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DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND IMPLICATIONS OF AGEING SOCIETIES: MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Malaysia is a developing country with a multiracial population of 25.05 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 are in the 0 – 14 years age group, 62 per cent in the 15 – 64 years age group and 4 per cent are 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 or 3.2 million people in 2020. Life expectancy for female is at 76 years and for male at 71 years. Its political and socio-economic stability has allowed the country to prosper and the country's now moving towards industrialization as envisaged in the country's Vision 2020.

1.2. As it move towards an industrialized nation status, through rapid development and modernization the socio-economic transformation of the society has enabled all Malaysians to gain equitably from the benefits of this transformation and enjoy a better quality of life.

1.3. With such strong fundamentals underlying the rapid expansion of the economy, the Malaysian Government continue to accelerate the attainment of the objective of a balanced development with the overriding objective of creating a more united and just society. Currently in its Eight Year Development Plan (2001 – 2005), the government continue to emphasize on a holistic approach in development, which among others include the building of 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**. It also calls for further enhancing of the quality of life through improving accessibility to social services whilst at the same time developing the aesthetic aspects of life. The Plan also reiterates the importance in intensifying efforts to nurture and inculcate positive values and attributed among Malaysians through the education system, civil or voluntary organizations and the media. Social services, which includes social welfare services, must therefore 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 groups namely children, adolescents, people with disabilities (PWDs), women, **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 form the perspective of increase social costs. Presently about 1.21 per cent of the population in the country comprise of poverty groups, i.e. people on welfare, of which about 0.06% are older persons.

2. POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR OLDER PERSONS

2.1. In Malaysia, with regards to the older persons, the well-being of the aged has been further advanced by the approval of the National Policy for Older Persons in October 1995. The policy aims to create a society of contented aged who possess a high sense of self-worth and dignity by optimizing their potential and ensuring that they enjoy every opportunity as well as care and protection as members of their family, society and nation. Implementation of future programmes and activities for the aged by individuals, groups, voluntary organizations, local communities, government agencies and the private sectors will be guided by this policy.

2.2. Following the approval of the policy, a National Advisory and Consultative Council for Older Persons was established in 1996 and two years later followed by the setting up of the National Plan of Action for Older Persons. The National Plan of Action focuses on an inter-sectoral collaboration and a multi-disciplinary approach to promote programmes and activities for older persons in the areas of health, housing, transportation, employment, life-long education, recreational activities, research and others so that they can lead independent and active lives. The Plan of Action also gives emphasis on developing community support system for families of older persons. This is a new iniative to encourage the care of the older persons within the community. The Department of Social Welfare is the Secretariat for both the Council and implementation of the National Plan of Action.

3. SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES FOR OLDER PERSONS.

3.1. The Department of Social Welfare (DSW) is the government agency responsible for providing social welfare services to the poor, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups requiring help and support. The DSW was

started in 1946 by the then British Military Administration to address social needs that arose after 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 58 years, The Department's role has evolved with the changing environment and needs of the time. Service-provisions had moved form remedial to provide preventive, rehabilitative and protection and care services.

3.2. 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.

3.3. The beginning of this decade saw the Department's scope of responsibility being widen to incorporate social development aimed 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. In line with this new perspective, the Department came out with a new corporate statement whereby DSW's vision is towards achieving a caring and well-being society. The corporate statement too outlined the objectives of the Department being:-

(i) To provide care and rehabilitation to the target groups.
(ii) To develop a society through attitude change and self-reliance
(iii) To create a caring society
(iv) Enhance the well-being of society through professional social development services and strategic smart partnership.

3.4. Today, DSW remains an important government agency developing the Department's human resources especially at grassroot levels to improve and better the lives of those affected by social upheavals, thus enabling them to meet the challenges of the new millineum. Development of case personnel at the grassroot levels itself poses a real challenge for human resource development policy levels.

3.5. Currently, the focus of social welfare provision is to increase the quality of life of society as a whole. The work not only emphasize in aspects of survival, protection and rehabilitation but also has moved to incorporate social 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." This 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 furfill its role in giving assistance but to provide the means and the environment to create a caring society.

3.6. In extending its concept of a caring culture, networking and further partnerships, social welfare services for older persons try to encompass every aspect of service provision, i.e. from care and protection to developmental. Older persons is one of the target groups which comes under the purview of the DSW. Thus the role and responsibility of the Department is important in ensuring that the welfare and well-being of older persons be cared for and maintained adequately.

3.7. Amongst some of the services, facilities and activities that are provided for by the DSW for older persons are as follows:-

(i) **Financial Assistance**

This is a monthly financial 'Assistance Scheme for Older Persons' @ RM135.00 per month. The criteria for eligibility includes those aged 60 years and above, have no income, no family/next-of-kin or with families but financially/economically constrained to support their older family member. The purpose of this financial assistance is to enable the older person to live among family and society members and in the environment they are used to, with care-givers either from family members or from amongst caring local communities. As of December 2003, about 12,935 older persons benefited from this assistance, amounting to RM19,716,358.00. More professional support could be advocated in order to integrate family and community efforts in social welfare for the older persons.

(ii) **Facilities for Personal Assistance**

These are support systems in the form of access to orthopedic equipments, spectacles, dentures, hearing aids, wheel-chairs and others. These assistance are a 'one-off' help and payment made based on actual cost of items requested.

(iii) **Guidance, Advice and Counselling Services** are given by social workers, counsellors and care givers where and when necessary.

(iv) **Institutional Services**

There are two types of institutions for older persons namely

(a) Old Persons Home and

(b) Homes for the Chronically Ill.

The Old Persons Home provides care and protection to the older persons in need to ensure their well-being and quality life. There are nine such Homes throughout the country and as of December 2003, about 1,829 are residents of these Homes, out of which 1,171 are males while 658 females. Meanwhile, Homes for the Chronically Ill provide care, medical services and protection to chronically older persons in a comfortable and peaceful environment. Presently there are two Homes of this nature for older persons. These Institutions try to provide professional welfare support for older persons with chronic conditions.

(v) **The National Old Persons Day**

This is an annual celebration specially meant for older persons in recognition of their contributions to society and nation building as well as to inculcate respect and filial piety towards older persons. This is one of the welfare promotion advocacy programme of the older persons for self-reliance and as a manpower.

(vi) **Day Care Centres for Older Persons**

The DSW provides various service provisions and other assistance to the older persons. However the existing services provided are more focus towards aspects of care and shelter and does not take into account the potential development and other social needs such as the ability and capability of older persons who are still healthy and full of energy to contribute their services and expertise to the local communities. As such, it is appropriate to establish a Day Care Centre for Older Persons to furfill those needs. The Day Care Centre for Older Persons is a programme identified in the National Plan of Action for Older Persons, as a community programme

which would enhance the well-being of older persons especially those who are still active and living alone when their children go out to work. This programme is seen as an alternative to care in residential care centres or nursing homes, thus allowing older persons to continue living in a family environment, with complete care and to furfill their leisure time with productive activities. To date, fifteen such centers are operational while four more are in various stages of planning. It is expected that a minimum of 30 people will be able to benefit and enjoy the facilities provided for at any one time in the centre. The Day Care Centre is another of welfare promotion of the older persons for self-reliance and as a manpower. Its day to day implementation is carried out through a smart partnership initiative with an older person related NGOs.

3.8. In the international arena, Malaysia's commitment to the older persons include adhering to the Madrid and Macao Plans of Action on Older Persons. In relation to all these, the work practice in the DSW require new approaches, new skills and new knowledge to meet and furfill these new demands. Work practice too requires a lot of monitoring and responses or feedback and a total commitment is therefore of utmost importance.

4. HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLICATIONS OF AGEING SOCIETIES.

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 lives through improved human interaction. It cannot be denied that industrialization, modernization, urbanization and lately globalisation 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. In relation to older persons, issues such as abuse, loneliness, social security, care and protection, neglect of needs of the aged, difference in lifespan between men and women and health issues, are felt and experienced by the older persons.

4.2. The relevance of welfare services 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 matual and consensual, community-oriented Malaysia 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. Being the focal point for issues related to older persons, the development of human resources should take into consideration the professional qualifications, specialized manpower and adequate numbers of officers to be recruited in meeting the social needs of older persons as an outcome of various social and demographic changes.

4.4. Towards professional qualifications and specialized manpower, 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 Counselling. The DSW is now promoting for more post-graduate degrees (locally and overseas) and six officers are presently undergoing their Masters programme. The next batch of post-graduate officers are awaiting approval from the Public Services Department. This is an ongoing 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, only recently two officers have been given approval to further their doctorate course beginning 2004. 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 and the Diploma in Counselling. The DSW also encourage institutions to review current social work education and training programmes and curricula to meet social needs including health related, of older persons continued, particularly in universities. Some of the academic institutions are currently involved in reorientating their programmes in these direction. In addition initiatives to be made in establishing 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 other 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, to provide input on practical aspects of service provision to older persons.

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. Close collaboration with the Public Services Department (PSD), needs to be established as the PSD is the central agency responsible for recruiting new workers for entry-level social service positions in the various government departments. The development of standards for the selection and employment of all categories of social welfare personnel in the public sector should mirror this close collaboration.

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, counselors, medical personnel and professional care-givers are either lacking or not available at all. Those that are 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). The development of personnel in the areas mentioned earlier are very much lacking and outside the purview of DSW. However the services of these professionals are equally of importance and relevant to effective service delivery in welfare services. An appropriately trained pool of

personnel at all levels should be develop, which include both generic and specialized services.

4.8. In overcoming these shortages, the DSW has embarked on a smart partnership initiatives by networking with the Non-Governmental Organisation, (NGOs), i.e. the older persons-related NGOs and also with the private/corporate sectors. They are very much involved at the community level, such as the Day Care Centres for Older Persons of the DSW as well as those run by the NGOs themselves. The *"Rumah Tunas Budi",* home for elderly care is an outcome of another smart partnership initiatives of DSW with the private/corporate sector. In relation to this, caregivers or carers need to be professionally trained both for institutional care services as well as for care provided by family members. Besides social care, medical help and care services are also areas of concern in establishing specialized units for elderly care.

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

4.10. In promoting and enhancing professional qualifications, continous and appropriate training is important. Training programme will also be specifically designed to reorient existing personnel towards developmental approaches and community-based care. This the DSW will undertake in her short-term programme. Refresher courses, 'in-situ' training, exhange programmes, field visits, specialized courses and Language courses are some of the short-term training programmes being implemented. To ensure that the skills of personnel in the social welfare sector are continuously upgraded, a comprehensive capacity-building programme

will be embarked upon. Such programmes will be based on a systematic analysis of training needs and will also form part of an ongoing in service training programmes.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

5.1. A major challenge for policy makers is to avoid viewing the elderly as a "problem' and a 'burden'. The social needs and concern of older persons must be mainstreamed into overall development agendas, poverty-reduction programmes and human resource development. There is an urgent need to increase public expenditure for all older persons. The goal is to have a society for all ages and the challenge is to utilize the vast resources of diverse and growing populations of older persons in the country. The challenge ahead for Malaysia is to develop creative, community-based and affordable support systems for the growing proportions of the elderly in line with her caring culture initiatives.

5.2. Thus, human resource development professionals must take into consideration when preparing their organization to meet the competitive challenges of globalization. It is necessary for human resource programmes to address past imbalances through affirmative action. A skilled, efficient and knowledgeable labour force is a prerequisite towards achieving developed nation status and caring societies.

5.3. The potential role of the social welfare sector in meeting the basic needs of communities of older persons in Malaysia requires a paradigm shift towards developmental and quality care. This paper has outlined the strategies that have been developed to reorientate personnel in the DSW towards developmental social welfare goals and priorities. The programmes, among others, focus on recruitment and appropriate policies, staff training and development and the creation of the facilitative

environment within organizations and institutions of the successful implementation of affirmative action programmes.

5.4. The Government of Malaysia continue to place emphasis on people-centered policies the latest being the National Social Policy, one of its objectives is to promote a positive environment for those who are disabled, abused, single parent and during **old age.** Taking into consideration the multiracial composition of population in the country, personnel working in welfare services must have a sound foundation of social values which include a commitment of social justice, equity, respect for diversity and for critical thinking and the application of indigenous social work. These personnel work with individuals, families, groups and communities to realize their potential to enjoy full, active and creative lives. They assist in dealing with loss and change, as well as creating social and environmental conditions to enhance the quality of people's lives. They help people obtain services, assist people in understanding the social contents within which they live and work for social change, consistent with the values of a profession. Human resource development and management therefore be critical to the achievement of social goals and should rightfully be developed by both the public and private sectors, with partnerships from NGOs, taking into consideration sufficient professional personnel to services provided and adequate or increase funding in order to provide an overall old-people friendly services and environment.

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