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GENDER RESPONSIVE BUDGETING

Enabling the practical
realisation of equality

A POLICY REPORT BY



WFD



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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AHS	Adolescent Health Survey
AIM	Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia
APPGM-SDG	All Party Parliamentary Group-SDG
ASEAN	Association of South-East Asian Nations
B40	Bottom 40% Income Group
BHEUU	Legal Division Department, Prime Ministers' Office
BNM	Bank Negara Malaysia
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSM	Cybersecurity Malaysia
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DAN 2.0	National Agrofood Policy 2021-2030
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
DOSM	Department of Statistics Malaysia
DPP	Deputy Public Prosecutor
ECWA	Evidence of Child Witness Act
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FRA	Fiscal Responsibility Act
GFSI	Global Food Security Index
GFT	Gender Focal Team
GLC	Government Linked Companies
GLI	Gender Lens Investing
GLIC	Government Linked Investment Companies
GRBiP	Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice
HRI	Human Rights Institutions
IBSM	Malaysia Sports Culture Index
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICU	Implementation and Coordination Unit
iDAM	Malaysia Liveability Index
IKHSAN	Services Entrepreneur Initiative
ILO	International Labour Organization
INSAN	Food Entrepreneur Initiative
INTAN	Agro Entrepreneur Initiative
IPR	People's Income Initiative
JKM	Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat (Department of Social Welfare)
JKOA	Department for Orang Asli Development
KEDAP	Kelas Dewasa Ibu Bapa Orang Asli dan Penan (Classes for Asli and Penan)
KEMAS	Department of Community Development (Ministry of Rural and Regional)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KPKT	Ministry of Housing and Local Government
KPWKM	Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development
KUSKOP	Ministry of Entrepreneur Development and Cooperatives
KWSP	Employee Provident Fund
LFPR	Labour force participation rate
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

M40	Middle 40% (income classification)
MCD	Ministry of Communications and Digital
MCMC	Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOHR	Ministry of Human Resources
MP	Member of Parliament
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
MWFCD	Ministry of Women Family and Community Development
MyMYNDA	Mental Health Wellness Improvement Program
NADMA	National Disaster Management Agency
NCEMH	National Centre of Excellence for Mental Health
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHMS	Institute for Public Health
OCSEA	Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OGBV	Online Gender-Based Violence
PACU	Performance Acceleration Coordination Unit
PAWE	Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas (Senior Citizens Activity Centre)
PDRM	Royal Malaysian Police
PEDi	Digital Economy Centre
PENJANA	National Economic Recovery Plan
PLI	Poverty Line Income
PPI	Inclusive Education Programme
PPKI	Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi (Special Education Integrated Programme)
PPP	Public Private Partnership
PSSS	One Stop Social Support Centre
PWD	Persons with Disabilities
PLC	Public Listed Companies
RMT	Supplementary Food Programme
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SME CORP	Small and Medium Enterprises Corporation
SOAC	Sexual Offences Against Children Act
SOCISO	Social Security Organisation
STAR	Special Task Force on Agency Reform
STR	Sumbangan Tunai Rahmah (Rahmah Cash Initiative)
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UPWE	Unit Penyayang Warga Emas (Senior Citizens Care Unit - Transportation)
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WEF	World Economic Forum
WOB	Women-Owned Business
WHO	World Health Organization

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About the Westminster Foundation

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About ENGENDER Consultancy

ENGENDER is a social enterprise focused on advancing gender equality and the empowerment of women, with core services in the areas of developing gender-sensitive public policies through gender analysis, gender scrutiny, gender mainstreaming and responsive budgeting, capacity building, strategic advocacy planning, and monitoring and evaluation. We collaborate with parliament, the government, civil society organisations, communities, and the private sector to draw on our collective learning and experience. Collectively we co-create strategic solutions to bring about a transformative, sustainable impact in the lived realities of women and men, girls, and boys.

For more information, visit www.engenderconsultancy.org

Executive Summary

Malaysia ranked 102nd out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2023, which is unchanged from 2022. This can be attributed to the plethora of persistent gender-based issues that still require attention and action. For instance, Malaysia's female labour force participation rate (LFPR) remains low at 55.9 percent, in comparison to the male LFPR at 82.3 percent. Among those that are in the labour force, economic opportunities tend to be limited by household and care work, which is a result of prevailing gender norms. However, if women and men participated in the economy equally, global annual GDP would increase by \$28 trillion (26%) by 2025.¹

The issues surrounding women's economic participation need to be unpacked and reconceptualised to consider all challenges and barriers within the labour eco-system which keep women out of the labour force and the alternative livelihood choices they are making. Women are disproportionately represented in the informal sector as it tends to be more suitable for women who look to flexible schedules to juggle their 'double burden' of employment and domestic work. However, this eventually impacts both their social protection and productivity.² There needs to be a collective reform in our care sector to address the 'double burden' and the gendered segregation that happens with occupations. At the root of it all, shifting outdated ideas of gender roles and stereotypes is an important first step that can lead to change. This requires campaigns to shift mindsets and institutional mechanisms need to be put in place to enforce this shift.

Progress has certainly been made, such as in July 2022 when the establishment of gender focal teams in ministries and agencies was announced.³ The move towards a whole-of-government approach is key to gender mainstreaming and fosters change to happen more rapidly. Gender mainstreaming is a process that considers the needs of both women and men in policies, programmes and legislation to ensure that systemic and structural barriers are removed and accord equal opportunities to advance gender equality.⁴ Part of this process involves the collection of gender-disaggregated data for analysis, a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as sufficient gender expertise and resources to carry out the work.⁵ In line with that, gender-responsive budgeting also comes into the frame as a tool to ensure that the allocation of public resources contributes to women's empowerment and gender equality.⁶ Ministries, with increasing institutionalised gender focus expertise, should be able to better analyse and review policies and programmes to more effectively deliver positive changes in people's lived realities.

¹ OECD. (n.d.). Women's economic empowerment. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/development/womens-economic-empowerment.htm>

² Schmillen, A. D., Tan, M. L., Abdur Rahman, A., Lnu, S. N. B. H., Weimann Sandig, N. (2019). *Breaking barriers: Toward better economic opportunities for women in Malaysia (English)*. (Report no.: 142011). Retrieved from World Bank website: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/734461569247873555/Breaking-Barriers-Toward-Better-Economic-Opportunities-for-Women-in-Malaysia>

³ FMT Reporters. (2022, July 28). Govt to form 'gender focal teams' in ministries, agencies. *Free Malaysia Today*. <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/07/28/govt-to-form-gender-focal-teams-in-ministries-agencies/>

⁴ UN Women. (n.d.). Gender mainstreaming. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/gender-mainstreaming>

⁵ United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Advancing gender, advancing development: Perspectives from UNDP's Gender Week 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/malaysia/blog/advancing-gender-advancing-development-perspectives-undps-gender-week-2023>

⁶ UN Women Asia Pacific. (n.d.) Gender responsive budgeting. Retrieved from <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/women-poverty-economics/gender-responsive-budgeting>

Malaysia MADANI prides itself on being a philosophy that strives for substantial recovery, with its readiness for change and on the six pillar values of sustainability, care and compassion, respect, innovation, prosperity, and trust. With that in mind, there are high hopes for the Budget 2023 to play its part in the advancement with its allocations.

This policy report delves into each of the measures presented in the Budget under three distinct themes – inclusive and sustainable economic growth, institutional reforms, and good governance, each of which is framed to restore confidence and combat inequality through social justice. To ensure inclusive and sustainable economic growth, there are measures for transparent and accountable fiscal policies, support for MSMEs, as well as empowering TVET through public-private partnerships. Nonetheless, there is still room for improvement in ensuring that women are included and their potential harnessed especially within traditionally male-dominated spaces. Other measures also seek to provide solutions where women and marginalised communities are disproportionately impacted, such as environmental risks, poverty, food security and health. For this, the government's measures work to strengthen disaster risk management, provide cash assistance and the People's Income Initiative (IPR), emphasise support in funds for food security initiatives and create access to health services. A deeper analysis through evidence-based gender impact assessments can reveal valuable learning on the process of design, implementation and outcome of policies and programmes as seen in beneficiaries' experiences.

To tie it all together would be to streamline government machinery to push for change, strengthen the monitoring and evaluation processes, and prioritise high-impact investments with transformative outcomes in mind. The budget would benefit from being clearer in articulating the process of development for the policies being put in place, such as whether there is advancement in terms of allocation of public resources and how it builds on the work done from years before. This status quo imposes an economic cost and risks setting us back from achieving our vision of becoming a leading global nation.

This requires nothing short of bold actions for transformative outcomes. This policy report aims to emphasise that crafting gender-responsive budgets can be a key driver and catalyst of it.

Introduction

Bank Negara Malaysia's Economic and Monetary Review for 2022 projected that Malaysia's economy is set to grow between 4% and 5% in 2023 with the support of domestic firms, despite the slowing global growth and thus external demand.⁷ Recovery across firms and sectors from the reopening of international borders was reported by the World Bank's Business Pulse Survey (BPS) in August 2022.⁸ However, this recovery remains unequal as the poor and vulnerable are still affected by the lingering effects of the pandemic and are unable to recover adequate financial resources to meet their basic needs. The increase in the cost of food and transport exacerbates their situation.

Malaysia aspires to become a high-income nation and projections show that the transition is set to be sometime between 2024 and 2028.^{9,10} To ensure that we are on the right track to that goal, the short-term focus of the government in post-pandemic times should be to uplift the vulnerable and put in fiscal buffers to prepare for the future.¹¹ This is presumed to have been set in motion with the Twelfth Malaysia Plan which aligns itself with the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to show Malaysia's commitments to the 17 SDGs. The end goal is for a peaceful, just, and inclusive society.¹² In order for no one to be left behind, Malaysia has also been taking a serious look at how poverty is considered through a multidimensional lens while revising the national Poverty Line Income (PLI) in 2019 to better reflect local realities. The result of this recalibration revealed that even though the overall rate of poverty has declined, poverty is still relatively high for vulnerable groups.¹³

The situation has now become so dynamic, that moving forward, our model has to be based on community resilience and a whole-of-society approach. The gender-responsive approach has been one effective method that helps unpack complex issues and formulate relevant mitigation strategies and interventions. It is promising that in 2022, there was the reinstatement of gender focal points in each ministry.^{14,15} Also rolled out is the capacity building programme, Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice (GRBiP) led by ENGENDER, Women's Aid Organisation and the Gender Budget Group in collaboration with the Ministry of Finance (MOF) currently in its second year since its launch and pilot programme in 2022. Gender-responsive budgeting must be emphasised as an effective tool to advance Malaysia MADANI's goal of good governance and shared prosperity through substantive reforms.

⁷ Bank Negara Malaysia. (2023). Economic and monetary review 2022. Retrieved from https://www.bnm.gov.my/documents/20124/10150285/emr2022_en_ch0b.pdf

⁸ World Bank. (2023). Malaysia economic monitor February 2023: Expanding Malaysia's digital frontier. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/malaysia/publication/malaysia-economic-monitor-february-2023-expanding-malaysia-s-digital-frontier>

⁹ World Bank. (2021, March 16). Malaysia to achieve high income status between 2024 and 2028, but needs to improve the quality, inclusiveness, and sustainability of economic growth to remain competitive [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/03/16/aiminghighmalaysia>

¹⁰ Basyir, M. & Hakim, L. (2023, February 15). Rafizi: Malaysia can become high income nation by 2026. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/02/880213/rafizi-malaysia-can-become-high-income-nation-2026>

¹¹ See footnote 8.

¹² Ministry of Economy. (2021). Twelfth Malaysia plan 2021-2025. Retrieved from https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/flipping_book/TwelfthPlan/mobile/index.html

¹³ Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department. (2021). Malaysia voluntary national review (VNR) 2021. Retrieved from [https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia_Voluntary_National_Review_\(VNR\)_2021.pdf](https://www.ekonomi.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-07/Malaysia_Voluntary_National_Review_(VNR)_2021.pdf)

¹⁴ Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. (n.d.). Achievements - 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/index.php?r=portal/about2&articleid=Y2x2Y1RDdS9ZSzdqMi9TVnN3N1NMZz09&id=b0J5ZFBERFhsalo2U05TWk1nSzVDQT09>

¹⁵ Bernama. (2022, November 9). 45 individuals appointed gender focal points. Astro Awani. Retrieved from <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/45-individuals-appointed-gender-focal-points-390456>

Gender Sensitive Scrutiny

Gender equality is more than a human right - it is also key to development, well-being, and good governance. A gender-responsive budget works for everyone where equal opportunities are availed to all by ensuring gender-equitable distribution of resources. To make this a reality, there needs to be a fundamental understanding of the population, that women and men are not a homogenous group; rather their identities are varied depending on their gender, ethnicity, nationality, education, marital, disability status or income levels - all of which often overlap and intersect in ways that create and compound deprivation and disadvantage. As a result, women and men experience life differently, making their lived realities unique. However, women continue to disproportionately face discrimination and exclusion, making their concerns a priority in the global agenda. Their issues are best understood within the context of historical and intergenerational structural inequalities.

All laws, policies and programmes therefore invariably affect women and men in different ways; and need to take into consideration the nuanced lived realities of different groups of women and men to ensure that everyone's needs are met in the most effective and efficient way.

Gender-sensitive scrutiny of the budget is a method of exploring and addressing the potential and actual impact of a policy or programme on women and men to ensure they do not directly or indirectly discriminate or exclude women or men intentionally or unintentionally. The findings of the scrutiny can inform positive interventions to increase gender equality and monitor the actual impact of policies and programmes on women and men. The absence of a gender consideration will however result in ineffective solutions to problems and inefficient allocation of public funds, risking deepening existing inequalities.

The following are some considerations when conducting a gender scrutiny of the budget:

Lived realities:

- What is the current situation of different groups of women and men?
- What are their needs and priorities?
- What are the specific areas of inequality that need to be addressed?
- Was the budget measure informed by a gender impact assessment?

Data:

- Is sex-disaggregated and gender data available? (i.e., data that represents the intersectional lived realities of different groups of women and men, boys, and girls)
- What are the gaps in data? Will women and men be differently affected because of their age, ethnic origin, disability, religion, socio-economic status, or geographic location?
- Is there evidence to show that one gender is more likely to be differently affected than another? Is it likely that men or women will benefit more from the law, policy, programme, or budget, or will they benefit equally?

Programme development:

- Were stakeholders (i.e., women's rights groups, civil society organisations, target beneficiaries) consulted in the design of the programme and its related budget?
- How was gender considered during the formulation of the budget?
- Will this programme reinforce or change gender stereotypes and gender inequalities?

Potential Impact:

- Who benefits (directly or indirectly) from the budget measure? Who is left out?
- Is the data sufficient to show the impact on women and men?
- How is this budget allocation likely to affect the living conditions of men and women in different ways?
- Will the programme/policy/budget likely reduce, increase, or leave unchanged existing inequalities between men and women?
- How will the impact be monitored?

Budget 2023 Overview



Inclusive and sustainable ECONOMIC GROWTH

Measure 1: Fiscal Sustainability
Measure 2: Fulfilling the Rakyat's Economic Needs
Measure 3: Facing Disasters
Measure 4: Achieving High Impact Investments



Institutional Reforms and Good Governance to Restore Confidence

Measure 5: Public Sector Reform
Measure 6: Empowering Public-Private Partnership
Measure 7: Prioritizing the Digital Agenda
Measure 8: Strengthening the Role of Government-Linked Companies and Agencies



Combating Inequality Through SOCIAL JUSTICE

Measure 9: Eradicating Hardcore Poor
Measure 10: Minimizing Cost of Living
Measure 11: Ensuring Harmony and Unity
Measure 12: Providing Quality Basic Amenities

Budget 2023 Scrutiny

This report attempts to put a gender lens on most of the Budget 2023 measures to evaluate the gender-responsiveness of allocations and policies. Putting the budget through thorough scrutiny allows for critical gaps to be identified and targeted interventions formulated.



Budget 2023 Scrutiny

Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth



Measure 1: Fiscal Sustainability

Expansionary Fiscal Policy | Managing Debt Levels | Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) | Increase Revenue Collection

Malaysia's GDP is expected to grow by 4.5%, alongside managing the fiscal deficit that was a result of the many economic stimulus packages and subsidies provided to cushion the pandemic's blow. To ensure that debt and fiscal risks are managed well, the Fiscal Responsibility Bill is set to be tabled in Parliament in 2023. The legislation is a welcomed move as it sets legal standards for transparency of fiscal policy and reporting. The FRA forms the parameters that allow us to hold the government formally responsible to the public for its fiscal performance. The question here is how will Malaysia's fiscal policy be gender-responsive to ensure sustainable growth?

Gender-responsive fiscal policies create more economic opportunities for women, increase growth, as well as reduce poverty and inequality.¹⁶ This happens as the increase in women's overall labour participation rate can lead to better productivity and positive GDP; in turn contributing to fiscal sustainability.¹⁷ It goes to show that gender-responsive budgeting aligns with the FRA in its objectives and outcomes – which are efficiency and effectiveness, transparency and accountability, and in effect, a transformative outcome.¹⁸

Measure 2: Fulfilling the Rakyat's Economy

Reduction in Tax Rate | Facilitating Hawkers and Small Traders | Extension of Stamp Duty Exemption for Restructuring or Rescheduling of Loan/Financing Agreements | Financing and Guarantee Facilities

The economic impact of COVID-19 and the upward-trending inflation rate continue to contribute to financial stresses faced by a large segment of the Malaysian population. The Budget 2023's approach to addressing the people's economic needs centres around enhancing MSMEs (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) and supporting entrepreneurs through training and incentives. MSMEs make up 97.4 percent of all businesses in Malaysia, contributing significantly to the economy in 2021 with 37.4 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 47.8 percent of total employment¹⁹, which makes these enterprises an important catalyst for sustainable recovery of the Malaysian economy post-COVID-19. MSMEs produce the majority of the world's food and have a potential compounding effect in reducing inequality.²⁰ These micro to medium-sized enterprises create employment opportunities for women, youth, and other vulnerable groups, allowing them to participate fully and effectively in the economy and society. The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted MSMEs badly, hence it is strategic that the government is prioritising rebuilding the resilience of these enterprises, the backbone of the Malaysian economy.

¹⁶ Fabrizio, S., Gurara, D., & Kolovich, L. (2020). Fiscal policies for women's economic empowerment. Retrieved from <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2020/02/18/fiscal-policies-for-womens-economic-empowerment>

¹⁷ Nicol, S. (2022). Gender budgeting: The economic and fiscal rationale. *OECD Journal on Budgeting*, 22/3. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9ca9b221-en>.

¹⁸ Ismail, M. F. (2022). *Seventh Tokyo Fiscal Forum: Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA)*. Retrieved from https://www.mof.go.jp/pri/research/seminar/fy2022/tff2022_s2_2.pdf

¹⁹ National Entrepreneur and SME Development Council. (2021). MSME insights 2021. Retrieved from SME Corp Malaysia: https://www.smecorp.gov.my/images/Publication/MSME_Insights/SME_Insight_2021_1_English_Full_Version.pdf

²⁰ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). Micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Retrieved from <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/capacity-development/msmes>

On the other hand, looking deeper into the budget measure to reduce the tax rate for MSMEs makes us question:



- Who are likely to be the primary beneficiaries of this incentive?
- Women-owned businesses are stagnant at 20.6 percent of SMEs. They already contribute RM69.1 billion to the country's GDP in 2021 and 2022²¹. What strategic measures have been taken to increase this number?
- Has a gender impact assessment been done to understand the situation?

Women are disproportionately represented in the informal sector, with many in the food and beverage industry. It is thus a commendable move to support entrepreneurs through facilitating hawkers and small traders, as well as providing financing and guarantee facilities. However, an ILO study showed that women entrepreneurs tend not to fund their businesses with external funding resources²². This could at times be due to a lack of awareness of the financial services available as well as not knowing how to access those services. The result is that women-owned businesses end up growing at a slower pace and are smaller in size, compared to male-owned businesses²³. This barrier would be even more significant for persons with disabilities (PWD) and the B40.



- How will the government ensure that information about these schemes reaches the population that needs it the most?
- How can the financial service process be tailored to be more accessible to all who are eligible?
- What gender-sensitive approaches²⁴ have been incorporated to improve the economic participation of women, PWD and B40 entrepreneurs?

Among the wide range of inclusive financing schemes proposed, green financing presents an opportunity for gender-responsiveness. The economic benefits of climate action are evident in the growing demand for green financing.

To enhance the design of green financial products, gender differences in climate risks and needs should be considered. This includes the difference in how men and women may access green finance products due to socio-cultural norms and policies. Collecting gender-disaggregated data in these processes can help inform financial institutions and companies better on managing their environmental and gender impacts.

²¹ The Star. (2022, March 10). Lazada empowers the growth of female-owned online businesses and celebrates the success of women entrepreneurs. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/starpics/2022/03/10/lazada-empowers-the-growth-of-female-owned-online-businesses-and-celebrates-women-entrepreneurs-success>

²² International Labour Organization. (2021). *Rebuilding better: Assessment of women entrepreneurs' needs and available support services during COVID-19 in Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand*. Retrieved from International Labour Organization: https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_835949/lang--en/index.htm

²³ International Labour Organization. (2022). "Financing business growth for women entrepreneurs" workshop series. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/asia/events/WCMS_839361/lang--en/index.htm

²⁴ Gender Sensitive Approach - The ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities pertaining to the lives of both women and men, and consider them in the design and implementation of strategies and actions. (Adapted from: Gender Equality Glossary, European Commission, 2013; http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/glossary/index_en.htm)



- How can the government facilitate this process to ensure these are identified, measured and appropriately managed?

On top of providing a range of financing schemes, it is important that programmes build on past lessons as well. Were impact assessments conducted on financial schemes which were offered in previous budgets?



- What have been the learnings from success and challenges faced by both beneficiaries and agencies?
- What success stories have emerged from the previous years' measures?
- Reflecting on these questions helps to improve programme outcomes. How are the Budget 2023 schemes being done differently than before?
- Above all, how will the current initiative be monitored?
- What data will be gathered from the beneficiaries to refine programmes?

Measure 3: Readiness in Facing Disasters

Readiness in Facing Disasters | Flood Mitigation | Green Practices

Malaysia has been experiencing extreme weather events, from the scorching heat wave that caused heat-related illnesses and fatalities in Sarawak and Kelantan²⁵, to heavy rainfalls that displaced more than 70,000 people as recently as December 2022²⁶. These phenomena of climate change are also leading to intense droughts and a rise in sea levels which affects human health, food production, labour productivity and more frequent severe flooding.²⁷

From Malaysia's experience with COVID-19 and the annual recurring floods, it is clear that building resilient communities is essential to managing adversities and ensuring recovery. A resilient community refers to a community that is able to cope with hazards such as extreme weather events by anticipating, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from them with minimal harm to social health, the economy, and the environment.²⁸

²⁵ The Star. (2023, April 28). Health DG: 11-year-old boy died from heatstroke, toddler from dehydration. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/04/28/health-dg-11-year-old-boy-died-from-heatstroke-toddler-from-dehydration>

²⁶ Channel News Asia. (2022, December 21). Five dead, more than 70,000 evacuated in Malaysia floods. *Channel News Asia*. Retrieved from <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/malaysia-flood-east-coast-evacuate-rain-johor-pahang-perak-3159916>

²⁷ Lum, M. (2022, July 5). The effects of climate change in Malaysia. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/health/the-doctor-says/2022/07/05/the-effects-of-climate-change-in-malaysia>

²⁸ Lamoille County Planning Commission. (2018). 2015 - 2023 Lamoille County Regional Plan. Retrieved from https://publicservice.vermont.gov/sites/dps/files/documents/Pubs_Plans_Reports/Act_174/LCPC/2015-2023_Regional_Plan_as_amended_on_May_22_2018.pdf

Resilience in developing countries often looks like impoverished rural communities changing their lifestyles to respond to climate change, rather than a systematic effort to build resilience²⁹. There should be a harmonised relationship between civil society organisations, the government, and the community to support one another to create resilience. Case studies also show that one of the most effective responses to natural disasters has come from communities themselves who have the indigenous knowledge and social networks to help one another cope and adapt in the aftermath³⁰. Thus, communities should be recognised as experts in their own lived realities and be consulted in all disaster risk management plans.

It is vital that resilience is prioritised for current realities and impact. Climate changes would only compound the existing health and economic crisis faced by low-income households and push them further into lasting poverty traps.³¹

With Malaysia's annually recurring floods, we have seen community leadership, whether formal or informal, rise to the occasion and uplift their own communities³². Learning from this, one recommendation may be that community associations and informal leaders such as *Rukun Tetangga* (Neighbourhood Watch) should be empowered and trained to self-mobilise. An initiative by the government to build their capacity and provide them with the right tools is a good start. In addition to that, the authorities should be learning from indigenous people who are experts in their own lived realities and ecological conservation as they possess Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

Amid this, women are disproportionately affected by climate change due to various factors such as systemic gender inequalities, different vulnerabilities to environmental hazards, and socio-economic and cultural factors³³. Thus, women have a critical role to play in disaster risk management. Not only because their lived realities should be centred on the solution, but also because women, with their socialised roles of managing natural resources and caretaking³⁴, have vast knowledge of their communities and insight into building communities' resilience to disasters. The key to mitigating climate change is for women to be empowered to take the lead.

²⁹ Hardee, K. (2017). What contributes to community resilience in the face of climate change? Retrieved from <https://www.prb.org/resources/what-contributes-to-community-resilience-in-the-face-of-climate-change/>

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Voegele, J. (2022). Building resilience is vital for a sustainable COVID-19 recovery. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/building-resilience-vital-sustainable-covid-19-recovery>

³² Rodzi, N. H. (2021, December 23). Malaysians offer help to flood victims amid criticisms over government's slow response. *The Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/malaysians-offer-help-to-flood-victims-amid-criticisms-over-governments-slow-response>

³³ OECD. (2022). Supporting women's empowerment through green policies and finance. *OECD Environment Policy Papers*, 33. <https://doi.org/10.1787/16771957-en>

³⁴ Asian Development Bank. (2014). Gender-inclusive disaster risk management. Retrieved from https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/34130/tip-sheet-gender-inclusive-disaster-risk-management_0.pdf



- Have NADMA and state agencies conducted a risk assessment/mapping of risk-prone areas / private sector, community leaders and CSO mapping to engage affected communities in understanding their needs and experience; particularly in the context of measuring their resilience and experience in both mitigation and risk management?
- Has a gender analysis been done to understand the impact of climate issues on different groups of women and men in affected areas?
- Are women-led businesses considered in the procurement process related to disaster management tender processes?
- How are the communities surrounding the projects being involved in the programme, design and resource distribution?
- Is a participatory approach in place to engage vulnerable communities such as PWD, elderly, single mothers, refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons in risk assessment and management?
- How are local community traditional knowledge/experience/expertise used?
- What have been the learnings from the orang Asli who have been previously appointed as rangers?

Measure 4: Achieving High-Impact Investments

Facilitating Investment in Key Sectors

High-impact investments in Malaysia refer to those high-impact and high-end sectors that bring about economic growth and job opportunities. Based on recent trends, the high-performing sectors include electrical and electronics (E&E), halal and smart farming, aerospace, and tourism³⁵. A glance at these sectors shows us that many of the industries that are valued as important industries tend to be male-dominated fields. Since certain sectors and work tend to be more gender-segregated than others, the private sector should consider integrating the UN Women Empowerment Principles in their work processes to ensure that women benefit equally. Additionally, employing gender lens investing (GLI), a strategy with origins from the impact investment movement, can achieve better long-term development outcomes for women and girls.³⁶



- What is the gender composition of the committees that are looking into the high-impact investment measures?
- Are there policies in place that will call for a gender-responsive approach in the design and implementation of action plans?
- Who benefits? Who is excluded?

³⁵ Mottain, M. (2022, February 12). High impact investment the priority for growth. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/business/business-news/2022/02/12/high-impact-investment-the-priority-for-growth>

³⁶ OECD. (2022). Blended finance for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD Publishing, Paris. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/dac/2022-blended-finance-gender-equality.pdf>

Institutional Reform and Good Governance to Restore Confidence



Measure 5: Public Sector Reform

Transparency in Public Procurement

The country measures up to higher standards in its move to increase transparency and good governance in the government procurement process. Public procurement plays a significant role in the economic development of Malaysia and can be a fiscally efficient route for empowerment, and yet women entrepreneurs are often left out of the equation. While local data is not publicly available, this situation is reflective of the global scenario where women-owned businesses in public procurement account for less than one percent of the total actual spending on public procurement.³⁷

Factors which contribute to women's exclusion can be attributed to the size of women-owned businesses which are predominantly micro and small-sized, and often unregistered compared to male-owned businesses. This can be due to several factors, including the fact that women-owned businesses are small or medium-sized and often unregistered compared to male-owned businesses. In practice, these engagement and business management practices do not attract bank financing/access to finance because of a lack of collateral security. It in turn negatively affects business growth for increased investment to position the businesses to win public contracts, thus increasing the gender gap in public procurement.³⁸

Rectifying the status quo may require a multi-prong approach. First, the procurement divisions in ministries and departments should improve the effectiveness of procurement processes and levels of accountability to be gender-responsive to avoid unconscious bias in the overall process. In response to that, women entrepreneurs would benefit from capacity building training to equip them with practical skills and knowledge in the area of public procurement so that they are able to submit winning bids for government tenders. Lastly, a gender impact assessment of the proposed Government Procurement Bill should be conducted to further understand the realities of differentiated impacts of procurement processes on women and men-owned businesses.



- What is the data of women-owned businesses (WOBs) that are in the supply chain of government procurement?
- How can capacity be built in WOBs to apply for government contracts?
- How can administrative procurement and company registrations be simplified to enable more WOBs to apply? What capacities need to be built in the public procurement department?

³⁷ UN Women. (2017). The power of procurement: How to source from women-owned businesses. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/The-power-of-procurement-How-to-source-from-women-owned-businesses-en.pdf>

³⁸ Kabatwairwe, O. (2022). Barriers & solutions to include women owned businesses in public procurement in Uganda_AFIC study. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/barriers-solutions-include-women-owned-businesses-olive-kabatwairwe-/>

Schools and clinics

The measure to repair dilapidated schools, hospitals, and clinics is a positive move and much needed. This was reiterated by the education minister who pledged to ensure 455 dilapidated schools on a scale of six and 113 dilapidated schools on a scale of seven³⁹ in Sarawak will be repaired⁴⁰. However, there has been a question as to whether the amount allocated is sufficient to repair the targeted schools when there are over 1,000 dilapidated schools in Sarawak⁴¹. It is estimated that the budget may only be able to cover approximately 100 schools. The Minister has also pledged to ensure none of the 289 dilapidated schools in Sabah will be side-lined.⁴²

On the other hand, while the repair of clinics and hospitals is crucial, there remains a need to set up more healthcare facilities in rural areas to ensure universal health access. The Ministry of Health in June 2023 reported that RM9.6 million had been allocated for the repair of 39 clinics in rural Kelantan.⁴³



- How many students across Malaysia are displaced as a result of the dilapidated conditions of schools? What are the conditions in which teachers and students are forced to teach and learn? What alternative arrangements which are accessible have been made for the students?
- Will the repairs in the clinics and schools also consider improving access for PWD and the elderly as well as parent and child-friendly facilities?

Streetlights, roads, and bridges

Streetlights, especially in both urban and rural areas, are important amenities to maintain as poorly lit public spaces pose safety risks, such as sexual harassment and other gender-based violence and other crimes. The government should consider expanding the scope of areas for streetlights to include poorly lit pathways such as laneways and other commonly used streets in both urban and rural areas. In the same vein, the road and path upgrades should ensure that safe walking and motorised accessible pavements are considered for PWDs, the elderly and children. As PWDs with physical disabilities make up 35.2% of our population, and the visually impaired stand at 8.2%, they are a significant community with needs that should be catered to. For the improvement of bridges, the focus should be on rural areas where children rely on such facilities for access to schools, considering more

³⁹ Dayak Daily. (2022, June 14). Statistics show declining trend in number of teachers in Sarawak. *Dayak Daily*. Retrieved from <https://dayakdaily.com/statistics-show-declining-trend-in-number-of-teachers-in-sarawak/>

⁴⁰ Malay Mail. (2023, January 26). Budget 2023: Dilapidated schools in Sarawak to be given priority, says education minister. *Malay Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/01/26/budget-2023-dilapidated-schools-in-sarawak-to-be-given-priority-says-education-minister/52059>

⁴¹ FMT Reporters. (2023, March 2). Sarawak State minister commented that the amount for repair of dilapidated schools in Sarawak is insufficient. *Free Malaysia Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/03/02/allocations-to-repair-dilapidated-schools-insufficient-says-sarawak-minister/>

⁴² Harun, H. N. & Mohamed Radhi, N. A. (2023, February 20). 289 dilapidated schools in Sabah, 64 unsafe - MOE. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/02/881633/289-dilapidated-schools-sabah-64-unsafe-moe>

⁴³ Malay Mail. (2023, June 5). Dr Zaliha: Ministry allocates RM9.6m to repair dilapidated clinics in Kelantan. *Malay Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/06/05/dr-zaliha-ministry-allocates-rm96m-to-repair-dilapidated-clinics-in-kelantan/72685>

than 200 schools in Sarawak use bridges⁴⁴, while schools in Sabah children risk the dangerous commute using community longboats⁴⁵ and Orang Asli children in Peninsula Malaysia are sardine-packed on pick-up trucks who traverse poor roads to schools.⁴⁶



- Will universal design be adopted in all infrastructure, fittings, and furniture (pathways, ramps, washrooms, furniture) repair and renovations to enable access for disabled students, faculty, and parents?
- Has a (gender) assessment been conducted to understand how this facility will impact different groups of women and men, boys, and girls in terms of safety?
- Will consideration be given to prioritising bridges and roads in rural areas which provide children access to schools?

Encouraging Ministries and Agencies to Innovate

There is a range of research allocations provided in this year's budget. The incorporation of high-quality, policy-relevant, evidence-based research has been outlined as a key strategy for improving development outcomes in most countries. Gender is an important consideration and a key explanatory variable in research excellence. When gender is superficially or inadequately considered, there is a serious risk of the "neutral" research being gender-blind, promoting stereotypes, and having biased results that do not consider women's and men's differentiated realities.



- The inclusion of the gender dimension improves the quality, rigour, reproducibility, and creativity of research⁴⁷. Will the allocation include gender-sensitising institutions engaged in undertaking research for the government?
- CSOs generate potentially rich data which can fill in evidence gaps within government and provide critical research insights for policy development. What steps can be taken to institutionalise this valuable partnership?
- The appointment of gender focal teams (GFT) across ministries underscores the cross-cutting nature of gender. Integrating gender and intersectional considerations into research commissioned by Ministries would strengthen the development of gender-responsive policies and programmes. GFTs are currently undergoing training on mainstreaming gender and gender-responsive budgeting⁴⁸. What monitoring mechanism is in place to ensure Ministries' budget proposals comply with the gender-related directives in the MOF annual budget call circular?

⁴⁴ Dayak Daily. (2023, February 23). 721 schools in Sarawak without proper access roads, Batang Sadong MP demands action from federal govt. *Dayak Daily*. Retrieved from <https://dayakdaily.com/721-schools-in-sarawak-without-proper-access-roads-batang-sadong-mp-demands-action-from-federal-govt/>

⁴⁵ FMT Reporters. (2022, August 4). Sabah village children risk lives crossing river to go to school. *Free Malaysia Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/08/04/sabah-village-children-risk-life-crossing-river-to-go-to-school/>

⁴⁶ Kamarudin, K. & Mohd Said, S. (2022, December 28). Orang asli: Are they putting their children's lives on the line for the sake of education? *Bernama*. Retrieved from https://www.bernama.com/en/b_focus/v2/news.php?id=2151631

⁴⁷ Institut de Ciències del Mar. (2022). The gender perspective in research. Retrieved from <https://www.icm.csic.es/en/news/gender-perspective-research>

⁴⁸ GRBiP training programme conducted by ENGENDER, WAO and the Gender Budget Group in collaboration with MOF since 2022.

- The Prime Minister announced that RM5 million⁴⁹ will be allocated to MWFCDC to be used for data collection, research, and promotion of future women’s empowerment programmes. Data collection and research to promote women’s empowerment is part and parcel of gender mainstreaming across ministries, which is mandated through the appointment of Gender Focal Points and Teams. Will the other ministries be also awarded equivalent measures for the same in budget 2024, for which capacity building should also run in parallel?

Key Performance Indicators (KPI) For All Ministries and Departments Based on the MADANI Framework

In a progressive move to mainstream gender across government, gender focal points were (re)appointed in all ministries in November 2022. This new cohort of GFPs is required to set up their respective gender focal teams in their ministries. The mandate of the gender focal teams is to mainstream gender in the policy, programme, and processes of their ministries. In parallel, capacity building of the ministries and now their gender focal teams commenced in July 2022 with the Gender Responsive Budgeting in Practice (GRBiP) training programme, which is conducted by ENGENDER, WAO together with the Gender Budget Group and in collaboration with MOF. This institutional mechanism is aligned to the 12MP which states that enhancing institutional capacity and evidence-based policymaking will be emphasised, particularly with a gender analysis.



- Will accountability measures on gender mainstreaming and gender-responsive budgets be explicitly included in Ministry KPIs - in line with MOF Budget Call Circular and MWFCDC’s terms of reference for Gender Focal Teams?

Improving Access to Justice

The increased threshold in the eligibility limit for full legal aid assistance from the Legal Aid Department from RM30,000 to RM50,000 allows more from the vulnerable citizen population to access the justice system. However, it leaves out the underserved population of non-citizens who are more likely to lack access to the justice system.

The rise in regular and irregular patterns of cross-border movement presents opportunities for organised and syndicated crime affecting refugees and stateless persons and asylum seekers, as well as smuggled and trafficked persons. The provision of legal aid for these groups will provide redress for the victims and help curb these criminal activities.



- Can a study be commissioned to understand the cost and benefits of extending legal aid to marginalised groups including refugees, stateless persons, and asylum seekers? Including the overall impact this would contribute towards improving law and order outcomes; better appreciation for the rule of law and overall access to justice in line with Sustainable Development Goal 16? This may also widen the circle of legal aid providers.

⁴⁹ Lee, B. (2023, March 9). Empowering women the Malaysia Madani way. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/03/09/empowering-women-the-malaysia-madani-way>

The mobile courts which were first introduced in 2007 are indeed a noteworthy initiative. It is gender-responsive in addressing the issues of access and expenses which continue to be an impediment to the rural population. While it hears civil and criminal cases, it has been most welcomed in the rural community in its facilitation of birth registrations. As of December 2021, the mobile courts expedited 93,799 cases of late registration.⁵⁰

The expansion of Mobile Courts operations with the allocation in the 2023 budget, particularly in rural Sabah and Sarawak, will help increase the outreach of these court services to the furthest communities. In effect, this improves the awareness of the legal services available for various cases among rural communities who might otherwise be ill-informed. Understanding the know-how helps rural communities in their dealings with legal matters and government departments. The state justice system should continue to work with CSOs to ensure that outreach efforts and awareness of legal advice reach the most marginalised communities.



- Will local community networks i.e., CSOs, MP offices and village leaders be engaged to collaborate to inform and advise interior populations about this initiative and related processes?
- Will there be accompanying awareness raising among the interior communities about the importance and processes of registration?
- What data can be gathered from the rural population served that can help to further improve services in enabling better access to justice? A wider range of information may be gathered when the data is both quantitative and qualitative, and not only disaggregated by sex but also by other socio-economic and demographic factors.

Strengthening Children's Sexual Crimes Court

There are no specific details on which areas the RM3 million allocation is intended. The Law Minister's response to a question in Parliament in 2023 stated that to date all 13 states have special SOAC courts and in addition, to facilitate better access, 40 general/criminal sessions courts around the country will be set up accordingly in stages to hear SOAC cases.⁵¹ Parliament passed amendments to the SOAC Act 2017⁵² as well as the ECWA Act⁵³ in 2023. The process saw a close engagement between the Department of Legal Affairs in the Prime Minister's Department (BHEUU) and CSOs from child and women's rights groups who continue to provide input on the related justice system processes. Facilitating the best interest of the child through the justice system process also requires further strengthening of the courts where this allocation could best serve.

⁵⁰ Chan, N. (2021, April 4). Late birth registrations persist in Sabah due to ignorance, money woes. *The Vibes*. Retrieved from <https://www.thevibes.com/articles/news/22730/Late-birth-registrations-persist-in-Sabah-due-to-ignorance-money-woes>

⁵¹ Portal Rasmi Parlimen Malaysia. (2023). Jawapan bukan lisan: Mesyuarat kedua, penggal kedua parlimen kelima belas (2023). Retrieved from [https://www.parlimen.gov.my/jawapan-bukan-lisan-dr.html?uweb=dr&\(note: in Malay\)](https://www.parlimen.gov.my/jawapan-bukan-lisan-dr.html?uweb=dr&(note: in Malay))

⁵² Portal Rasmi Parlimen Malaysia. (n.d.). List of bills. Retrieved from <https://www.parlimen.gov.my/bills-dewan-rakyat.html?uweb=dr&lang=en#>

⁵³ Ibid.



- Has an audit or assessment been conducted on courts and processes in the associated justice system to identify gaps and take necessary interventions to align to national and international standards of systems to serve justice and support the best interest of the child?
- How are DPPs and defence attorneys' capacities e.g., questioning child victims and witnesses supported through regular, sustained training? What percentage of the budget is allocated for capacity building and how is this monitored and evaluated?
- CSOs report that courts lack technical equipment, translators as well as technical personnel to address connectivity and other technical glitches during the hearing. Will some of this allocation be channelled to these needs?

Institutional Reforms

Reformation and streamlining Government agencies and institutions | Special Task Force on Agency Reform (STAR) established to lead the public delivery system | Performance Acceleration Coordination Unit (PACU) for planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating MADANI programmes

Bringing coherence to government machinery and services is critical for an efficient and effective system of governance and delivery. This has the potential to address the fragmentation, duplication and overlapping of not only functions but also programmes delivered to the same target groups - all resulting in inefficiency and wastage in spending and resources - year after year. Developmental issues are cross-cutting, and this is evidenced in the overarching 12MP and the collective ministerial strategic and action plans.

A gender-responsive mainstreaming and budgeting model presents the same whole of government system of coherence, efficiency, and effectiveness - in short, good governance, by extending the principles of inclusion, social equity, transparency, and accountability. Engaging the gender focal teams from all ministries on the STAR task force and PACU unit can reinforce strategic thinking, gender analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and impact assessment.



- Have STAR and PACU undertaken a comprehensive evidence-based assessment of the overall governance and delivery system both at national and sub-national levels?
- Will a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework be developed to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives, the efficiency, effectiveness (including cost), impact and sustainability of public delivery systems?
- The M & E system has the potential to contribute towards an open government system which is based on the concept of democratic governance which has been expounded by the Government as part of the principles of MADANI. How will STAR and PACU integrate democratic accountability into their framework?
- Will there be CSO seats on both STAR and PACU? CSOs form a valuable partner in measuring the efficacy of service delivery at the grassroots.
- Will gender focal points in each ministry (Deputy Secretary General - Strategic/Policy) be included in the membership of STAR and PACU?

Measure 6: Empowering Public-Private Partnership

Partnership With Industry for TVET Implementation

Public-private partnerships (PPP) are strategic objectives to tackle poverty and enhance shared prosperity by improving the availability and quality of essential infrastructure services as well as access to employment, education and markets, income-generating opportunities, and entrepreneurship. These sectors are however not gender neutral as men and women have different preferences, roles and responsibilities in their households, communities and markets which result in different needs for services⁵⁴. Women and men are also not homogenous groups as their lived realities can be better understood through an intersectional lens.⁵⁵ Considering gender in PPPs can promote inclusivity and address specific needs - by incorporating gender perspectives and taking proactive measures, PPPs can contribute to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes.



- What minimum standards can be integrated into PPP policies and arrangements, so gender considerations are taken into account when PPP projects are planned, designed, implemented, and monitored? For example, collecting sex and gender-disaggregated data, including men and women at an early stage in the community-wide consultations and by incorporating gender aspects into the various analyses and assessments; translating gender analysis into gender-responsive policies, bidding documents and contracts, and using meaningful performance indicators to monitor and evaluate actions designed to narrow gender inequalities.
- The TVET pathway has promise in providing the upskilling required for women at risk of losing their jobs due to the adoption of digital technologies. It can also be a channel for women to take up non-traditional or usually male-dominated technical fields. This will require mainstreaming gender in TVET institutions. How will the government incentivise private sector partners in the PPP to mainstream gender?
- Although there are no gender restrictions in TVET enrolment, the proportion of women is significantly lower, except in certain niche courses⁵⁶. What measures will be instituted to ensure equal opportunities for girls/women, rural students and PWD access to TVET?
- Will both curriculum and infrastructure design be reconceptualised to be gender-responsive with reasonable accommodations to enable the participation of girls and PWD?
- Coherence has been the main challenge with the multi-agency set-up of TVET in the country. With the PPP, how will the overarching framework and strategic plan of TVET be monitored and impact assessed?

⁵⁴ Shepherd, C. (2016). 5 ways public-private partnerships can promote gender equality. Retrieved from <https://blogs.worldbank.org/ppps/5-ways-public-private-partnerships-can-promote-gender-equality>

⁵⁵ Intersectional lens - understanding women and men's lived realities by considering their age, income, education levels, nationality, ethnicity, and strata among others. When these identities intersect, they may reveal the privileges enjoyed or compound the disadvantage experienced by the sub-groups of women and men.

⁵⁶ Fauwaz, A. A. & Subramaniam, N. (2023). TVET in Malaysia: Current situation, challenges and recommendations. Retrieved from <https://penanginstitute.org/publications/issues/tvet-in-malaysia-current-situation-challenges-and-recommendations/>

Post-pandemic analysis of the lived reality for all income levels has validated that their household expenditure far exceeds their income. B40 families spend 30 percent of disposable income on food and other essentials, and this is also comparable to the experience of the M40⁵⁷. The situation is exacerbated when the breadwinners of the family lose their jobs – a single job loss can affect the well-being levels of up to a family of four dependants, the average household size.⁵⁸

Women are disproportionately affected by the rising cost of living due gender pay gap – as an Australian study found, the gender pay gap makes it harder for women to make ends meet (9.4 percent of women’s salary compared to 8.1 percent of men’s)⁵⁹; working in insecure jobs and unable to increase working hours due to household and care responsibilities – this is true of rural women globally who shoulder multiple responsibilities of purchasing and preparation of food and budget management – all of this compound to make them the “shock absorbers of poverty”.⁶⁰

The job readiness and placement initiatives within the PPP framework are necessary and work in tandem with skills capacity building to meet market needs. According to DOSM’s 2023 first-quarter labour statistics, the actively unemployed category (i.e., available, or actively seeking work) was 472.9 thousand persons (February 2023: 475.5 thousand persons). Youth unemployment is also concerning at 454.9 thousand persons (March 2023: 7.0 percent; 450.2 thousand persons)⁶¹. The Minister of Economy attributed the unemployment of youth to a “mismatch of skilled talent produced by local training institutions and the actual skills in demand by the market”.⁶² Housework and family responsibilities continue to be the main reason for the working-age population being out of the labour force; a situation which can be attributed to women who shoulder most of the household and care responsibilities.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) reiterates that “countries that invest in all their human capital and make it easier for their populations to balance work and family life tend to be more prosperous. Countries should invest in closing gender gaps in access, resources, and opportunities. With an increasingly uncertain economic outlook, unleashing the creativity and dynamism of a country’s entire human capital is critical to overcoming the current crises and accelerating a recovery.”⁶³

⁵⁷ Loh, J. & Yeo, A. (2022, June 30). Inflation rate must reflect reality on the ground. *The Malaysian Insight*. Retrieved from <https://www.themalaysianinsight.com/s/389004>

⁵⁸ Babulal, V. (2021, May 24). A million people may lose jobs under another strict MCO, says Tengku Zafrul. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/government-public-policy/2021/05/692526/million-people-may-lose-jobs-under-another-strict-mco>

⁵⁹ Charlton, E. (2023). This is why women are bearing the brunt of the cost of living crisis, according to research. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/01/cost-of-living-crisis-women-gender-gap/>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2023). Labour force statistics report: March 2023. Retrieved from https://www.dosm.gov.my/uploads/release-content/file_20230511111955.pdf

⁶² Tay, C. (2023, February 20). Rafizi: Skills gap main cause of youth unemployment, not increase in minimum wage. *The Edge*. Retrieved from <https://theedgemaalaysia.com/node/655910>

⁶³ World Economic Forum. (2022). Global gender gap report 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>



- What has been the impact assessment of the previous PENJANA programme? What disaggregated data (sex, age, strata, ethnicity) has been collected and how has it informed the current capacity building and job placement initiatives?
- Globally, women are the most common priority group for surveyed organisations' DEI programmes⁶⁴ across all regions and industries, with four of five respondents identifying them as a priority for DEI programmes – how receptive is corporate Malaysia to the same and what awareness, capacities and incentives need to be provided to raise the mark on gender inclusion?
- How are all these measures contributing towards earlier commitments on PWD employment?
- Was a gender impact assessment conducted of the previous years' employment measures from both employer, agencies and employees' experience and learning?
- How will the related agencies support raising awareness about these schemes to facilitate enlisting the intended target groups?

Formulation of Gig Workers' Policy to Protect the Rights and Welfare of Gig Workers

It is estimated that gig workers form 26 percent (4 million) of the workforce in Malaysia.^{65 66} There is no specific sex-disaggregated data on gig workers but the data of own-account holder / self-employed females (19.5 percent in 2018) is often used as a proxy to indicate the possible number of female freelancers/gig workers. While gig work provides an attractive income generating opportunity in reducing income inequality and autonomy i.e., work-life balance with the flexibility of working time⁶⁷, it poses challenges in the lack of social protection, personal development or particularly for female workers, bias, harassment, and violence.⁶⁸

While there have been recent legislative and policy protections such as the provisions in the Employment (Amended) Act and the Self-Employed Social Security Scheme, gig workers are not protected under the Work Act 1955 Labour Ordinance (Sabah Chapter 67) and Labour Ordinance (Sarawak Chapter 76). The development of a Gig Workers Policy should provide the necessary comprehensive protections and supporting redress mechanisms and recognition of their rights.

⁶⁴ World Economic Forum. (2023). Future of jobs report 2023. Retrieved from https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs_2023.pdf

⁶⁵ Business Today. (2022, December 10). Gig economy in Malaysia: Transforming the labour landscape and promoting decent work. *Business Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.businesstoday.com.my/2022/12/10/gig-economy-in-malaysia-transforming-the-labour-landscape-and-promoting-decent-work/>

⁶⁶ Supramani, S. (2021, October 11). DOSM data shows the informal economy has been projected to grow to 30% as of last year. *The Sun Daily*. Retrieved from <https://www.thesundaily.my/local/dosm-data-shows-the-informal-economy-has-been-projected-to-grow-to-30-as-of-last-year-HH8449018>

⁶⁷ Paul Hype Page. (2023). Gig economy in Malaysia: Pros, cons & regulations. Retrieved from <https://www.paulhypepage.my/gig-economy-in-malaysia-pros-cons-and-regulations/>

⁶⁸ Cloete, C. (2023). Female gig workers face bias, harassment, and violence, report finds. Retrieved from <https://www.internationalemploymentlawyer.com/news/female-gig-workers-face-bias-harassment-and-violence>



- Considering gig workers encompass different groups of women and men including PWD and older persons, will gender considerations be mainstreamed into the Policy? This includes stakeholder engagement and consultations, ensuring the membership of steering committees and task forces includes women and other critical stakeholders.
- What data is being collected of women who have left the labour force to inform if they have taken on gig work to continue working on an informal and flexible basis to pursue their career, support the family and contribute to home responsibilities?

Encourage private sector to pay higher wages

SOCSSO's Dana Kerja Programme for vulnerable communities and TVET graduates provides employers a wage subsidy incentive amounting to RM600 for three months on top of the offered salary is projected to enable the employment of 17,000 TVET graduates⁶⁹. It also sets out to provide the same for vulnerable groups including long-term unemployed, particularly youth; women particularly single mothers; persons with disabilities; ex-convicts; and the homeless.



- What disaggregated data (sex, age, marital status, strata, income, education, skills) are there of those who secured jobs in this scheme in 2023? What analysis has been conducted on the data to inform Budget 2024?
- Incentivising employers is a recurring initiative, what has been the learning from the previous years' programme? What has been the employment trajectory for the earlier cohorts?
- What is the impact of the programme on the vulnerable groups - including challenges and barriers particularly for the homeless, single mothers and persons with disabilities? What workplace access and cultural reforms are mandated to facilitate the uptake by specific groups? How are these workplaces being monitored for safety and non-discrimination?
- If Malaysia is seeking to increase high-skilled employment by 4.5 per cent by 2030, what further means will be in place to ensure a larger number of TVET graduates gain employment?

Measure 7: Prioritising the Digital Agenda

Internet Connectivity for the *Rakyat*

Technology adoption will remain a key driver of business transformation in the next five years⁷⁰. It has become an imperative for individuals and businesses wherein it enables enhanced communication, knowledge and collaboration, increased productivity, faster return on investment, cost reduction,

⁶⁹ PERKESO. (n.d.). Daya kerjaya programme for vulnerable groups and TVET graduates - targeted hiring incentives. Retrieved from https://www.perkeso.gov.my/images/belanjawan2023/penggajian_bersasar/210623_Daya_Kerjaya_-_Targeted_Hiring_Incentives_For_Vulnerable_Groups_TVET_Graduates__School_Leavers.pdf

⁷⁰ See footnote 65.

operational efficiency, increased innovation, and competitive edge among others.^{71 7273} The National Digital Economy Blueprint which was developed in 2021 provides a comprehensive framework towards an inclusive digital society.⁷⁴

While digitalisation presents a host of benefits, it poses challenges for different groups of people and organisations:

Persons with Disabilities

Digitalisation poses several impediments to PWD namely lack of accessibility features - without closed captioning, alt-text, or headings, visually or hearing-impaired persons may not be able to utilise the technology fully. There are also economic barriers when financial insecurity makes Internet services and digital devices unaffordable. In addition, PWD may face challenges acquiring the necessary skills and/or some digital tools.



- Will the measure/ policy/ scheme take into account accessibility and user-friendliness in the development of digital solutions through co-creation, innovation, and universal design to ensure accessibility, efficiency, and responsiveness to the needs of all segments of the population including rural and remote populations, women and the disabled?
- What is the strategy to narrow “the digital divide among income and age groups, and between gender”; which is a line of action in the National Digital Transformative Plan? Has an impact assessment been conducted on the various initiatives undertaken by ministries and agencies e.g., KUSKOP, SME CORP?

Businesses

There has been a poor uptake of digitalisation, particularly by MSMEs in Malaysia. A survey conducted by SME Corp and Hua Wei found that only 77 percent are at the basic digitalisation stage, lagging behind peer countries in the region⁷⁵. Furthermore, 53.9 percent have a web presence while only 6.3 percent are seen to venture into data analytics.

In the same survey, the challenges to the uptake are reported to be low knowledge about financing and technologies, where 60 percent are unaware of financing options. Digital literacy is also a challenge with only 15 percent equipped with advanced ICT skills.

Women-owned businesses have for some years now remained at 20.6 percent of the total SMEs in Malaysia. They are likely to be smaller or grow more slowly than male-owned businesses - this is likely

⁷¹ WalkMe. (n.d.). What is digital adoption? Retrieved from <https://www.walkme.com/glossary/digital-adoption/>

⁷² Nexus Integra. (n.d.). The importance of digital transformation for the industry. Retrieved from <https://nexusintegra.io/digital-transformation-industry/>

⁷³ White, N. (2022). Top 10 benefits of digital transformation. Retrieved from <https://www.ptc.com/en/blogs/corporate/digital-transformation-benefits>

⁷⁴ Economic Planning Unit. (2021). Malaysia digital economy blueprint. Retrieved from <https://www.epu.gov.my/sites/default/files/2021-04/Malaysia%20Digital%20Economy%20Blueprint.pdf>

⁷⁵ SME Corp. (2018). Digitalisation survey of SMEs in 2018. In SME Corp (Eds.). *SME annual report 2017/18*. Retrieved from <https://www.smecorp.gov.my/images/SMEAR/SMEAR2017/ENG/Chapter2BoxArticle2.pdf>

due to their challenges in accessing financial support.^{76 77} This might very well pose a further challenge for them to digitise their operations effectively.

Women's lack of digital access has cost countries USD1 trillion in GDP⁷⁸, whereas closing the gender digital divide by 2025 could increase GDP by as much as USD 500 billion.⁷⁹

The Malaysian Digital Economic Blueprint recognises the need to remove the gender digital divide.⁸⁰ It commits to supporting vulnerable groups such as the B40 and women to ensure equal access and opportunity to participate in the digital economy. It aims to provide a one-stop online platform through the integration of existing platforms, designated for vulnerable groups such as the B40, women and people with disabilities to obtain information and resources to grow their online businesses - where it targets 875,000 MSMEs onboard eCommerce by 2025.



- What plans are in place for the accomplishment of the target? What has been the learning from the monitoring of the project thus far - what are the challenges? What are specific goals and strategies to onboard women-owned businesses?

Rural communities



- With rural communities in particular waiting in the queue to be connected, what interim measures are in place to provide some temporary modes of connectivity that can allow individuals to stay connected, facilitate student learning, business activity and communications?

PEDi (Pusat Ekonomi Digital Malaysia / Malaysian Economic Digital Centre)

The PEDi is a promising initiative of a local community one-stop centre or internet hub to provide a local centre of digital learning and e-commerce with the aim of raising their socio-economic status. Its participatory and community-based model serves to empower local communities.



- How many of the 1083 PEDi centres are fully operational?
- What measures have been put in place to ensure the services reach all members of the local community?

⁷⁶ International Labour Organization. (2022). Malaysia's women entrepreneurs kickstart their financial journey with KUSKOP and the ILO. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/asia/media-centre/news/WCMS_845188/lang--en/index.htm

⁷⁷ Ibid

⁷⁸ Alliance for Affordable Internet, (2021). The costs of exclusion: Economic consequences of the digital gender gap. Retrieved from <https://a4ai.org/report/the-costs-of-exclusion-economic-consequences-of-the-digital-gender-gap/>

⁷⁹ Asakawa, M. (2023). DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/news/speeches/digitall-innovation-technology-gender-equality-masatsugu-asakawa>

⁸⁰ The digital divide among income and age groups, and between gender need to be narrowed.

- Has a gender analysis⁸¹ or impact assessment been conducted to understand the needs of the local community?
- Are non-citizens welcome to benefit from the services?

Cybersecurity Empowerment

There has been an increasing number of cybersecurity threats in Malaysia, with Cyber Security Malaysia (CSM) having reported 4,741 cases of cyber threats in 2022, while 456 fraud cases were recorded as of February 2023.⁸² These cyber-attacks have resulted in consequences such as financial losses, personal information breaches and the disruption of essential services for individuals, businesses, and governments. That explains the Budget 2023's measures that focus on digital empowerment for businesses, public sectors, and even at the school level.

However, it appears that online cyber violence has not been given adequate focus, particularly online gender-based violence (OGBV). This is worrying when over the past five years, police statistics report 5,727 cases of sexual harassment cases involving children through social media, where in 2022 alone there were 1,464 cases of online sexual harassment affecting children⁸³. While cyber violence does not operate in a gender-targeted manner, women and girls are disproportionately affected given the types of personal information breaches and harassment that tend to take place. These cybersafety issues affect women's participation in the digital economy and civic spaces and thus lead to tangible economic costs to businesses and the national economy. With adolescents being the most digitally connected generation, they are also disproportionately at risk of facing violence online, especially girls. Tackling the issue of OGBV is important to ensure their meaningful participation in society online and offline.

Technology is a double-edged sword, simultaneously a tool that creates safe and democratic spaces that can promote civil, political, economic and social rights, yet at the same time perpetuate inequalities by amplifying opposing voices and reinforcing negative social norms.⁸⁴ There has been documentation of high levels of gender-based cyber violence in several ASEAN countries, including Malaysia⁸⁵, which was rated poorly alongside the Philippines in terms of having gender-based cyber violence⁸⁶. It is important that users are empowered to stay digitally connected in a safe manner. Therefore, a gender analysis must be present when designing policies and programmes to enhance cybersecurity in Malaysia.

⁸¹ A gender analysis is a critical examination of how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities and rights/entitlements affect men, women, girls and boys in certain situations and contexts. It examines their access to and control of resources and the constraints they face relative to each other. The analysis should inform all sector assessments to ensure that interventions do not exacerbate gender based injustices and inequalities. (Adapted from: Gender Equality Glossary, European Commission, 2013; http://ec.europa.eu/justice/gender-equality/glossary/index_en.htm)

⁸² Bernama. (2023, March 17). Malaysia faces increasing cybersecurity threats - Teo. *News Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/03/890120/malaysia-faces-increasing-cybersecurity-threats-teo>

⁸³ Yusry, M. (2023, May 3). Report: Online sexual harassment of minors on the rise with sextortion trending; most victims aged 13-15. *Malay Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2023/05/03/report-online-sexual-harassment-of-minors-on-the-rise-with-sextortion-trending-most-victims-aged-13-15/67421>

⁸⁴ Spencer, J. & Shrubsole, N. (2023). Girls must be digital leaders! Retrieved from <https://plan-international.org/blog/2023/04/27/girls-must-be-digital-leaders/>

⁸⁵ NORC at the University of Chicago & International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). (2022), Landscape analysis of technology-facilitated gender based violence: Findings from the Asia Region. Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development.

⁸⁶ Timur, F.B. (2022). ASEAN and gendered violence in cyberspace. In G. Hacıyakupoglu & Y. Wong (Eds.), *Gender and security in digital space: Navigating access, harassment, and disinformation* (pp. 51- 68). London: Routledge.



- What budget allocations will the government put in place to address the growing number of OGBV before it gets out of control? The same was reiterated in recent research on online sexual abuse, *Disrupting Harm*, which found that almost all the participants in the research confirmed that there was no specific budget for OCSEA and that more resources need to be allocated.⁸⁷
- While awareness-raising efforts by both government and CSOs have resulted in an increase in reporting, research has shown that there is insufficient monitoring and evaluation of current public awareness efforts, particularly with respect to OCSEA, where it is not known how much knowledge is retained by the target groups. What efforts including resources and expertise are set in place to raise greater awareness and monitor the impact?

Measure 8: Strengthening the Role of Government - Linked Companies and Agencies

Corporate Social Responsibility by GLC and GLIC

Parked under the budget for Corporate Social Responsibility are efforts to improve public housing liveability in Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia has had relative success with providing housing for the people and moving them out of slums⁸⁸ since Independence through various phases of the National Housing Policy.⁸⁹ However, there has been an evident deterioration in the physical, social, and economic aspects of public housing, causing it to be a 'social time bomb' waiting to explode. There have been efforts to improve liveability in Malaysia overall, with the Housing and Local Government Ministry (KPKT) introducing the Liveable Malaysia Agenda by setting up a Malaysia Liveability Index (iDAM).⁹⁰ The index is a tool to be utilised by the Local Authorities (LAs) in Malaysia, though that remains on a city-wide scale.

The Budget 2023 mentions the appointment of Think City to address liveability on a more microscale in public housing, through an intervention programme that aims to empower the urban poor, increase the standard of living, and provide policy input for the next generation's sustainable public housing.⁹¹ Improving liveability is a huge task to take on and requires continuous effort to show results. It would be crucial to document the process done at the Kuala Lumpur public housing complexes in order to replicate and scale up efforts for national reform. When discussing issues of public housing liveability, gender and other aspects should be factored into the equation.

⁸⁷ End Violence Partnership. (n.d.). *Disrupting harm*. Retrieved from <https://www.end-violence.org/disrupting-harm>

⁸⁸ Meng, Y. C. (2022, June 15). Vital step towards better public housing. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/metro/metro-news/2022/06/15/vital-step-towards-better-public-housing>

⁸⁹ Dietrich, U. & Hisham Ismail, B. (2022). From public housing to public homes. Retrieved from https://thinkcity.com.my/R2C/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/TC_PublicHousing.pdf

⁹⁰ Abdul Jabbar, R. (2022, August 31). KPKT sets 23 indicators to improve Malaysia's rating in the Global Liveability Index. *EdgeProp*. Retrieved from <https://www.edgeprop.my/content/1903513/kpkt-sets-23-indicators-improve-malaysias-rating-global-liveability-index>

⁹¹ Think City. (n.d.). *Kita-untuk-Kita (K2K) programme*. Retrieved from <https://thinkcity.com.my/kita-untuk-kita-programme/>



- For instance, the composition of community-based organisations tends to be led by male figures, would female leadership be representative and advocated for?
- The pandemic and rising inflation have led to more women sharing the burden of being the family's breadwinner, how has this affected care duties for their children and elderly?
- The issue of overcrowding in a living space is gendered as well due to cultural contexts in Malaysia; estimation of overcrowding should factor in the age and gender of household members. Would an intersectional analysis be factored into the efforts to improve liveability?
- What would be some of the programme's indicators of success?
- Would the budget allocation be renewed annually, or what would be the programme's exit strategies to ensure the longevity of the programme's impact?

Combating Inequality through Social Justice



Measure 9: Eradicating Hardcore Poor

Cash Assistance and People's Income Initiative

Implementing People's Income Initiative (IPR) | Monthly assistance for hardcore poor under the Social Welfare Department | Whitelisting of recipients is expedited for the Government monthly assistance by combining the efforts and databases of e-Kasih ICU and JKM

Malaysia rebounded from a pandemic-induced economic shock with an encouraging recovery trajectory. However, lived realities on the ground reflect deep concerns about cost of living and making ends meet. A recent survey by a UCSI Poll Research Centre showed that 89 percent were "very concerned" about the cost of living, whereas a majority (60 percent) said they were the most concerned about groceries and food prices.⁹² In another survey by the World Bank, it was found that almost 70 percent of the lower-income households in Malaysia have insufficient financial resources to cover their monthly necessities, and more than 60 percent have reportedly no savings.⁹³ As of May 2023, the population of hardcore poor, which is defined as households with a monthly income of less than RM1,169, is around 120,000 people nationwide.⁹⁴

Studies globally and locally attest to the fact that women are disproportionately more vulnerable to poverty than men because of inequalities in access to productive resources, lack of control over their labour and earned income; and therefore, it has become an acknowledged fact that men and women experience poverty differently and are affected differently. These differences need to be considered if the causes of poverty are to be adequately understood and addressed. A gender perspective contributes to the design of policies allowing measures to be directed at the severest poverty and the most vulnerable populations.⁹⁵

In addressing these challenges, the Prime Minister announced the government's ambitious plan in Budget 2023 to eradicate hardcore poverty in Malaysia by 2023 through a poverty alleviation provision of RM64 billion set to minimise the cost of living through price control of essential goods, financial assistance and providing services. He informed Parliament in March 2023 that the government's poverty alleviation programmes will focus on the 130,000 families identified as hardcore poverty households.⁹⁶

The Prime Minister also announced combining the welfare (JKM) and Implementation Coordinating Unit (ICU) databases which will consolidate the list of beneficiaries of cash assistance and welfare services and allow for a more efficient disbursement without duplication and wastage. The government also plans to build the income generation capacity of the hardcore poor through various programmes. This includes the implementation of the People's Income Initiative (IPR), which has three categories,

⁹² Malaysia Now. (2023, February 10). Nine in 10 Malaysians 'very concerned' about cost of living. *Malaysia Now*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaysianow.com/news/2023/02/10/nine-in-10-malaysians-very-concerned-about-cost-of-living>

⁹³ World Bank. (2022). COVID-19 impact and recovery among Malaysian households. Retrieved from <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099705206232213729/pdf/P17543701d72f00470968401289d32fa325.pdf>

⁹⁴ FMT Reporters. (2023, June 24). End hardcore poverty this year, says Anwar. *Free Malaysia Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2023/06/24/end-hardcore-poverty-this-year-says-anwar/>

⁹⁵ Women and Development Unit of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). (2004). Understanding poverty from a gender perspective. Santiago, Chile. Retrieved from https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/5926/1/S046466_en.pdf

⁹⁶ Rahim, R., Tan, T., & Carvalho, M. (2023, March 28). PM: Nearly 125,000 hardcore poor households identified under e-Kasih database. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/03/28/pm-nearly-125000-hardcore-poor-households-identified-under-e-kasih-database>

namely Agro Entrepreneur Initiative (INTAN), Food Entrepreneur Initiative (INSAN), and Services Operator Initiative (IKHSAN). INSAN allows B40 and hardcore poor Malaysians to sell cooked food through vending machines sponsored by the government. However, early reports have shown that the programme requires further refining as programme participants report a lack of marketing and narrow margins for their products, which would defy the purpose of this initiative.⁹⁷

Cash Assistance



- What system is in place to monitor how the cash handout will help the beneficiaries? Has a beneficiary analysis been conducted to understand the differentiated impact on women and men? What data is being gathered to facilitate such an analysis?
- How do we ensure that invisible and vulnerable communities that are unregistered or not within the database system are sought and registered? What tracking system is in place to identify those households falling through the cracks?
- What has been the learning from the previous years? Are agencies involved in adapting strategies to better meet needs on the ground?
- Is this programme also packaged with other accompanying empowerment programmes (upskilling, support services, job placement) and offered to the same beneficiaries to reduce welfare dependence, and empower them to prepare for and find meaningful livelihoods?
- How can the support of existing grassroots systems of CSOs, MPs offices, and village head (*Ketua Kampung*) be improved and synergised for effective coordination and service delivery?

People's Income Initiative (IPR)



- Will IPR consider the other factors that surround poverty such as social, health, and well-being? Poverty alleviation needs to go beyond the economic lens.⁹⁸
- How will the programme participants be engaged? What are the plans for scaling up the programme at all national and sub-national levels?

All Party Parliamentary Group-SDGs, Malaysia (APPGM-SDG) (RM20m) including the community garden programme

The APPGM-SDG, which was in operation from 2020 was set up to localise SDGs in parliamentary constituencies through the mapping of local issues, solutions, and networks through grassroots multi-stakeholder engagement. To date, 85 constituencies have been involved with 318 solutions projects undertaken in 2022 and an anticipated 508 projects due in 2023. It employs a gender-responsive approach across the project cycle including monitoring and evaluation. The APPGM-SDG also includes a policy research component that aims to draw out local ground issues for policy discussion among Parliamentarians.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Boo, S. (2023, May 17). The hidden costs of IPR vending machines: Food safety compliance, marketing, startup capital. *CodeBlue*. Retrieved from <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2023/05/17/the-hidden-costs-of-ipr-vending-machines-food-safety-compliance-marketing-startup-capital/>

⁹⁸ Farid, A. (2023, March 14). Why teaching the poor to 'fish' in Malaysia is problematic and does not address the root cause of poverty. *Coconuts KL*. Retrieved from <https://coconuts.co/kl/features/why-teaching-the-poor-to-fish-in-malaysia-is-problematic-and-does-not-address-the-root-cause-of-poverty/>

⁹⁹ APPGM-SDG. (n.d.). Publication. Retrieved from <https://appgm-sdg.com/publication/>
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1PLj8TT4X4k6J-gIIQJ1Yq6vXBm0Ra2x>

The APPGM-SDG is well-poised to undertake community garden programmes, with its bottom-up grassroots experience and learning along with its wide network of multi-stakeholders.



- There is much learning that can be drawn from the APPGM-SDG's work at parliamentary constituencies - one which is based on grounded research on the realities of grassroots communities; gender mainstreaming in project management including monitoring and evaluation; government delivery systems; multistakeholder dynamics and collaboration; and solutions related to people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships. How are these learnings being utilised in the work of all relevant national and subnational ministries and agencies?

Measure 10: Minimising Cost of Living

The unprecedented rise in the cost of living globally is pushing close to 71 million into poverty.¹⁰⁰ Fundamentally caused by higher inflation and low wage growth, the cost-of-living crisis is leaving many households in a precarious situation. In Malaysia, a 2022 national poll found that 9 out of 10 persons were concerned about the cost of living¹⁰¹. In another study, it was found that Malaysians have low financial literacy. Its findings also show that the rising cost of living was central to Malaysians having low savings, over-indebtedness, and youth bankruptcy.¹⁰²

The impacts of the high cost of living are gendered and seen in the lives of women and vulnerable groups of the population experiencing specific disadvantages. Inequality between women and men in a household is a strong contributing factor to overall income inequality in society. For women and girls, gender inequalities have different effects on income generation as well as other forms of well-being such as health and education. If gender inequality coincides with other types of discrimination, such as those related to age, disability, ethnicity, or economic status, it can multiply the burden of discrimination and disadvantage.

The following situations warrant a closer and more granular consideration of policy measures:

- Women are “shock absorbers” of poverty making them more likely to be poor.
 - Female-headed households, particularly single mothers, face greater hardship, and exclusion and tend to fall through the cracks in access to aid and services.
- Women are likely to be in debt and have lower levels of savings and wealth than men.
 - According to Bank Negara Malaysia's study, 50 per cent of the country's unbanked population are women. It also found that adults with no or low income are less likely to have a bank account, which may include women homemakers.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Development Programme. (2022, July 7). *Global cost-of-living crisis catalyzed by war in Ukraine sending tens of millions into poverty, warns UN Development Programme* [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/global-cost-living-crisis-catalyzed-war-ukraine-sending-tens-millions-poverty-warns-un-development-programme>

¹⁰¹ UCSI Poll Research Centre. (2023). 89% Malaysians are concerned with the cost of living. Retrieved from <https://www.ucsipoll.org.my/poll-finding/89-malaysians-are-concerned-the-cost-living>

¹⁰² KWSP. (2023). *Belanjawanku: Expenditure guide for Malaysian individuals and families*. Retrieved from <https://www.kwsp.gov.my/documents/20126/142907/Belanjawanku+2022-2023+-+EN.pdf/670c9c4e-40a6-f4c6-ada2-f74fd09c58e6?t=1686619560631>

- Women’s caring responsibilities mean they are often less able than men to increase their hours of paid work, as childcare costs increase, this compounds their situation.
 - In 2019, 3,023.1 thousand persons cited housework and family responsibility as their reason for remaining out of the labour force and not seeking work and 97.4 percent of these were women.¹⁰³
 - Women’s care responsibilities also hold them back from negotiating more days of work to increase the household income.
 - Women’s work situation is precarious, making them more likely to lose their jobs due to their concentration in certain sectors and industries.
- Particular groups of women more likely to be impacted include indigenous women, female-headed households, disabled, refugees and asylum seekers.

The government in its 2023 Budget has introduced a slew of initiatives and measures in an effort to minimise the rising cost of living and address hardcore poverty. These include:

The Payung Rahmah initiatives through public-private partnerships which include, RM5 Menu Rahmah meals and Jualan Rahmah’s 36 daily basic necessities at around 30 per cent discounted rate can make affordable meals and food provisions for families. In addition, the Community Drumming programme of fuel subsidies including expansion to 25 new zones together with the Cooking Oil Stabilisation Scheme ensures beneficiaries across the population and rural area sufficiency of essential food items aims to ensure availability and cost of essential food and other items in both rural and urban regions are consistent.

The Rahmah Cash Assistance (STR) will reach 9 million recipients and includes households with more than five children. In addition, hardcore poor families will receive RM100 vouchers for the Bakul Rahmah Assistance (food baskets) for six months (July to December 2023).



- What system is in place to monitor how the cash handout will help the beneficiaries? Has a beneficiary analysis been conducted to understand the differentiated impact/vulnerabilities on different sub-groups of women and men? What data is being gathered to facilitate such an analysis?
- How is beneficiary impact being measured throughout the year to understand and measure the impact of these measures including identifying challenges and good practices? The experience of beneficiaries as well as public-private partners will be crucial in formulating an even more effective system in Budget 2024.
- Intra-household poverty may occur when the head of household receiving the cash or household essentials does not equitably distribute or provide for the household dependents. What agency or community-based monitoring system can be set up to identify, report and address this occurrence?
- How do we ensure that invisible and vulnerable communities that are unregistered or not within the database system are sought and registered? What tracking system is in place to identify those households falling through the cracks?
- How can awareness be improved from previous measures to ensure those households left behind are aware of and can access the services?
- What tracking system is in place to identify those households falling through the cracks?
- How can the support system of JKM, CSOs, MPs offices, and Village Head (*Ketua Kampung*) be improved?

¹⁰³ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2019). Labour Force Survey Report.

According to a local study in 2019 on food security, Malaysians today have more food available to them from local production and imports compared to 1961 but food availability does not ensure affordable access for all Malaysians.¹⁰⁴ As mentioned in the earlier section, the current rising cost of living is pushing vulnerable populations, who spend the bulk of their earnings on food, to cut corners in their already precarious income to make bargain food purchases over nutritious and healthy considerations.¹⁰⁵

Food security has a strong gender perspective. Malaysia ranked 41 on the Global Food Security Index 2022, where gender inequality was listed as an indicator (2.8.4).¹⁰⁶ The GFSI report also cited FAO which found that improved access to educational and economic opportunities can improve food security outcomes for women and families.¹⁰⁷ Government's numerous measures in the budget to address food security through the National Food Security Action Plan 2021-2025¹⁰⁸ and National Agrofood Policy 2021-2030 (DAN 2.0) signals a strong commitment to improving agricultural productivity, adaptivity and sustainability, and enhancing food security. Notwithstanding mainstreaming gender in these policies will have overall positive and multiplier outcomes. The increased attention to empowering female farmers has increased by 19 percent according to the GFSI 2022. Noteworthy then is our data on women in agriculture:

- According to DOSM's statistics in 2017, women-owned establishments in the agricultural sector were 1,541 establishments with an annual growth rate of 21.6 percent as compared to 2010. Gross output contribution was RM5,228.6 million, 7.1 percent of the total gross output of the agricultural sector with a value added of RM2,824.6 million.¹⁰⁹
- Skilled women agricultural and fishery workers in Malaysia were reported to be 205,000 in 2017 which is an increase of 4.06 per cent the year before.¹¹⁰

It is important to consider the gender dimension and links between agricultural production, diet sufficiency, health, and nutritional outcomes. A regional report underscores this fact in that women's control over the use of income and assets will directly benefit the children's health, education and nutrition compared to when the household income is controlled by men. It also adds that rural women

¹⁰⁴ Sundaram, J. K. & Tan, Z. G.. (2019). Achieving food security for all Malaysians. Kuala Lumpur: Khazanah Research Institute. Retrieved from

https://www.krinstitute.org/assets/contentMS/img/template/editor/Discussion%20Paper_Achieving%20Food%20Security%20for%20all%20Malaysians.pdf

¹⁰⁵ Wong, L. Z. & Teoh, M. (2022, August 19). Feeling the pinch. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.pressreader.com/malaysia/the-star-malaysia-star2/20220819/281479280205938>

¹⁰⁶ Economist Impact. (2022). Global Food Security Index 2022. Retrieved from https://impact.economist.com/sustainability/project/food-security-index/reports/Economist_Impact_GFSI_2022_Global_Report_Sep_2022.pdf

¹⁰⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (n.d.). Gender. Retrieved from <https://www.fao.org/gender/learning-center/thematic-areas/gender-and-food-security-and-nutrition/5/>

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security. (2021). National Food Security Policy Action Plan 2021-2025. Retrieved from http://www.kpk.gov.my/en_US/pelan-tindakan-dasar-sekuriti-makanan-2021-2025

¹⁰⁹ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2017). *Value added of forestry and logging sub-sector recorded an annual growth rate of 2.2 per cent in 5 years period* [Press Release]. Retrieved from <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/value-added-of-forestry-and-logging-sub-sector-recorded-an-annual-growth-rate-of-2.2-per-cent-in-5-years-period>

¹¹⁰ CEIC. (n.d.). Malaysia employment - female: Skilled agricultural & fishery workers. Retrieved from <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/malaysia/labour-force-survey-employment-by-sex--occupation/employment-female-skilled-agricultural--fishery-workers>

who control assets are likely to favour farms that include food crops that ensure food security for the family, compared to men who would prefer cash crops.¹¹¹

Food security in this regard is seen to have implications for malnutrition. The 2022 Global Nutrition Report's review of Malaysia found no progress in addressing anaemia, affecting 32 percent of women aged 15-49 and causing low birth weight in 11.3 percent of infants.

A further growing concern seen in the same report is the rising rate of stunting at 21.8 percent of children under 5 or wasting in 9.5 per cent of children under 5.¹¹² The stunting process has also been found to begin in the uterus. If the stunted child is a girl, the process may be perpetuated causing an intergenerational effect.¹¹³ The long-term effect of stunting is also seen in diminished cognitive and physical development; reduced productive capacity and poor health.¹¹⁴ The World Health Organisation has warned that stunting can be an enormous drain on economic productivity and growth;¹¹⁵ where economists estimate that stunting can reduce GDP by up to 3 percent.

Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agriculture sector and for society. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4 percent, which could, in turn, reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 percent.¹¹⁶



- Seeing positive global outcomes when gender is considered, will gender be mainstreamed into the National Food Security and National Agrofood Policies?
- What policies and safeguards will be in place to ensure that produce and food across all the agricultural and agro-food initiatives to increase production and enable income generation are of high quality, safe, nutritious, accessible, and affordable? What regulations are in place to ensure safe pesticide application guidelines?
- What monitoring and regulatory systems will be in place to ensure that people are accessing sufficient levels of food that also promote well-being and prevent illness and disease?
- What strategies will the government be undertaking to address the rising maternal malnutrition and child stunting rate in the country? Action plans of other countries suggest formulating a comprehensive strategy for women's nutrition (adolescents and women of reproductive age) and its linkages with broader existing health delivery structures.

¹¹¹ Asian Development Bank. (2013). Gender equality and food security: Women's empowerment as a tool against hunger. Retrieved from <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/30315/gender-equality-and-food-security.pdf>

¹¹² Global Nutrition Report. (n.d.). Malaysia: The burden of malnutrition at a glance. Retrieved from <https://globalnutritionreport.org/resources/nutrition-profiles/asia/south-eastern-asia/malaysia/>

¹¹³ Bose, A. (2018). Let us talk about stunting. *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, 64(3), 174-175. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tropej/fmx104>

¹¹⁴ UNICEF. (2013). The state of the world's children 2013: Children with disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/media/84886/file/SOWC-2013.pdf>

¹¹⁵ World Health Organization. (2014). Global nutrition targets 2025: Stunting policy brief. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-NMH-NHD-14.3>

¹¹⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2011). The state of food and agriculture. Retrieved from <https://www.fao.org/3/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>

Measure 11: Ensuring Harmony and Unity

Sports

Improving sports facilities | Organising leisure and healthy lifestyle Fit@Komuniti for all ages in Projek Perumahan Rakyat (Public Housing)

Malaysia's target is to become a "Sporting Nation" by 2025, which would be indicated by a Malaysia Sports Culture Index (IBSM) score of over 75 percent.¹¹⁷ Achieving so ensures improved population health and promotes sports as an industry for work opportunities. In addition to that, sports are an important tool for promoting social inclusion and community resilience through fostering positive values such as teamwork and leadership.¹¹⁸ Sporting programmes also tend to become safe spaces that provide a positive outlet for expression.

The community-based fitness programmes at local public housing areas, which are open to all ages, can create a culture of wellness in the community and foster a spirit of unity.



- The Ministry of Sports recently issued its Safe Sport Code with guidelines on a safe environment for all parties in handling harassment and violence including handling complaints about sexual harassment in the sports industry. Will adequate budget allocations be given in Budget 2024 to support the awareness raising and capacity building in the rollout of the SSC?
- The Malaysian participation in the SEA Games in 2023 saw 403 men and 274 women whereas in the 2023 Asian Games, the contingent included 189 men and 100 women. Has a gender analysis been conducted to understand why women fall short in numbers compared to men in sports?

It is encouraging that the government's allocation for sports appears to promote private-public sector collaboration to ensure that sports programmes can be run sustainably for communities to thrive.

There are also calls for the government to provide an even larger allocation to present Malaysia as an attractive location to host international-level sports events, further boosting the nation's economy.¹¹⁹

The allocation for improving sports facilities has an opportunity to (re)design the facilities that are accessible, safe, and adapted to all; and offer equal sporting opportunities by granting equal access to safe, affordable, and adapted sports facilities to encourage the participation of women and men; boys and girls from all sections of the population.



- Will the allocation expenses cover the universal design of sports facilities?

¹¹⁷ Bernama. (2022, October 1). Ministry targets Malaysia becoming 'Sporting Nation' by 2025 [NSTTV]. *News Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2022/10/836232/ministry-targets-malaysia-becoming-sporting-nation-2025-nsttv>

¹¹⁸ UNDP Malaysia. (2023). Sports as a peacebuilding tool: Enhancing resilience, encouraging inclusion. Retrieved from <https://www.undp.org/malaysia/blog/sports-peacebuilding-tool-enhancing-resilience-encouraging-inclusion>

¹¹⁹ Bernama. (2022, October 3). Budget 2023: Hoping for new shift towards 'Sporting Nation' 2025. *Astro Awani*. Retrieved from <https://www.astroawani.com/berita-malaysia/budget-2023-hoping-new-shift-towards-sporting-nation-2025-383991>

■ Measure 12: Providing Quality Basic Amenities

Education

Conducive and safe school learning space | School maintenance and repair work | Upgrade buildings and infrastructure in 380 dilapidated schools, primarily in Sabah and Sarawak | Replace worn-out dormitory and classroom furniture and equipment | Construction of seven new schools

The Education Ministry received the largest budget with RM52.6m in Budget 2023. It has consistently reported a high educational attainment with a larger proportion of girls to boys at primary, secondary and tertiary. However, Malaysia continues to face challenges in delivering quality educational outcomes with several areas of concern including dropouts, dilapidated schools, filthy and unusable toilets¹²⁰, access to schools for rural and indigenous groups, cost of schooling for B40 parents and bullying and harassment among students.



- How many students across Malaysia are displaced or moved to other classes as a result of the dilapidated conditions of schools? What are the conditions in which teachers and students are forced to teach and learn? What alternative arrangements which are accessible have been made for the students? (Note: this was also mentioned in an earlier section)

There are also gender considerations which must be taken into account:

Enrolment: Fewer boys are enrolled in schools compared to girls at all levels of primary, secondary, and tertiary.



- Has a study been conducted at national and sub-national levels to understand the root causes of school dropouts?

Learning poverty: The lack of out-of-school and reading proficiency is also higher for boys than girls.¹²¹



- Are the capabilities of the current teacher cohort sufficient in addressing the poor reading proficiency of students? What learning can be drawn from collaborations with organisations

¹²⁰ Rajaendram, R. (2022, October 16). Cleaner school toilets in the works, Radzi says. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/education/2022/10/16/cleaner-school-toilets-in-the-works-radzi-says>

¹²¹ World Bank. (2021). Malaysia: Learning poverty brief. Retrieved from <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/249371624612646747/pdf/Malaysia-Learning-Poverty-Brief-2021.pdf>

such as Teach For Malaysia and the experience of MYReaders¹²² in enhancing teaching skills for language?

Not in school - child marriage: 1500 children have married as of 2018, meaning the same number of children are less likely to be in schools. Child marriage affects not only education but leads to a higher probability of sustained poverty, childbirth complications and a higher risk of domestic violence.¹²³ While there is a National Strategy Plan in Handling the Causes of Child Marriage (2020-2025), there has been no evidence of its implementation.¹²⁴ To date, only two states Kedah and Selangor have amended their state legislations to increase the minimum age of marriage to 18.



- What concrete steps and budgetary allocation are there for the effective implementation of the national action plan on child marriage? Making secondary school compulsory may have a bearing on the approvals for child marriage as well as have a stronger hold on keeping children in school. When is the government expected to make this amendment to the Education Act?

Special needs: School facilities, equipment and instruction not catering for special needs continue to exclude children with disabilities.¹²⁵ There is also a higher proportion of male students enrolled in special education schools which reflects girls with disabilities missing from schools. More special education schools in urban than rural areas mean lower educational opportunities for rural children with disabilities.



- Will the repairs to schools also consider improving conditions that provide universal access to all persons with visible and invisible forms of disabilities? Will universal design specifications be included in the design of the repairs and renovations? Will an audit be conducted in schools to ensure compliance?

Bullying and harassment: Worrying is an alarming rate of one in five adolescents in Malaysia who have either been bullied or harassed online.¹²⁶ In the same MOH report, 16 percent (5,363 adolescents,

¹²² Azlee, A. (2019). Fighting illiteracy: How MYReaders' intervention programmes teach kids to read in 27 weeks. Retrieved from <https://journal.epic.my/myreaders-english-literacy-malaysia-tay-sue-yen/>

¹²³ UNICEF. (2021). Fact sheet: Child marriage in Malaysia. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/1801/file/Child_marriage_brief_factsheet_%28ENG%29.pdf

¹²⁴ Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. (2020). National Strategy Plan in Handling The Causes of Child Marriage. Retrieved from <https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Dokumen/Pelan%20Strategi%20Perkahwinan%20Bawah%20Umur/EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY.pdf>

¹²⁵ UNICEF. (2021). Impact of climate change on children: A Malaysian perspective. Retrieved from https://www.unicef.org/malaysia/media/2211/file/UNICEF_-_UKM_Synthesis_report_2021.pdf

¹²⁶ Arumugam, T. (2023, May 26). 1 in 5 teens has bullied someone, according to ministry report. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2023/05/913715/1-5-teens-has-bullied-someone-according-ministry-report>

13-17 years) reported being involved in physical fights. Gender-based violence in schools was also reflected in a 2021 NGO campaign which gathered 1,145 testimonials from persons who have experienced sexual harassment, rape or bullying in school.¹²⁷



- What data across MOE, MOH (National Health and Morbidity Survey (NHMS): Adolescent Health Survey (AHS) 2022, MWFC (Talian Kasih), MCMC and PDRM are being collated to analyse the prevalence of bullying and harassment both physical and online? MOE is reported to be rolling out the guidelines on dealing with bullying and sexual harassment and the new Student Discipline Regulation. Has the process been participatory with the involvement of students and parents? What capacity building (gender and trauma sensitisation) will teachers and staff of the school undergo? Do the related ministries and agencies – MOE, MOHE, MCD, MOH and MWFC have a joint task force to address the issue holistically with shared resources including budgets?

Mental health: Among the pressing matters affecting students is their mental health which has been attributed to exposure to violence, peer victimisation, harassment, and loneliness. MOH's 2019 National Health Mobility Survey (NHMS) revealed that 424,000 children in Malaysia have mental problems, but many do not come forward to seek assistance.¹²⁸ 1 in 8 adolescents (10-19 years) and 1 in 20 (5-9 years) are estimated to have mental disorders in Malaysia, while suicide is the leading cause of death of adolescents between 15-19¹²⁹. It should be noted that the available data may not be representative of the actual situation as most incidents go unreported as found in the UNICEF survey where 7 out of 10 bullying incidents were unreported.¹³⁰



- There is a dearth of mental health counsellors in schools, where 1:350 and 1:500 serve primary and secondary schools. Does MOE's plans of action on bullying and sexual harassment include provisions to increase the number of trained counsellors in schools?

Period poverty: Girls are also at risk of being absent from school due to menstruation-related concerns. The Kotex Period Poverty and Stigma Study 2022 reveal that one in two female students in Malaysia want to skip school when they are going through their period.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Ayamany, K. (2021, Dec 1). How safe are our schools? Study notes over 1,000 testimonies so far from sexual harassment to rape and bullying. *Malay Mail*. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2021/12/01/how-safe-are-our-schools-study-notes-over-1000-testimonies-so-far-from-sexu/2025175>

¹²⁸ Ministry of Health Malaysia. (2019). National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019: Key findings. Retrieved from https://iptk.moh.gov.my/images/technical_report/2020/4_Infographic_Booklet_NHMS_2019_-_English.pdf

¹²⁹ UNICEF. (2022). Malaysia: Country Report 2022 - Strengthening mental health and psychosocial support systems and services. Retrieved from <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/11811/file/Malaysia%20Country%20Report.pdf>

¹³⁰ U-Report Malaysia. (n.d.). #StandTogether campaign. Retrieved from <https://malaysia.ureport.in/story/573/>

¹³¹ Rusly, A. (2023, August 15). Putting a period to 'period poverty': Empowering women and men through menstrual education. Retrieved from <https://www.malaymail.com/news/what-you-think/2023/08/15/putting-a-period-to-period-poverty-empowering-women-and-men-through-menstrual-education-azizah-rusly/85333>



- Will the Budget 2022 provision of sanitary kits for girls continue in MOE or MOH's budget? What has been the impact assessment of the earlier provision? Has it resulted in an increase in girls' attendance in schools? How is this being monitored to measure the efficacy of the initiative?

While the government has expressed its commitment to address some of these issues, the data reveals the persistence and gravity of the issue.

Rancangan makanan tambahan RMT and Bantuan Makanan Prasekolah (Supplementary Food Programme in schools and pre-schools)

The government's two food programmes in public schools which target low-income household children and pre-schools which benefit all children in government centres is a positive initiative. It is well evidenced internationally that such state programmes of school feeding were seen then (and still are) as a safety net for children, especially in poor and food-insecure areas. Evidence shows that these programmes prove to be a safety net and have the ability to improve the health, nutrition, and education of children, and offset lost income for struggling families.¹³² In many cases, they can also support local and national economies and food security. What is missing in this year's budget is the allocation to provide food vouchers to public university students. Local studies show that the prevalence of food insecurity among university students ranges from 43.5% to 67.1%.¹³³ With the escalating cost of living, this situation among university students could still persist requiring continued interventions.



- How will the two food programmes be monitored and evaluated? Good practices in other countries implementing similar programmes have proven that a rigorous assessment of the costs and impacts associated with the school meals programmes was a clear priority for policymakers.¹³⁴ This is particularly necessary when considering scaling up the programmes.

Childcare and Pre-School

The RM180 per month subsidy for childcare is limited to civil servants. This is a much-needed subsidy which should also be extended to private sector workers and entrepreneurs to allow family members, particularly women, to return to work. The limit of this subsidy to households where the per capita income is less than RM800 should be increased to reflect the current minimum wage.

¹³² Verguet, S., Limasalle, P., Chakrabarti, A., Husain, A., Burbano, C., Drake, L., & Bundy, D. A. P. (2020). The broader economic value of school feeding programs in low- and middle-income countries: Estimating the multi-sectoral returns to public health, human capital, social protection, and the local economy. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 8. doi:10.3389/fpubh.2020.587046

¹³³ Mohd Jamil, N., Sulaiman, N., Adznam, S. N. & Badari, S. A. Z. (2020). Financial problems associated with food insecurity among public university students in Peninsular Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Nutrition*, 26(3), 411-423. <https://doi.org/10.31246/mjn-2020-0032>

¹³⁴ Drake, L., Woolnough, A., Burbano, C. & Bundy, D. A. P. Global school feeding sourcebook: lessons from 14 countries (English). Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/764611468197374242/Global-school-feeding-sourcebook-lessons-from-14-countries>



- Will the childcare subsidy be commensurate with the cost of living and be extended to both the private and public sectors?

The subsidy of RM0.5m for community childcare centres will only benefit the 19 registered centres under the Department of Welfare.



- What efforts have been made to increase the community-based childcare centres beyond the current 19¹³⁵ serving the whole country?
- What incentives could be provided to CSOs or individuals to provide this service?

The call to the private sector or even government agencies (Budget 2022 - RM30m) to set up childcare centres is not new. This has been repeatedly made over several years.



- Has a study been done to understand the poor uptake by both private and public sectors in setting up in-house childcare centres?

Registration of unlicensed nurseries and daycare centres is crucial in ensuring children's rights and well-being are safeguarded. In 2022, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development reported that there were 1,910 registered and 933 unregistered centres.¹³⁶

It was reported that these centres had been issued warnings.



- What stringent enforcement steps are the Ministry taking to ensure the safety and protection of the children in the 1,045 centres?

The measure to build 80 KEMAS schools can expand this very affordable preschool in the community.



- Does this measure also include increasing KEMAS' Tabika Transit centres? This is an extended after-school daycare which is affordable, and community-based.

¹³⁵ Jabatan Kebajikan Malaysia. (n.d.). Senarai taska komuniti yang diiktiraf. Retrieved from https://www.jkm.gov.my/jkm/index.php?r=portal%2Fnursery&map_type=01&inst_cat=03&id=UHZvTE4xN05WTUdRNjE5ajlhaHh2Zz09&Map%5Bname%5D=&Map%5Bstate%5D=&Map%5Bdistrict%5D=

¹³⁶ Bernama. (2022, June 11). More than 1,000 unregistered childcare centres still running. *Free Malaysia Today*. Retrieved from <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/nation/2022/06/11/more-than-1000-unregistered-childcare-centres-still-running/>

Health

Mobile health clinics with an extension to cancer screening and dental

Mobile health clinics including boat services have been running for several years and have been proven to narrow the gap of access to the serviced rural communities. With the provision of this service families in rural and remote areas are spared from walking sometimes close to five hours to the nearest government healthcare facility.



- With a growing need, private sector organisations and CSOs have begun to offer mobile clinic services. Will public-private collaborations be considered to widen the coverage and services offered to underserved communities?

Madani medical scheme and health card for B40

The Madani medical scheme and health card for the B40 is an innovative pilot initiative to provide free healthcare for registered recipients of welfare cash assistance (STR) and their dependents. The services include consultations, examinations, medicines, procedures, and referrals, according to set packages. Commenced in June 2023, the service will benefit 700,000 households (29 percent of B40 in the area, assuming there is an 80 percent uptake¹³⁷). Launched in June 2023, this public-private partnership service is being provided by private clinics in 10 districts in Kuala Lumpur; Gombak, Hulu Langat, Klang and Petaling (Selangor); Kinta (Perak); Timur Laut (Penang); Johor Bahru (Johor); and Kota Kinabalu (Sabah). In August 2023, the scheme expanded to Kota Setar, Kuala Muda (Kedah) and Kuching (Sarawak); Kuala Terengganu and Kuala Nerus (Terengganu). The government aims to enlist 700 private clinics for this programme.



- There will be a wealth of data that could comprehensively inform the government of the B40 community's health needs. Will there be a monitoring system in place to measure not only the efficacy of the programme but also collect health-related disaggregated data?
- What system is in place to ensure the awareness of this initiative as well as the STR is widely disseminated through multiple channels to reach populations who are likely to fall through the cracks within communities and households e.g. older persons or persons with disabilities?

¹³⁷ Pillai, S. (2023, September 5). FPMPAM questions 'lofty' 1,000 Madani patients monthly target per clinic. *CodeBlue*. Retrieved from <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2023/09/05/fpmpam-questions-lofty-1000-madani-patients-monthly-target-per-clinic/>

Breast cancer affects 1 in 19 women in Malaysia, where it is the most prevalent cancer affecting females in all states in the country. The worrying trend of Malaysia's breast cancer five-year survival rate of 67 per cent, is one of the worst in the Asia Pacific region.¹³⁸ Despite the annual subsidy of breast cancer screening since 2007, the National Health and Morbidity Survey – Non-Communicable Diseases 2019 reported that only 25 percent of women aged 40 years and above reported having ever done a mammogram, while 21 percent of women had done so in the past three years.¹³⁹ When diagnosed, it was found that 48 per cent were at an advanced stage of 3 and 4.

Once diagnosed, the cost of cancer care across the disease continuum becomes financially burdensome. The costs are seen in diagnosis, and treatment modality – including medication, supportive care, supplements, post-treatment etc.¹⁴⁰ Women are likely to be more vulnerable in terms of coping with the financial strain of cancer-related costs, including indirect costs. Even before their cancer diagnosis, women have been reported to be less likely to own adequate health insurance coverage, more likely to be unemployed, or employed in low-wage jobs or informal sectors, to have fewer savings and have poorer social support.¹⁴¹ Given the vulnerability of pre-existing economic inequalities, it is conceivable that women are likely to be financially impacted by a diagnosis of cancer.¹⁴² Female non-citizen populations comprising refugees, asylum seekers or stateless continue to disproportionately face struggles in accessing affordable basic healthcare; what more in cases of non-communicable diseases.¹⁴³ The economic cost of breast cancer cannot be understated; where in the US it is one of the highest in cost for treatment.¹⁴⁴ There is clearly a need to urgently consider a more holistic approach to addressing breast cancer in the country.



- The allocation for mammogram subsidy is the same as the previous year. Has the government conducted a study to understand the impact of breast cancer on the lived realities of patients across the continuum of the disease? What can be gleaned from the studies already conducted by various cancer researchers to better inform where the needs are for a more targeted allocation of resources?

¹³⁸ National Cancer Registry, National Cancer Institute, Ministry of Health Malaysia. (2019). *Malaysia National Cancer Registry Report 2012-2016* (Report No: MOH/P/IKN/05.19(AR)). Retrieved from [https://www.moh.gov.my/moh/resources/Penerbitan/Laporan/Umum/2012-2016%20\(MNCRR\)/MNCRR_2012-2016_FINAL_\(PUBLISHED_2019\).pdf](https://www.moh.gov.my/moh/resources/Penerbitan/Laporan/Umum/2012-2016%20(MNCRR)/MNCRR_2012-2016_FINAL_(PUBLISHED_2019).pdf)

¹³⁹ Ministry of Health Malaysia, National Institutes of Health. (2019). National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019: Technical report – volume 1. Retrieved from https://iku.gov.my/images/IKU/Document/REPORT/NHMS2019/Report_NHMS2019-NCD.pdf

¹⁴⁰ FNU, N., Kuan, W.C., Kong, Y.C., Bustamam, R. S., Wong, L. P., Subramaniam, S.,...Bhoo-Pathy, N. (2022). Cancer-related costs, the resulting financial impact and coping strategies among cancer survivors living in a setting with a pluralistic health system: A qualitative study. *Ecancermedicalscience*, 16(1449). doi: 10.3332/ecancer.2022.1449.

¹⁴¹ Zhou, M., Zhao, S. & Zhao, Z. (2021). Gender differences in health insurance coverage in China. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(52). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01383-9>

¹⁴² Yeh, P. T., Kennedy, C. E., de Vuyst, H. & Narasimhan, M. (2019). Self-sampling for human papillomavirus (HPV) testing: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *BMJ Global Health*, 4(3). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2018-001351>

¹⁴³ Médecins Sans Frontières. (2023). Lack of maternal healthcare puts refugee women at risk in Malaysia. Retrieved from <https://www.msf.org/lack-maternal-healthcare-puts-refugee-women-risk-malaysia>

¹⁴⁴ National Cancer Institute. Financial burden of cancer care. Cancer Trends Progress Report. Updated August 2022. Retrieved from https://progressreport.cancer.gov/after/economic_burden

There is an economic cost to mental health. Workplace mental health issues cost RM14.46 billion in 2018. WHO estimates that an investment of RM2-RM4 in anxiety and depression alone can increase productivity by 10 percent.¹⁴⁵ Malaysia's mental health figures in 2016 tripled from 10.7 percent in 1996 to 29.2 percent.¹⁴⁶ The pandemic's devastating impact also affected the overall mental health of the population bringing the issue to the fore. In a global study, 31 percent of European and 33 percent of Asian respondents felt the stigma around mental health issues had declined since the pandemic.¹⁴⁷ The government's NHMS survey revealed the highest prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents 16-19 years. In 2022, a survey on mental health found that 84 percent of respondents expressed a prioritisation of mental health.¹⁴⁸ However, the number of mental health care professionals is worryingly low with a ratio of 1 psychiatrist per 100,000, and only 15 clinical psychologists were employed in the public health service sector in 2018.

Women suffer higher levels of stress and anxiety at 54 percent compared to 49 percent of men as reported by a survey conducted in 2022.¹⁴⁹

With such a high risk to population well-being and human capital performance, the overall budget for mental health seems dismal. WHO indicates global government spending at 2 percent. The Madani Budget has allocated RM34.5 million (0.10 percent) of the overall health budget for mental health. Singapore in 2022 allocated 6 percent¹⁵⁰, while the Philippines apportioned 3 percent in its 2019-2023 health plan. Low levels of recognition and access to care for depression and another common mental disorder, anxiety, result in a global economic loss of a trillion US dollars every year.¹⁵¹



- What efforts are being made to institute both prevention and intervention initiatives to remove the social stigma on mental health; and raise greater awareness on mental health and stress coping strategies in schools, workplace and at the societal levels?

¹⁴⁵ Relate Mental Health Malaysia. (2020). Workplace mental health: The business costs. Retrieved from https://relate.com.my/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WorkplaceMentalHealth_FA_17022020_BW.pdf

¹⁴⁶ Chua, S. N. (2020). *The Lancet*, 7(4), e23. The economic cost of mental disorders in Malaysia. Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpsy/PIIS2215-0366\(20\)30091-2.pdf](https://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lanpsy/PIIS2215-0366(20)30091-2.pdf)

¹⁴⁷ AXA. (2022). *Study suggests a mental-health silver lining to the pandemic: a boost to people's resilience in Asia* [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://www.axa.com.hk/en/article/axa-mind-health-study>

¹⁴⁸ Mohamad Zailani, S. H. (2023, July 13). Prioritise mental healthcare for overall well-being. *The Sun Daily*. Retrieved from <https://www.thesundaily.my/opinion/prioritise-mental-healthcare-for-overall-well-being-CA11222011>

¹⁴⁹ Statista. (2022). Share of people suffering from higher level of stress or anxiety during the past year in Malaysia as of May 2022, by gender. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1322300/malaysia-share-of-people-feeling-more-stressed-or-anxious-by-gender/>

¹⁵⁰ Ministry of Health Singapore. (2023). Expenditure on mental health promotion prevention and treatment. Retrieved from <https://www.moh.gov.sg/news-highlights/details/expenditure-on-mental-health-promotion-prevention-and-treatment>

¹⁵¹ World Health Organization. (2018). Mental health: massive scale-up of resources needed if global targets are to be met. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-06-2018-mental-health-massive-scale-up-of-resources-needed-if-global-targets-are-to-be-met>

Women

Women's Leadership

Special training programme by the Securities Commission to enhance skills, identify and increase the number of qualified women to be appointed as Board members.

The number of women in leadership positions is arguably the litmus test of a country's progress in its trajectory towards gender equality. 12 years after the implementation of the policy in 2011¹⁵², women's presence on corporate boards reached new heights in July 2023 when it was reported that women occupied 30.6 percent of board seats of the top 100 public listed companies (PLCs) and 25 percent of seats of all PLCs on Bursa Malaysia.¹⁵³

It may be attributed to several factors including a strong policy statement in Budget 2022 which called for the appointment of at least one female director for all publicly listed companies by December 2023. This provided a strong push to the earlier Bursa listing requirements for all PLCs to have at least one woman director by 1 June 2023. These measures together with the driving force of industry champions, 30% Club Malaysia have demonstrated that where there is deliberate attention to this agenda, we achieve results.

However, women's presence in decision making needs to be monitored across all areas. Of greatest concern is the low number of women legislators with 14.9 percent in Dewan Rakyat. Not to mention women's presence at sub-national, district and community level leadership spaces. This underscores the real issue of gendered attitudes and mindsets which result in direct or indirect bias and discrimination towards women's rightful place in decision making positions. These attitudes have over time also taken a toll and have negative impacts on women's ability to navigate these biased structures and systems.

According to LinkedIn's research, recruiters were 13 percent less likely to click on a woman's profile than on that of a man and also 3 percent less likely to send her an InMail than they would her male counterpart. It was also seen that women are less likely to apply for senior (and presumably board) roles than men. In fact, research purportedly shows that in order to apply for a job, women feel they need to meet 100 percent of the criteria while men usually apply after meeting about 60 percent.¹⁵⁴

Women's underrepresentation in leadership limits the presence of female voices in important decisions and deprives girls and young women of strong role models.¹⁵⁵ For example, according to the Credit Suisse Gender 3000 (CSG3000) data covering 3000 global companies in OECD countries from 2014-2017, more diverse boards can translate into long-term value creation. It was found that companies with at least one female director generated on average 3.5 percent higher returns on equity than those with no female directors, and companies with more than 15 percent female senior managers had 50 percent higher profitability compared to those with less than 10 percent female managers.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Anis, M. N. (2011, June 27). PM: 30% of corporate decision-makers must be women. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2011/06/27/pm-30-of-corporate-decisionmakers-must-be-women>

¹⁵³ Disruptr MY. (2023). 30% Club Malaysia celebrates new milestone for gender diversity In corporate Malaysia. Retrieved from <https://www.disruptr.com.my/30-club-malaysia-celebrates-new-milestone-for-gender-diversity-in-corporate-malaysia/>

¹⁵⁴ LinkedIn. (n.d.). Gender Insights Report: How women find jobs differently. Retrieved from <https://business.linkedin.com/content/dam/me/business/en-us/talent-solutions-lodestone/body/pdf/Gender-Insights-Report.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ OECD. (2020). Policies and practices to promote women in leadership roles in the private sector. Retrieved from <https://www.oecd.org/corporate/OECD-G20-EMPOWER-Women-Leadership.pdf>

¹⁵⁶ Credit Suisse. (2019). The CS Gender 3000 in 2019: The changing face of companies. Retrieved from <https://www.credit-suisse.com/media/assets/corporate/docs/about-us/research/publications/the-cs-gender-3000-in-2019.pdf>



- Who in government is driving the agenda of women in leadership?
- What has been the learning derived from the various initiatives since 2011?
- Will the Government make another strong statement in Budget 2024 directing public, private and the legislature to make the numbers and set processes for its sustainability?

Local One-Stop Social Support Centre (PSSS)



- What has been the learning from the evaluation or impact assessment of the RM4.5 million allocation for the same (PSSS) in Budget 2022?
- What public awareness has been conducted? What outreach? Has a survey been conducted to ascertain public awareness of this service?
- What easy/safe access will the community have to the local PSSS if the victim/affected person needs to go to the centre? What first responder assistance is provided for a victim in high risk? What safe house/shelter is provided at the PSSS?
- What is the existing operational allocation in MWFCDC for Talian Kasih? Does this include capacity building for call centre operators?
- What funding is also in place to increase the number of social workers in the system? When will the long awaited Social Workers Bill be tabled in Parliament?
- What internal plans are there to strengthen the delivery of support through the national helpline? What is the evaluation of the response and support provided for victim callers?

Women Empowerment: Implementation of the Sexual Harassment Act through the establishment of a Tribunal and Advocacy Program

The Anti Sexual Harassment Act was passed in Parliament in August 2022. In March 2023 some of its provisions came into effect with others due in stages. The legislation is the fruition of 30 years of advocacy by civil society, followed by the formation of a multi-stakeholder Special Project Team by MWFCDC which included government agencies, CSOs and academics to formulate the draft legislation. Women's rights groups formed the Anti-Sexual Harassment Coalition early on to strengthen the advocacy, raise awareness and provide expertise as resources to the government. CSO consultations also extended to legislators across the Houses and the Parliamentary Select Committee on Women, Children and Social Development.

The legislation provides redress for survivors beyond provisions in existing laws including the Penal Code and the Employment Act, through the establishment of a Tribunal. The guidelines were established in 2023 and currently, the Ministry has rolled out a nationwide awareness programme. An area that was not covered in the legislation is the organisational duty in the prevention and management of sexual harassment. Currently, this is covered in part as a provision in the Amended Employment Act 2022 with a fine amounting to RM50,000 for not addressing claims of sexual harassment. It also encourages organisations to place notices on their premises to raise awareness of sexual harassment.

The collaborative endeavour thus far presents an opportunity to engage all stakeholders in all areas of the implementation of this legislation.



- Will anti-sexual harassment awareness programmes be ongoing at the state and district levels including public service announcements in mainstream and social media?
- Will there be a joint inter-agency, civil society, and private sector monitoring committee?
- What human resources will be needed in the full set-up and implementation of the legislation?
- Is there a capacity building plan and resources including experts from civil society who will conduct training for members of the tribunal, helpline call centre, counsellors, and enforcement?
- What capacity building will be conducted for organisations to understand their duty in the prevention and management of sexual harassment? This could best be a joint initiative between MOHR, MWFC, CSOs and industry associations.

2-Year Exit Policy Programme that will benefit 300 women entrepreneurs Women Business Financing Fund

The Productive Welfare and 2 Years Exit Policy (2YEP) programme is being undertaken by the Department of Welfare (JKM) of the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development (MWFC). This poverty amelioration programme promises positive outcomes in that it provides entrepreneur grants and skills training to existing JKM welfare beneficiaries to empower them through productive income-generating work and lower their dependency on government welfare. A 2020 study found that 84 percent of the participants were earning less than RM1000 while 42 percent earned less than RM500 which continued to keep them below the poverty line.¹⁵⁷



- Based on the findings of several studies, what steps have been taken by the agency to improve its monitoring and close accompaniment (support) of the participants?
- Has a gender impact assessment been conducted to ascertain the efficacy of the programme and challenges faced by service providers and participants? The learning will certainly inform improved outcomes for this potentially transformative programme.

Women Business Financing Fund

The financing programmes being offered include TekunNita by TEKUN, Semarak-Nita by Bank Simpanan Nasional, Biz Lady Bank Rakyat, and DanaNITA by MARA. These initiatives have been running for a number of years which would provide a wealth of data and information as well as learning to better inform the current year's rollout. A programme that was not mentioned in the Budget is Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) which has a notable history as a microcredit initiative. The State in its

¹⁵⁷ Jamaluddin, Z. & Mohd Ali Hanafiah, N. (2021). Poverty eradication and entrepreneurship development through productive welfare in Malaysia. *Sains Humanika*, 13(2), 27-36. <https://doi.org/10.11113/sh.v13n2.1812>

report to the CEDAW Committee referred to the AIM project's large membership of 342,887 women entrepreneurs in June 2017, most of whom are housewives.¹⁵⁸



- What efforts are being made to gather data on this segment of women entrepreneurs (including those in the gig economy)?
- What enabling features exist in the funding application criteria that would ease the application process for women / PWD entrepreneurs, particularly in terms of collateral and capital outlay?
- What monitoring system is in place to follow up with the women participants?
- Will the government be working with civil society organisations that are already working with these women?
- Is this programme inclusive for all entrepreneurs who are eligible or is it for a certain segment?
- What has been learnt from Budget 2022 which could inform this allocation?
- How will this communication reach the population who needs it? Is the government working with CSOs and grassroots networks for data collection as well as for their needs assessment?

Children

Children Development Department Under JKM to provide more comprehensive services to children.

There is little information about the rollout of this initiative. However, there is much need for a dedicated and specialised department to oversee matters that involve 9.19 million children in Malaysia.



- Will this department budget include sufficient and specialised human resources including social workers and children?
- Will the department have offices that are well resourced and with trained officers at the sub-national levels?
- CSOs have a wealth of expertise and experience in child rights, protection, and case management. Will the department engage CSO partners to bring the requisite specialisation and ready resources to create a stronger system to uphold the rights and support the needs and protection of 9.19 million children¹⁵⁹ (not including non-citizen children) in the country?

¹⁵⁸ Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development. (2022). Sixth periodic report submitted by Malaysia under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2022. Retrieved from https://www.kpwkm.gov.my/kpwkm/uploads/files/Penerbitan/instrument_antarabangsa/Discrimination%20against%20women%20CEDAW/CEDAW_C_MYS_6_8667_E.pdf

¹⁵⁹ The Star. (2022, November 28). Statistics Dept: 9.19 million children under-18 in Malaysia in 2022. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/11/28/statistics-dept-919-million-children-under-18-in-malaysia-in-2022>

Implementation of Senior Citizen Activity Centres (PAWE) and Older Persons Care Unit (UPWE)

Malaysia is set to be an ageing nation by 2035 with a projected 15 percent (5.6 million) population of 5.6 million older persons above 60. The trend is mainly due to lower fertility rates and mortality. Women have a life expectancy of 75.6 years compared to men at 70.8 years.¹⁶⁰ With the shrinking working-age population, the country is looking to see not only impacts on the GDP but also overall on the well-being of this population.



- Only 45.2 percent of persons aged 55 to 64 are employed in Malaysia, with an even lower rate among women. What measures will be in place to productively engage this age group while providing them with a meaningful income and leveraging on their experience and expertise?
- Health and caregiving for this group will be a critical consideration. The shortage of geriatric specialists in the country is worrying with only 33 in government hospitals, 13 in university hospitals and 14 in private hospitals. What strategies is the government considering to ensure this area of specialisation is adequate in training and supply?

Orang Asli

The Orang Asli forms the indigenous population residing in peninsula Malaysia. According to the Department of Orang Asli Development's 2021 records, there are 178,197 Orang Asli residing in Peninsular Malaysia.¹⁶¹ The community continues to experience economic hardship, food insecurity, inaccessible education, and poor health outcomes.¹⁶²

There are concerning data on the health of Orang Asli children and women. Prevalence of underweight among children and adolescents has been reported at 59.1 percent while stunting was seen in 45.8 percent of children; along with wasting at 42.3 percent. The prevalence of anaemia in children and adolescents at 68.4 percent is equally alarming. Another study in Pahang found 13.8 percent of men and 25 percent of women were underweight.¹⁶³



- Studies have shown that the stunting among Orang Asli children may be due to untreated water, a lack of sanitation, and a high prevalence of soil-transmitted helminth (STH) among Orang Asli due to nutrient malabsorption caused by acute and chronic enteric infection.¹⁶⁴ What research has been done to investigate the sources of water and install safe drinking water for the villages? This can be done through public-private partnerships including with CSOs.

¹⁶⁰ Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2022). Abridged life tables, 2020-2022. Updated 28 September 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.dosm.gov.my/portal-main/release-content/abridged-life-tables-2020-2022>

¹⁶¹ Mahmud, M.H., Baharudin, U.M. & Md Isa, Z. (2022). Diseases among Orang Asli community in Malaysia: a systematic review. *BMC Public Health*, 22, 2090. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-14449-2>

¹⁶² Idrus, R., Man, Z., Williams-Hunt, A., & Chopil, T. Y. (2021). Indigenous resilience and the COVID-19 response: a situation report on the Orang Asli in Peninsular Malaysia. *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*, 17(3), 439-443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801211038723>

¹⁶³ Tay, J. E. F., Ulaganathan V., Kua, G. Y. L., Adan, M. A., & Lim, S. Y. (2022). Nutritional Status of Orang Asli in Malaysia. *Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 29(3), 17-29. doi: 10.21315/mjms2022.29.3.3

¹⁶⁴ See footnote 162.

- How can the current mobile clinics and JKOA transit stations¹⁶⁵ in and close to Orang Asli villages be equipped with specialist resources to address the persistent health conditions of Orang Asli communities?
- These are persistent issues - What is JKOA and MOH's strategic plan to address these issues and how will the budgetary allocations for 2023 be utilised for health awareness and mitigation efforts?

The education outcomes of Orang Asli are a long-standing issue resulting in persistent gaps between Orang Asli and non-indigenous children. This is despite the investments into supporting the development of the Orang Asli in peninsular Malaysia over the years. It was reported in 2021 that 42.29 percent of Orang Asli children did not complete Form 5.¹⁶⁶

Factors that affect non-schooling include the long distance of schools from homes and children's safety and security in and en route to school. A more thorough analysis of the situation cannot be drawn up when there is insufficient data including on children under 7 years not in school.

The Education Minister reported that the Adult Class for Orang Asli and Penan Parents (KEDAP) initiative since 2008¹⁶⁷ is a continuous effort to address the problem of dropouts among Orang Asli children. The KEDAP programme has long been implemented by the ministry for Orang Asli parents to enable them to help with their children's learning at home after school hours. The initiative helped to improve mastery of the 3M skills, namely reading, writing, and counting, among the community, especially students.



- Is the government utilising the resources and expertise of CSOs who are already working on the education of Orang Asli? SUKA Society's Empower2Teach programme provides training to indigenous teachers who are recommended by their village heads. The organisation provides training, support, and resources for the indigenous communities to start their own preschool education classes within their rural villages. They currently run for over 250 students in 14 pre-schools located in seven locations in Peninsular Malaysia and others in Sabah.¹⁶⁸
- The Orang Asli communities' affairs including education come under several ministries and agencies. Is there an inter-agency body and strategic plan that monitors the outcomes?

¹⁶⁵ Zainuddin, A. (2022, November 12). In Ulu Kinta, Orang Asli women share insights on health care access. *CodeBlue*. Retrieved from <https://codeblue.galencentre.org/2022/11/12/in-ulu-kinta-orang-asli-women-share-insights-on-health-care-access/>

¹⁶⁶ Kamarudin, K. & Mohd Said, S. (2022, December 27). High dropout rate among orang asli schoolchildren a never-ending concern. *Bernama*. Retrieved from https://bernama.com/en/b_focus/v2/news.php?id=2151344

¹⁶⁷ Ministry of Education Malaysia. (n.d.). Kelas dewasa ibu bapa orang asli dan Penan (KEDAP). Retrieved from <https://www.moe.gov.my/bantuan-pembelajaran-menu/kelas-dewasa-ibu-bapa-orang-asli-dan-penan-kedap>

¹⁶⁸ Suka Society. (n.d.). Creating greater access to education. Retrieved from <https://www.sukasociety.org/creating-greater-access-to-education/>

Persons With Disabilities

There are 637,537 persons with a disability registered with the Department of Welfare (JKM) as of 2023, accounting for 1.9 percent of the country's population.¹⁶⁹ Since registration is not mandatory, it may be estimated based on WHO's global data that 16 percent of the population may have some form of disability, with two to four per cent experiencing significant functional difficulties.¹⁷⁰ According to the country's National Health and Morbidity Survey 2019, one in four adults and 4.7 percent of children experience functional disabilities.¹⁷¹¹⁷² The same report also found that the prevalence of disability is higher among people in rural areas.¹⁷³

Women and girls disproportionately face multiple challenges when they are disabled. According to international statistics, one in four women live with a disability compared to one in eight men and in low- and middle-income countries, women comprise 75 percent of the disabled. In employment, there is 20 percent of disabled women compared to 53 percent of disabled men engaged in the labour force.¹⁷⁴ However, there is a lack of data locally which can allow for a thorough analysis of the situation.

The state has ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which affirms its commitment to provide broad protections for people with disabilities, including the rights to life, freedom from discrimination, equal recognition before the law, and access to justice, education, employment, and health. The government also enacted the Persons with Disabilities Act 2008 providing the right to access to employment on an equal basis with persons without disabilities. This right is protected in Section 29 in which the employer has to provide favourable workplace conditions and stable employment. Any workplace discrimination can be challenged under the Act.

However, persistent barriers and challenges remain that would require a broader consideration of the design, implementation and monitoring of budgetary measures and incentives, current policies, and legislation.

Jobs with meaningful income

MOHR reported 67 special interview sessions for Persons with Disabilities (PWD) nationwide from January 2020 to March 31 2023. 1,677 PWD attended the interview sessions, where of the total, 464 successfully secured jobs, while another 566 people made it to the second round of interviews. From 2020 to 2022, a total of 1,689 applications were approved involving payments of RM12.8mil under the JaminKerja initiative. The government through SOCSO also organised Career Carnivals for the PWD group with 2,874 of them employed from January 2021 to 31 March 2023. A total of 55,634 PWD participants were assisted in reintegrating into the labour market from 2007 to March 31 2023 through the Return to Work programme.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat. (n.d.). OKU registration statistics by country and category up to 31 January 2023. Retrieved from <https://www.jkm.gov.my/jkm/index.php?r=portal/full&id=ZUFHVTB1NnJWM0EreGtwNC9Vb1hvdz09>

¹⁷⁰ World Health Organization. (2023). Disability. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/disability-and-health>

¹⁷¹ Ministry of Health Malaysia, Institute for Public Health. (2019). National health and morbidity survey: Fact sheet. Retrieved from https://iptk.moh.gov.my/images/technical_report/2020/FactSheet_BI_AUG2020.pdf

¹⁷² See footnote 140.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ UN Women. (2017). Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/Making-SDGs-count-for-women-with-disabilities.pdf>

¹⁷⁵ The Star. (2023, April 5). Persons with disabilities can secure jobs via special interviews, Dewan Negara hears. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/04/05/persons-with-disabilities-can-secure-jobs-via-special-interviews-dewan-negara-hears>



- There needs to be a concrete results-based approach to securing livelihoods for the PWD. Will the Government issue a directive in Budget 2024 to push for uptake across all government ministries and agencies to employ PWD based on its 1 percent policy? This will also require capacity building for PWD as well as a holistic approach towards creating an enabling environment to allow PWD to develop their potential in society.

Wheelchair ramp facilities at 7 airports in Sabah and Sarawak and benefit 2,300 wheelchair users who fly with MASWings | Free fare for train services for persons with disabilities and students from Std 1 to Form 6



- Has there been a comprehensive audit of the reasonable accommodation or the higher standard of universal access, beyond the provision of ramps, to allow inclusive use of airport spaces for all?

Education

The Education Blueprint 2021-2025 has set a goal targeting the enrolment of 75 percent of special needs children into public schools by 2025. As of 2019, the government has reported that there are 28 Special Education Schools, 2 Special Education Secondary Schools and 4 Vocational Special Education Secondary Schools. There are also 2,375 schools that offer PPKI (Program Pendidikan Khas Integrasi - Special Education Integrated Programme) while 5,986 schools offer PPI (Pusat Pendidikan Inklusif - Inclusive Education Centres) throughout the country. Much progress has been made in instituting the infrastructure. MOE had reported that there is a 50% increase in special needs enrolment in schools (87,574 in 2019).¹⁷⁶ Reports also suggest that 92,951 of 200,004 autistic children registered with the Department of Social Welfare in 2020 are enrolled into public schools.¹⁷⁷

The additional 50 new nurseries would enable more special needs children to have access to a conducive learning environment. A further inclusive and sustainable provision would be to increase the number of special needs trained teachers and infrastructure needed to provide reasonable accommodation in terms of accessible spaces, equipment, and technology to facilitate learning for special needs students in schools across Malaysia.



- What is the outcome of the 2022 Budget allocation of RM50 million to purchase teaching aids and improvements to facilities in special needs schools and a further RM124 million to build eight new blocks for special needs students? What database of children with disabilities was used and how are these areas selected? Has the number of students increased with the availability of these additional infrastructures?

¹⁷⁶ Kannan, H. K. (2019, September 26). Education Ministry registers 87,574 special needs students as of June. *New Straits Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2019/09/524752/education-ministry-registers-87574-special-needs-students-june>

¹⁷⁷ Mohd Suhaimi, A. (2023, February 22). Need for affordable autistic childcare services. *The Sun Daily*. Retrieved from <https://www.thesundaily.my/opinion/need-for-affordable-autistic-childcare-services-EB10667399>

- Where will the new nurseries be located and what are the plans to build sufficient schools for disabled students? Will there be sufficient trained teachers for these schools?
- Will there be fare-free allocations for chaperones of disabled children?
- How much of these allocations will also be used to raise awareness of the public and increase the number of special needs teachers? Children with disabilities are usually hidden, stigmatised, and marginalised. A UNICEF survey revealed that 1 in 3 persons in Malaysia feel that children with disabilities should be kept hidden and 43 percent feel that children with disabilities would be disruptive in mainstream class.

Tax Relief

The tax relief, the scope which covers rehabilitation treatment costs for children with learning disabilities such as autism, down syndrome, and special learning disabilities up to RM4,000 is welcomed as an acknowledgement of the associated costs incurred by families with children with learning disabilities. However, the wider costs for health and rehabilitation, education, and care for PWD can be burdensome for many households. In an earlier study, it was found that the extra costs of disability for households containing at least one person with disabilities may take up 27.5% of monthly income.¹⁷⁸



- Will the Government assess more comprehensively the needs of PWD and their families to provide for them equitably?

Health

According to UN Women's global studies on disability, women, including adolescent and young women, with disabilities continue to face numerous barriers to accessing health services; they receive less screening for breast and cervical cancer than women without disabilities due to a lack of targeted health promotion and prevention campaigns, and a lack of appropriate physical accommodations. Even when services are available, environmental, financial, attitudinal, and physical barriers, as well as information barriers to accessing the knowledge required to demand their rights to access stigma-free and suitable health services persist.^{179/180}



- Have studies been conducted in Malaysia on the full spectrum of disabilities in Malaysia?
- What steps will be taken to ensure PWD have awareness of all government programmes and have equal opportunities enabled for them to access these services?

¹⁷⁸ Mohd Amin, R. & Md Adros, N. S. (2019). The extra costs of having a disability: The case of IIUM. *Intellectual Discourse*, 27(S 1 #2), 829-854. Retrieved from <https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id/article/view/1464>

¹⁷⁹ UN Women. (2017). Making the SDGs count for women and girls with disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2017/Making-SDGs-count-for-women-with-disabilities.pdf>

¹⁸⁰ OKU Rights Matter Project. (n.d.). Women and girls with disabilities. Retrieved from <https://www.okurightsmatter.com/women-and-girls-with-disabilities>

The measures involve the expansion of the tax deduction for companies employing inmates, and ex-inmates including now ex-drug dependents and convicts. MOHR reported in April 2023 that there were 77,000 prisoners work-ready upon their release. Further, it reported that from 2021 till March 2023, 588 prisoners, ex-prisoners and inmates of Henry Gurney School received job offers under previous initiatives including Free Inmates Licence Placement and Re-Entry@MyFutureJobs programmes.¹⁸¹

Notwithstanding these efforts, ex-prisoners continue to face barriers to reintegrating into society and this may be attributed to societal stigma, low skills and lack of self-efficacy.¹⁸² Naturally, there are barriers faced by ex-offenders which studies have shown generally consist of their self-efficacy attitude or job-related skills which may be addressed by pre-release employment preparation programmes.¹⁸³ However, they also face various forms of discrimination including gender and other types of offences. Furthermore, other real challenges loom over ex-convicts such as financial stability, housing arrangements, societal stigma, mental health or even being drawn back to crime.¹⁸⁴



- What is the sex-disaggregated data on the number of prisoners who are job-ready, received job offers and are in employment? There is no available sex-disaggregated data to provide a clearer picture of the challenges different groups of women and men may have in securing employment. This will also inform the capacity building needs of these groups as well as necessary interventions to enable better uptake by the private sector.
- What support systems are in place for ex-convicts such as halfway homes and prison or social welfare caseworkers to help ease their transition and reintegration into work and society?
- While prison facilities are being upgraded and prisoner medical well-being is being looked into, are similar considerations being considered for the immigration detention centres which have been reported to be overcrowded with poor facilities, and lack of medical access putting detained children, women, and men at great risk? The matter has been raised repeatedly as an urgent concern by CSOs and Human Rights Institutions (HRIs) including the conditions which led to the death of 150 foreigners (including seven children and 25 women) in detention in 2022.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ The Star. (2023, April 6). 15,000 ex-prisoners, inmates targeted to get jobs this year, says Sivakumar. *The Star*. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2023/04/06/15000-ex-prisoners-inmates-targeted-to-get-jobs-this-year-says-sivakumar>

¹⁸² Nee, W. Y., Singh, J. & Kularajasingam, J. (2022). Exploring the perceptions of Malaysian employers towards hiring ex-offenders. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance*, 12(3). doi: 10.5296/jpag.v12i3.20216

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Jasni, M. A., Abu Bakar AH, S. H., Mohd Yusoff, J. Z., Md. Shahid, K., Omar, N. & Azman, Z. (2019). The need of more halfway houses as transit to reduce homelessness amongst former prisoners in Malaysia. *Geografi*, 7(1), 33-54. Retrieved from <https://ejournal.upsi.edu.my/index.php/GEOG/article/download/3097/2116/7622>

¹⁸⁵ Al Jazeera. (2023, February 23). Malaysia pressed to probe deaths of 150 foreigners in detention. *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/23/malaysia-pressed-to-probe-deaths-of-150-foreigners-in-detention>

Forward-Looking

While there may be a rising consciousness of the inequality gap and the need to address not only poverty but the overall well-being of the people of the nation, the actual impacts of the many measures of Budget 2023 are not evident. The quantitative measurement of beneficiaries needs to be weighed against how their lives have improved, remained status quo or regressed. What complementary or conflicting factors including social forces contributed to their current situation? What disaggregated data have been gathered to understand their realities; beyond ticking boxes of receipt of services, grants, and employment? All these are subsumed in the considerations of a gender-responsive budgeting process.

Looking ahead to Budget 2024, the bold and honest reflections of the Government during the launch of the MADANI Economy, hold hope of an improved governance and people-centred system,

"we need to leverage on our inherent strengths and create new opportunities...with collective effort and respect for different views..."

"These strategies require an all-of-Malaysia approach to succeed..."

"We cannot continue on this downward trajectory - not only do we have to do things better, but we also have to do better things. What worked in our past may no longer work today. We have to do things differently. We have to do difficult things..."

"Good governance and delivery provide the foundation to rebuild trust, in order to sustain the support and collective action for the transformation by all stakeholders"

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