



# NCWO QUARTERLY

Newsletter of the  
**National Council of Women's Organisations**  
*Majlis Kebangsaan Pertubuhan-Pertubuhan Wanita Malaysia*

A quarterly publication to promote the advancement of women and the exchange of ideas  
between NGOs and like-minded people

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## WOMEN'S SUMMIT 2007

### **WOMEN AT THE HEART OF DEVELOPMENT: PUTTING WORKLIFE BALANCE ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA**

There is a sense of optimism that this year's Women's Summit 2007 has finally raised work-life balance issues onto a national platform.<sup>1</sup> Dato' Sri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, in her Welcome Address, emphasised that working women need to be supported to play their part in the nation's economic development, and this must include supporting their role as caregivers. She warned that unless workplaces become more family-friendly, we will face a 'female retreat'.

The Deputy Prime Minister, Dato' Sri Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak in his Keynote Address responded by urging all sectors to nurture a work environment that enables women to be engaged in achieving national aspirations. He pledged that Public Services Department would study the possibility of adapting workplace policies in the public sector to better accommodate women's need for flexibility.

These are important ideas whose time has come. Society has changed significantly since the 1950s. Where women could rely on a trusted local maid or family member to help raise their children, today they have to rely on foreign workers which comes with its own risks and impacts. The current focus on increasing workplace flexibility is meant to ensure that there are viable options. In addition, fathers want to have more contact with their children and to share in their care but little provision exists for men to do this. Policies need to be adapted so reflect that both parents have equal roles to play in the care of their children.

These issues were among those that emerged from the Focus Groups held at the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development in the lead up to the Summit. Participants from the corporate sector, government sector, entrepreneurs and SMEs, and the NGOs raised a range of issues under the overarching theme of work-life balance. Close to 200 participants examined these issues at the Summit Roundtable with the view to give policy directions to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

The corporate sector group proposed that the Ministry develop Best Practice standards for family friendly work policies for the Malaysian context and conduct a review of the 1955 Labour Act which is woefully archaic and out-of-date.

Women entrepreneurs highlighted the various shortcomings that currently hinder efforts to grow their businesses. They proposed setting up a directory of women in SMEs, strengthening networks for women-run enterprises, and establishing a database of available resources where women can gain access to relevant information.

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## Editorial

“I only regret that I have but one life to give for my country” - *Nathan Hale (1755-1776)*.

Every year during the national day period we are asked to show our patriotism by displaying the national flag. This yearly action, we are told, demonstrates loyalty to our country. But does this behaviour show our true love for the country. Is it a real measure of patriotism?

Waving the flag, mounting it on our cars and displaying it in our windows are not signs of true patriotism. The flag is merely a symbol. If we sincerely love and care for our country we should persuade the authorities and make efforts as concerned citizens to work with them on how to solve disasters such as floods, fires, landslides, road accidents and other calamities that seem to be occurring fairly frequently. As mentioned recently, if they are serious about jail terms for chief executive officers of pollution-causing companies, citizens should insist that they should seriously enforce punitive measures. We should go back to the *Rights of Man* written by Thomas Paine (1737-1809) who said ‘The world is my country, all mankind are my brethren, and to do good is my religion’.

In Penang recently, Prime Minister Datuk Sri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi came down hard on those who continue to pollute the environment by the indiscriminate disposing of rubbish. He said “filthy habits had caused most states in the country to become dirty and ugly while rivers were badly polluted”. At the launch of the National Environment Awareness Campaign 2007 in Penang, the Prime Minister “took to task developers who were bent on cutting every tree to construct as many houses as possible at their project sites. Such practices not only created unsightly residential areas but also contributed to rising temperatures and flash floods. We can see rubbish every where in most places”. (NST Monday July 9, 2007).

The Prime Minister was concerned that if this habit continued, the country would soon become dirty and ugly and eventually it is the people who would suffer.

How should citizens help to maintain a clean environment and respond to the PM’s concerns? It is our duty as a society not to be passive, to have more initiative and forceful qualities to change the conditions in our society. For this we need to use whatever outlet at our disposal.

**Datin Zaharah Alatas**

*Editor*

*Cont. from page-1*

The public sector participants said that work-life balance is not a women’s issue but a national one. They endorsed more flexible work conditions, such as flexi-hours, four-day weeks, and working@home as long as workers proved to be dependable. Rather than leave the workplace altogether (as some clearly felt pressed to do), participants requested that the Ministry investigate the option for women to job share or work part-time. There is also a need for supervisors to learn to manage staff more productively and efficiently rather than requiring them to be on ‘standby’ all the time. While the Ministry’s efforts to improve childcare facilities for babies and toddlers, was appreciated, participants also identified a need for after school care for older children that would be going home to an empty house.

The NGO representatives took a broader view in terms of addressing the critical disconnect between individuals and the larger community. In the spirit of reviving the dynamism of the interdependent community, the NGOs proposed more support in terms of resources for NGOs and residents’ associations to run activities in their areas. One of the suggestions was setting up a Resource Bank of Volunteers and a database linking all NGOs so that they would be able to combine experience and resources.

The NGOs were very supportive of the push to establish flexible work options and family-friendly policies. They felt such policies would positively impact single mothers, who face real challenges in caring for their children. In addition, a less pressured work environments could potentially afford working adults more time to be involved in worthy activities that helped give back to society.<sup>2</sup>

- by *Capital Corporate Communication*

Notes

<sup>1</sup> The foreign speakers included Leslie Bennetts, author of *The Feminine Mistake: Are We Giving Up Too Much?*, Barbara Holmes, Managing Director of Managing Work/Life Balance, in Sydney, and Josefine van Zanten, the Global Head of Diversity and Inclusiveness, Shell International. The Malaysian speakers were Ar. Nafisah Radin, Anusoorya Themudu, Chong Sheau Ching and Helen Read.

<sup>2</sup> All this input is being compiled for further action by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development with the understanding that it will be reported on at next year’s Summit. The public can also submit further comments to [info@thewomensummit.org](mailto:info@thewomensummit.org). Visit [www.thewomensummit.org](http://www.thewomensummit.org) to view the full array of reports, presentations and press articles related to the Women’s Summit 2007.

# EPSM PRESENTS THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING IN MALAYSIA ...

*By Ms Khaw Siok Kim, Environmental Protection Society Malaysia*



*Prof. William Rees, 5th from left, special guest who delivered the Keynote address*

June was a momentous month on the environmental scene! The Environmental Protection Society Malaysia, in cooperation with Universiti Malaya and Majlis Bandaraya Petaling Jaya held a workshop on Introduction to the Ecological Footprint and a Conference and Public Forum on Sustainable Living in Malaysia (SLIM).

What is the Ecological Footprint? It is a concept about sustainability developed at the University of British Columbia's School of Community and Regional Planning by Prof William Rees and his students. It was popularized by Wackernagel and Rees (1996) in the publication "Our Ecological Footprint – Reducing Human Impact on the Earth".

Prof Rees was our special guest at the events and he delivered the keynote address, "The Eco-Footprint Challenge to Global Development". He was also graciously available at another session in the programme, "Conversation with Prof William E Rees".

The concept of the Ecological Footprint needs explanation. This "footprint" refers to the impact of our consumption on the earth's resources. It is an indicator of how much biologically productive land and water an individual needs to produce the products he consumes and to absorb the wastes that he generates. The "footprint" is an indicator of a population's demand for resources compared with nature's

available supply. The land and water which enters into the calculation may be beyond the borders of one's own country because of trade, through import and export.

Ecological footprinting makes consumption, production and sustainability measurable and thus can be a management tool for governments to plan within the limits of the earth's ecological limits.

Holding the conference in 2007 was auspicious because this year our country celebrates 50 years of nationhood. Together with economic progress, has a culture of materialism spread? So is it timely to introduce the idea of Sustainable Living in Malaysia or SLIM? It is time to pursue this goal now because sustainable development underpins the 9<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan. The conference explored the possibility of using the Ecological Footprint as a management tool for sustainable development.

The focus of the workshop and conference was on reducing the Ecological Footprint.

There was an attempt to raise awareness for Sustainable Living in Malaysia (SLIM) in individual and collective behaviour. To realize the goal of sustainability, society at large has to give up unsustainable patterns of production and consumption.

In 2001, the global Ecological Footprint was 2.2 global hectares per person. A global hectare is a hectare whose biological productivity is the global average. But the Earth's biological capacity was only 1.8 global hectares per person. (The Living Planet Report, 2004, WWF)

The Ecological Footprint is not evenly distributed among countries. The footprint in the US was 9.5 global hectares whereas in Bangladesh it was only 0.6 global hectares. Malaysia's footprint was 3.0 global hectares.

Does this mean that we can be complacent because our footprint was much smaller than that of the US?

No, it does not. The criterion for sustainability is that human activities are sustainable **ONLY IF** we do not consume resources faster than they can be produced.

Also, sustainability has to be **COLLECTIVE**. We cannot be sustainable alone. Humans are interdependent on each other and on other species. We cannot survive alone.

The Ecological Footprint as a tool for measurement and planning is very personalized. Everyone consumes.

What we should learn is to take only what we need, not what we want. The earth has enough for our needs but not our greed.

How can we shrink our footprint? Take a step in the right direction!

Firstly, consider food. Eat less meat. Meat has a very big footprint.

Secondly, consider transport. Use public transport. Reduce the use of your car. Walk or cycle short distances (1 – 2 kilometres).

Thirdly, reduce consumption of electricity. Use a fan instead of an air-conditioner.

Fourthly, save water. Turn off the tap when you brush your teeth. Have a smaller bath. Best of all, invest in a rainwater harvesting system.

Fifthly, generate less waste. Buy products with the least packaging. Use a cloth bag for shopping. Reject plastic bags.

Next, recycle. Plastics, paper, bottles, aluminium containers can be recycled. By recycling, you return used materials to the production cycle.

And, do we need such a big house?

Change your mindset. Re-assess your values and cultural practices. Does our culture sanction greed? Is a rising income our only goal? Beyond a certain level, money does not bring additional well-being. Indeed, increased wealth can bring unhappiness.

Growth and development are not the same. When you grow you become bigger. When you develop, you become better. You can grow without becoming better. You can also become better without growing. Material growth is not enough. We need balance. We need to be more spiritual at a personal level and as a society. We need to love our fellow humans and other species as well.

What lifestyle changes do we need to make so that everyone has a fair (NB: not equal) share of the earth's bounty? To begin with, give up eating as a hobby and shopping as a recreation. Reject the culture of materialism. **SLIM** down. Understand the need to change. Live more simply, more modestly. Set limits for yourself because the earth's resources are finite. Don't be just a consuming machine.

Take the **SLIM 2007 Challenge!** This is simply the challenge to take 3 out of 10 baby steps to become more sustainable in your personal life. Some examples are (1) Find ways to reduce your electricity usage by 10% this year. (2) Choose at least one day a month to eat a meat-free meal in your household. (3) Don't use your car for at least one day a month.

Visit our website at [www.epsm.org.my](http://www.epsm.org.my) to see what the other 7 steps are and make an electronic pledge to reduce your impact on the environment

And so the workshop and conference ended on a sombre note. Be **SLIM!** Be sustainable!

Millions of dollars' worth of advertising shows such little respect for the reader's intelligence that it amounts almost to outright insult.

- James Adams.

A great library contains the diary of the human race. The great consulting room of a wise man is a library.

- George Dawson

## PERSATUAN MALAYALEE SELANGOR DAN WILAYAH PERSEKUTUAN (Selangor & Federal Territory Malayalee Association)

The Malayalee Association registered in 1952 was affiliated to the National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) in 2002. Following is an account of its aims and objectives to uplift the status of the Malayalee community.

### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SELANGOR AND FEDERAL TERRITORY MALAYALEE ASSOCIATION

*by Parimala Satheesan*

**T**he genesis of the Selangor & Federal Territory Malayalee Association (SFTMA) formerly known as Kerala Samajam Selangor (KSS) is one of the earliest Malayalee organizations to be registered on 18<sup>th</sup> November 1952 in this country after the Second World War and Mr. PN Pillai was the 1<sup>st</sup> President.

The formation KSS now known as SFTMA was to cater for the social and cultural needs of Malayalees in Selangor and Federal Territory. Malayalees are those who hailed from the then states of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar in South India now called Kerala, with a language of their own called Malayalam. Malayalees have their own traditions and customs and celebrate **Onam**, irrespective of their social or religious differences.

In the 55 year of the Association's existence, it has not only seen the membership progressing to the 4<sup>th</sup> generation of Malayalees but also the entrenchment of Malayalee culture and traditions among the Malayalee community in its newfound homeland, Malaysia.

SFTMA during this period played an important role in initiating the formation of the All Malaysian Malayalee Association (AMMA) in 1975, an umbrella body that brings together all Malayalee Samajams and Associations spread across the Malay Peninsula. SFTMA is proud of our Patron, Mr. A.C. Pereira who initiated the formation of AMMA.

Our Past Presidents Ir. K. Bhaskaran and the late Mr. V.M.N. Menon were among the founding members of AMMA Education Foundation formed in 1980 and now known as AMMA Foundation which is set up to provide financial assistance to our needy children to further their higher education.

The current President of SFTMA is Mr. G. Satheesan who is the Immediate Past President of AMMA and one of the Directors of AMMA Foundation.

#### **Aims and Objectives are:**

1. To promote the cultural, social, educational and economic advancement of its members.
2. To encourage education by providing financial assistance to the deserving members or their children.
3. To provide encouragement and opportunities for the youth members to mingle freely and thereby to foster goodwill and understanding among themselves.
4. To provide encouragement and opportunities for the youth members to actively participate in youth activities organized and conducted from time to time by Federal or state Government.
5. To render all possible assistance to the needy and deserving Members and their dependents in particular and also to other needy Malayalees in general.
6. To visit poor folks homes for the disabled and needy and render assistance where necessary.

The generosity and cooperation of all our members and untiring effort of the committee members who have served during the last 55 years is what SFTMA is today.

# 'Men and Menstruation'

by *Professor Dato' Dr. Dzulkifli Abdul Razak,*  
Vice-chancellor University Science Malaysia (USM) Penang

From June 27 until August 5, Malaysians will be able to enjoy "Menopause – The Musical" at the Actors Studio, Bangsar Shopping Centre. Directed by Kathryn Conte and choreographed by Patty Bender, it promises to be a hilarious celebration of women and the change! The musical is being staged in four countries and dozens of cities across the US, UK, Canada and Australia. It is all about four women at a lingerie sale with nothing in common but some signs of what turns out to be menopause.

Apart from being "funny", the musical is undoubtedly educational and informative. This is especially so for those who have yet to understand what this vital bodily function is all about.

Last week was Mother's Day. A perfect reminder that we owe much to this one person for bringing us into this world. This would not be possible without the mother. It would not be possible if mothers were not endowed with the biological process that allows for this. It is part of nature's way of ensuring that the human species multiplies and maintains its lineage. In fact this takes us back to the days of Eve, for those who believe.

Today, the facts about the human reproductive cycle are now common knowledge. The story about the storks delivering babies to homes are more difficult to sell today. Most know how babies are made. Indeed, the worrying trend today is that many would want to experiment with the little knowledge they have, resulting in various undesirable outcomes. Of late, we heard some parliamentary exchanges that seem to indicate that a number of our MPs may be able to benefit from attending this musical!

They may come out better informed and more importantly appreciating such an intricate bodily function that nature has endowed women with. It is therefore downright insulting to speak of menstruation in terms of something as crude as a "leak".

My guess is that all these boil down to the question of respect between the genders and being sensitive to the differences between them. In a world where there is an increasing participation of women in all spheres of life, including being elected representatives of the rakyat, there is no room for "sexist" attitudes. Unless we realise and adapt quickly to these real changes, there is little hope for us to respond swiftly to the many other intangible sweeping changes brought about by the forces of globalisation, for instance.

But in reality attitudinal and perceptual changes are more difficult to bring about. A case in point is a recent study aimed at gauging adolescents' gender differences in

knowledge and attitudes towards menstruation among Taiwanese. This study published in the June 2007 issue of *Nursing & Health Sciences* (vol. 9, no. 2) seems to indicate that although almost all the students had heard about menstruation and most of them had received information about it at school, their knowledge about menstruation was not accurate. Unfortunately this is regardless of gender, though reportedly the male students expressed more negative attitudes towards menstruation than the female students.

Apparently, there may still be some extenuating circumstances that are influencing attitudes towards such a basic fact of life. Some suggested homespun taboos that have managed to survive over the decades, if not centuries, being actively circulated. Some claim that even up to recent times, women are still branded as housekeepers and child bearers, and that the phenomenon of menstruation is grossly misrepresented to exemplify woman's inferiority and unclean status.

Ultimately, such disparaging expressions or innate thoughts are a direct affront to millions of women, many of whom are among our loved ones. Hence, we must learn to respect others especially those who are "different" biologically or otherwise, at least by keeping our language civil and polite. This goes even for those whose mental processes seem to have gone through an early stage of "menopause." Indeed, for this group, the musical might do them good. Perhaps the laughter might stimulate an increase blood flow to their undernourished brains. Then, they may be more sensitive to the feelings of others.

The newspaper is an institution developed by modern civilization to present the news of the day, to foster commerce and industry, to inform and lead public opinion to furnish that check upon government which no contribution has ever been able to provide.

- Robert McCormick.

The scholar who cherishes the love of comfort is not fit to be deemed a scholar.

- Confucius.

It is essential that the student acquires an understanding of and a feeling for values. He must acquire a vivid sense of the beautiful and the morally good. Otherwise he, with specialized knowledge more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person.

- Albert Einstein.

The aim of education is the knowledge not of facts but of values.

- W.P. Inge.

## Best Practices of NCWO

On 3-10 June 2007, the Girl Guide Movement of Malaysia hosted the 9<sup>th</sup> Pacific Regional Conference of the World Association of Girl Guides and Girls Scouts (WAGGS) as well as the Friends of Asia Pacific WAGGS 3<sup>rd</sup> gathering. The meetings were held at Sunway Resort, Subang Jaya. I was invited to present a paper on behalf of NCWO entitled "Best Practices of NCWO".

To begin with, I gave the participants some basic facts about NCWO and our achievements. Formed 44 years ago, NCWO started with a few women NGOs whose leaders wanted to form an umbrella body to coordinate the women's NGOs in the country. The first President was Datin Khamsiah Ibrahim (now Tan Sri) followed by Datin Fatimah Hashim (now Tun). Today there are more than 100 NGOs affiliated to NCWO, representing various women's organizations.

NCWO maintains a very close relationship with all women's NGOs in the country. It respects them as individual organizations and only seeks to unite all them and work closely with them in various programmes.

NCWO also works very closely with the government. Guided by the idea of 'smart partnership', NCWO and its affiliates implement some of the projects for the advancement of women in the country proposed and funded by the government. All these projects are monitored by the Ministry of Women, Family and National Development. This smart partnership approach has been very successful and forms the basis of the great progress made by women in Malaysia today.

NCWO also maintains a good working relation with the private sector and, in particular, with some prominent personalities who became donors to many of our projects dedicated to improving women's lives. This equally smart partnership has proven to be a boon to the development process for the betterment of women.

Over the years, NCWO has achieved a great deal of success in promoting Malaysian women, legally, socially and economically. For example, during its inception, NCWO fought for equal pay for equal work together with other NGOs such as the Women Teachers Union. It also successfully campaigned for amendments to the Pensions Act whereby widows can remarry without sacrificing their husband's pensions. NCWO also worked successfully with other NGOs, for the Child Maintenance Act whereby employers can deduct the salary of husbands who failed to send maintenance to their children.

NCWO has been successful as a result of some best practices. One such practice is the philosophy of non-interference with the autonomy of affiliate organizations. Instead NCWO maintains a relationship of mutual respect. In this way harmony is achieved and over the years more and more women NGOs have applied to be members of NCWO.

Another best practice is to maintain a high quality of leadership. NCWO has been extremely fortunate to have

been led by able leaders, by people who readily serve the organization out of goodwill and without expectation of personal gain. These leaders are also helped by good administrative staff and volunteers.

Another important factor in the success of NCWO is its ability to harness the resources and potentials of affiliate members. Each affiliate organization has its own expertise, and NCWO has been quick to fall back on them whenever the need arises. For example, the Association of Women Lawyers has been most helpful in NCWO's struggle for law reforms and the drawing up of legal documents. Similarly, various academics in affiliate organizations have come forward to help in carrying out research, writing reports and presenting papers. When NCWO was the main organizer of the Hari Wanita, affiliates in every state were called on to organize the activities at the state level.

NCWO is well known for its promotion of racial harmony. All the various ethnic groups worked closely and in harmony. The best example of racial balance is in the post of its three Deputy Presidents. Without any written agreement, at every biennial meeting the three Deputy posts are elected from the three major ethnic communities in the country.

Another best practice is its non-confrontational stance with the government. Although some criticise this pro-government stance, throughout the years NCWO has worked closely with the government, in particular with women politicians, and has found that this formula achieves results. For example, if there is a law to be amended or to be passed, NCWO and its affiliates would do the ground work. As soon as all the documents are ready, they would be given to a Member of Parliament for tabling. In the days when Tun Fatimah Hashim was president of NCWO as well as Member of Parliament for Jitra-Padang Terap, it was she herself who took some of the laws to Parliament for adoption, an example being the Child Maintenance Act. Later on it was the turn of Tan Sri Zalina Ismail, Tan Sri Napsiah Omar and several others.

Finally, another best practice is the way NCWO organizes its activities in order to achieve maximum results. One such example is the establishment of several commissions formed after the UN International Year for Women (1975), to handle the ten or so areas of concern identified by the First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City. Through these commissions, programmes were formulated and implemented to ensure the advancement of women in the country, in line with those suggested by the world body. All the commissions were headed by able members of the affiliates of NCWO.

It can be seen that because of these best practices, NCWO has been very successful, and today is well respected not only by its member organizations but by the government and the private sector as well. At the international level too, NCWO maintains a good relationship with some of the world bodies.

*Professor Datuk Dr Nik Safiah Karim  
NCWO Vice President (Central Zone).*

## NCWO CONFERENCE ROOM

Fully air conditioned, NCWO conference room  
Available for rent:  
Address : No: 46, Jln.14/29, 46100, Petaling Jaya.  
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## Q & A and INVITATION TO WRITE

### 1. Questions & Answers :

Do send in your questions regarding women and health which should be brief and clear and we shall do our best to answer them.

We would very much appreciate news and events and activities your organisation is involved in. You may write in Bahasa Malaysia as well.

### 2. Write In :

We would like our readers to write their comments on any current issue or those raised by NCWO Quarterly.

**Do send your articles and rejoinders of not more than 500 words to be included in the next NCWO quarterly (October-December 2007) latest by 7th December 2007.**

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## What is NCWO ?

The National Council of Women's Organisations (NCWO) Malaysia was formed in 1963.

It is a non-political, non-religious consultative and advisory body for women's organisations affiliated to it.

The council promotes the development and advancement of women.

Its purpose is to eliminate the major disadvantages, inequalities and discrimination affecting women.

## NCWO VISION

A just society free from discrimination in which women at all levels enjoy equality through the promotion of their human rights. NCWO continues to be the leading advocate of women's human rights in the sustainable development and advancement of society.