

WHERE ARE MALAYSIA'S WOMEN IN GE-13?, 16 APR 2013

Lost amidst the focus on political posturing for the upcoming General Election, women's political participation remains a concern for Malaysia. It is telling that while much of the attention of women revolved around handouts and charitable assistance, they are much less likely to be portrayed as active participants in electoral politics and governance.

Persatuan Kesedaran Komuniti Selangor (EMPOWER) has, since 2009, tracked women's political progress – or lack thereof – through its “Equality Under Construction: Monitoring Women's Political Participation” project.

According to the electoral roll for the third quarter of 2012, 6,578,916 women are registered as voters. They represent 50.2 percent of the total number. However, this parity in terms of voter registration is not reflected in the number of elected representatives at the Parliamentary and State Assembly level. Only 10.4 percent of sitting Members of Parliament are women. The numbers are even more miserable at the State level: only 8.2 percent of State Legislative Assembly members (ADUN) are female. It is doubly disheartening that despite the low figures, this is still the highest number women as MPs and ADUNs since the formation of the country. Given that the first woman to be elected as an MP was in 1959, Malaysia should be doing much better. [1]

Women's political participation in the legislature and executive branches is important as their presence brings the spotlight squarely on issues that have been historically overlooked. Domestic violence, sexual assault and sexual harassment disproportionately affect women. They are also more vulnerable to certain forms of urban crime, such as snatch thefts. EMPOWER also notes that women are at increased risk of contracting HIV/AIDS: in 1990, out of the reported cases of HIV, 1.2 percent were women. In 2011, the number has risen to 21.1 percent, with housewives reportedly being the group with the highest increase of new infections. In addition, the participation of women in the labour force has never exceeded 48 percent between 2000 and 2011, the implication being that there are strong factors preventing women from reaching their economic potential. Among working women, only 3.6 percent are at managerial level.

Response to these issues, at State and Federal level, has largely been disappointing and falls far short of the demands by women's groups. With the low number of women in law and policy-making positions, is it any surprise that Malaysia has not progressed?

EMPOWER will monitor women's political participation and representation in the coming general election. After the election, EMPOWER will continue to monitor the

elected representatives on the impact of their policies on women. The results will be published on our website: [website](#)

EMPOWER strongly encourages more women to participate in politics. We urge political parties to nominate more women as candidates in winnable. The democratisation process will never be truly democratic without a gender agenda.