Gender Mainstreaming Process in the Public Sectors in Malaysia: Is it Possible?

Nur Syakiran Akmal Ismail, and Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan

Abstract—This paper explores the impact of gender mainstreaming process in the public sector in Malaysia. It is an attempt to see whether gender mainstreaming process is able to make any impact or difference in the organization, in the context of making policy output to be more women-friendly. Available studies mainly in the West have shown that gender mainstreaming process still encounter many problems such as lack of understanding of the concept itself and lack of support from the organizations. Using face-to-face interviews with top female and male management groups, this paper examines the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming process in one selected organization in Malaysia. It was revealed that the main contributing factor to the less effective gender mainstreaming process in that organization was the lack of gender awareness among its members.

Keywords— Mainstreaming, Public Sector, gender awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

THE participation of women in all spheres of life has been accelerated by strategies such as Gender Mainstreaming (GM). GM, which was launched in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, is a global strategy used to promote gender equality. It refers to the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. Gender mainstreaming in Malaysia was established as a global strategy for the promotion of gender equality, as indicated in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing, 1995. Competition against man is not the main reason used to propose for the introduction of GM. More likely, GM is form of approach to ensure that women receive the same benefits as the men once women's population reaches half of the world's total population.

II. WHAT IS GENDER MAINSTREAMING?

The concept of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) was proposed for the first time in 1985 during the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi. The idea of GM was brought forward by the United Nation to emphasize on development of society. It was then debated seriously and eventually was made as an official item to be implemented by countries after the in the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. Two issues that became the foci in the Conference are equity and equality. Every delegation of each nation that participated in the Conference created a Platform for Action, aiming to achieve an equality and opportunity for women [14]. For this reason, GM was introduced to fulfill this objective. Malaysia was no exception. The GM basic principles are to enhance the role of women and to delegate more authority to women especially to handle their issues of human rights, poverty, decision making, young women, violence against women and other women related matters. Therefore, a document had been created in the Conference. This is seen as the right step toward achieving this mission.

Mehra and Gupta [11] stated that the origin of GM as an answer to previous strategies that had failed to advance the status of women. GM was created to bring forward issues of gender equality in the key development activities. The formal definition concept for GM as agreed by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC):

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goalis to achieve gender equality. [12]

Based on previous studies, the authors have established the definition of GM into three main perspectives. The perspectives refer to (i) the process; (ii) strategies and; (iii) approaches. GM started with the concept of process. This is based examples showing there are a number of countries and organizations have been exposed to GM even before the concept was made known in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995[12], [7], [20], [6], [3], , [12], [5], [11], [16], [15], [2], [21].

The process involves two types; (i) process to organize , improve and develop policy [20], [6], [3], (ii) the planning, formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies with a gender perspective [12], [5], [11], [16], [15], [2], [21].

GM process also requires a strategy to achieve gender equality [12], [7[4], [10]. Furthermore, to implement the planned strategies, the implementation of GM will use a variety of approaches based on the appropriateness [13], [20],

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[11], [6]. Through previous studies, the concepts of GM can be considered as process because majorities of scholars were discussed about the development of GM. Therefore, the authors conclude GM as a process.

Various scholars have given arguments for each perspective basing on their respective studies and understanding. However, the authors have identified each perspective may actually occur simultaneously and separately. Nonetheless, the authors have decided GM should be defined as a process because it reflects the main perspective of the GM in a country or organization in Malaysia. GM as a process, will be used as the approach and strategies in the examination of the issues involved.

II. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MALAYSIA

Malaysia comprised of 28.3 million population in 2010 The percentage totals of men are 51 percent of the total population and women are 49 percent of the total population in Malaysia in year 2010. The percentage of women is almost the same with men for year 2010 and it maintain until year 2013 [17].

These backgrounds have shown that the population of women and men in Malaysia are very similar. Therefore, policies should be formulated based on gender should be equitable for both sexes. However, based on Malaysia Gender Gap Index (MGGI), Malaysia still encounters a problem in the context of gender Equality. MGGI has been designed to measure and monitor the extent of gender inequality in Malaysia. The index comprises four sub-dimensions covering the areas of health, education, economic activity, and the empowerment of women. Each of these four sub-dimensions is given equal weight in the computation of the MGGI, where there is no gender inequality in a society when the value of MGGI is zero. The gender inequality is at a maximum when the value is one. Table 1 shows the Malaysian Gender Gap Index (MGGI) for several years.

TABLE 1
MALAYSIAN GENDER GAP INDEX (MGGI)

	1980	1990	2000	2004
MGGI	0.340	0.275	0.261	0.243
Health	0.119	0.119	0.115	0.099
Education	0.141	0.064	0.046	0.046
Economic Activity	0.318	0.228	0.257	0.247
Empowerment of Women	0.782	0.689	0.628	0.579

Source:Malaysia Department of Statistics, 1980,1990b, 1991a, 1991b, 2000a, 2001, 2004

The index shows that the empowerment of women and economic activity have values close to one which may indicate that there is gender inequality in these two sub-dimensions. It shows that gender inequality declined markedly over the period 1980–2004 because of improvement actions for education and health. Because of that, the dimensions for education and health have shown that the disparity was small as compared to the empowerment of women and economic

activity. The dimensions of education and health are better because of Malaysia's policies, since its independence, have paid a greater attention in both issues. The continuous efforts have been made to improve women's health status.

Gender mainstreaming process in Malaysia started since before independence. Gender mainstreaming process in Malaya was influenced by the women's movements at the international level [8]. The women's movement became as a major contributor in the formulation of various policies related to women and gender. They impose pressure on the government to get women's right such as economic, education, political and social. They were demanded from the government through conferences, talks, memorandums, and also networking with women MP in Parliament. Hence, unavoidably, this movement has impacted the Malaysian political system hence contributed to gender mainstreaming process that impact to women rights.

III. GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN ORGANISATION

This section will expose the GM process that occurs at the organizational level. The organization was selected from the ministry in Malaysia, namely organization A. Generally, the organization produces educational services in Malaysia.

The paper based on qualitative interviews with eight (8) informants comprising of three woman and five men who hold top management at Organization A from Malaysia. Findings will be discussed to describe the actual practice of GM in the organizations. Generally, the organization provides educational services in the country. Ministry A is an organization that is selected by the researcher because it comprised of female staffs as the majority group in the organization. It is also due to its nature in giving direct services to the society. Statistically, in 2012, there were 285,299 female staff (as direct bureaucracy) as compared to 127, 241 male staff (as direct bureaucracy). At the decision making level, there were 269 male as compared to only 100 female [9].

The organization A structure in Malaysia is shaped by the political system and administration in the country. The services system under organization A in Malaysia is centralized. The Organization A is a huge organization and is divided into five levels, namely i) executive, ii) management , iii) supervision, iv) technical v) implementer/ direct bureaucracy. These five levels further are categorized into four structures, namely i) federal, ii) state, iii)districts and iv) main implementers [22]. These structures can be viewed clearly in the chart below.

This chart shows that the administration of organization A is wide. Only the executive level is discussed in this paper to show the implementation of GM through the process of decision making level in organization A. The executive group is the group which involve directly in making policies in organization A at the central level, as viewed through the Micro Political System. The Chief Secretary (KSU) and Chief Director in organization A are the core force in this level. [22]

CHART 1
HIERARCHY OF ADMINISTRATION IN ORGANIZATION A
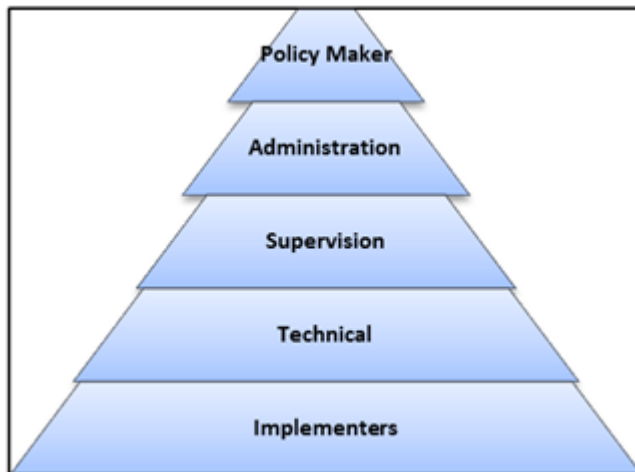
The finding shows that Organization A experiences the GM process since independence. It is influenced by the history of the nation. Issues which were raised domestically and international were displayed very pronouncedly by the mass media. In addition, there were also various issues raised by the Ministry of Women and organization A itself. This background has eventually contributed to the gender-related issues to be brought into organization A such as men staff and sexual harassment. Eventually, organization A has inspired, to a certain extent, highlighting gender-related issues and has garnered attention from the government.

The findings revealed that the GM process in organization A has been influenced by external environment such as what happened at the international level. However, GM process in organization A take place in a slow pace, because it was influenced by the behavior of actors in organization A. Easton (1965) in Birkland [19], state that a study on a system could not be separated from the behavior of its actors who at the same time move/work the system. In this organization, GM takes place because its actors are gender aware and the female decision makers are empowered. The results have shown four main elements of gender awareness were defined in an organization. The four elements, at the initial stage of gender awareness, are identified as (i) knowledge (ii) comprehension (iii) sensitivity and; (iv) acknowledge. These elements are theme results produced from analyses conducted on interviews with the informants.

Based on the finding, majority of the informants who were interviewed at the two organizations have known about gender concept. However, the knowledge was limited by comprehension among them. Majority of them have never been to understand about the concept. According to [1], they were never understand the concept because of the lack of promotion by gender focal person. The lack of understanding contributed to process of gender mainstreaming in the organization.

Some of the informant cannot understand of concept gender, but they were sensitive and can acknowledge the issues of gender in the organization. Hence, the level of gender awareness has influenced the behavior of policy makers in the

Ministry A in translating gender issues at the organization. The study revealed that the majority of decision-makers do not fully understand the concept of gender and gender issues cannot be identified clearly. Majority of them refuted that the organization has any issue related to gender. However, at the same time they expressed about the lack of male staffs in the organization. They also claimed that the lack of male staffs as the critical issue in the human resources in the organization. Although this is one of the gender issue, due to lack of understanding of the concept, they were not aware of the problems that they encountered are actually related to gender!

Findings show that the majority decision makers do not understand fully the concept of gender and hence could not identify gender issues clearly. They also deny that there were any issues related to gender in the organization. However, they admitted that the organiztion raised that they lacked of male staffs. And this is actually gender issue. This shown that they are aware of the issue despite denying it. This means that they do not understand the concept of gender well. However, they slowly have improved on this and have led them to discuss the issue at the decision making level.

IV. CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that gender mainstreaming practices do occur in the organization. However, the implementation and its existence are still at a benign level. This occurs due to the low level of gender awareness influenced the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming process. Therefore, the public sector do not pay much attention to gender issues in their organization and make it as the organizational agenda. At the end, these agenda do not appear to the government as a whole to enhance and to promote gender issues to achieve gender equality.

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