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Malaysia's efforts toward achieving a sustainable development: Issues, challenges and prospects

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Abstract

Malaysia is classified as a middle-income country. In recent years, Malaysia has been transformed from an agro-based economy to a manufacturing economy. Malaysia is the fastest growing economies amongst ASEAN countries. This rapid growth rate is attributed mainly in the ability to exploit the very environmental resource base available for the country. The early European Colonialists who came over to Malaysia driven to vigorously exploit the country rich environmental resource base and the exploitation trend continues after the country independence till today. Government programs to develop and promote investment in the key sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, and services will need to be dealt with in a holistic manner. Environmental resources exploitation are important generators of economic growth but since the colonial periods environmental resources exploitation also have led to a steady increase in environmental degradation. Environmental degradation issues are becoming more intense and frequent in the last half decade or so not only in Malaysia but for the Southeast Asia Region as a whole. Environmental degradation would impact on the country societal wellbeing and quality of life. The last half decade also witnesses the emerging importance of trans boundary issues which further impact the well-being and quality of life in Malaysia. This paper discusses the attempts by Malaysia to address the environmental degradation within the whole fabric of sustainable development at both the National and International levels. The discussion is examining the issues, challenges and prospects of environmental management strategies, formulation of national policies and responsible ministries including implementation agencies, constraint factors and the role of the country in addressing environmental degradation at the Regional and Global scales. The discussion is based on frequency analysis of secondary information derived from literature search, government publications and information appraised from the internet.

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1. Introduction

Sustainable development, or sustainability, is now seen to be pervasive and multidimensional (Lubben, 2009). According The Bruntland Report (1987), development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Most interpretations of sustainable development work within the Bruntland formula but vary in relation to the emphasis placed on each of the three components of sustainable development namely economy, environment and society (Ross, 2009). Throughout history, the relationship between humanity and nature has been among the most important existential and philosophical issues. In traditional cultures the unity of humanity and nature was presented within an overall perception of the world and some indigenous cultures still preserve the view (Pavlova, 2009).

Sustainable development that is locally relevant and culturally appropriate could include several common goals or themes. The International Implementation Scheme for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) (UNESCO 2005) identified key areas of the concept as:

- Society: an understanding of social institutions and their role in change and development, as well as the democratic and participatory systems which give opportunity for the expression of opinion, the selection of governments, the forging of consensus and the resolution of differences.
- Environment: awareness of the resources and fragility of the physical environment and the effects on it of human activity and decisions, with a commitment of factoring environmental concerns into social and economic policy development.
- Economy: sensitivity to the limits and potential economic growth and their impact on society and on environment, with a commitment to assess personal and societal levels of consumption out of the concern for the environment and for social justice.

Indeed sustainable development has been widely adopted as a policy objective by institutions, governments, businesses, voluntary bodies and others. 'Ensuring environmental sustainability' is one of the UN's Eight Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015 (Ross, 2009). However, Environmental degradation, caused by unsustainable patterns of development taking place in many countries of the region, is exacerbating the effects of natural hazards. The damage caused by natural hazards is higher in countries where environmental degradation is severe. Deforestation, soil erosion, overgrazing, over-cultivation, flawed agricultural practices and the degradation of natural buffers all amplify the effects of natural hazards. Land degradation and desertification pose a serious threat to the region in the wake of the growing population and enhanced food demand (Jingzhu Zhao, 2008).

2. Study Area

Malaysia's is the developing country in Asia. Malaysia starts concerned in environmental issues since colonial times. Malaysia actively participates in for example, the Association of South-East Asian Nation (ASEAN) and in Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Malaysia has also participated in partnerships for the implementation of economic strategies, such as regional growth triangles (UNDP, 2005). Malaysia is an independent nation state, a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, with a federal government structure. The country, one of 10 nations in South-East Asia, comprises thirteen states spread across two major regions separated by the South China Sea (Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia on the Island of Borneo, and three Federal Territories. Kuala Lumpur was established in 1974, Labuan was established in 1984 and Putrajaya was established in 2001. Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia had a common background of British colonial administration, though this administration began at different times in different states. Malaysia also represents one of the success stories of a developing economy. Malaysia succeeded in reducing its incidence of poverty from 49.3 percent in 1970 to 6.3 percent in 2002 (Anuar, 2003).

Subsequent development policies such as the National Development Policy (NDP), National Vision Policy (NVP) and Vision 2020 had continued to incorporate elements of poverty eradication strategies in their implementation.

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