educate women on antenatal care, breast feeding, nutritional advice for both mother and child and also on child spacing.

There is no separate allocation of budget for women in both the Annual and Development Budget. However, through Ministries and Departments allocation of various programs and projects are

being planned and implemented to cater a broader aspect of national development by improving the quality of life of the people of Brunei Darussalam including women. Such programmes and projects included the proposal of setting up of day-care centers at the workplace for working mothers and the construction of a new hospital for women and children.

There are no separate plans for women's concern in the National Development Plans. Brunei Advocates an equal opportunity policy for both the sexes in all sectors , based on the principle of meritocracy. This policy is incorporated in the planning and implementing of policies and programmes of the various government Ministries.

After the 5th Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible For Women's Affairs held in Trinidad and Tobago, 1996, a National Plan of actions was prepared to address the issues of gender and development. At this point in time the goals of gender equality and advancement of women are equally treated as priority in the activities and programmes. Although the programmes and plans carried out in Brunei Darussalam are not gender specific both men and women are included.

As far as the Beijing Platform For Action is concerned, the 12 critical areas of concern is being addressed accordingly:

1. Women and Poverty:

The government of Brunei Darussalam has introduced a welfare assistance scheme for women in particular are the major recipients of the monthly assistance allowance. Special Old Pension scheme are given to the local citizens who has reached the age of 60 years old regardless of their gender.

2. Education and Training of Women:

Women are given equal opportunity in both education and training. Accessibility to education are given free to both males and females.

3. Women and Health

Generally the health of women in Brunei are excellent. Free medical services are also extended to women in pre and postnatal care.

4. Violence Against Women

Recently a Domestic Violence Unit was established at the Police Force specifically to address violence against women and children.

Brunei Darussalam has signed the Convention on The Rights of The Child (CRC) and at present are studying the Convention On The Elimination Of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Just recently a new Islamic Family Law was drafted and has been submitted to the relevant authority for final approval. This law will cover divorced women, custody of children and marriages.

5. Women and Armed Conflict

In Brunei Darussalam the issues of armed conflicts are not present therefore this is not applicable to Brunei Darussalam.

6. Women and the Economy

In times of economic crisis, women in Brunei are very lucky. They are not severely affected. Opportunities are given equally both to men and women to participate in the development of the economy. In fact today, there is an increase number of women becoming successful entrepreneurs.

7. Women in Power and Decision - making.

In 1997, an unexpected appointment of 2 female permanent secretaries, an Ambassador At-Large and a Lady Ambassador.

8. Institutional Mechanism for the advancement of Women.

The setting up of a Drafting Committee for the establishment of a National Committee on Women. At present all matters pertaining to women and children are addressed by The Social Affairs Services Unit, one of a division under The Ministry Of Culture Youth and Sports.

9. Human Rights of Women.

At present, Brunei are actively looking into CEDAW.

10. Women and the media

The Social Affairs Services Unit has made progress in acquiring a special column in the Government newspaper called "Pelita Brunei " to highlight women achievements and activities in the country.

Aside from that, a special programme, which is devoted to the progress of women in the country, a women's programme was currently being aired weekly on local television to portray women activities and achievements.

11. Women and the Environment

The government of Brunei Darussalam has introduced a housing and land scheme for the people and women are no exception to receiving this scheme. Today, more women are owning lands and houses entitled under their name through this government scheme.

The Brunei Darussalam Women's Council is the coordinating body for the Women Organisations. The Brunei Darussalam Women's Council consists of more than 2,000 members. About 11 Women Organisations are affiliated under the Brunei Women's Council. The establishment of the Brunei Darussalam Women's Council and other Women Voluntary Organisations have made it possible for women to participate actively in the deliberation and discussion of issues pertaining to women and development both in the public and private sectors.

The most recent development of close partnership between women NGO's and government pertaining to women are:

1. The celebration of the first ASEAN Women's day, 5th July 1999.
2. Volunteer Counseling Services for cases referred to the Social Affairs Services Unit, 1998.
3. The formation of a Working Committee on Conventions On The Rights of The Child, 1998.
4. The establishment of A Committee on Social Issues, 1998.
5. The establishment of The HIV/ Aids Foundation, 1998.
6. The establishment of a Drafting Committee for the establishment of A National Commission on Women, 1997.

Judging from the achievements attained by women in Brunei Darussalam there is indeed a lot of progress been made towards the advancement of women within the context of culture, religion and social settings of the country.

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