

# Creation of A Prosperous Society: The Need of Spirituality In Implementing The National Social Policy

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## Introduction

This concept paper will examine the role of government agencies in developing a prosperous society. Towards that end, the national social policy (*Dasar Sosial Negara*) will be the term of reference for this paper. Our society has changed in all kinds of ways, our expectations are different and so are many of the challenges we face. In the past few years, Malaysian government and the various agencies under it have had to focus on deficit reduction and managing with reduced federal contributions in many areas. Today, while the economy is on a steady pace, the nation must continue to be fiscally responsible, and the social policy needs to reflect the changes that have undergone.

In addition to changes to the financial situation, there are changes in society as well. Changes in society require changes to the kinds of programs we may want, new information technologies are altering, in fundamental ways, policy-making, program design and service delivery. As Malaysia is in its third phase of social policy (began in mid 1997), government has started to use new technologies to improve the way services are delivered, as well as to reduce costs. This phase was influenced in large part by the financial crisis of 1997, and among the consequents of that crisis was the economic slow-down and the repercussions of that on poor (Social Policies in Malaysia, 2003). With fewer and limited resources, services have been more and more targeted towards those in greatest need.

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Malaysia is not a welfare state; hence, the government has redesigned a number of the fundamental social programs so that people have to take more personal responsibility. It has also increasingly recognized that integrating programs and services of different departments will make them work better. This integration will also help prevent those in need from falling through the cracks. However, if the mechanisms of integration are not proper, the intended objective of delivering services might be tangled up in red-tapes and duplicities.

The aim of government agencies have to be the promotion of a prosperous and caring society. Now more than ever, it has become increasingly clear that building a just and caring society in our nation means developing partnerships among the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. It also means involving the public in the redesign of social policy. It means society as a whole discussing the responsibilities as individuals, families, communities and government. And above all, the objectives of a prosperous and caring society can only be successful if the implementation by the various government agencies is being carried out diligently and effectively.

### **Concerns of Society**

Although different era ushers in different set of issues, the concerns of society in this modern era are not much difference from the past, namely:

- Healthcare – the possibility of declines in the standard of service as the cost of the system increases, and the lack of doctors in the public sector.
- Education – older schools; increasing students; short supply of teachers; more pressure on the education system to provide a vast array of life and career skills; more pressure on our schools to fix many of society's problems.
- Employment – high level of unemployment among college graduates; underemployment of many as the nature of jobs is changing (i.e. part-time work, self-employed, home-based, multiple-jobs, shift work, etc.); the fluctuating purchasing power of the average Malaysian families.
- Social supports (social assistance, welfare, subsidized housing, etc.) – not adequate to meet the needs of those who are struggling to meet the basic needs of their families; little help for the working poor.
- Poverty – the increasing depth of poverty as shown by increasing demands on various social support systems; the ongoing challenge of poverty among the aged.
- Social services in general – appropriate service not always delivered at the right time; not always very well coordinated.

Such challenges are not only being considered provincially. As a nation, Malaysia has embarked on "integration" discussions which may alter the way government agencies work together. *Dasar Sosial Negara* (DSN) which is our national social policy aims at bringing a just and caring society where all citizens

are valued and have the opportunity and the means to fulfill their potential. It envisions a society where the citizens celebrate their differences and they all feel responsible for each other's well-being. As written in the policy,

*"Dasar Sosial Negara (DSN) adalah satu dasar pembangunan sosial yang berteraskan nilai-nilai murni dan peningkatan keupayaan insan bagi mencapai kesepaduan dan kestabilan sosial, ketahanan nasional dan kesejahteraan hidup masyarakat Malaysia yang maju dan mantap. Dasar ini bermatlamat mewujudkan masyarakat Malaysia yang maju dan mapan dari aspek sosial, ekonomi dan teknologi. Setiap anggota masyarakat berpeluang untuk memperkembangkan potensi diri secara optimum di dalam persekitaran sosial yang sihat berdasarkan ciri-ciri bersatu-padu, berdaya tahan, demokratik, bermoral, bertoleransi, progresif, penyayang, adil dan saksama selaras dengan matlamat Wawasan 2020."*

Every society has certain values and beliefs about how people should treat one another (DiNitto, 2003). These values and beliefs become a society's "social policy." Therefore, what and how should government agencies responsibilities to achieve the noble aim of creating a just society? At the very least, all agencies must adopt universal shared values that focus on:

- Believes in the worth, dignity and value of all people.
- Believes in citizens' basic needs being met.
- Believes in people having the opportunity to achieve their potential.
- Believes in Malaysians being able to live and work without fear for their personal safety.
- Believes in individuals, families and communities contributing to the collective well-being, to the best of their ability.
- Believes in living within our means and not mortgaging the future of subsequent generations.
- Believes in preserving the environment as a legacy for future generations.

### **Selected Government Agencies**

Agencies under the ministries in Malaysia are the implementation bodies of the DSN. There are presently twenty-eight ministries in the Malaysian government. Some ministries have several departments and agencies. Some have departments but no agency(s), yet some others do not have any departments but do have agencies. It is not the intention of this paper to discuss the matrix of each ministry. It is, however, the intention of this paper to focus on one particular ministry – *Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat*.

Under this ministry there are four agencies – *Jabatan Pembangunan Wanita (JPW)*, *Jabatan Kebajikan Masyarakat Malaysia (JKMM)*, *Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN)* and *Institut Sosial Malaysia (ISM)*.

These agencies have the responsibility of implementing the national social policy in order to meet the objectives. All these agencies are guided by the above mentioned DSN and below are the guidelines as extracted from DSN (2003):

### General Objective

To guarantee that each individual, family and society in general; will not be discriminated based on ethnicity, religion, culture, gender, political orientation and locality, able to participate and to contribute towards the development of the nation as well as attainment a sustainable prosperous life.

### Specific Objective

- To ensure that the basic needs of the individual, family and society in general are being met.
- A lifelong development and empowerment of the individual.
- To strengthen and develop the social support system and services.
- To generate multi-sectors synergies.

### **Objective 1**

To Ensure the Basic Needs of the Individual, Family and Society Are Being Met  
Includes:-

- Adequate basic needs
- Physical environment which is healthy, clean, safe and “friendly”
- Social environment that emphasizes noble values
- Opportunities to improve quality of life
- Family and societal lifestyle and the right as a citizen
- Other life’s needs that are appropriate to current development

### **Objective 2**

A Lifelong Development and Empowerment of the Individual

Without discrimination based on gender, class and physical capabilities, one should be able to improve one’s resources as well as one’s self reliance optimally in every level of life’s cycle.

### **Objective 3**

To Strengthen and Develop the Social Support System and Services  
Strengthen and increase:

- Social support system for family, ethnic group, religion, social organization and other systems at the community level
- Social delivery system at all sectors that are involved in social services

#### **Objective 4**

##### **To Generate Multi-sectors Synergies**

Cooperation between different disciplines in and around the public and private sectors along with volunteer bodies has to be improved in order to create a synergy of manpower and resources within the society so as to guarantee good social services for members of society, with the understanding that social development is a collective responsibility.

A look at each agency's mission:

- i) JPW – to raise the involvement level of women in contributing to nation building
- ii) JKMM – to develop a society towards social prosperity
- iii) LPPKN – to the lead agency in making Malaysia a nation of character built by families which are resilient, ethical, healthy, knowledgeable and harmonious
- iv) ISM – to encourage exchanges of ideas, quality training, research and the concept of life-long learning in social policy and social development

These agencies are further guided by an umbrella body called *Majlis Sosial Negara* (MSN) which comprises of practically all the cabinet ministers. The functions of MSN are as follows:

- To determine policies and strategies for the implementation of social development programs and to tackle social problems
- To ensure that social development programs are being implemented following the adopted strategies
- To evaluate the strategies of implementations
- To make policy decisions that is relevant to the issues of social development programs implementation
- To ensure that program implementations are in line with the nation's social and economic policies

Below the MSN is the *Jawatankuasa Pembangunan Sosial Negara* (JPSN) made up of all the *Ketua Setiausaha* (KSU) of each ministry. The functions of JPSN are as follows:

- To ensure that all MSN's decisions are being implemented accordingly and effectively
- To supervise the strategies and plans of the social development programs nationally
- To monitor the implementation of the social development programs by government agencies, NGOs, and volunteer bodies so that all are in line with the mission, objectives and implementation strategies of DSN
- To identify and solve problems that occurs during the implementation of the social development programs

- To evaluate the achievements and effectiveness of the implementation
- To recommend to the MSN new policies and strategies of the social development programs

Below JPSN is the *Jawatankuasa Kerja Pembangunan Sosial Peringkat Kementerian* (JKPSK) made up of representatives of the various KSUs. The functions of JKPSK are as follows:

- To ensure that all decisions made by MSN and JPSN are being implemented
- To supervise social development programs strategies and planning
- To monitor the implementation of social development programs
- To evaluate the achievements and effectiveness of the implementation of the social development programs
- To recommend new policies and strategies of the social development programs for the approval of JPSN and MSN
- To tackle issues/problems of implementations of the social development programs at the ministry level

Additionally, there is *Majlis Pembangunan Negeri* (MPN) made up of *Ahli-ahli Majlis Mesyuarat Kerajaan Negeri* and *Ketua-Ketua Jabatan Sektor Sosial and Pengarah Kebajikan Masyarakat Negeri* (PKMN) aiding the *Pegawai Perpaduan Negeri* (PPN) and act as the secretariat of the MPN whose functions are:

- To ensure that decisions and directives of the MSN are being implemented at the state level
- To plan and implement social development programs at the state level in-line with the objectives of DSN
- To monitor and evaluate the implementation of the social development programs at the state level
- To recommend new ideas pertaining to social issues to the MSN

The ladder continues down with yet another body called *Jawatankuasa Kerja Pembangunan Negeri* (JKPN) made up of *Ketua-Ketua Jabatan Negeri Sektor Sosial and Pengarah Kebajikan Masyarakat Negeri* (PKMN) assisting the *Pegawai Perpaduan Negeri* (PPN) and act as the secretariat of the JKPN. This body's functions are as follows:

- To ensure that decisions and directives of MSN and MPN that relate to social development programs are being implemented at the state level
- To supervise social development programs implementation at the state level
- To monitor and evaluate the implementation of the social development programs at the state level
- To recommend new ideas and strategies pertaining to social issues to the MPN

Finally the chain of command stops at *Jawatankuasa Kerja Pembangunan Daerah/Bahagian* (JKPD/B) made up of *Ketua-Ketua Jabatan Peringkat Daerah Sektor Sosial and Pegawai Kebajikan Masyarakat Daerah* (PKMD) assisting the *Penolong Pegawai Daerah* (PPD) [Pembangunan] and act as the secretariat to the JKPD/B. This entity has the following functions:

- To ensure that all decisions and directives of MPNG and JKPNG are being implemented at the district and grassroots levels
- To supervise social development programs implementation at the district level
- To monitor and evaluate the implementation of the social development programs at the district level
- To submit a report and recommendation pertaining to social development policies and strategies to JKPN

## **Analysis**

At the macro level DSN is a good document; it embodies the aspiration of society, especially the needy. There are a lot of merits with philosophy, vision and mission of the policy. It is for the betterment of society at large. With proper implementation, it can achieve in making society prosperous. However, a scrutiny of the process of discharging the task is warranted. Looking at the various levels of entities above, immediately we notice the multi-layer of entities are all trying to achieve the same end. While the process of vetting is much needed, redundancies are not. With too many duplications involving various ministries and agencies, it is worried that the main agencies that are entrusted to carry out the task may get "lost" in the web various committees and sub-committees. For any implementation process to be carried out successfully, red-tapes have to be reduced. The delivery of services to the needy should not be dragged by the labyrinth of committees and sub-committees.

Another important variable that has to be looked at is the human capital. The success or failure of a policy usually can be traced to the level of commitment by individuals – beginning with the minister right down to frontline workers. A well written document with noble vision, mission and objectives will come to a naught if the people who are entrusted to implement them are not competent, efficient, committed, motivated and spiritual (as opposed to religious). Condescending attitudes that still exist with many of our public servants have to be eradicated.

### Spiritualism in the Working Place

The infusion of spirituality in the working arena is important. A movement from the command-control ego-driven organization to a more selfless driven ethics is needed now in order to serve society (Langer, 2003). The organization has to operate less in mechanical terms and more in living terms. The key organizational

asset becomes its human assets, its collective memory and its shared vision (Monsma, 1996). The prosperity of a nation cannot be simply measured by GNP nor can the quality of the government's machinery be based on the multi-layered committees and sub-committees at its disposal. Other indicators such as happiness, honesty, integrity, and humility – these are important indicators to make a nation prosper in a holistic fashion (Wilson, 1999). Similarly, the delivery of services cannot simply be measured by having numerous committees serving the same end. What is required are well-trained, competent and efficient workers, and at the same time ethical and spiritual individuals. The creation of a peaceful, equitable, and sustainable future is not just a matter of public administration, economy, technical planning and politics. Without the infusion of the ethical and the spiritual, the entire edifice will crumble and deteriorate (Wineburg, 2001).

Spirituality has to do with how we lean into life, not only in our active motivations but also in our receptivity. According to Cleveland and Luyckx (1998), spirituality, therefore, is not a static concept; it is always emerging, changing, adapting, embracing, relinquishing. It has to do with how we are being grasped by reality when we are at our best or our worst. "Meaning" implies how we continually try to make sense of our world; and "experience" expresses spirituality's holistic dimension. It is more than conceptual meaning-making; it involves our emotions and our bodily reality. In a more religious vein, spirituality, as the word connotes, is about the dynamic presence of Spirit in our spirits and in the universe. In the Islamic lexicon, it is called *ihsan* – a state of existence where one is always conscious of the presence of the Creator. It is that state of awareness which has to be brought to work – to the office; it is not something that is confined to one's private life. We require individuals who can transcend above race, religion, class, and locality. In order to be agents of bringing "prosperity" to society, the workers in the relevant agencies have to be people oriented. They have to cease judging these needy people.

## Conclusion

In summary, the present DSN is adequate vis-à-vis its vision and mission. In particular, there are also adequate numbers of agencies under the *Kementerian Pembangunan Wanita, Keluarga dan Masyarakat*. JPW, JKMM and LPPKN have enough guidelines and programs to move ahead. For ISM, it can infuse more spiritual components in its curriculum. Nevertheless, we question the logic of having so many layers of committees under the umbrella of MSN. Presently we do not need a new policy to bring about a prosperous society – the framework is in place. The programs and activities are sufficient for now. However, more importantly in order to make this dream come true, the focus should be given to the personnel or what is coined as human capital. The nation needs workers who are spiritual in order for them to have a sense of universality with the people whom they are serving. Then they will serve as they would like to be served.



Several initial steps can be taken to bring about this spiritual consciousness to the working environment. One way is to ask foundational questions of society and organization. These would include:

1. Is the organization/society neo-humanistic (that is, expanding identities beyond state, race, religion and class)?
2. Does the leadership of the organization demonstrate through example the spiritual principle?

It will take time for the spiritual dimension to be inculcated by workers. However, Malaysia is good at promoting new ideas. A massive campaign has to be taken immediately to acquaint society with the idea. Only this time, unlike previous other campaigns, it should be continuous and spread through all levels. Seminars and workshops will have to be conducted to expand the ideas in order for it to be accepted.

At present, unfortunately, the condescending attitude is still rampant among workers – frontline workers, middle management, managers, directors and beyond. A sense of humbleness has to be brought to all those serving society. Collectively as government servants, they owe the people whom they are serving, and not the reverse. With that mindset, the function of government agencies in moving ahead to bring about a prosperous society will be enhanced – commitment and dedication are by products of spirituality.

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