

BEST BUSINESS PRACTICE  
CIRCULAR 2/2011



Establishing a Conducive  
Working Environment for Women:  
**Nursing Mothers Programme  
at the Workplace**





## Guiding Principle

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by Malaysia in 1995, upholds “the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and access to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health” - Art. 24(1)



# Objectives

1. The objectives of the Companies Commission of Malaysia's (SSM) Best Business Practice Circular 2/2011 (BBPC 2/2011) are:
  - To contribute towards Malaysia's strategy for inclusive socio-economic development that will ensure productive and sustainable female workforce participation.
  - To support and foster the establishment of a family and child-friendly environment at the workplace that will help achieve women's economic empowerment.
  - To provide a corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiative and example with recommendations for future actions that may be adopted by employers, starting with the establishment of a 'nursing mothers programme' at the workplace.
  - To highlight the role that companies and businesses can play in supporting the national promotion of exclusive breastfeeding practices with the aim of achieving optimal child health development.

# Background

2. This BBPC is the second publication by SSM and UNICEF following the launch of the Best Business Practice Circular 1 of 2010 entitled "*Establishment of a Child Care Centre at the Workplace by Corporate and Business Employers*" on 28 January 2010. Both BBPCs represent the continued efforts of SSM and UNICEF in encouraging companies and businesses to achieve a balanced workplace environment for employees.
3. The recent decades have seen a promising increase in women's participation in the Malaysian work force. Accordingly, there has been a manifest increase in the number of women in decision-making positions.
4. This was highlighted in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015), which revealed a rise in the percentage of women in management positions in the public sector from 18.8% in 2004 to 30.5% in 2010. In the private sector, the percentage doubled from 13.5% to 26.2% in the same period. In 2009, 6.1% of corporate directors and 7% of Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) were women in Bursa Malaysia's 100 largest companies while women's board representation in Government Linked Companies (GLCs) was capped at 14%.<sup>1</sup>
5. However, these percentages are still low and there are opportunities for improvement.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the national Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)<sup>3</sup> among women in Malaysia has not surpassed the 50% mark since the 1980s.<sup>4</sup>
6. In June 2011, the Prime Minister announced the approval of a policy to ensure "30% of women are at the decision-making level in the private sector". In light of this, the corporate sector was given a five-year transition period to raise the number of women as members of the boards of directors, and hold top positions in their respective companies.<sup>5</sup>
7. Concurrently, the target of 30% aimed at increasing the percentage of women in decision-making levels in the private sector also seeks to contribute to the national target of increasing the female LFPR from the current 47.3% to 55% by 2015 under the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011-2015).<sup>6</sup>



# Correlation between women's labour force participation and growth

8. It is noteworthy that successful and sustainable female workforce participation will translate into a correlated increase in national economic growth achievements. In the 2010 Asia-Pacific Human Development Report (AHDR), it was estimated that Malaysia would enjoy Gross Domestic Product (GDP) gains of 2.9% annually if the LFPR amongst women increased to over 70%.<sup>7</sup>
9. An international report by McKinsey also emphasized that economically-empowered women would not only enjoy national and individual economic gains but personal gains in reproductive health and children's lives. In essence therefore, "every pay cheque to a woman is also an investment in the human capital of the next generation".<sup>8</sup>
10. However, the LFPR will be impacted when women start having children and exit the workforce due to the demands of family life and motherhood. This was underscored by a 2008 national survey, which showed that women's child bearing and rearing roles significantly influence their ability to participate in the workforce.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that women will not be able to attain the targets set if they are faced with obstacles in their career development including at the corporate workplace.
11. Therefore, by endorsing a family and child-friendly workplace, employers not only contribute to achieving the national targets, but also facilitate the corporate sector to take an important step in adopting family-friendly mindsets geared towards achieving socio-economic development, as laid out in the Tenth Malaysia Plan. Essentially, this moves the nation towards narrowing the gender gap and achieving women's economic empowerment.
12. Creating an environment that promotes a family and child-friendly workplace means creating a corporate structure which gears towards corporate sustainability.
13. This will allow more women to thrive and excel in their careers, and take on senior management roles and decision-making positions. In time, these efforts will indirectly contribute to creating a corporate environment where women decision-makers can formulate family-friendly decisions for their companies.



**The adoption of family and child-friendly workplace policies is a long-term investment in CSR, which in effect is translated to all levels of corporate governance. It is about creating a shared value between the company and the staff and it will be important to integrate this into the corporate culture and sustainability framework.**



# Investing in CSR: A Nursing Mothers Programme



Achieving the target of 30% of women at the decision-making level will ensure better diversity and inclusiveness in the boardroom, in line with Malaysia's Vision 2020 ideal, which promotes and stresses inclusive socio-economic development as the way towards developed economic status.

14. The corporate sector in Malaysia may have already adopted and incorporated various family and child-friendly policies at the work place. These policies are very likely related to establishing a childcare centre, adopting flexible working hours that will enable parents to attend to their children more readily when needs arise, supporting educational opportunities for parents, and developing a mentoring programme for women as role models.
15. In light of the national targets set by the Malaysian Government on the LFPR and the economic empowerment of women, we are proposing a sustainable family-friendly CSR initiative: *A Nursing Mothers Programme*. Such a programme will greatly benefit women by providing the support and workplace assistance nursing mothers need, making their return from maternity leave less stressful. At the same time, this initiative will complement the national goals to promote exclusive breastfeeding, which is defined by a period of no less than six months.<sup>10</sup>
16. Finding ways to promote exclusive breastfeeding remains a challenge as many mothers discontinue breastfeeding when they return to work. A Malaysian study on understanding the reasons behind why women discontinue breastfeeding, published in the *International Breastfeeding Journal*, observed that it is important for workplaces to provide adequate breastfeeding support to ensure continuation of the internationally recommended time period for breastfeeding an infant. The study, which was carried out among working mothers, revealed one of many factors that "working in the private sector was associated with a higher tendency to discontinue breastfeeding."<sup>11</sup>
17. In order to facilitate continued exclusive breastfeeding after mothers return to work, there has to be supportive work place health promotion policies in place. According to the Malaysian Dietary Guidelines, it is important for employers to ensure the provision of education and health promotion, facilitation of either frequent feeding or frequent expression, and accessibility to store breast milk, at the workplace.<sup>12</sup>



# IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES for a Nursing Mothers Programme

- 18 The maternity protection described under the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 183 safeguards women's employment and income security during and after maternity. Maternity protection is also essential for ensuring women's access to equal opportunity and treatment in the workplace.<sup>13</sup>
19. In 2003, the Global Strategy on Infant and Young Child Feeding framework was released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and UNICEF. This framework aims to protect, promote, and support optimal infant and young child feeding practices. According to the global strategy it is best to ensure that infants are exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life to achieve optimal growth, development and health. This is then followed by breastfeeding and complementary foods for up to two years or older.
20. This global strategy, along with the Ministry of Health's National Plan of Action on Nutrition II 2006-2015, which highlights the importance of breastfeeding, serves as the blueprint on nutrition and health interventions for infant and young child development for Malaysia.
- 21 In addition, the National Breastfeeding Policy launched in 1993 encourages all mothers to breastfeed exclusively from birth until the infants are six months old which complement the Government's Baby Friendly Hospital Initiative. This national policy is the guiding principle in promoting exclusive breastfeeding in the country.



# Elements for a successful Nursing Mothers Programme at the workplace

22. Support for a nursing mothers programme to promote exclusive breastfeeding at the workplace will require employers to consider providing the following:-
- the establishment of a nursing room;
  - having in place procedures on mother's ability and flexibility to express milk; and/or
  - promoting breastfeeding education activities and other workplace support.
23. Employers may wish to consider the following basic components for a nursing mothers programme:

<b>Work arrangements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Flexible working hours be made available to allow mothers to take appropriate breaks to express their milk. Employees could incorporate extra time (coming in early, staying late, etc.) to make up part of the flexible schedule.</li> <li>Such a flexible and lactation-friendly policy would allow mothers to be more at ease, better focus on their work without added stress or distractions, and express more successfully.</li> </ul>
<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Internal working policies in line with the National Breastfeeding Policy<sup>14</sup> should be implemented to support mothers who wish to breastfeed.</li> <li>Open communication between colleagues and other working mothers in the workplace should be encouraged so that mothers can share information and take turns covering for each other when required.</li> </ul>
<b>Schedule of the facility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A clear schedule is essential to enable mothers to plan lactation times, obtain uninterrupted access to the facility and avoid conflicts with other mothers who need to use the nursing room.</li> </ul>
<b>Access to Nursing Room</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mothers should have access at least two to three times daily, at three-hour intervals, for an average of 15 to 20 minutes at a time.</li> </ul>
<b>Privacy and Security</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The room should be of a suitable size and provide privacy during lactation.</li> <li>Combination locks are highly recommended to ensure that only those in the programme may access the room.</li> <li>'Occupied' or 'Do Not Disturb' signs should be made available to avoid interruptions during lactation.</li> </ul>



24. The integral part of a successful nursing mothers programme at the work place is the creation of a nursing room facility that is accessible, safe, secure, and clean. Creating a room that is comfortable for breastfeeding mothers is a fundamental essential.
25. An employer could also consider the following questions and options on establishing the nursing room at the workplace:

#### **Options for the nursing room space**

- An infrequently-used existing office space or other room
- An infrequently-used space near an employee lounge or other area where sink is available
- A small corner of a room to section off with either permanent walls or portable partitions
- Adapting a “small unused space” that is currently not well-utilized

#### **What should the nursing room have?**

- A comfortable chair and a small table
- Sink (either in the room or located nearby)
- Rubbish bins
- Lock on door
- An electrical outlet
- Partitions/privacy curtains so that more users can occupy the nursing room at the same time
- Adequate lighting and ventilation

#### **Furniture or fittings that may also be considered**

- A separate small refrigerator (for mothers to store personal pumps and breast milk)
- At least two electrical outlets (for breast pump and refrigerator devices)
- Hooks (to dry tubing after cleaning)
- Bulletin boards (for information sharing)

#### **How should we support mothers who are using breast pumps?**

- The provision of electric breast pumps is encouraged. If breast pumps are provided, employees need only bring their own pump attachment sets and accessories.
- Electric automatic double-sided pumps (typically found in hospitals or clinics) are most efficient and effective

#### **Additional supplies that may be required**

- Antibacterial soap (to clean equipment after use)
- Paper towels

#### **Who would administer the nursing room?**

- Appoint a focal person to manage the nursing room facility.
- This person will handle daily responsibilities such as cleaning, pump schedules, facility problems, etc.
- To provide support to the new mothers and if required also voice out concerns to the management related to the facility.
- To give an orientation of the room and available facilities.

#### **Are there rules and regulations to the nursing room?**

- Individual users to take responsibility for keeping the room clean.
- Employers can provide general maintenance oversight of the room within their administrative services department.



# Implementation Benefits

## FOR EMPLOYERS

26. Corporate employers will benefit tremendously from contributing to a nursing mother's programme in their business. This not only contributes to the health and wellbeing of the mother and the child but also generates substantial economic gains for the business due to reduced employees' health care costs, decreases in absenteeism, enhanced productivity, improved employee and enhanced corporate image. Most importantly, it contributes towards supporting the achievements of national targets in women's economic empowerment and workforce participation.
27. A company based in the United States called CIGNA Corporation conducted a two-year study on 343 employees who participated in their lactation support programme and disclosed the following financial returns<sup>15</sup> in 2010:
- Annual savings of \$240,000 in health care expenses for breastfeeding mothers and children;
  - 77% reduction in lost work time due to infant illness, with annual savings of \$60,000;
  - Lower pharmacy costs due to 62% fewer prescriptions needed for sick babies;
28. At Mutual of Omaha, newborn healthcare costs were three times less for mothers who participate in their nursing mothers programme. Those who participated generated health care costs of US\$1,269 in comparison with the expenditure of US\$3,415 for those who did not participate. This is a per person cost of US\$2,146 more for each mother who did not participate.<sup>16</sup>
29. The availability of family-friendly facilities such as lactation sites and childcare centres translates to a higher rate of employees returning to work after maternity leave. This reduces the need for fresh recruitment and recurrent training costs brought on by loss of talent.
30. In addition, providing a supportive environment for breastfeeding improves a company's public image and enhances its ability to recruit the best talents available.
31. Easing the transition from childcare at home to the workplace boosts staff morale, leading to loyalty and higher productivity especially among women employees and working mothers.
32. This was recorded amongst employees at the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Even though 80% of its employees were male, it was found that a lactation support programme for mothers, fathers and partners of male employees made a dramatic difference in reducing turnover and absenteeism rates for both male and female workers. Perception and support of the programme will also lead to a more positive outlook on the department.<sup>17</sup>

**Establishing a nursing mothers programme and facilities that include lactation sites for breastfeeding at the workplace can help reduce the number of days an employee is absent due to child sickness since evidence shows that breastfed infants are generally healthier. This in turn helps to reduce any healthcare costs or loss of productivity resulting from an employee's absence.**



## FOR MOTHERS AND INFANTS

33. Breastfeeding also benefits mothers. The practice when done exclusively often induces a lack of menstruation, which is a natural (though not fail-safe) method of birth control. It reduces risks of breast and ovarian cancer later in life, helps women return to their pre-pregnancy weight faster, and lowers rates of obesity.<sup>18</sup>
34. Breast milk is the ideal food for newborns and infants. It gives infants all the nutrients they need for healthy development. It is safe and contains antibodies that help protect infants from common childhood illnesses - such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, the two primary causes of child mortality worldwide. Breast milk is readily available and affordable, which helps to ensure that infants get adequate sustenance.<sup>19</sup>
35. Beyond the immediate benefits for children, breastfeeding contributes to a lifetime of good health. Adults who were breastfed as babies often have lower blood pressure and lower cholesterol, as well as lower rates of overweight, obesity and Type-2 diabetes. There is evidence that people who were breastfed perform better in intelligence tests.<sup>20</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Economic Planning Unit, Tenth Malaysia Plan, 2010.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 The "LPFR" is the percentage of working-age persons in an economy who are employed, or those who are unemployed but looking for a job.  
[http://economics.about.com/od/unemploymentrate/f/labor\\_force.htm](http://economics.about.com/od/unemploymentrate/f/labor_force.htm) (retrieved 24 August 2011)
- 4 Department of Statistics Malaysia, Labour Force Survey Report Malaysia 2010.
- 5 "Cabinet approves 30 per cent women as decision-makers in private sector", Bernama News, 27 June 2011  
[http://www.pmo.gov.my/?menu=newslist&news\\_id=7689&news\\_cat=13&cl=1&page=1731&sort\\_year=2011&sort\\_month=](http://www.pmo.gov.my/?menu=newslist&news_id=7689&news_cat=13&cl=1&page=1731&sort_year=2011&sort_month=) (retrieved 14 October 2011).
- 6 Statement by the Hon. Senator Sharizat Abdul Jalil, Minister of Women, Family and Community Development of Malaysia, on Agenda Item 3: Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the 23rd Special Session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-First Century" of the 55th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, UN New York, 24 February 2011.
- 7 UNDP, Asia-Pacific Human Development Report (AHDR) 2010 - Power, Voice and Rights, A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific, February 2010.
- 8 McKinsey & Company, "The Business of Empowering Women", January 2010.
- 9 Opening Remarks by H.E. Kamal Malhotra, United Nations Resident Coordinator Malaysia, on the launch of the UNDP Asia-Pacific Human Development Report 2010-Power, Voice and Rights: A Turning Point for Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific, Kuala Lumpur, 15 April 2010.
- 10 WHO & UNICEF, Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding, 2003.
- 11 Amin R.M. et al., "Work related determinants of breastfeeding discontinuation among employed mothers in Malaysia", *International Breastfeeding Journal*. 6:4, 2011
- 12 National Coordinating Committee on Food and Nutrition, Ministry of Health Malaysia, Malaysian Dietary Guidelines, 2010.
- 13 ILO, Maternity at Work-A review of national legislation, Findings from the ILO Database of Conditions of Work and Employment Law, Second Edition, 2010.
- 14 National Breastfeeding Policy, Ministry of Health Malaysia, 1993
- 15 National Business Group on Health, Center for Prevention and Health Services, Issue Brief, Workplace Breastfeeding Programs: Employer Case Studies, November 2009. [http://businessgrouphealth.org/pdfs/NBGH%20Breastfeeding%20IB\\_Final%20Proof.pdf](http://businessgrouphealth.org/pdfs/NBGH%20Breastfeeding%20IB_Final%20Proof.pdf)
- 16 United States Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Business Case for Breastfeeding, 2008.
- 17 Cohen R., Lange L. & Slusser W., "A description of a male-focused breastfeeding promotion corporate lactation programme", *Journal of Human Lactation* 18(1), pp. 61-65, 2002.
- 18 World Health Organisation (WHO), 10 Facts on Breastfeeding, WHO website:  
<http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/breastfeeding/en/> (accessed October 2011).
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Ibid.

# Resources

## **Nutrition Division, Ministry of Health**

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## WEBSITES

### **UNICEF**

- <http://www.unicef.org/programme/breastfeeding/>

### **WHO**

- <http://www.who.int/topics/breastfeeding/en/>

### **The Breastfeeding Network**

- <http://www.breastfeedingnetwork.org.uk/>



REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES/BUSINESSES  
**COMPANIES COMMISSION OF MALAYSIA**  
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**NOTE:**

This BPPC does not create any legal obligation for companies and businesses to comply and merely outlines the best practices to be adopted at the option of such companies/businesses. SSM and UNICEF encourage the adoption of this BPPC towards ensuring business sustainability and promoting corporate social responsibility.

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