

Gender issues, gaps at all levels still exist in Malaysia

KOTA KINABALU: Gender issues and gaps at macro and micro levels still exist in Malaysian society despite efforts to gender sensitise all-level programs in planning and implementation with the target of integrating gender into the mainstream development.

Several policies and programs are in place but the challenge is to integrate gender concerns in existing policies and programs.

And gender mainstreaming and empowerment of women are complementary strategies to achieve the goals of gender equality and

advancement of women.

"Women empowerment strategies include efforts to address discriminations against women by devising programs and strategies that increase women's capacities, opportunities and understanding of their human rights," Associate Prof. Dr Jariah Masud of Faculty of Human Ecology of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) said yesterday.

She revealed this while presenting her paperwork entitled "Gender and Development" at a seminar on Gender, Family and Development organised by

Institute for Development Studies (IDS) and Sabah Women Advisory Council.

She said that women empowerment also involved needs for prioritised initiatives that help create conditions for women to become the agents of their own development, empowerment and rights.

Women empowerment emphasised transformatory potentials of development initiatives, highlight ways in which women create new space for action themselves.

"And it emphasises transformation of the mainstream by ensuring that the perspec-

tives of both men and women inform design, implementation, and outcome of policies and programs," she said.

With this note, Dr Jariah said that men and women have potential roles to play and that gender gaps and gender constraints often hinders effective contribution to individuals.

She also noted several recommendations that can be put forward to mainstream gender which is a prerequisite for gender equality which are:

- Intensify gender sensitisation efforts and gender training at various levels as

prerequisite to gender mainstreaming.

- Responsible agencies should develop national strategies for gender mainstreaming and integration of women in mainstream development.

- Allocate resource to reflect the commitment for gender equality and adequate resource support should be provided to local governments to achieve this commitment.

- Establishment of gender disaggregated database to monitor progresses toward gender equality.

- Education for local

communities should focus on women as stakeholders in development and their contribution to the family economy and the community.

- Participatory approach to development should be promoted to enable men and women have input policy formulation and program planning.

She concluded that short term and long term strategies are needed in gender mainstreaming efforts and political commitment on the part of the government is very important in efforts to improve the well being of women and men.