

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In September 1997, Malaysia was badly hit by haze and it reached a climax when the state of Sarawak declared an emergency for ten days (DOE, 1997). News on environmental catastrophes and foreboding are common to us. Hardly a day goes by without the media highlighting on some issues.

Campaign after campaign on environmental issues has been launched and carried out by various groups from both governmental and non-governmental organizations. These campaigns are largely aimed at educating and influencing people's life-styles for the purpose of preserving the environment. Environment issues are not foreign in our lives. We often hear about recycling efforts, reduction of pollution, ozone layer, toxic waste and others.

The environment refers to the natural surrounding atmospheric conditions of land, air and water in which people live. Human beings depend on the environment for survival and hence it is important to preserve and protect the environment. The balance between man and nature is a delicate one; without proper conservation and protection of the environment, our basic well being may be in jeopardy.

The Seventh Malaysia Plan highlighted the need to create a clean, safe, secured, healthy and productive environment for the generations of today and tomorrow

(Government of Malaysia, 1996, p.648). Environmental programmes, however good in design, can only be effective with public participation and this is likely to be high if citizens are well-informed and fully committed in caring for the environment (Sham, 1992).

Recent reports in the media indicated that public participation in environmental issues was generally low (The Star, October 19 1999; The Star, Nov 2 1999; The Star, March 21 2000). Besides awareness of environmental issues, perhaps not being able to appreciate their own roles in environment efforts have resulted in apathy and a lack of compliance.

1.2 OBJECTIVES

The specific objectives of this study are:

- a) Gauge the level of knowledge and attitude towards environmental issues using various questionnaire instruments;
- b) Understand and examine the extent of participation in dealing with waste and other environmental issues;
- c) Suggests some policy implications based on the findings of this study.

In particular, the study will focus on the reduction of household waste and explore the extent of compliance and public participation. It will also explore public opinions on care of public places, effects of environment pollution and environmental friendly actions such as car pooling, reducing use of plastic bags in shopping, tree

planting, reducing emission from vehicles, reporting environmental violation to the authority and recycling.

1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1986, a study on public environmental awareness conducted by the Department of Environment, Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment Malaysia (DOE) found that environmental issues were ranked as the second last of eight public issues (Frank Small, 1986). However, over the last 10 years, the number of complaints received by DOE rose from 633 in 1987 to 4254 in 1997, suggesting rising public awareness on environment issues and/or rapid deterioration in the care and attention of the respective authorities (DOE, 1997). It should be noted that 79 percent of total complaints in 1997 were related to air pollution and this was the same year Malaysia was badly hit by haze (DOE, 1997).

Malaysian Science and Technology Information Center (MASTIC) under the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment Malaysia conducted 2 surveys in 1994 and 1996 to measure public understanding and awareness towards science, technology and environment. MASTIC found in the 1996 survey that the Malaysian public were aware of air pollution, flash floods and haze. However, they reported that they had not heard of environmental terms such as global warming, green house effect, ozone layer and acid rain (MASTIC, 1997). MASTIC concluded that Malaysians were generally not aware of direct effects. Another study found that the majority of

individuals were aware of environmental effects such as acid rains, ozone layer and global warming (Cerina, 1993). Some 75.2 percent of the respondents felt environmental issues were their concern. Hence, the literature search found that environmental awareness was generally high but one is unsure of the level of understanding of such issues, and the linkages to their quality of life. Hence, the measures utilized were generally weak and in no way indicative of their understanding of such issues or how they affect their lives.

It is also possible that the research efforts were not properly carried out resulting in findings which are questionable. Perhaps too, the questions used did not focus on issues of local concern and hence were of little value for action. From the literature review, it is also fairly clear that a high awareness need not necessarily encourage great public participation on environmental issues. There are possibly other intervening factors that need to be incorporated. It is the intention of this study to focus on teasing out some of these factors for policies and programmes. Better measures of knowledge and amenable policies and programmes are dearly needed. This study therefore explores alternative questionnaire instruments for measuring environment knowledge and highlights those particularly useful for policies and programmes. In many ways therefore the findings of this study represent a pioneering effort of great significance in effecting public participation in environment programmes.

1.4 FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study comprises six chapters. This chapter presented the research objective and literature review.

The research framework and methodology including a brief description of survey are presented in Chapter 2. This chapter also presents a discussion of the key variables used for analysis.

Chapter 3 describes measures of knowledge on environmental issues, particularly the effects of environmental pollution and household waste disposal. It also looks at the main sources of environmental information. Public attitudes towards preservation of the environment as regards their own roles and care of public places are also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4 analyses household behaviour towards waste, including the amount and types of household waste. The attitudes of respondents towards separation of household waste and household waste disposal are also covered in this chapter.

Ways of tackling environmental issues are presented in Chapter 5. Among others, recycling and waste reduction would be highlighted as ways to treat unwanted items.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings of the study and presents the result of multivariate model. Some policy and programme implications and recommendations based on the findings are presented in the final section.