1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Malaysia is a developing multiracial country with a population of 24.92 million people living in peace and harmony. The population is expected to increase to 27.8 million in 2010 and 33.4 million by the year 2020. About 33 per cent of the population comprise those in the 0 – 14 years, 63 per cent in the 15 – 64 years while 4 per cent comprise of those aged 65 years and above. The percentage of older persons is expected to increase from 7.3 per cent in 2010 to 9.5 per cent in 2020. Life expectancy for older women is at 75.5 years while for older men at 70.6 years. Its political and socio-economic stability has allowed the country to prosper and moving towards industrialization as envisaged in the country’s Vision 2020.

1.2. In its preparation for an industrialized nation, indeed, Malaysia is undergoing rapid pace of development through modernization and urbanization processes that has resulted and succeeded in bringing about socio-economic transformation of the society enabling all Malaysians to gain equitably from the benefits of development and enjoy a better quality of life.

1.3. With the strong fundamentals underlying the rapid expansion of the economy, the Malaysian Government continues to accelerate the attainment of the objective of a balanced development with the overriding objective of creating a more united and just society. In the Malaysian Five Year Development Plans, presently its Eight Plan (2001 – 2005), evolves around the holistic approach of development based on its major thrusts.
among others, building a resilient nation by fostering unity, inculcating the spirit of patriotism, nurturing political maturity, cultivating a more tolerant and caring society with positive values and raising the quality of life as increasing economic resilience. It also calls for further enhancing the quality of life through improving accessibility to social services whilst developing the aesthetic aspects of life. The Plan also reiterates the importance in intensifying efforts to nurture and inculcate positive values and attributes among Malaysians through the education system, civil or voluntary organizations and the media. Social services, which includes social welfare services then must be able to respond to the social and economic needs of those who need help and support over their life span, i.e. the vulnerable and disadvantaged target populations namely children, adolescents, people with disabilities (PWDs), women, the older persons and families. Social Welfare Services must also be flexible and responsive to the pressure from demographic and economic changes, changes in the epidemiological pattern of social problems.

1.4. In the quest for development and prosperity, the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society are sometimes left behind and not able to access the benefits of economic growth and equity, therefore allowing for the existence of social issues and problems. Social problems not only resulted in stress and affect well-being of individuals, families and communities, but also brought about bigger implications in terms of negative returns to present economic growth from the perspective of increase social costs. About 1.3 per cent of the present population in the country comprise of poverty groups, i.e. people on welfare.

2. **SOCIAL WELFARE AND SERVICE PROVISIONS**

2.1. Social Welfare becomes accepted as a proper, legitimate function of modern industrial society in helping individuals to achieve self fulfillment.
The complexity of modern life is recognized. In this context, social welfare is widely accepted and became a part of modern life necessities, not something to be ashamed of and further more there is no social stigma attached to it.

2.2. In Malaysia, the Department of Social Welfare (DSW) is the government agency responsible and very much associated with providing social welfare services to the poor, vulnerable and disadvantage requiring help and support. The DSW was started in 1946 by the then British Military Administration to address social needs consequent to the Second World War. Its main concern then was to assist and socially and psychologically rehabilitate the victims of war. The involvement of work were very much remedial. However over a life span of 57 years, the Department’s role has evolved with the changing environment and needs of the time. Service-provisions had moved from remedial to provide preventive, rehabilitative and protection and care services.

2.3. Since the 1970’s social welfare concept was expanded to be more constructive in its efforts to eradicate poverty and restructure society in line with the New Economic Policy. With this new concept the focus of social welfare was not only towards individual and families but encompasses community groups and society with the aim of improving their well-being through development programmes.

2.4. The beginning of this decade saw DSW’s scope of responsibility been widened to incorporate social development towards creating a caring society in line with Vision 2020 while at the same time, not neglecting its role and responsibility in preventive and rehabilitative services. Today, DSW remains an important government agency monitoring the pulse of the nation at its grassroots in creating and developing a Malaysian
community meet for the challenges of the new millennium, due to rapid socio-economic development and increase in social upheavals.

2.5. Currently, the focus of social welfare provision is to increase the quality of life of society as a whole. The work not only gave emphasis in aspects of survival, protection and rehabilitation but also has moved to incorporate social human development. The participation of all levels of the community, government agencies, private/corporate sectors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are focused on smart partnerships and align to the call for “Welfare Is A Joint Responsibility”. It is also in meeting the objectives of the National Social Welfare Policy in providing equal opportunities and creating a caring society to meet the present challenges. Social Welfare is to not only fulfill its role in giving assistance but to provide the means and the environment to result in a caring society.

2.6. In extending its concept of a caring culture, networking and further partnerships, service provision and work practice has gone global. Assistance in the forms of finance and goods were sent to Malaysia’s neighbours in need. DSW’s expertise and co-operation were much sought after by various international bodies in matters relating to adoption, development and protection of children and in disaster management. The work practice transcends across nations now and DSW’s personnel were prepared to meet these new challenges.

2.7. Malaysia’s commitment in the international arena through DSW include the World Summit on Social Development, (1995); Proclamation on Equal Opportunities for People With Disabilities Asia Pacific Region (1993 – 2002); Convention on the Rights of the Child (2001) and the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action (2003 – 2012). In relation to this, the work practice require new approaches, new skills and new knowledge to
fulfill the needs of this new demands. Work practice too requires a lot of monitoring and responses or feedback and a total commitment is therefore of utmost importance.

3. HUMAN RESOURCE AND PRESENT WORK PRACTICE

3.1. Work practice in social welfare services for the target groups are through social work intervention. In Malaysia social work thus social work practice has always been synonymous with the DSW. The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work. Social work practice for personal enhancement and uplifting social functions were implemented through case work and group work. Social work practice for developmental measures however were implemented through community organization, community development, social research, networking and partnerships.

3.2. Under present circumstances, it would appear that social work is practiced within a very limited setting. One could be for given for thinking that social workers could only work in the various Department of Social Welfare, which is the biggest employer of trained social workers in the country today. Very few are aware that social workers are also employed in the other Government agencies such as the Ministry of Health (medical social workers), hospitals, prisons and universities. Social workers also do serve with NGOs, in private clinical practices and in the corporate sector.
3.3. Where DSW is concerned, presently the total number working in the Department are 2898 people, comprising 783 officers (259 social welfare officers and 524 assistant social welfare officers), 34 counsellors and a majority 2081 as supporting staffs. The officers are university graduates with a wide variety of academic qualifications (Diplomas, Degrees and Masters) and a small number with Higher School Certificates. The graduates are mostly from the School of Social Sciences and very few with the social work background. This was due to the fact that in the 1970’s there was only one institution providing social work training in the country, i.e. the University Science Malaysia (USM) in Penang. However, more recently courses of social work education and training have become available at other Malaysian universities such as University Putra Malaysia (UPM), University Utara Malaysia (UUM), University Malaya (UM) University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), University Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS) and University Malaysia Sabah (UMS).

3.4. The social welfare officers by virtue of their work functions in the Department are actually doing social work, therefore they are also social workers. They are attached to various areas of work namely as social administrators, social planners, and social researchers. However the majority work in areas pertaining to child welfare, disabled and elderly welfare, care management welfare, rehabilitation, probation and developmental areas of welfare, such as working with the targeted communities and involving their active contribution and participation. The distribution of these officers are widespread, from those in the headquarters to those working in the states, districts and institutions.

3.5. Training is essential to ensure professionalism among social workers and care providers. Apart from in-service training by the Department for all its staff, social workers and other support staffs have the opportunity to receive relevant training from local and overseas universities as well as
institutions run by NGOs. To date 120 have received their Diplomas in Counselling from UKM and another 20 are undergoing the course now. The National Council of Welfare and Social Development provides training for care givers from NGOs. Apart from local institutions, training programmes for social workers and care providers are also provided through co-operation with international organizations such as JICA, ESCAP, JICWELS, UNICEF and UNESCO at local and international institutions. In 2001, the Government established the Malaysian Social Institute to provide training for social workers to upgrade their knowledge, skills and professionalism in social administration and social development.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

4.1. In a country rapidly moving towards industrialization and seeking to develop its social infrastructure to support a knowledge-based economy, social welfare services and social workers are very relevant and will play an important and effective role in reducing problems in human relationships and on enriching living through improved human interaction. It cannot be denied that industrialization, modernization and urbanization also brings with it changing environments and lifestyles, attitudes, values and stress, thus requiring people to make adjustments and to an extent causing the emergence of new social problems.

4.2. The relevance of social work is seen further for out of the nine challenges in Malaysia’s Vision 2020, two are especially significant for the development of more responsive social work practices that promote social development alongside economic and technological developments within the Eight Malaysian Plan. These challenges include:
• Fostering and developing a mature democratic society, and practicing a form of mutual and consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy that can be a model for many developing countries.
• Establishing a caring society and a caring culture, a social system in which society comes before self, in which the welfare of the people revolves not around the state or the individual but around strong and resilient family systems.

4.3. In meeting the many challenges ahead and for the DSW to be relevant, being the main employer of social workers in the country, the Department will have to critically analyze herself and to develop and design her human resources for the provision of social welfare. The development of human resources should take into consideration the professional qualifications and the appropriate numbers of officers to be recruited in meeting the social needs as an outcome of various social changes.

4.4. Towards professional qualifications, presently there are 20 officers holding Masters Degree in various fields such as Social Work, Management of Social Services, Social Planning, Child Welfare, Gender Development, Criminal Justice, Urban Planning, Housing and Counseling. The DSW is now enhancing for more post-graduate degrees (locally and overseas) and three officers presently undergoing their Masters programme. The next batch of post-graduate officers are awaiting approval from the Public Services Department. This will be an on going programme of the Department to ensure the professional qualifications required by the Department are met. The Department however has not had any doctorate holder to date. In meeting the needs of social welfare services, the Department has identified and prioritise areas for post-graduate programmes. They include Social Work, Social Work Education, Social Research, Social Policy and Planning, Social Legal Studies, Child
Psychology and Welfare, Family Welfare, Gerontology, Disability Studies, Community Development, Criminology, Social Development and Administration, Psychology of Human Development, Residential Care and Gender Issues.

4.5. In another long term programme of training, the Department will continue to upgrade its training/course with local universities, presently the Degree Course in Social Work with USM and the Diploma in Counseling with UKM. In addition initiatives are made to establish networking with the 7 universities offering Social Work, to help tailor the course curriculum, establish standards, guidelines and code of practice and field supervision in social work education, to meet present social needs and demands and at the same time professionalising the Social Work course. A representative of the DSW is in this Joint Working Committee with the other 7 representatives from the related universities.

4.6. With the availability of social work courses offered by local universities and in addition to the already established ones overseas, in future the Department hope to recruit new workers especially those with social work background and not those lacking specialist professional expertise in Social Work. This will have to be work at with the Public Services Department, which is the central agency responsible for recruiting new workers for entry-level social service positions in the various government departments.

4.7. Besides the social workers as the main professional human resources in social welfare services, other professionals such as child psychologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, special education teachers, vocational teachers and medical personnel are either lacking or not available at all. Those that were attached to the DSW are mostly on secondment from other government agencies like Health and
Education, while some were provided through the Japanese Overseas Co-Operation Volunteers (JOCV). Since 1976 – 2002 JOCV had dispatched 98 volunteers who were physiotherapists, occupational therapists and special education teachers. Presently there are 17 volunteers serving the social welfare services. The development of human resources in the areas mentioned earlier are very much lacking and outside the purview of DSW. However these professionals are equally required, relevant and important to effective service delivery in welfare services.

4.8. In addition to professional qualifications, their numbers in terms of quantity and ratio should be appropriate to the services and the clients and potential clients. As it is, the numbers of social workers employed are still insufficient and a solution for this must be rectify.

4.9. In promoting and enhancing professional qualifications, continuous and appropriate training is important. This the DSW will undertake in her short-term programme. Refresher courses, “in-situ” training, exchange programmes, field visits, specialized courses and Language courses are some of the short-term training programmes being implemented.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1. In every setting where human beings are involved, their functioning and relationship should be properly considered. For example, in a production activity, while high technology is the most sought after commodity to enhance productivity, it is the people who man such machines that require high motivation in order to attain the organizational objectives. How would one manage an organization without taking into consideration of the people involved in such a setting? Managing an organization, be it a small concern or large conglomerate requires specialized knowledge, skills and the right attitude not only the business and but the manpower
aspects which form the greatest assets of any organization. Social work background would enhance the chances of success.

5.2. Professional training is a prerequisite to professional work and social workers being trained professionals are abided and guided by the principles and ethics of work practice. Besides professional training, a sense of adventure must be inculcated among social workers so that they could venture out to blaze the trails into new areas, develop new approaches and open up new work situation where social work training could be applied.

5.3. To do all that, one thing is very crucial, however. All social work practitioners as well as educators should be fully aware of things happening around them, analyze them, and follow current global thinking in relation to theories and practices and make necessary adjustments to existing structures if need be. An appropriate and complete human resource development with financial support would help facilitate this move.