

## **MALAYSIAN-AUSTRALIAN GENDER POLICY DIALOGUE**

### **Overview**

Malaysia has made remarkable progress in promoting greater gender equality, including by increasing women's participation in the economy, leadership in entrepreneurial activities and opportunities in higher education. However, more remains to be achieved with improvements in gender policy development and implementation being emphasised in the new government's comprehensive reform agenda. Among the reforms linked to gender equality, the three key priority areas are: increasing women's labour force participation; promoting the economic empowerment of poor and rural women; and eliminating violence against women and promoting respect for women. The Malaysian Government is keen to draw on Australia's experience and the lessons we have learned from developing and implementing policies and programs in these areas. The Malaysian-Australian Gender Policy Dialogue will aim to workshop ideas, transfer knowledge and build skills to help the Malaysian Government to overcome impediments that are preventing the adoption of more progressive gender equality policies and practices.

Australian subject-matter experts, who will serve as co-chairs during the dialogue, and practitioner-level policy experts, who will also participate in the dialogue, will collaborate with a researcher from RMIT to design, develop and deliver the tailor-made training activities, including examining best practice techniques in gender policymaking and implementation. Participants will consider the merits of 'proven to work' policies and programs and their suitability for the Malaysian landscape. Training activities conducted during the dialogue will also seek to produce actionable items, including practical steps to empower participants in their role as professionals tasked to bring about real and sustainable gender equality change in the workplace and the broader economy

Australia's Aid Policy, launched in June 2014, establishes gender equality and women's empowerment as a priority for development, and sets an ambitious target requiring eighty per cent of all Australia's aid, regardless of objectives, perform effectively in promoting gender equality. It is important that Australia work with countries like Malaysia, with which we have enduring and positive relationships, to support their efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through the sharing of our knowledge, experience and expertise.

## ANNOTATED AGENDA

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### SESSION 1

**09.00 - 09.45**     **Welcome and Overview: Promoting the Economic and Physical Wellbeing of Women**

- Speakers*
- Malaysian Deputy Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, Hannah Yeoh
  - Australian High Commissioner, Andrew Goledzinowski
  - Specialist subject-matter expert (Lead Australian co-chair), tbc

*Objective*

Following the customary formalities, this opening session will provide a scene-setting overview of gender policy development in Malaysia, highlighting the three core focus topics of the Dialogue: increasing women's labour force participation; promoting the economic empowerment of poor and rural women; and eliminating violence against women and promoting respect for women. The session will outline the range of problems and impediments to progress across the three areas. It will also briefly touch on success stories, and opportunities for learning, from the Australian context that will be usefully explored during the technical workshops. The session will also provide an opportunity to emphasise the outcomes expected as a result of the dialogue and the importance of working towards uncovering actionable steps to be taken forward after the conclusion of the Dialogue.

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### SESSION 2            CONCURRENT TECHNICAL WORKSHOPS

**10.00 - 12.30**     **Group A: Increasing Women's Labour Force Participation**

- Co-chairs and practitioner expert*
- Specialist subject-matter expert (Australian co-chair), tbc
  - Specialist subject-matter expert (Malaysian co-chair), tbc
  - Policy practitioner expert (Australian), tbc

*Objective*

One of the key priorities of the Malaysian Government's *11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan* is to improve female labour participation rates by five percentage points to 59 percent by 2020. This workshop will discuss the structural barriers that deter Malaysian women from meaningful workforce participation and identify mechanisms to tackle these barriers under the guidance of subject-matter experts. An identified hurdle to female labour participation is low levels of education amongst women from rural and regional areas. Through leveraging

the expertise of the co-chairs, discussion will focus on how to design policy mechanisms that increase female enrolment rates in high school and university among the rural and regional population, for example through the diversification of skills training. Australia's recent Independent Review into Regional, Rural and Remote Education and current work in developing a National, Rural and Remote Higher Education Strategy are applicable to the Malaysian context, and will be used as a basis for discussion to identify policy and programs that could be implemented in Malaysia. Another identified hurdle to female workforce participation is the lack of workplace flexibility. Following discussion of the Australian model, which provides all employees and employers with a legal framework around utilising flexible hours, participants will work through how similar legislation would be implemented in the Malaysian context (using the knowledge and experiences of the Australian experts to guide them).

#### *Format*

##### **Policy overview**

Each co-chair will briefly outline their countries' current landscape. Co-chairs will speak about the successes and limitations of current policy approaches, lessons learned in past policy development, roadblocks to better policy and opportunities going forward. Participants will be given an opportunity to raise questions and discuss key points.

##### **Group exercise**

Participants will be asked to identify policy opportunities for increasing women's labour force participation in Malaysia. They will consider current challenges to resolution and/or implementation, including knowledge and expertise gaps, before moving on to a discussion (led by the co-chairs) on mechanisms to overcome roadblocks. The group will be asked to participate actively in the discussion, bringing-in examples and experiences they have accumulated, and sharing ideas on how to overcome identified barriers.

##### **Summary discussion**

Participants will identify actionable steps they can take upon returning to their workplaces in order to address policymaking in this area, for example how to move forward with amendments to the *Employment Act 1955* to better support flexible working arrangements. Participants will consider where further knowledge and expertise is required and how these gaps will be addressed following the workshop (e.g. working with a counterpart Australian organisation, developing programs with specific NGOs in this field).

#### *Immediate outcomes*

At the end of this session, participants will have acquired a strong working knowledge of the policy mechanisms available to improve women's labour force participation in Malaysia. They will have discussed specific Australian policies and

programs that can be applied in the Malaysian context, and considered how to take forward opportunities for improvement.

*Long-term Deliverables<sup>1</sup>*

- Independent review into regional, rural and remote education for women and girls, including policy recommendations.
- Amendments to the *Employment Act 1955* to better support flexible working arrangements for both men and women.
- Adoption of policies aimed at promoting family friendly employment strategies in the labour market by:
  - reducing the burden of unpaid care (supporting child and elderly care);
  - balancing the gender division of paid and unpaid work (promoting the father’s share of parenting and parental leave);
  - developing family friendly work designs (promoting flexible hours and patterns).
- Increase maternity and paternity leave entitlements in the public sector, and develop targeted initiatives for the private sector to follow suit.

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**SESSION 2      CONCURRENT TECHNICAL WORKSHOPS**

**10.00 - 12.30      Group B: Promoting the Economic Empowerment of Poor and Rural Women**

*Co-chairs and practitioner expert*

- Specialist subject-matter expert (Australian co-chair), tbc
- Specialist subject-matter expert (Malaysian co-chair), tbc
- Policy practitioner expert (Australian), tbc

*Objective*

Women contribute significantly to local, national and global economies. In Malaysia, their participation in the workforce is growing, their leadership and management of business are on the rise, and their influence over economic development activities is gaining momentum. However, women – and especially poor and rural women – continue to face many challenges that prevent their full and equal participation in the economy. This session will utilise the expertise of the co-chairs to broadly outline the landscape of female economic engagement in Malaysia and Australia, with the aim of highlighting real or potential gender-related constraints that limit meaningful and equitable access to markets. Participants will discuss how particular policies, regulatory requirements, business practices or unconscious bias on the part of policymakers are preventing the full engagement of poor and rural women in Malaysia’s economic system. The group will learn about policies that have been successful in Australia

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<sup>1</sup> The 2019 Malaysian-Australian Gender Policy Dialogue is the first event in ongoing engagement between Australia and Malaysia on gender policy. This first training workshop will enable the development of a forward calendar of engagement to take forward agreed-upon action items with a view to achieving long-term deliverables.

and that could be implemented in the Malaysian context (using the knowledge and experiences of the Australian experts to guide them). With this knowledge, participants will then be able to make decisions about next steps – for example in terms of reducing regulation – in order to clearly articulate how to move forward in this space in the short- and long-term.

*Format***Policy overview**

Each co-chair will briefly outline their countries' current policy landscape. Co-chairs will speak about the successes and limitations of current policy approaches, lessons learned in past policy development, roadblocks to better policy and opportunities going forward. Participants will be given an opportunity to raise questions and discuss key points.

**Group exercise**

Participants will be asked to identify policy opportunities for promoting the economic empowerment of poor and rural women in Malaysia. They will consider current challenges to resolution and/or implementation, including knowledge and expertise gaps, before moving on to a discussion (led by the co-chairs) on mechanisms to overcome roadblocks. The group will be asked to participate actively in the discussion, bringing-in examples and experiences they have accumulated, and sharing ideas on how to overcome identified barriers.

**Summary discussion**

Participants will identify actionable steps they can take upon returning to their workplaces in order to address policymaking in this area. They will consider where further knowledge and expertise is required and how these gaps will be addressed following the workshop (e.g. contacting a counterpart Australian organisation, obtaining better statistics from relevant Malaysian agencies).

*Immediate outcome*

At the end of this session, participants will have acquired a strong working knowledge of the policy mechanisms available to promote the economic empowerment of poor and rural women in Malaysia. They will have discussed specific Australian policies and programs that can be applied in the Malaysian context, and considered how to take forward opportunities for improvement.

*Long-term Deliverables*

- Implement policies and programs that support rural women's entrepreneurship and aim to reduce barriers (e.g. in the form of excessive regulation).
- Improve poor and rural women's access to loans, licenses etc. through targeted outreach support and the development of 'one-stop' centres to assist female entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen cooperation between the government and non-government sectors.

- Encourage ‘gender responsive budgeting’ among policymakers to ensure economic policies are gender neutral.
- Develop legislation to protect women against workplace discrimination or sexual harassment, or amend the *Employment Act 1955* to broaden its scope.

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## SESSION 2      CONCURRENT TECHNICAL WORKSHOPS

### 10.00 - 12.30      **Group C: Eliminating violence against women and promoting respect for women**

*Co-chairs and practitioner expert*

- Specialist subject-matter expert (Australian co-chair), tbc
- Specialist subject-matter expert (Malaysian co-chair), tbc
- Policy practitioner expert (Australian), tbc

*Objective*

Government has a critical role in the elimination of violence against women and fulfilling gender equality. Public policies set the framework in which society operates. Rights – including the right to be free from violence and discrimination – must be codified in legislation if they are to be fully realised. This session will draw on the expertise of the co-chairs and practitioner expert to pinpoint the key obstacles to developing a *Gender Equality Act* and hurdles to moving forward with other policies and programs that would improve circumstances with Malaysian women. The recent success in Malaysia of amendments to domestic violence legislation demonstrates that there is an appetite for change, and this session will draw on lessons learned in both Malaysia and Australia to come up with concrete actions in the policy space that can be taken forward following the Dialogue to improve and develop legislation. The session will build the capacity of government officials to better respond to domestic violence – this is central to ensuring consistency in the enforcement of existing domestic violence legislation (a significant problem in Malaysia). Knowledge gained during the workshop enable participants to make decisions about next steps in order to clearly articulate how to move forward in this space in the short- and long-term.

*Format*

#### **Policy overview**

Each co-chair will briefly outline their countries’ current policy landscape. Co-chairs will speak about the successes and limitations of current policy approaches, lessons learned in past policy development, roadblocks to better policy and opportunities going forward. Participants will be given an opportunity to raise questions and discuss key points.

#### **Group exercise**

Participants will be asked to identify policy opportunities for addressing violence against women and respect for women. They will consider current challenges to

resolution and/or implementation, including knowledge and expertise gaps, before moving on to a discussion (led by the co-chairs) on mechanisms to overcome roadblocks. The group will be asked to participate actively in the discussion, bringing-in examples and experiences they have accumulated, and sharing ideas on how to overcome identified barriers.

### Summary discussion

Participants will identify actionable steps they can take upon returning to their workplaces in order to progress their key areas of interest. They will consider where further knowledge and expertise is required and how these gaps will be addressed following the workshop (e.g. contacting a counterpart Australian organisation, obtaining better statistics from relevant Malaysian agencies).

#### *Immediate outcomes*

At the end of this session, participants will have acquired a strong working knowledge of the policy mechanisms available to reduce violence against women and improve respect for women, and how these can be specifically applied to address the key of interest. They will have discussed specific Australian policies and programs that can be applied in the Malaysian context, and considered how to take forward opportunities for improvement, for example through the establishment of a commission or tribunal.

#### *Long term Deliverables*

- Development of a Malaysian *Gender Equality Act*, similar to Australian *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, to give effect to Malaysia's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
- Establishment of a Gender Equality Commission to undertake research and generate evidence-based policy solutions, overseen by a commissioner like the Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner.
- Establishment of a Gender Equality Tribunal, to investigate and resolve complaints of sex discrimination, harassment and bullying. The Tribunal would perform a similar function to the Australian Human Rights Commission complaints mechanism.
- Amendment of Section 375 of the *Malaysian Penal Code* to delete the rape exception for husbands, making rape within marriage illegal.
- Amendment of the *Malaysian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code*, or introduce standalone legislation, to make stalking a crime.
- Improvement of marriage tribunal procedures for non-Muslims who are seeking divorce to protect the safety of domestic violence survivors, for example through ensuring they are not required to attend marriage tribunals at the same time as their perpetrator-spouse.

## LUNCH

12:30 – 14:30

### SESSION 3

14.30 – 16.00 **Plenary: Report back from technical workshops, including actionable items**

- Speakers*
- Specialist subject-matter experts (Australian co-chairs), tbc
  - Specialist subject-matter experts (Malaysian co-chairs), tbc
  - Policy practitioner experts (Australian), tbc
  - Rapporteurs

*Objective* This session will report on the scope and outcomes of each of the concurrent technical workshops. Each workshop will highlight at least two potential action points that the participants have identified to take forward following the Dialogue.

*Format* Each workshop group will be given 30 minutes to present their report, discuss their deliberations and learnings during the workshop and seek reactions to their action points from the wider group.

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### SESSION 4

16.00 – 17:00 **Conclusion and Summary of Discussions**

- Speakers*
- Specialist subject-matter expert (Lead Australian co-chair), tbc
  - Specialist subject-matter experts (Lead Malaysian co-chair), tbc
  - Australian High Commission representative, tbc

*Objective* Following the customary formalities, this closing session will describe the structure of follow-up work post-Dialogue including how support will continue to be provided by the Australian Government to the Malaysian Government in the area of meaningful gender policy reform .

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