

Political Will, Industry Incentives And Policies Crucial For Women's Empowerment

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KUALA LUMPUR, March 10 (Bernama) -- In celebration of the 2025 International Women's Day on Saturday, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim stressed the importance of empowering women to enhance their contributions to society and national development.

Although the government has implemented various programmes to increase women's participation in the workforce in both the public and private sectors, the lack of involvement at the policymaking level requires attention.

To achieve this, Universiti Teknikal Malaysia Melaka (UTeM) vice-chancellor Prof Datuk Dr Massila Kamalrudin emphasised the need to prioritise three key aspects: political will, government incentives for industries, and supportive policies and legislation.

She said political will is the foundation for strengthening women's role in development sectors, given their low representation in politics, with only 13.5 per cent of MPs in the 15th Parliament being women.

"Increasing political commitment is necessary to encourage more women to enter politics, including setting a minimum quota for female candidates in elections and providing leadership training programmes specifically for women," she told Bernama.

Massila said government incentives, such as tax exemptions or subsidies for companies that adopt women-friendly policies, including flexible working hours and childcare facilities, are also crucial in promoting women's participation in the workforce.

She said the formulation and enforcement of policies and laws supporting gender equality are critical, including prohibiting gender-based workplace discrimination and implementing policies that ensure equal opportunities for women's career advancement.

"In comparison, European countries that offer comprehensive childcare facilities and enforce strict anti-discrimination policies for pregnant workers have seen significant increases in women's workforce participation.

"For example, countries like Sweden and Norway have high female workforce participation rates, attributed to strong family support policies and inclusive work environments," she said.

While some still hold the view that women will ultimately return to domestic roles, she said policy changes, increased access to education, and growing gender awareness have created more opportunities for women to progress across various sectors.

Director of Ghazali Shafie Executive Enhancement Programme (GSEEP), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM) Assoc Prof Dr Mashitah Mohd Udin said the key focus of the National Women's Policy 2025-2030 is crucial, particularly in safeguarding women's employment security, protecting them from sexual harassment, and upholding maternity rights.

However, she said the success of the policy depends on effective implementation mechanisms and comprehensive support from both the public and private sectors.

"A more holistic approach is needed, including mother-friendly policies, increasing women's leadership quotas in the private sector, and establishing more women entrepreneurship support networks, in addition to strengthening early education on gender equality to shape a more inclusive generation," she said.

Mashitah said Malaysia has witnessed a significant surge in women's empowerment through various initiatives that have created opportunities in entrepreneurship, leadership, and higher education. However, challenges such as wage inequality, an imbalance in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education, and cultural constraints still persist.

Echoing this sentiment, senior lecturer at the Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Dr Nor Azira Ayob, said women's empowerment efforts should be enhanced through education and access to technical, technological, engineering, and digital knowledge.

"Artificial intelligence (AI) now allows them to work from anywhere and with greater flexibility. It also supports women entrepreneurs in starting and expanding their businesses," she said.

She added that flexible work policies and remote working should be embraced more openly, allowing women to contribute their expertise more proactively when given the flexibility to balance work and family responsibilities.