TOWARDS WATER SUSTAINABILITY

Water in Malaysia : The holistic sustainable path

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SUDI
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SUDI: CETDEM's Think Tank

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Malaysia

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FOREWORD

The concept of sustainability remains somewhat fuzzy and has not been applied well to Malaysian water. This study decided to address this issue on a national basis and draw up recommendations on how this path could be undertaken.

The study recognized that Malaysia itself does not have many effective sustainable practices ranging from comprehensive and efficient water management to maintaining adequate water supply and quality.

Within SUDI's constraints, two draft papers on governance and physical aspects were commissioned at the beginning and their findings were discussed with invited stakeholders in 5 major towns. After updating the papers, recommendations and a Plan of Action were drafted

Many problems were encountered as detailed later but the most severe was the paucity of stakeholder inputs, which the study team felt was necessary for enriching the team's findings.

The Executive Summary presents the findings as well as challenges that need to be overcome for sustainability to be entrenched in our water system. A Plan of Action has been drawn up to ensure monitoring of how well the Recommendations are being implemented by the relevant actors.

A common refrain at the consultations was poor or sometimes lack of enforcement of many regulations. This is also the common complaint for the entire environmental field in Malaysia. It has to be seriously addressed by the new Pakatan Government as well as civil servants at all levels since inefficiency and corruption have become pervasive.

The formation of the Ministry of Water and Natural Resources [KATS] mid-way through the study has resolved one of the major Recommendations of the Governance chapter. We hope that over the coming years the majority of this study's Recommendations are implemented. Malaysia will then be on the correct path!

Gurmit Singh,

November 2018.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study set out to examine Malaysia's current water conditions with the aim to suggest an appropriate holistic approach to achieve water sustainability.

Its approach was to work with data available in the public domain for assessing the current status of Malaysia's water management. Besides that, consultations between the study team and stakeholders in five different towns were held to gain insight on the current water situation in those towns. Two draft papers on Governance and Physical were presented during these consultations.

The first chapter was compiled from literature review and discussions to set out the objectives and benchmarks of the study. Malaysia has set out some targets to improve efficiency and savings in the water sector, but these targets are only achievable if the government sets strict regulations for all. Considering that, the study looked into two sections, the governance of water and its physical aspects. Team members were to examine and assess measures that can be undertaken to achieve water sustainability.

Chapter 2 examines the governance of water. Malaysia's water resource management is complex due to the sharing of jurisdiction between the Federal and State governments. This chapter describes the status of Malaysia's water management through reviewing the existing water regulations, its economic and policy dimensions and the water administration in the country. It also discusses the constraints in governing the water sector at three institutional aspects [i] hardware [ii] software and [iii] heartware. It raises the aspect of hydrosocial considerations in management.

Chapter 3 analyses the physical aspects of water. The major source of water in the country is surface water while a small percentage comes from groundwater. This chapter looks into the quantity of water for [i] agriculture, [ii] potable water and [iii] groundwater. Additionally, the chapter examines the quality of Malaysia's water resource and the pollution that contributes to the deterioration of the quality of our rivers and sea. Suggestions on practices and measures that could be implemented to achieve sustainable water are given.

Chapter 4 focuses on the recommendations that need to be implemented in order to achieve water sustainability. These recommendations were set out by the team members while also considering the feedback given by stakeholders from the five consultations held throughout the project period.

Some of the recommendations are:

i. Enacting a Federal law on water
ii. Streamline national water administration
iii. Studying the pattern of water consumer behavior
iv. Cross sector financing
v. Removing perverse incentives
vi. Creating new knowledge and partnerships
vii. Upholding the rights to water for the poor and disenfranchised
viii. Reduction of non-revenue water and per capita consumption
ix. Developing other potential sources of water

In **Chapter 5**, the plan of action is established. The plan is mainly the monitoring the progress of recommendation implementation by key stakeholders involved. The targeted dates of implementation are specified in Chapter 4. This monitoring & public evaluation process will be done over the span of 5 years.

The constraints and challenges faced during this project are discussed in **Chapter 6**. Like most projects, financial and individual involvement were the common challenges faced. Nonetheless, that did not stop the project from proceeding.