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## Environmental Awareness and Behaviour Index for Malaysia

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### Abstract

National Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is evaluated every two years to examine the environmental performance in Malaysia concerning different indicators such as climate change and water quality. Considering the causes of environmental degradation are mainly due to anthropogenic activities, this study aims to explore the need of indicating the social-psychological factors among Malaysians in qualifying the level of public environmental awareness and behaviour. A nationwide study has been conducted to examine environmental awareness and behaviour from 13 States and three Federal Territories. The result demonstrated current level of environmental awareness and behaviour among Malaysians, as according to the four categories; water pollution, air pollution, waste management and climate change

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**Keywords:** Environmental performance index; environmental awareness; environmental behaviour; Malaysians

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### 1. Introduction

Rapid urbanization and pursuing of better quality of life has caused Malaysia to shift towards environmental degradation resulting from the series of challenges from environmental issues. Harmful waste secretions, climate

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change, environmental pollution and ecosystem breakdown, to name a few, are the environmental catastrophes that are accustomed by the general public. These have been long articulated by a significant amount of researchers from varied scientific disciplines (Dominick et al., 2012; Asmuni, Khalili&Zain, 2012). The centre of the root leading causes to these occurrences is triggered by satisfying human needs through aggressive economic activities.

Environmental indicators are increasingly gaining their place in levelling and presenting the environmental conditions in quantitative contents. Environmental indicators can serve as a useful instrument for a nation to preserving the quality of life. In a global level, the Global Environmental Performance Index (EPI) has been established which encloses comprehensive indicators on measuring and tracking a country environmental performance under two major objectives, which are Environmental Public Health and Ecosystem Vitality performance. Since 2006, the Environment Performance Index (EPI) has quantified and ranked the environmental performance regionally including both environmental health and ecosystem vitality of 133 countries. The listed countries with EPI were up to 178 in 2014. EPI is developed by the Yale Centre for Environmental Law and Policy and the Centre for International Earth Science Information Network of Columbia University. The Global EPI vocalises two (2) major objectives of Environmental Public Health and Ecosystem Vitality performances. Based on the performances of these objectives, Malaysia ranked 9th position in 2006, 26th in 2008, 54th in 2010, 25th in 2012 and 51st in 2014 in the context of global EPI. The dropping of Malaysia's performance in global EPI has raised attention and concerns from the government and authorities.

For that reason, Malaysia has constructed its own signature of EPI known as Malaysia EPI, which consists of an additional objective of Socioeconomic Sustainability for national self-assessment purpose instead of global ranking. Somehow, this additional major objective of Socioeconomic Sustainability could be significant as it manifests the indicators in Malaysia EPI that help the both the government and non-government organizations in better decision-making, especially in policy implementation and management.

Malaysia EPI is regularly published every two (2) years whereas the last assessment is the year of 2012. Hence, there is a need to reform and reassess the existing indicators periodically to meet the socioeconomic changes (Malaysia EPI, 2012). Preceding studies pertaining to socioeconomic sustainability indicators have been proposed for bioenergy (Dale et al., 2013) and fishery (Seung& Zhang, 2011). Meanwhile, this study reviewed socioeconomic sustainability indicators in measuring environmental performance for the purpose of Malaysia EPI. As the civilization of the city runs down in the nation, people get attached to the environmental issues that greatly incur as the development rises up (Asmuni, Khalili&Zain, 2012). Individual environmental awareness and concern towards environmental issues are varied at different levels.

The dominant aim of Malaysia EPI is to present a comprehensive environmental performance profiling of the States within the nation for ranking purposes. Hence, it measures and highlights the inter-states' environmental performance through a quantitative methodology to identify best pedagogy and environmental policies which diminish the gap of socioeconomic development and environmental issues (Malaysia EPI, 2012). However, previous Malaysia EPI is lacking comprehensive methods of presenting the environmental awareness and behaviour performance in four (4) major environmental issues categories which are water pollution, air pollution, waste management and climate change. These are the four (4) categories that serve as grounded environmental problems that construct Malaysia EPI.

This study aims to discuss the contribution and importance of environmental awareness and behaviour levelling in policy making decisions. In this study, it also demonstrates the environmental awareness and behaviour performance in terms of four (4) categories in Malaysia EPI. It also examines the performance level of environmental awareness and behaviour among Malaysians as the outcome of a nationwide survey.

## **2. Environmental awareness and behaviour evaluation in policy making decisions**

Knowing the significance of exploring environmental awareness of Malaysians, it is essential to understand the context of environmental awareness. According to Hassan, Noordin and Sulaiman(2010), environmental awareness has three (3) concepts that include emotional, attitude and practice of sustainability awareness. With the motivating of psychological factors and emotional forces, the intention to conduct the series of environmentally friendly actions is driven. Based on the study accomplished by Altin et al. (2014), environmental awareness is referred as awareness to the environmental issues and active involvement in environmental organizations. In spite of that, environmental

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