

A Fair Green Economy? Studies of Agriculture, Energy and Waste Initiatives in Malaysia

Adnan A. Hezri and Rospidah Ghazali



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Acronyms

FELCRA	Federal Land Consolidation and Rehabilitation Authority
FELDA	Federal Land Development Authority
GDP	Gross domestic product
GEF	Global Environment Fund
GR	Green revolution
HYV	High-yielding variety
ICT	Information and communication technology
KEDA	Kedah Regional Development Authority
MARDI	Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute
MCED	Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development
MGBC	Malaysia Green Building Confederation
NEM	New Economic Model
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACOS	Partners of Community Organisation
RM	Ringgit Malaysia
SEDA	Sustainable Energy Development Authority
SMA	Single Mother Association
SREP	Small Renewable Energy Power
SRI	System of Rice Intensification
TNB	Tenaga Nasional Berhad
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Summary

This paper proposes that a green economy needs also to be a fair economy. Following broader global trends, in 2009 the Malaysian government established the basic architecture for green economy by incorporating a green technology portfolio into the newly established Ministry of Energy, Green Technology and Water. This was followed by a suite of interventionist policy instruments. However, Malaysia's approach raises the question whether the full range of social, economic and environmental goals is considered in its policy objectives, since a strictly economic approach to sustainability risks marginalizing the social equity aspects of green economy.

Parallel to the debate on sustainability, the social dimension of green economy has proven elusive both in definitional and substantive terms. There is no single understanding of integrated/comprehensive greening coming from either green growth, green economy or global green new deal discourses. However, the allocation of green goods and services is considered key, and it is recognized that this will eventually demand greater resources (not just economic) to achieve the necessary level of greening. For these reasons, although green economy does present an alternative pathway for development, it only partially resurrects the broader vision of sustainability as originally outlined by the sustainable development concept. For instance, focusing on green growth does not automatically lead a community to pathways to sustainability. Likewise, pro-poor investment alone cannot guarantee the diffusion of green projects that can lead to positive socioeconomic development outcomes. Since established poverty reduction programmes do not necessarily target the environment and vice versa, a green economy must integrate both poverty and environmental objectives.

Malaysia's national green economy framework reflects a mainstream economics framing, such as that of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). That is, it attempts to strengthen the economy via incentives, the tax system, pricing, regulatory frameworks and prioritized investments. Its target group, however, is industries located in urban centres and not the poor communities living in the rural areas of Malaysia. Consequently, the social dimension is not clearly spelled out in terms of programme and policy tools, despite the fact that "improving the quality of life for all" is one of the four pillars of Malaysia's National Green Technology Policy. This is manifested in the country's green policy design, evincing an urban bias. Given this scenario, the empirical section of this paper surveys piecemeal greening projects in a subnational context, particularly in Malaysia's rural frontier where poverty is still a major challenge. These projects are not officially considered a part of the country's recent response to the green economy agenda. Through case studies of agriculture, renewable energy and waste-to-wealth initiatives, the paper illustrates that green economy in Malaysia has most potential when it arises from the engagement of communities. The paper explores the contribution of these three sectors in meeting social policy objectives, as well as the challenges. Specifically, the paper investigates the benefits from a greener economy that will accrue to society members

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