

FOREST DEPARTMENT SARAWAK PARTICIPATION IN IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES OF THE MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS (MEA) SIGNED BY MALAYSIA

1.0 BACKGROUND

On the global front, Malaysia is party to various biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Malaysia is also party to agreements covering a wide range of subjects including trade in endangered species, protection of important wetlands, biosafety, climate change, transboundary movement of hazardous wastes, haze and laws of the sea. Our obligations are numerous, and we need to strengthen our policy framework to enable us to fulfill our responsibilities.

In addition to the CBD, Malaysia is also party to various other biodiversity-related multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs) such as:-

- ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze
- Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movement of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal
- Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (CPB)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)
- Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar Convention)
- Kyoto Protocol to the UNFCCC
- Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer
- Rotterdam Convention
- Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)
- United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer
- World Heritage Convention (WHC)

These MEAs complement and mutually reinforce each other in defence of the broad environment, including measures that are needed for national and international biodiversity management.

2.0 FOREST DEPARTMENT PARTICIPATION IN THE UNITED NATION FORUM

For more than a decade of its existence, Forest Department Sarawak (FDS) has played a central role in managing and conserving forests and forest resources. FDS has been actively participated in various international forums as part of the Malaysian delegation in discussing, deliberating and negotiating issues related to forestry sector and climate change. Among the United Nation (UN) forum that FDS participated in are the United

Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and United Nation Forum on Forests (UNFF).

2.1 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

What is UNFCCC?

The UNFCCC is a multilateral treaty adopted in 1992 – shortly after the first assessment report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1990 – to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations "at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (human-induced) interference with the climate system."

Since entering into force in 1994, the UNFCCC has provided the basis for international climate negotiations, including landmark agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015).

The first Conference of the Parties

The first Conference of the Parties (COP) was held in Berlin, Germany, in 1995. COP29 was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, in November 2024. COPs have created global milestones for the climate movement, setting standards and advancing action, including on reducing carbon emissions, accelerating a global energy transition, and helping countries adapt and build resilience to compounding climate issues. COPs are crucial in bringing governments together while also mobilizing the private sector, civil society, industry and individuals to tackle the climate crisis.

Malaysia's Commitments

Malaysia became a Non-Annex I Party to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) when it ratified the UNFCCC in 1994. Malaysia ratified the Kyoto Protocol in 2002.

The Paris Agreement (PA) which is a Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) aims to strengthen the global response to climate change threats, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty. The PA underpins the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) that binds all Parties to share the common obligation to address environmental destruction but denies equal responsibility of all states with regard to environmental protection, since developed countries would have an unfair economic advantage as they do not face the same restrictions like developing countries. All Parties are required to implement and report on their mitigation, adaptation, voluntary cooperation and Communication, Education and Public Awareness (CEPA) efforts to UNFCCC. The additional obligation for developed countries include providing financial support and developing transparency framework in assisting developing countries' in mitigation and adaptation efforts.

As a signatory to the UNFCCC, Malaysia has an obligation to report its GHG inventory to the UNFCCC. Malaysia takes this obligation very seriously. Consequently, every effort has been made to ensure that the document is comprehensive in its coverage, accurate in its reporting and contains the most recently updated historical data. The GHG inventory takes into account many sources of emissions and removals that were not included in the INC. The net result is a national communication document that far more realistically reflects the GHG emissions and removals in the country for the year in question.

The issue of climate change covers many sectors and as such is the concern of a wide range of institutions within the country. Overall changes to improve environmental management since the preparation of the Initial National Communication (INC) have also advanced the country's ability to cope with the complex issues of climate change.

Malaysia generally adopts a "precautionary principle" approach and "no regrets" policy and applies this in action that should be taken to adapt to or mitigate climate change. Government agencies, the private sector and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) work harmoniously together through appropriate initiatives to address climate change. Greater public awareness has resulted from such initiatives and mutually beneficial cooperation has increased between the formal and informal sectors to better tap into each other's respective strengths towards the common goal of addressing climate change.

Forests for Mitigation of Climate Change

Studies in Malaysia have shown that a significant amount of carbon is sequestered by existing forested areas and managed land use areas. Furthermore, substantial amounts of carbon are sequestered through reforestation and replanting programmes, as well as suburban and urban tree planting.

Approaches to Mitigation in the Forestry Sector

Climate change mitigation in the forestry sector may be accomplished through two broad approaches. The first approach involves reducing the rate of forestry-related GHG emissions to the environment. Emissions reductions in the forestry sector can be accomplished either through harvesting fewer trees and converting less forested land to other land uses, or, alternatively, by harvesting timber or converting land in ways that result in fewer emissions of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. In the forestry sector, emissions are associated primarily with timber harvesting. Sources of emissions include the actual harvesting event, the efficiency of log utilization and physical damage to surrounding trees, under storey plants, and oxidative loss of soil carbon. Therefore, barring the complete cessation of harvesting, the most intuitive method of reducing emissions, is simply to harvest fewer trees and to harvest a given area less frequently. The second broad approach takes advantage of the unique ability of living green plants to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, sequester the carbon in the form of lignin and cellulose-based materials, and release oxygen back to the atmosphere. Using this approach, forests and green spaces can also be used to mitigate climate change and

global warming through the sequestration of CO₂. This carbon is stored in the form of wood and other stable organic compounds such as humus or other soil carbon and not released to the atmosphere in the near-term.

The mitigation options in forestry could be classified into three broad categories (Sathaye & Ravindranath 1997).

- First is conservation of forest carbon by controlling deforestation, protecting forests, changing harvesting regimes, and controlling other anthropogenic disturbances, such as fires and pest outbreaks.
- Second is enhancing and expanding carbon sink by increasing forest area, soil carbon density and storage of carbon in durable wood products.
- Third is by substituting the use of fossil fuel-based energy generation with biomass-based energy or the use of biomass products in place of energy-intensive ones

2.2 United Nation Forum on Forests (UNFF)

What is UNFF?

The United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF) is an intergovernmental policy forum which promotes “management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end”. UNFF was established in 2000 by the UN Economic and Social Council. The Forum has universal membership, and is composed of all Member States of the United Nations.

The Basics

Participation in the Forum: Active participation of a wide range of forest related stakeholders is crucial to sustainable forest management. Governments, international organizations, instruments and processes, and major groups are actively involved in the Forum.

National Focal Points: Member States designate National Focal Points within their governments, to enable coordination and information exchange with the Forum. A directory of these focal points is available on the UNFF website.

The Four Global Objectives on Forests

- Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management (SFM);
- Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits;
- Increase significantly the area of sustainably managed forests; and
- Reverse the decline in official development assistance for SFM and mobilize increased financial resources for implementation of SFM.

Forest Department Sarawak (FDS) being the custodian to Sarawak’s forests participated in UNFF as delegation from Malaysia. FDS participation in the forum is crucial to showcase its commitment in implementing SFM.

3.0 SARAWAK'S COMMITMENT TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE THROUGH FORESTRY SECTOR

Terrestrial ecosystems play a significant role in the global carbon cycle. Forests capture and store atmospheric carbon dioxide in vegetation, soils and tree biomass. Forests account for almost half of the global terrestrial carbon pool, and if vegetation is considered alone (excluding soils) they hold about 75% of the living carbon (FAO 2006). Tropical forests store on average about 50% more carbon per unit area than forests outside the tropics. Thus, tropical forests could play a particularly important role to mitigate global climate change (Raihan et al., 2018).

The review by Raihan et al. 2018 shows that, the effective potential mitigation options in the forestry sector could be forest protection and conservation followed by afforestation, reforestation, sustainable forest management and urban forestry.

In tackling climate change, among the efforts of the Sarawak government is currently developing a Climate Change Policy that will provide a comprehensive framework for addressing carbon emission and mitigating the impact of climate change. Under PCDS 2030, one of the strategic thrust emphasizes on balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability, which is important to tackle climate change.

In line with sustainable development principle and commitment towards climate adaptation, various initiative will be implemented such as to maintain more than 50 per cent forest and tree cover, established an integrated watershed management policy to conserve and protect water resources, increase urban green spaces and priorities green mobile solutions, including developing electric vehicle (EV) based on public transport systems and expansion of renewable energy. (Rakan Sarawak, 2023)

Forest Department has since at the forefront in addressing climate action. Among the notable initiatives are:

1. Mandatory forest management certification by long-term timber licences
2. Embarking on Forest Landscape Restoration programmes
3. Enhancing the awareness of forestry related issues through Communication, Education and Public Awareness Programmes (CEPA)
4. Implementing Social forestry programs to assist local communities residing at the periphery of Permanent Forests
5. Gazettement of Permanent Forests
6. Enhancing Research and Development of flora and fauna
7. Enhancing the use of technology in monitoring Sarawak's forests
8. Conservation of flora and fauna

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