

Environmental Governance in Malaysia

Mohd Rizal Yaakop Norman Suratman, Aziawati Zakaria, Hussaind Yusria Zawawi, Jaziman Zakaria, Ainul Adzelle Hasnul, Ali Seman, Ruslizawati Taib and Samsu Adabi Mamat

Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600, Bangi, Selangor, Malaysia

Abstract:

In the era of globalization public concerns on environmental governance is imperative. The government is no longer source of authority and the style had change from government to governance. The objective of this study is to examine public views on environmental governance and political cooperation between state agencies in relation to environmental problem. Questionnaires involved a total of 678 data and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results show that despite many respondents are satisfied with the governance aspect, this include counter services, issuance of permits and licenses as well as staff training to deal with complains. The cooperation between state agencies and between Federal and state government is still perceived as low and need to be strengthened. Findings from this study provide response towards policy and practices related to the environment. It is important for future analyses to look into the question of political cooperation on managing environmental problems. It is recommended that future research on environmental policy will take into account perceptions toward environmental governance and political cooperation among the public.

Key words: Environmental Governance – Political Cooperation - State - Political Parties - Devolution

Corresponding Author: Mohd Rizal Mohd Yaakop, School of History, Politics and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 43600 UKM Bangi Selangor, Malaysia, Tel: +603-89215829, E-mail: rizaly@ukm.my.

INTRODUCTION

Threat to environment is a serious global problem and is regarded as very important and urgent matter. Thus the urgency of environmental security has been acknowledged since the end of the Cold War. Barnett [2001] argues that environmental policy is more than a coordination but also concern the utilitarian aspect of it. He argues that environmental security is ultimately driven more by the power of security-makers than by the need to address environmental problems. According to Dauvergne[1997], environmental policies have had little impact on powerful, politically-connected companies. With substantial areas of valuable timber controlled by state-business networks, and with state controls over civil society, state and business leaders have managed to resist

and undermine genuine environmental reforms. He further argues that when Sarawak does link security and environmental degradation, the purpose is generally not to improve environmental management, but to justify and legitimize campaigns to increase control and suppress internal dissent

The idea to focus on policy making is also stressed in Tampubolon [1998] who explains on the roles of policy and resource management stakeholders in land-use planning and management in order to reduce the impacts of trans-boundary pollution from fires in Indonesia. It was noted that the fundamental problem arose from the existence of a set of inconsistent and conflicting macro and micro policies in the context of meeting the food and fiber needs of Indonesia. For plantation companies land clearing via burning was rational; so was the concern of the government to prevent burning

Empirical analysis of the changing governmental roles in steering society - the shift in the way processes are thought about from 'government' to 'governance'- is made possible by observing the choices of policy instruments. Pierre and Peters [2000] suggest that, as an outcome of changing relationships between state and society, coercive or regulatory instruments are complemented by softer instruments, be they market-based or informational. Similarly, Jordan and colleague [2005] compare 'new' environmental policy instruments in nine different jurisdictions. This is premised on the existence of a continuum of control from government (indicating state dominance) to governance (implying more coordination by non-state actors).

The first wave of environmental policy institutionalization is characterized by innovations in: organizational instruments like the setting up of national environment ministries, environment authorities, and specialized advisory bodies; regulatory instruments through creation of a comprehensive legal framework and the incorporation of environment as a Constitutional article; and informational instruments such as the publication of national environmental reports and education campaigns [1992]. The second wave of institutionalization expanded and complemented the above list with new policy instruments. The number of instruments that governments apply is more pervasive in the second wave, mainly to address the integrative logic of sustainable development. Moreover, the shift to multiple instruments is also a characteristic of a government reorganizing itself by engaging with other parties, suggesting the shift from government to governance in tackling long-term goals for sustainable development [2005].

Devolution and decentralization is a concept that delivers freedom through a decrease of power and authority. It also devolved power to make a decision within a district or region to the local governing body, such as local authorities. This form is available in Malaysia, Britain, the United States and certain other countries. In Malaysia, the local authority or local government has devolved power of administration. Among the features and policies of devolution are: a. Local government has a clear geographical boundaries and legitimacy in the exercise of the duties and powers; b. Local government control is small and not directly, because it is autonomous, independent and united at the level of isolation from the federal government; c. Local government has sources of finance to carry out tasks or so-called financial autonomy. In the context of our study, devolution of power on environmental law means that a particular administrative and political task can be performed by a local or state government. The authority to make a final decision lies with the Local Legislative Council, District or State [2009]. The objective of this study is to examine environmental governance and political cooperation of state agencies in relation to environmental problems.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a questionnaire as an instrument for obtaining data. 678 questionnaires are taken into account. These are respondents selected from flood area in several states in Malaysia. Sampling method used is a random sampling by states experiencing flood problem. The distribution of samples is distributed randomly by states in Malaysia, which ranged from District of Kota Tinggi (Johor) 16.52 %, Kuching (Sarawak) 14.1 %, Kedah, 13.72 %, Selangor 12.83 %, Sibul (Sarawak) 11.2 % and Perak 10.2 %. Based on gender, samples were distributed to 32 % of male respondents and 68 % of female. Majority of respondents or 78.9 % are at the age of 18 to 25 years old, 11.5 % at the age of 26 to 35 years old, 4.13 % at the age of 36 to 45 years old, 2.8 % at the age of 46 to 55 years old and 2.6% at the age of 56 years old and above.

Qualitative method was chosen as researchers surveyed through items that are associated with aspects of knowledge, responses and political cooperation in addressing environmental. The questionnaires were chosen because they represented a comprehensive measure and could be used to measure all aspects of public opinion especially on addressing environmental issues in Malaysia. The questionnaire consisted of several sections: Part A: Personal information of respondents. This part contains the personal information that aims to help researchers find and understand the background of research subjects. This section contains seven items intended to obtain information relating to gender, nationality, age, occupation, income, tenure, and ethnicity. Part B deals with the respondent evaluation of Government Agencies. In Part C, there were 20 different questions relating to the respondents overall assessment of the government agency managing the environmental problems. Respondents were asked to choose an appropriate answer to each question on the following scale: A. Very good and exceeded my expectations; B. Good and meets my expectations; C. Less than satisfactory and not as expected.

The data obtained from questionnaires were analyzed using Statistical Packages for The Social Science (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics were used for %ages and frequencies. Descriptive analysis is a comprehensive technical description of the status of the survey which aims to provide an initial overview of the demographic profile. In analyzing the data, researchers are concerned with the complete answers of the respondents. Thus, incomplete questionnaires would be misleading and will be deducted from the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response to Environmental Governance: On question of how the public views management of environmental problems, there are few issues which had been addressed. With regard to counter service complaints on environmental problems, it appears that about 49.3 % of respondents felt that the counter service complaint meet their expectations. Meanwhile, there were 39.5 % or 374 respondents not satisfied and do not get the service as expected. A total of 9.1 % or 86 respondent satisfied with the state of services received as excellent and exceeded the expectations. The other question is on the availability of the departments and environmental agencies to serve the complaint. It is found that 50.8 % thought that the willingness of the government departments and environmental agencies to serve the complaint is well and meet expectations. Further, only 9.8 % are very satisfied with the readiness of the departments and environmental agencies to serve the complaint. Meanwhile, 37.8 % not satisfied and found the availability of environmental departments and agencies to serve their complaint is not satisfactory and not as expected.

The other part of question is on training to deal with environmental problems. It appears that 51.9 % of respondents feel that training of government staff to deal with an issue is not satisfactory and not as expected. Further, only about 36.1 % say that the training received by employees or government agency meet their expectations. 9.9 % respondents are very satisfied with the training received by employees or agencies which exceed their expectations. On the question of production of commercial licenses for diesel engine vehicles, 46.2 % of respondents believe that the issuance of licenses for commercial vehicles and diesel engines meet their expectations. Meanwhile, about 40.7 % less satisfied with the issuance of such licenses. Further, 10.4 % of respondents accept these things beyond their expectations. Similar to the issue of licenses, next question deals with the production of timber harvesting permit. It is found that 46.2 % of respondents believe that the issuance of a permit felling of timber is not satisfactory and not as expected. Meanwhile, a total of 32.4 % or 307 respondents accept this. Hence, only 102 people or 10.8 % of respondents felt that the issuance of permits felling of timber is very good and exceeds their expectations.

It is also found that 46 % of respondents believe that cleanliness, facility and building layout is good and government agencies meet their expectations. Meanwhile, a total of 39.7 % respondents do not agree with this statement and found the cleanliness, facilities and layout are not as expected. 10.8 % of respondents very satisfied with this statement.

Political Cooperation: The other question is on political cooperation: the question of state and government agencies cooperate on environmental issues is on the role of community leaders. It is found that 45.9 % of respondents felt that community leaders play a better role and meet their expectations in handling matters related to the environment. Next, there were 42.7 % of respondents found community leaders does not play a role in this matter and not as they expect. There were only 9.9 % accept and feel that the leader of this community have a vital role in environmental matters related to this. The second question is on the role of political leaders. It is found that that 45.9 % viewed the role played by political leaders is not satisfactory and not as they expected. Hence, a total of 43.1 % of respondents viewed the role of political leaders such as party leaders to address environmental problems in Malaysia as acceptable. Meanwhile, 9.2 % said that these leaders played their role well and exceed expectations. The third question is on public facilities to maintain good environmental. It is found that 47 % viewed public facilities to maintain a good environment is good and meet their expectations. Hence, a total of 40.6 % less satisfied with public utilities and 10.2 % of respondents said that it was more than what they expected.

It was found that the public were less satisfied with the cooperation given by the political parties in the face of environmental threats. This fact is evidenced by the results of the analysis that 49.8 % of respondents who think so. This number is very large as about 472 respondents found that cooperation between political parties in the face of environmental threats is very weak compared to only 37.6 % of respondents. Only 10.9 % of respondents are satisfied with the quality of cooperation among political parties in addressing the environmental threats at present. On Federal-State relations, 52.65 % found that state policies are generally good and meets their expectations. Meanwhile, a total of 34.23 % of respondents not satisfied with the overall state policy. 11.21 % respondents found that the state government's policy as a whole is very good and exceeds their expectations.

Almost half of the respondents did not satisfy with the role played by community and political leaders in addressing environmental problems such as floods. It was found that the public were less satisfied with the cooperation given by the political parties in the face of environmental threats. Interestingly, this can be link to floods in Kedah and Perlis, northern states in Malaysia. The problem had caught public attention and awareness on role played by different community and party leaders. It was reported that there were incidents that Islamic Party (PAS) ruling government in Kedah did not want to cooperate with the United Malay National

Organization (UMNO), a party ruling Federal government. In the same manner the PAS leadership made accusations that assistances and aids carried out by the Federal agencies were solely for their party supporters. To counter such accusations, few UMNO leaders appear to stress that their assistances and aids were made to everybody regardless their political belief. On the other hand, the PAS Chief Minister of Kedah was shown with fierce and sour faces, rejecting all sorts of publicities by the media.

On Federal-State relations, 52.65 % found that state policies are generally good and meets their expectations. The cooperation between federal and state governments is a challenge for the management and enforcement of environmental policy in Malaysia. Enshrined in the Constitution are jurisdictions of the Federal Government (First List) State Government (Second List) and the Concurrent List (List three) under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution of Malaysia. Absolute power is given to each state to deal with any matters relating to the use of land and natural resources in their respective states. The Constitution also guarantees Sabah and Sarawak to deal with certain things within a given jurisdiction. In addition, understanding of separation of powers and the special relationship between the Parliament, The Government of the Federal and State Government is very important to understand the issue related to the environment.

The above argument is in line with Jamaludin Jahi [1999] who argues that the National Policy on Environment has set out a number of strategies and if they are really implemented through various programmes could actually ensure human security. Nevertheless, efforts at curbing environmental quality deterioration in this country are beleaguered by lack of inter-agency coordination and cooperation. Jamaludin Jahi [2001] also argues that environmental management should be carried out in an integrated manner because there is no single action taken that will result in any reciprocal action or response. Given the above discussion on governance and political cooperation, this study expects that environmental policy is not directly been done by the Central government but hand in hand with state government and other agencies (as in the case of Sarawak). However, with regard to regional and global environmental threats such as climate change, ideas and input to national policy will be given by agencies operating at national level. Environmental policy is not simply taken single-handedly by politician but by many others due to a need to a careful analysis by experts and opinions of various agencies dealing with such issues. The urgency of environmental issues such as climate change had set the process of policy making as rational as possible. Information and data on certain environmental issues were richly gathered. As climate change is concerned, data was not only from scientist but also social scientist. However, what is still at stake is whether different parties can cooperate well facing the environmental problems.

CONCLUSION

The analysis showed that political cooperation in facing environmental problem is still low between parties as well as Federal-State government in Malaysia. The publics were less satisfied with the cooperation given by the political parties in the face of environmental threats such as floods. Therefore, this aspect must be strengthened as environmental issue concerns togetherness and unity against common enemies. Management of environmental problem should be based on cooperation, and by having a correct knowledge the people can decide what the best is for themselves and the nation. It is important for future analyses to look into the question of political cooperation on managing environmental problems which has become one of important measures in dealing with environmental disasters and calamities.

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