1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Malaysian Government has always been committed to the well-being and the development of Person With Disabilities (PWDs) in the country. Before the Second World War, services for the disabled in Malaysia were undertaken by missionary and voluntary organizations and the programmes were of protection and custodial in nature. Rehabilitation of the disabled as such appeared after the Second World War, as a result of rapid social and economic change and improvements in the health and medical care. The awareness and interest in rehabilitation programmes started in Malaysia in the early 20th Century.

1.2 Since then, Malaysia is committed to the concept of “total rehabilitation” which entails a multi-disciplinary approach. This includes medical, social and vocational rehabilitation. Collaborative efforts were restricted to four major ministries, namely the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the
Ministry of Human Resources and voluntary organizations. The thrust of
disability policies and programmes was towards the integration of the
disabled minority into the non-disabled majority. There was a conscious
trend towards deinstitutionalization and working towards normalization of
the disabled.

1.3 In Malaysia a disabled person is defined as any person unable to ensure
by himself wholly or partly, the necessities of a normal individual and / or
social life, as a result of a deficiency either congenital or not, in his
physical or mental capabilities (WHO). Based on this definition,
Malaysia has classified disabled person into 6 categories (i) Visually
Impaired, (ii) Hearing impaired, (iii) Physically disabled, (vi) Cerebral
palsy, (v) Learning Disabilities and (vi) others. It is estimated that at
least 1% (261,000) of the Malaysian population comprises of PWDs.
Currently only 132,655 are registered with the Department of Social
Welfare (DSW).

2.0 NATIONAL POLICIES ON DISABILITIES

2.1 Currently there is no specific legislation or policy on disabilities in
Malaysia. The well-being and the rights of PWDs is imbedded in the
various national policies such as the National Welfare Policy which was
introduced in 1990. The policy emphasizes on the attainment of self-
reliance, equalization of opportunities for the less fortunate and fostering the spirit of mutual help and support towards enhancing the caring culture. This is in line with Malaysia’s Vision 2020 which aspires to attain the status of a fully developed nation in the next two decade but with equal emphasis on enhancing the well-being and social stability of the people and the establishment of a fully caring society.

2.2 To facilitate the realization of Vision 2020, the government formulated the National Social Policy, which serves as the main reference for the coordination and implementation of other related social policies. The objective of the National Social Policy is towards enhancing lifelong empowerment of the individuals; strengthen social support system, delivery of effective social services, promoting social inclusion and generation of multi-sector synergy. The National Social Policy adopts a holistic approach in enhancing social development, taking into consideration the national philosophy and the various social development policies of the country. The policy recognise the role of NGOs in contributing to the development of PWDs.
3.0 INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENT ON DISABILITIES

3.1 Malaysia’s role and participation at the regional and international level has also reflected her commitment towards meeting international agenda on issues pertaining to PWDs. The well-being and rights of children with disabilities has always been given priority. To ensure their survival, protection, development and participation rights the Malaysian government ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the year 1995.

3.2 Malaysia is also a party to the “Proclamation on the Full Participation and Equality of the PWDs in Asia and the Pacific Region” and the Agenda for Action for the Asian and Pacific Decade for Disabled Persons, 1993-2002. Following the conclusion of the Decade, “Biwako Millennium Framework for Action: Towards an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for PWDs in Asia and the Pacific” was endorsed and also the extension of Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons for another decade from 2003-2012. With the adoption of this framework, all plans of action for the development of PWDs are focused on seven priority areas namely the development of self-help organisations of PWDs and related family and parents association; women with disabilities; early detection, early intervention and education; training and employment, including self-employment; access
to built environment and public transport; access to information and communication, including assistive technologies; and poverty alleviation.

3.3 To ensure their rights to education, Malaysia is also a party to various international declarations in education for the disabled such as The World’s Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (Salamanca Statement) 1994.

4.0 SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DSW

4.1 The role and responsibilities of the DSW are significant for the development of persons with disabilities in this nation. The department has provided various services to the PWDs. Services provided for PWDs includes registration, artificial aid and assistive devices, launching grants, disabled workers allowance, job placement, institutional care and rehabilitation, sheltered workshop, vocational training and medical rehabilitation, community-based rehabilitation programmes and group homes.

4.2 Registration of PWDs is important to enable the government to know the extent of disabilities in order to formulate suitable programmes for the development of PWDs. The department undertakes the voluntary registration of PWDs. Identification cards are issued to the registered
PWDs for easy access to services and public amenities. Somehow rather the DSW plan to improve on the system of registration whereby an on-line system will be implemented. The on-line system will generate information and facilitate the development of a comprehensive database on disabilities.

4.3 Various programmes and schemes are also available to ensure that PWDs continue to benefit as well as participate in the mainstream society. Several financial assistance schemes are available to help needy PWDs.

4.4 To encourage the disabled to continue working to support themselves and their families, a Disabled Worker Allowance of RM200 per month is provided for PWDs with a monthly income of less than RM750. The assistance to help meet the cost of transport to the workplace as well as other expenses.

4.5 The DSW provides funding to purchase assistive devices and artificial aids such as orthopaedic appliances, hearing aids and wheelchairs for PWDs. This is to help PWDs gain better mobility or to improve their impairment. The National Welfare Foundation also maintains a special fund to assist PWDs to purchase motorized tricycles and other assistive devices. Imported products or appliances for the usage of the disabled
persons are tax exempted. Deduction of 50% on the excise duty is given to the physically disabled persons for the purchase of the national cars and motorcycles.

4.6 Launching grant is also provided to help PWDs possessing knowledge and skill to venture into small businesses and towards achieving self-reliance in the community. The maximum grant is RM2,700.00. However, additional grant can be considered for small business expansion.

4.7 The DSW provides institutional care and rehabilitation for the PWDs who are intellectually challenged. Currently there are 7 such institutions, known as “Taman Sinar Harapan” (literally translated as Home for Bright Hope). The objective of this institution is to improve the quality and standard of living of the disabled to enable them to live independently.

4.8 The Bangi Industrial and Rehabilitation Centre is a training centre for the physically disabled. Training programmes available includes IT-computer, electronic, dress making, prosthetic and orthotic appliances. Some of these programmes received accreditation from National Council for Vocational Training. Facilities for medical rehabilitation are also available.
Job placement is provided in sheltered workshops. The DSW has two sheltered workshops and supports 16 others under the NGOs. Financial grants are also given to those workshops. The types of jobs provided include tailoring, bakery, handicraft and general services.

In line with the global trend, Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) is being given greater emphasis in Malaysia thereby providing rehabilitation facilities at the local community level itself rather than depending on traditional institutionalized rehabilitation concept. The government is fully committed to increase and improve the CBR programmes which are expected to cover the entire country over the years. Up till now, some 313 centres providing services for 8,453 children are in operation and this figure is expected to increase manifold in the years to come. Malaysia’s has embarked on a community-based programme to cater the needs of the disabled persons in the rural areas since 1983.

CBR is not only an avenue for rural disabled to have access to rehabilitation but it is also seen as an entry point for the development of the community as a whole special focus on the disabled themselves. Through the various programmes implemented and with the adoption of the multi sectoral collaboration approach, the CBR programme has the
potential to further enhance the active participation of the disabled themselves in the programme. Efforts to increase the level of participation from mere participation of the rehabilitation programme to care workers, trainers and community members will be given priority. Besides financial grant to help subsidized the costs of operations of the CBR centres, additional financial assistance was given for the upgrading of facilities and purchases of rehabilitation aids. The CBR programme will continue to be given priority and emphasis as it has proven to be an effective grass-root mechanism for increasing awareness and participation of the community on disability issues as well as enhancing the quality of life of the disabled themselves towards independent living, especially in the rural areas, who otherwise would be marginalized.

5.0 MULTI SECTORAL COLLABORATION

5.1 In carrying out the obligations and commitment towards the development of PWDs the DSW has always work in close collaboration with other governmental agencies such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Human Resources. The Department also recognizes the role played by NGOs and have acknowledges NGOs as an important partner.
5.2 The NGOs have complement and supplement efforts by the government in providing various services for the benefit of PWDs. In line with the concept of “Welfare a Shared a Responsibility”, the DSW provides support in the form of annual grants to the NGOs. These grants are meant to help NGOs to cover part of the expenditure for providing services to the PWDs.

5.3 In acknowledging NGOs a partner of the department, NGOs has always been included in the formulation of policies and programmes. This can be seen in the drafting of the National Social Policy and in the involvement of NGOs in various capacities in the National Advisory and Consultative Council for PWDs. NGOs are also involved in the planning and implementing programmes to commemorate the National Day of the Disabled celebrated each year on the 3rd December.

5.4 The Government has established a national coordinating body known as the National Advisory and Consultative Council for People with Disabilities. The Hon. Minister of Women, Family and Community Development chairs the council. The members of the council comprised of the Secretary-General of various government agencies, NGOs, private sectors and interested individuals including PWDs to coordinate and implement policies and programmes for the disabled.
6.0 EMPLOYMENT OF PWDs

6.1 In recent years the role and duties of the department have increased and it is moving towards developmental approach. With the changes, the department needs more officers who are not only trained in social work but also capable in other related works. A new division with the responsibility for the development of PWDs has been set up. This new division will be more focused and more independence to formulate policies that are more progressive in training and advocacy.

6.2 A National Committee for the Promotion of Employment of Disabled Persons in the Private sector was formed by Ministry of Human Resources. Three incentives are provided to encourage the private sector to employ disabled people. Firstly, there are deductions in respects of expenditure on the provision of any equipment to assist a disabled employee. Secondly, double tax deductions are made in respect of the remuneration paid to each employee who is physically or mentally disabled. Thirdly, there is also double deduction on expenses incurred in the training of any handicapped person. This committee has successfully helped 5,582 PWDs in various job placement. On the other hand, in the public sector, there is an administrative circular which allocates 1% of work employment to PWDs who are eligible.
6.3 PWDs who are unable to secure employment in the open labour market are placed in 18 sheltered workshops. Presently there are 812 PWDs working in these sheltered workshops.

7.0 CONCLUSION

7.1 The Malaysian Government is committed to improve the quality of live of PWDs and to ensure that PWDs contribute, enjoy and benefit in the country’s development. To achieve these aims, the Government will continue to work in close collaboration with both governmental and NGOs to ensure PWDs to live an independent meaningful lives as respected members within the society.

7.2 Although much has been achieved in the last decade, there is still much more that needs to be done. Due consideration must be given to facilitate meaningful participation and equal opportunities for the disabled persons in contributing towards the nation building process and the development of the economy with a human face. It is hoped that the National Welfare Policy and the Malaysia’s Vision of establishing a "Caring and Sharing Society" through the coordinated efforts involving government agencies, voluntary organizations and the society at large would enable the disabled community to enjoy the same rights and privileges as a normal citizen of the country.