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PERSATUAN PENGGUNA-PENGGUNA NEGERI
PULAU PINANG



No. 27, Keiawei Road,
Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.

CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION OF PENANG

When Replying Please Quote Our Reference

Talipon ~~83548~~ 373511
~~20361~~ 373713

Our Ref : CAP/W/001/0001/82/EH

14 May 1982

New Zealand Home Birth Association
P O Box 7093
Auckland
NEW ZEALAND

Dear Madam

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) is a non profit, independent consumer organisation involved in consumer and environmental issues. We take up such issues as food, nutrition, health and drugs, transport, education, environment and resources, consumer safety and laws.

Recently CAP formed a women's group to develop ideas and activities primarily concerned with women as they are the most important consumers in our society. Following this, CAP organised a Seminar on Consumer Education for Women in October last year. Over 120 female participants representing more than 35 women's organisations in Malaysia participated in the Seminar. We are pleased to enclose a copy each of the :

- a) Report on the Seminar on Consumer Education for Women.
- b) Declaration and Resolutions passed by the women participants at the Seminar for your attention.

CAP is very interested in establishing links with groups and networks elsewhere who are taking up problems of Third World Women and women's issues in general. In this respect we would be most interested in developing better and meaningful exchange and co-operation with your organisation.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes.

EVELYN HONG
Secretary
Women's Committee

Encl.

/ps

10078-22-079

No. 27, Kelawai Road,
Pulau Pinang, Malaysia.



PERSATUAN PENGGUNA-PENGGUNA NEGERI
PULAU PINANG

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REPORT ON THE SEMINAR ON CONSUMER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN, PENANG,
30 OCTOBER - 1 NOVEMBER, 1981

There is an increasing awareness that women have a crucial role to play in the socio-economic development of the country. In the context of the consumer movement, there are many issues which affect the daily lives of women in a developing country. Women are often exploited in the market place, the work place and also the home. Yet they are sometimes not aware of their condition, let alone their rights to solve these problems.

With this in mind, the Consumers' Association of Penang organised a three-day Seminar on Consumer Education for Women, 30 October - 1 November, 1981 in the premises of the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang.

The aim of the Seminar was to bring together representatives of various women's organisations or women representatives of organisations to study consumer issues related to the well-being of women. Through the Seminar, it was hoped that the participants would be able to share their experiences, gain a new awareness into consumer issues, and transfer these experiences and knowledge to the members of their organisations. In this way, the principles of consumerism, sound health and nutrition and ecological balance could become part of the activities of the women's organisations and thus be spread among a large sector of the population.

Altogether, ¹²⁰~~100~~ women participants took part in the Seminar. They included representatives from national women's organisations; trade unions and youth organisations; journalists from national newspapers and editors of women's magazines; university academics and students; headmistresses and teachers from secondary schools and colleges; and representatives from various religious organisations.

The Seminar comprised six sessions during which papers were presented on various topics, followed by discussions from the participants. The papers presented at the Seminar covered the following topics:

1. Consumerism in the 1980s
2. Women as Consumers - How we are cheated and what we should do?

3. Product Safety (together with a demonstration on dangerous products)
4. Nutrition and Lifestyle
5. The Use and Abuse of Women in the Mass Media
6. The Role of Women in National Development
7. The Changing Roles and Values of Women and the Challenges Ahead
8. Women, Economics and the Environment
9. Business Malpractices and the Law
10. The Importance of Making Complaints When We Are Cheated
11. Hazards Faced by Malaysian Women at Work
12. Health and the School Child
13. Social and Preventive Aspects of Child Health.

Several films and slide-shows were also presented during the evening sessions of the Seminar. This included a special slide series on the exploitation of women in advertisements which was prepared for the Seminar.

On the last day of the Seminar, the participants broke up into workshop groups to discuss the various issues raised during the sessions. Following the workshop discussions, the participants came together again for the final session to put forward and adopt a Declaration and Resolutions proposing various reforms to be carried out to improve the position of women in Malaysian society.

Among the resolutions put forward were the following:

- To enable an appropriate period for breastfeeding, maternity leave for working women should be extended to three months paid leave.
- Women and women's organisations should speak out for a more realistic, non-sexist, portrayal of women in the school curriculum and in the mass media.

- * Women's organisations should take steps to oppose sexist advertisements, pornography, sex-related tourism and the humiliating portrayal of women in jokes, magazines, novels, TV programmes, films and newspapers.
- * Consumer and environmental issues should be integrated into the school syllabus whilst they should also be taken up in the activities of women's groups.

The Declaration also recognised that women's issues and problems were "part of the overall socio-economic and socio-cultural problems in our society."

It added: "In the fight for the better education, status and role of women, men have also to be co-opted into consumer education programmes. These problems are not insurmountable. We have to act now. We have to equip ourselves, our husbands, brothers, fathers and our children with the awareness, the knowledge and the motivation to act."

As a follow-up to the Seminar, CAP will continue to maintain close contact with the organisations represented at the Seminar. Among the activities planned with the aim of further spreading the issues raised are the following:

- exchange of information and publications
- joint workshops and seminars between CAP and other organisations
- educational programmes to promote breast-feeding, proper nutrition and health care
- continuing a campaign against the abuse of women in advertisements and the media
- educational programmes for women in estates and villages in rural areas
- efforts to incorporate a more serious treatment of women's problems in newspapers and the school curriculum

For more information on the Seminar, please contact:

The Women's Section
Consumers' Association of Penang
27 Kelawei Road
Penang
MALAYSIA

CONSUMER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

Declaration and Resolutions adopted by the Seminar on Consumer Education for Women
Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, October 30 - November 1, 1981

A. Preamble:

It is recognized that women today are the most important consumers in their roles as mothers, child educators, homemakers and wage earners.

They have become a key target of exploitation by manufacturers and advertisers (while men and children have not been spared either).

To this end they have been brainwashed by the consumer culture to buy consumer products and manipulated to adopt lifestyles which are alien to our traditional values and culture. Many of these products, women do not require but more important, many of them are harmful to their health and the health of their families.

For example, mothers have increasingly rejected breast-feeding for bottle-feeding which in many instances have had very tragic consequences for the health of their children. Women have also been used as sex objects in the promotion of products by manufacturers.

This violence against the humanity and dignity of women is increasingly being seen in pornography, sex tourism, women's magazines and novels, TV and films, comic strips and coverage by the media, in which women are denied as intelligent, rationale, honourable human beings.

As more and more women take their place in the workforce of the nation, they have been burdened with double work and responsibilities, that as managers of the home and that as full-fledged workers contributing to the economy of the nation. Yet their status and role first as homemakers is not given due recognition. As workers they have been relegated to the lowest paid job which is often intellectually and emotionally deadening and more important which exposes them and their unborn children to many serious health hazards.

Due recognition must be given to working women who are the sole breadwinners of their families. Many of these women come from the most economically depressed group of people in our society who have either lost their husbands through early death or through separation. In addition unemployed and many of the self-employed women are important groups of women who suffer from severe economic and social problems. It is such groups who are the poorest of the poor and who need society's sympathy, understanding and help most. The government is urged to plan special education and economic programmes which will improve the quality of life of these groups. It is they who are the poorest of the poor and who need society's sympathy, understanding and help most.

And for many of the women in our disadvantaged communities it is always the women who suffered most when there is a deterioration in their physical environment. Polluted water and deforestation means that women have

to bear the brunt of these effects because traditionally it is the women who are the carriers of water and firewood for their family's drinking and fuel needs, and the provider of the subsistence needs of their homes.

Women's issues and problems are part of other socio-economic and socio-cultural problems in our society. Hence in the fight for the better education, status and role of women, men have also to be included in consumer education programmes.

These problems are not insurmountable. We have to act now. We have to equip ourselves, our husbands, brothers, fathers and our children with the awareness, the knowledge and the motivation to act.

We, the participants of this Seminar, recognize that there is a vital need for Consumer Education and urge that Consumer Education should be initiated and developed at all levels both in our personal lives and in our organizations.

B. Action Proposals

Organizational Level

1. Women as parents and teachers should urge for the integration of Consumer Education into the school syllabus. This can be done through regular subjects like Civics, Bahasa Malaysia, English, Geography, Science and Domestic Science. Special emphasis on the various aspects of breastfeeding should be incorporated in the school syllabus, especially in the relevant subjects like biology, health education, and human and social biology.
2. Women's organizations should also form consumer sections within their organizations to generate consumer awareness and action among their members. To complement these activities, consumer publications should be promoted.
 - 2.1 Women's organizations should urge their members to subscribe to the Utusan Konsumer.
3. The activities should be carried out in the form of exhibitions, programmes, seminars, workshops and surveys and the monitoring of environmental and consumer problems.
4. That committees should be set up within women's organizations to look into the problems of sexist advertisements, pornography, beauty contests, sex tourism and the humiliation of women in jokes, magazines, novels, TV and films and the press, and to take appropriate action to prevent such practices.
5. Women's organizations should urge the government

that due recognition be given to the problems of unemployed and self-employed women.

6. Women should also urge the government that due recognition be given to the needs of working women. For a start that maternity leave should be extended to three months paid leave, with additional leave on no pay for the next six months to allow women to breastfeed their newborn. Women should also be allowed to take one year's absence from their work to tend to the care of their newborn. They should be reinstated without their chances of promotion or seniority being affected.
- 6.1 Nurseries with full time qualified staff should also be supplied by the government or industry for their employees who have children to look after.
7. Women's organizations should urge the government to ensure that all industrial workers are made aware of the labour laws and the Industrial Act and that they are well informed of their rights under these laws.
8. Women's organizations should urge that the government set up facilities in public places for example in shopping complexes, airports, railways and bus stations to enable mothers to breastfeed their young.
- 8.1 Women's organizations should also encourage and highlight within our own setting the important fact that breastfed babies have a higher I.Q. as one of the measures to promote breastfeeding.
9. Problems affecting the health and nutrition of their children should also be looked into by the Ministries of Health and Education. For instance, canteen food, sanitary conditions of the school environment, the problems of malnutrition and other health problems among school children. There must be regular monthly checks by health inspectors on the cleanliness of the school surroundings.
- 9.1 Women's organizations should also look into and work closely with the Ministry of Education on the environmental conditions which affect the learning abilities of children, e.g. poor ventilation, poor lighting, noise pollution and safe playgrounds. There must also be regular annual medical checkups for school children to test their dental health, eyesight and hearing abilities to ensure that these problems do not affect their learning ability.
- 9.2 Parents should take a more active role in the Parent

Teachers' Association (PTA) to establish closer ties and better understanding between the home, the school and the education department.

10. Women's organizations should urge that a full fledged women's department should be set up in the Prime Minister's department to examine and research into the problems of women and to take effective and appropriate action to resolve these problems.
11. Consumer issues should be promoted via traditional Malaysian Cultural activities.

Personal Activities

12. That women help to identify local problems and develop and exchange experiences and ideas with their sister organizations.
13. That concerted efforts be made by women and women organizations in organizing seminars, exhibitions, slide shows, dialogue sessions at district levels and the collection of samples for testing. In this context a committee of women should initiate and implement these activities. Joint efforts between women's groups and organizations in the same locality should be encouraged for example, an inter-organizational anti-smoking campaign can be organized.
14. The sale of consumer publications in residential areas, parent-teacher associations, religious communities, etc.

C. Conclusion and Pledge

We also feel that women should speak out in one voice to present a strong case for a better and more realistic portrayal of women in the school curriculum and the mass media, and for the incorporation and implementation of consumer education in the school curriculum, in the mass media and in our women's activities.

We ourselves, who have had the opportunity to take part in this Seminar pledge to do our best to put into practice what we have discussed. We will do our best to spread consumer education through its integration into our activities, through the sale and use of consumer publications and through getting other women and the community involved in consumer activities.

For further information, please contact the Consumers' Association of Penang,
27 Kelawei Road,
Penang, Malaysia.