

Consumers Education, Representation and Participation in Integrated Water Resource Management and Conservation-Malaysia

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Extended Abstract:

Water is a precious and scarce resource. Water is a critical factor to alleviate poverty and hunger, for sustainable development, for environmental integrity and for human health. Community has complex priority for the use of water as economic factor as well as household use. However, recently the access to this basic necessity is continuously being threatened by privatization and shortages in some states. The restructuring of the water industry in Malaysia is pertinent, because we need an immediate solution to the water rationing and water shortages faced every year. The success and failure of any policies relies mainly on two critical features, which is the enforcement of the policy and the end users satisfaction. Therefore, consumers' representation and participation in water industry is vital.

Wastefulness and water contamination diverts this resource from meeting the growing demands. Malaysia is a country, blessed with an abundance of water however lately the water situation of the country has changed from abundance to scarcity. Apart of other reasons such as rapid industrialization, population increase, non-revenue water, old asbestos pipelines, sectoral based water laws, FOMCA realized the pivotal reason is the lack of public education on water conservation. This is due to the reasons such as the mindset of the community, whereby wastefulness has turned into a habit, and the community is taking the precious resource as granted.

Over consumption, as practised in high-income countries and in middle and upper classes of the developing world must be examined. (*Malaysia falls under the Upper-middle income countries in the OECD List*). Water consumption as in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Countries at the end of 1990's was between 100 and 200 litres per day per person. Some countries such as US and Canada (Malaysia in some states) exceed 300 – 500 litres per day per person. In contrast average consumption in the poorest areas of the developing world hovers at the 10 litres per day per person, the minimum necessary for survival. According to the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), which was adopted in the year 2000, reasonable access is defined as the availability of at least 20 litres a person a day from a source within one kilometre of the dwelling.

It is clearly noticeable that there are no exact measures or indicators of the appropriate amount of water for per capita consumption per day. However, studies have concluded that to sustain a reasonable quality of living requires about 80 litres of water per person per day inclusive of 3 litres of water for drinking purposes.

Malaysian Water Industry Guide 2004 indicates that in year 2002, 67% of water consumption is for the domestic usage. Per capita consumption rate of the domestic water usage varies from one state to another. The highest is about 476 liters per capita per day and the lowest is about 90 liters per capita per day. Water conservation at domestic level is not limited to using less water; it is also about channeling the kitchen wastewater in a proper manner as well as reusing water whenever possible. It is noticeable that there are factors contributing towards the high water consumption and pollution patterns such as the tariff rates, the sanitation and disposal facility, drainage system and the availability of water. The per capita consumption also varies significantly between the urban and suburban areas.

Recently there have been a lot of change in the legal framework of the water resources in Malaysia. Issues on the governance as well as methods of managing water resources are being studied and looked into in Malaysia following the amendment of the Federal Constitution to transfer the jurisdictions of law under a concurrent list which was previously under the state purview. Legal framework and policies should be made in consultation with communities and civil society to ensure that they are aware of the framework as well as to foster participation in order to encourage ownership and responsibility. Therefore, NGO's such as FOMCA which has wide contacts with grassroots communities can be utilized to gather their comments on the framework drafted by government on IWRM. This applies especially to issues such as water, air, energy and food.

Two new water acts namely the National Water Resources Commission Act and the Water Services Industry Act were drafted and FOMCA played an important role in the process to gather comments from public as well as to provide detailed feedback to the Acts. FOMCA presented a 97 page memorandum, making 57 changes in the drafted laws which were open for comments. The Parliament of Malaysia acknowledged FOMCA's input and the Ministry accepted some of FOMCA's input/recommendations when it tabled the final draft of the water act.

This paper will concentrate mainly in creating awareness and harnessing conservation in achieving sustainability as well as some suggestions on consumer participation in water related policy. The paper will also highlight the pivotal role of government, industries and community participation in consumer education on water conservation in addressing the increasing demand problems. Consumer education and awareness has to be harnessed in promoting conservation and achieving sustainability. Being a good consumer means being able to understand and value what one's needs and wants are. It involves thinking and utilizing resources intelligently so that conscious decision-making takes place during consumption. They need information on the linkages between their attitudes and practices as consumers, and the degradation of the environment. It will help them to practice better use of resources for their daily needs. They will also be able to understand the cumulative effect of consumer decisions on the community, economy and the environment. Failure to move in this direction will impose disastrous implications to the environment and its finite resources.

Realizing the importance of Water Conservation, FOMCA with the cooperation of the Ministry of Water, Energy and Communications Malaysia will hold a 24-month **National Water Conservation Campaign**. The main aim of this campaign is to create awareness, build capacity and train the local consumers, community and school children on water conservation issues.

The campaign has been officially launched by the Minister of Energy, Water and Communications Ministry Malaysia on the 31st of July 2006. The campaign activities started from the month of July 2006 and will prolong till June 2008. The target set for this campaign is to achieve a rate of 10% reduction in the domestic water consumption. FOMCA together with the Ministry will work with many other interested parties, NGO's, government department in making this campaign a success story and also to ensure the problem addressed in holistic manner with the cooperation of all parties. This will further promote the sustainability of the campaign.

Objective of Water Conservation Campaign

To increase consumers' awareness on the rational usage of water and to promote water conservation through:

- Providing consumers with information, educate and build their capacity on different issues related to water conservation such as pollution reduction, grey water pollution and rainwater harvesting.
- To conduct a research on the domestic water consumption in Malaysia to understand the limitations and problems in domestic water conservation, as to take action on the most water wasteful activities.
- To gauge the performance of rain water harvesting in terms of quality and economy to further reinstate and reaffirm the benefits of rain water harvesting in Malaysia.

The main activities to be undertaken in this campaign will be producing brochures, posters and reading material in all languages widely used in Malaysia. Apart of that a national level research on domestic water consumption pattern, a national case study on rain water harvesting implementations and benefits to consumers, 10 capacity building workshops for school children, 5 public forums throughout the country will be incorporated in the campaign activities.

Expected Outputs of the Campaign

The expected outputs of the project and the campaign are:

- a) Improve interpretative materials and guides of water conservation methods for domestic level.
- b) To establish a closer working relationship between the entire water stakeholder, the government and the community.
- c) To encourage rainwater harvesting at domestic level as to include the technology for the new housing development projects.
- d) To create a self-sufficient consumer community through capacity building.

This paper will include case study of community-based approach taken by Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations and the result which will be a example to other government

departments, industries, non government organizations (NGO's) and community based organizations (CBO's).