

Malaysia under the Purview of the United Nations and Agenda 21

Maisarah Makmor, Zulhabri Ismail, Rugayah Hashim, and Nasyairi Mat Nasir

Abstract—Developing a nation geared by the principle of sustainable development has been one of the piers in moulding a greater nation for Malaysia since its independence. This is seen by the act of joining the United Nations in 1957, just a month after gaining their independence. The United Nations is an international organization that aims to unite the nations worldwide based on justice, human dignity and human well-being. Malaysia has established a local body called the United Nations Malaysia which collaborates with the government to accomplish the aim of supporting sustainable development in Malaysia. Agenda 21 is an international document produced from the Earth Summit providing guidelines of implementing sustainable development globally, nationally and locally. Initiatives of applying Agenda 21 in Malaysia have been taken by the government and non-profit organizations to expose issues regarding sustainable development and providing environmental education to the community to increase awareness towards environmental protection.

Keywords—Agenda 21, Environmental Protection, Malaysia, Sustainable Development, United Nations.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE United Nations is an international organization that has members of countries all over the world. Currently, there have been 193 independent nations that has become the member of the United Nations [1]. The term 'United Nations' was originated from the Declaration by United Nations which was named by Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt on the 1 January 1942 during the Second World War [2]. The Declaration by United Nations is an international pledge by 26 countries against the Axis Power in the World War II and thus this organization is addressed as the United Nations [3]. According to Briney [2], the United Nations has officially been established in 1945 after the blueprint of the Charter of the United Nations was drawn up by 50 countries at the UN Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, California.

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The Charter was then signed on 26 June 1945 by 50 countries and followed by a signature from Poland which makes a total of 51 countries ratifying the Charter. Consequently, with the ratification from 51 countries, the United Nation has formally come into existence on the 24 October 1945 [3].

II. THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations has several aims which revolve around one purpose which is to unite all nations worldwide as one while striving for peace and development based on justice, human dignity and human well-being [4]. Moreover, the United Nations organizes international conferences that address, debate and seek solutions for international issues that affect the global environment and the development of human race [4]. Since the existence of the United Nations, Malaysia has decided to become a part of the international organization. Initially, the United Nations was joined by the Federation of Malaya on the 17 September 1957 [5]. On 16 September 1963, the Federation of Malaya has been renamed to Malaysia and it is followed by the event of Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak joining the new federation. Nonetheless, Singapore has decided to renounce their position from being a state in Malaysia and gain their independence on 9 August 1965 thus joining the United Nations on 21 September 1965 [5].

In order to function efficiently in Malaysia, the United Nations has its own country team in Malaysia under the name of United Nations Malaysia. The United Nations Malaysia works hand in hand with the Government of Malaysia and has several bodies that work together under the organization to achieve an aim of supporting sustainable development in Malaysia [6]. The United Nations Malaysia operates in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that strive to minimize the extreme poverty at a global level with a deadline of 2015 [7]. Recently, Malaysia has been praised by the United Nation Secretary-General on the excellent achievement in sustainable development where poverty has been curtailed throughout the country in compliance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) ahead from the target year [8]. Furthermore, Malaysia has actively involved and has given numerous contributions to the organization in support for a better world. Malaysia has been recognised by the United Nations for the contributions of 20,000 courageous troops, police and civilians that has participated in abundant United Nations missions to achieve peace and security globally [9].

III. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTOCOLS

27 years ago, the world was shocked by the news of the Antarctic ozone hole present in the atmosphere by the British scientists under the British Antarctic Survey [10]. The ozone hole has caused several negative impacts to human and the environment. More importantly, the event has induced the potential of a greater global warming and extreme climate changes [11]. Thus, environmentalists and policy makers have excogitate and successfully come out with several environment guidelines and protocols throughout the years to reduce the effects of human impact to the global environment.

A. Agenda 21

Three words can be used to describe sustainable development are equity, economy and environment. This can be further defined as a scheme to utilise global control via land and resources including managing social transformation without damaging the environment [12]. The concept of sustainable development does not only involve the care for the environment but it also involves a combination of social welfare programmes with government's control over private business, socialized medicine, national zoning controls of private property and restructuring of school curriculum [13]. Sustainable development definition may be significantly different between developing countries and developed countries. This is because developed countries have wealthy economic backgrounds and they are only required to adopt and apply policies regarding environmental issues such as recycling and energy efficiency to achieve sustainability. On the other hand, developing countries will focus more on implementing policies related to managing equity, economic transformation programmes to generate wealth and also distribution of wealth, education and community development [14].

A "soft-law" policy document consisting 40 chapters which is known as the Agenda 21 has been designed to complement the concept of sustainable development [15]. Agenda 21 is an international document that contains guidelines to be applied globally, nationally and also locally to attain sustainability [16]. Agenda 21 was revealed in the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or 'Earth Summit' which was held at Rio de Janeiro in 1992 [17]. The Agenda 21 is a document that comprises issues addressed by the UN General Assembly (UNGASS) in UNGASS Resolution 44/228 of 1989 which are separated into four significant sections [16]. The blueprint is a non-binding programme of action has been signed by 179 countries [18]. The Agenda 21 is intended to mitigate world community's problems such as poverty, hunger, sickness and illiteracy without abusing the environment [16]. This programme also strive in moulding the world to be a more civilised and humane place which integrates the great benefit of the environment with a better community development in all aspect for the use of the future generation [19].

Every signatory member for the Agenda 21 will be monitored by a Commission on Environment and

Development on their commitment and progress in applying the environmental agreement as to the objectives of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) [20]. Agenda 21 has been implemented locally and has been known as Local Agenda 21 where it is a programme that forms partnership between three parties which are the Local Authority, the private sector and the local communities in planning and implementing programmes and caring for the surrounding environment to achieve sustainable development [21]. According to Alebon & Klinsky [22], 674 Local Agenda 21 (LA21) had been produced by 17 countries in the Asia-Pacific region and one of the eminent criteria of the Asia-Pacific's LA21 is the emphasis on environmental protection which distinguished the region from other regions. Malaysia has been one of the 17 countries that have contributed 9 LA21 to the total of 674 LA21 in Asia-Pacific region in support of the Agenda 21 [22].

Focus of LA21s in the Asia-Pacific Region

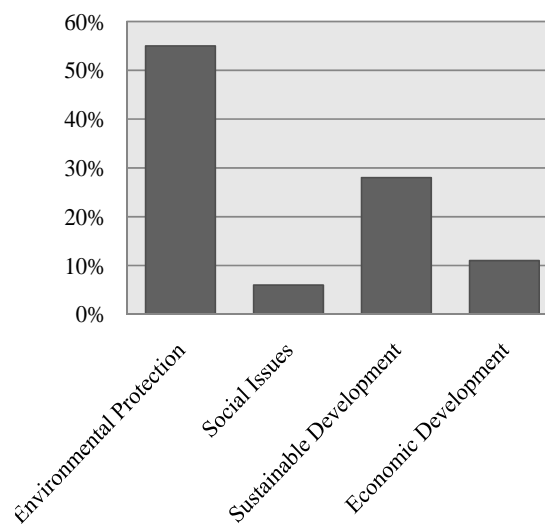


Fig. 1 Local Governments' Response to Agenda 21: Summary Report of Local Agenda 21 Survey with Regional Focus.

Adopted from: Alebon, K., & Klinsky, S. [22]

Malaysia has taken the initiatives to implement Agenda 21 into the country's development planning and monitoring systems, viz, the five-year Malaysian Development Plans and the long-term Outline Perspective Plans (OPPs) which are carried out in a period of 10 years [23]-[26]. Moreover, other initiatives to apply the Local Agenda 21 in Malaysia have been executed by Federal Government, State Government and non-governmental organization [23].

The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) is one of the bodies that has initiated the Local Agenda 21 Pilot Projects in collaboration with the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) of the Prime Minister's Department with a purpose of applying Local Agenda 21 to the local

governments in four chosen pilot sites [27].

In the midst of 1999, the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) has evaluated all local authorities throughout Malaysia and the four local authorities that have been chosen to be the sites for the LA21 Pilot Projects are Miri, Petaling Jaya, Kerian and Kuantan [28]. The Local Agenda 21 Pilot Projects utilizes a bottom up approach which prioritises the community participation especially the public to be involved in the programmes [21], [27]. The main aim of the LA21 Pilot Projects is to expose the local community to the issues regarding sustainable development thus providing environmental education and awareness towards our obligation and commitment to preserve and conserve the environment for a better tomorrow [21], [29]-[30].

In the Country's profile for the Johannesburg Summit 2002, UN [31] has reported that the Prime Minister's Department has inaugurated poverty alleviation policies and programmes in Malaysia which has involved multi-tiered bodies such as the village community, the Cabinet, the Parliament, government corporations and few non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Poverty Eradication Foundations who voluntarily agreed to collaborate in programmes to eradicate poverty issues in Malaysia. The programmes carried out to reduce the poverty level in this country include economic and social development programmes which introduce income generating projects, promote positive value among the poor and provide amenities to improve the quality of life especially among the indigenous community, the Orang Asli [31].

Furthermore, the WWF-Malaysia which is a non-profit organization has executed the Eco-Schools programme to promote sustainable development concept among younger generations in Malaysia. The Eco-Schools programme highlights the importance of the being aware and conscious for the local actions that contributes to the positive and negative effects on both environment and people in the present and also the future [32]. In addition, the Agenda 21 has contributed awareness and comprehensive actions towards protecting the marine environment in Malaysia [33]. Basiron [33] explained that the programmes that have been catered to implement Chapter 17 of the Agenda 21 in Malaysia will encompass six areas which are as follow;

- i. Integrated management and sustainable development of coastal areas, including exclusive economic zone (EZZ);
- ii. Marine environmental protection;
- iii. Sustainable use and conservation of marine living resources of the high seas;
- iv. Sustainable use and conservation of marine living resources under national jurisdiction;
- v. Addressing critical uncertainties for the management of the marine environment and climate change; and
- vi. Strengthening international, including regional cooperation and coordination.

Since signing the Agenda 21 in 1992, Malaysia has been more keen and active in developing new policies and

participating in programmes related to sustainable development on all aspects in the regional and international level to help improve the standard of being a developing country thus assuring a better environment for the benefit of present and future generation [21], [28], [30].

IV. CONCLUSION

Malaysia is a developing nation that projects growing interests in sustainable development and environmental protection. The development of environmental protection and sustainable development in Malaysia are influenced by the participation of Malaysia in the United Nations and the Agenda 21. The relation can be analysed from Fig. 2, Table I and Table II.

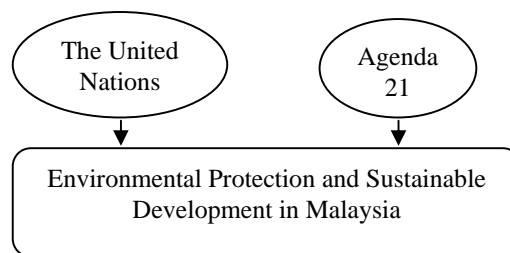


Fig. 2 The relationship between the United Nations and Agenda 21 towards the environmental protection and sustainable development in Malaysia

TABLE I
 THE UNITED NATIONS AND MALAYSIA

The United Nations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An international organization • Has 193 independent nations as members • Officially established in 1945 • Aim: To unite all nations worldwide as one, strive for peace and development on justice, human dignity and human well-being
Malaysia in the United Nations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in the international organization on 17th September 1957 • Established a local United Nations body called The United Nations Malaysia • The United Nations Malaysia collaborates with the government to achieve the aim of supporting sustainable development in Malaysia • The United Nations Malaysia operates in accordance with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to minimize the extreme poverty at global level by 2015 • Has been recognised by the United Nations for the contributions in participating in abundant of United Nation's mission to achieve peace and security globally

TABLE II
AGENDA 21 AND MALAYSIA

Agenda 21
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An international document • Contains guideline to attain sustainability globally, nationally and locally • Revealed at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) or 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 • Aims: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To mitigate world's community problems, i.e. poverty, hunger, sickness and illiteracy without abusing the environment - Strive in moulding the world to be a more civilised and humane place by integrating the environment's benefit for the use of future generation • Local Agenda 21 is Agenda 21 implemented locally to form a partnership between Local Authority, the private sector and the local communities to achieve aims of Agenda 21 • 674 Local Agenda 21 (LA21) has been produced by 17 countries in the Asia-Pacific Region
Malaysia's Actions in Agenda 21
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malaysia has implemented Agenda 21 into the country's development planning and monitoring systems; i.e. the five-year Malaysia Development Plans and the long-term Outline Perspective Plans (OPPs) • The Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG) initiated the Local Agenda 21 Pilot Projects in four chosen pilot sites • The LA21 Pilot Projects utilize a bottom up approach which prioritise the community participation • Aim: The LA21 aims to expose the local community to issues regarding sustainable development thus providing environmental education and commitments to preserve and conserve the environment • The Prime Minister's Department has inaugurated poverty alleviation policies and programmes to eradicate poverty issues in Malaysia • The WWF-Malaysia has executed the Eco-Schools programme to promote sustainable development concept among younger generations in Malaysia

Malaysia has been known worldwide to be active in the efforts supporting the increasing environmental protection awareness campaigns internationally via participating in various environmental protocols. Numerous efforts have been carried out locally by the government of Malaysia to increase the level of awareness towards environmental protection. Focusing on the topic of environmental protection in Malaysia, it all started in the year 1974 [34]. The Environmental Quality Act (EQA) was first enacted in the year 1974 to prevent, minimize and regulate the pollution level and also to intensify the environment in Malaysia [35]. Then, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment

(MOSTE) was joined by the Department of Environment (DOE) in 1975 and was established under the Third Malaysian Plan [36]. With the Department of Environment up and running, the government has started to draft on an Environmental Impact Assessment Handbook that consist of guidelines in applying the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) on new developments in Malaysia.

In approximately 12 years from the establishment of the Department of Environment (DOE), a Handbook of Environmental Impact Assessment guideline was published by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (MOSTE). Furthermore, the EIA Order was also gazetted under the Environmental Quality Act (EQA) in the same year [37]. Consequently, the EIA Order has been fully effective to new developments from 1 April 1988 [36]-[37]. Even though the EIA process in Malaysia has existed since 1970's, the performance of the local EIA is far behind to be compared with EIA in developed countries [38]. This is due to the 'top down' initiatives that have been applied in developing countries in implementing EIA while the 'bottom up' initiatives were utilized in implementing EIA process in developed countries [39].

Furthermore, the limited jurisdiction of the Malaysian EIA unit is another major constraint in the implementation of EIA process in Malaysia. According to Briffet et. al [40], the power of the DOE is only limited under the federal government jurisdiction and the approval or disapproval power rests on the local authorities which is under the jurisdiction of the state government. This current situation faced by the Malaysian government might lead to difficulties in implementing EIA in Malaysia [41]. The level of effectiveness in the implementation of EIA in developing countries including Malaysia has yet to be upgraded to achieve the recognized international practice and environmental protection benefits of EIA application [38]. Therefore, this paper will lead to a research focusing on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) in relation to the sustainable development and environmental protection in Malaysia and also in regards to the participation in numerous environmental protection protocols.

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