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**GLOBALISATION AND ITS CHALLENGES TO GENDER
MAINSTREAMING IN MALAYSIA**

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GLOBALISATION AND ITS CHALLENGES TO GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MALAYSIA

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Introduction

Malaysia has a population of 26.6 million of which 13.1 million are women. 63.4 per cent of women in Malaysia are aged 15 to 64 years while another 32 per cent are 14 years old and below. In 1995, Malaysia ratified (with reservations) the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and in 2001, the Ministry of Women and Family development was established. In August of the same year, the Federal Constitution Article 8(2) was amended to include the word “gender” as being prohibited from discrimination. Although the word “women” was for the first time introduced into the development agenda as outlined in the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991-1995), it was not until a decade later, in the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) that the momentum of gender mainstreaming gathered speed. In 2003, gender budgeting was piloted in five Ministries (Education, Higher Education, Health, Human Resources and Rural and Regional Development). Gender budgeting in this context meant integrating gender information into decision-making on policies and prioritizing resources in order to achieve gender equity. Gender Focal Points were also introduced in 39 Ministries to monitor issues of gender which arise in the work of these Ministries. In August 2004, the government agreed to the implementation of a policy of at least 30 percent women in decision-making positions in the public sector (Norhayati Sulaiman, 2007). In May 2007, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development launched the Malaysian Gender Gap Index (MGGI) which is a new index designed to measure the extent of gender inequality in Malaysia.

Without going into the technicalities of the MGGI, it suffices to say that it works very much like the Human Development Index (HDI) that is, when there is no gender inequality in a society, the MGGI takes on a value of 0 and when gender inequality is at a maximum, it takes on a value of 1. It is a composite index and does not take into account the complexity of gender inequality and other factors such as legislations and gender-based violence. Although it is based on a simplistic value of a relative gender gap, it is a working tool and a beginning. The MGGI looks at four dimensions covering the areas of health, education and

economic activity and the empowerment of women. By this, it means women in position of decision-making power.

The MGGI Index indicated that women are doing well in health and education but doing very poorly in labour force participation rate. The female labour force participation rate is 47.3 percent in comparison to men at 80.9 percent in the year 2004. Women join the labour force and drop out rapidly during child-bearing and child-rearing years and do not return. The picture is even more bleak when it comes to the empowerment of women. Out of 219 members in the house of representatives, only 17 are women. In other words, women make up only 9.6 percent share of elected parliamentarians. The percentage share of appointed senators is only 33.3 percent and in the public sector, out of 28 Ministries, there are only 3 female director-generals. For JUSA posts (top posts in the Malaysian civil service), women represented only 24.6 percent. Women make up 6.9 percent of ambassadors and high commissioners and 7.6 percent in the corporate sector as board of directors (ibid).

Such is the national picture of women's position in Malaysia. My argument in this paper is that mainstreaming mainstream women is one thing, the challenges posed by globalization is another. Women are a diverse constituency. They have different resources, power and identities. This is exacerbated by structural inequalities in society and intersected by a myriad of positionalities including ethnicity, class, age, geographical location and migrant status. As Malaysia's economy becomes more and more globalised, there will be various groups of women who will fall through the black hole of mainstreaming. I pose the question as to what gender mainstreaming means to these groups of women and whether in fact, they want mainstreaming when it has adverse effects on them.

1. Globalisation and the feminization of transnational migration

Much ink has been spilt on defining globalization. For the purpose of this discussion, I will merely use the word to mean the intensification of global flows of people, capital, technology and commodities and the compression of the world in terms of time and space. One aspect of globalization which I would like to shine a torch on is the feminisation of the transmigration of labour. Although the movement of people on a global scale is not a new phenomenon, what makes it different in contemporary times is the scale in which it is occurring. Since the 1980s, there has been an unprecedented rise in international migration in the Asia-Pacific region (Chow 2002). The international division of labour and the export of labour intensive industries from the matured economies in the North to the emerging economies in Asia meant that many countries faced accelerated urbanization as rural migrants take up newly created jobs in the new economic priority zones (EPZs) in their countries. The rapid growth in export led industrialization has resulted in an increased participation of women in the work-