

Environment, Economic Growth, and Livelihood:

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The interconnection or even trade-off between the goals of preserving the quality of environment, promoting economic growth, and ensuring decent livelihood has been debated for decades. Nevertheless, the current emerging challenges posed by climate change (including the impending heat wave) serve as clear demonstrations that we have yet to effectively and promptly address these concerns. Policymakers might be overly preoccupied with attaining high levels of economic growth, while business individuals could be heavily focused on maximizing their personal profits, possibly at the expense of environmental degradation resulting from their endeavors. Comparable trade-offs may also confront smaller-scale activities. Small-scale activities may face similar trade-offs. They may know the importance of their environment, but limited or absence of environmentally friendly livelihood may force them to harm their own environment for their short-run economic survivability.

Therefore, the book's focus on the Island of Borneo, endowed with one of the world's oldest rain forests, is indeed timely. Borneo's uniqueness lies in its ecological significance, being the largest island in Southeast Asia and the third-largest in the world, as well as its shared territories among three countries: Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak states), and Indonesia (provinces of West Kalimantan, South Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and North Kalimantan). With the anticipated move of Indonesia's capital from Jakarta on the Island of Java to East Kalimantan on the Island of Borneo, the countries of Brunei, Malaysia, and Indonesia will be more integrated. It may present an opportunity to address the interconnection or trade-off between preserving the environment's quality, promoting economic growth, and ensuring decent livelihoods. The debate surrounding the aforementioned topic can be further heightened.

Therefore, the book's focus on the Island of Borneo and its exploration of the above-mentioned debate is a welcome contribution to the literature and global policy making. By drawing lessons from the distinctive challenges and opportunities of Borneo, a better path toward a sustainable and prosperous future as well as more collaborative efforts among the three countries involved can be charted for the region and beyond.

The book outlines five distinct segments depicting the environmental degradation in Borneo. The initial segment covers the period of extensive timber extraction spanning from 1970 to 2000. Before the early 1970s, Borneo still possessed plentiful rainforests. Nevertheless, the 1970s marked a turning point as the majority of Borneo's regions engaged in substantial timber extraction, except for Brunei Darussalam which depended on oil and gas resources. The swift timber extraction practices led to deforestation and degradation of the environment.

Consequently, because of the exploitative character of logging activities, the worth of the forestry industry has been decreasing since the 1990s.

The second segment examines the period following the logging activities, marked by the presence of two expansive land-based initiatives in Borneo. The first initiative involves the establishment of extensive dams aimed at generating hydroelectric power in Sarawak. Capitalizing on the region's ample land and water resources, hydroelectricity was anticipated to emerge as a fresh catalyst for economic development, intended to be supplied to neighbouring Brunei Darussalam, Sabah, and West Kalimantan. The construction effort faced backlash due to its insufficient efforts in relocating and supporting the local population, resulting in a decline in their livelihood.

The second initiative involves the establishment of Mega Rice Project, a huge one-million-hectare rice plantation in the mostly swamp areas in Central Kalimantan, in 1995. This project was supported by a transmigration programme aimed at relocating individuals from external regions to contribute to the province's labour force. Commencing in 1997, this project coincided with Indonesia's financial, economic, and political crises from 1997 to 1999. The project was ultimately abandoned in 1999.

Coal mining commenced in East Kalimantan in 1990 and in South Kalimantan in 1991. However, the dramatic rise in large-scale coal mining in both provinces occurred from 2000 to 2019. East Kalimantan is the leader, followed by South Kalimantan. Coal has been the major contributor to energy production and economic growth in Indonesia. This period is the third segment of Borneo's environmental degradation. However, the expansive open-cut mines has resulted in the pollution and tainting of water sources as well as the occupation of once-productive agricultural lands. Furthermore, abandoned mining sites frequently lack efforts toward landscape restoration, leading to the formation of perilous acidic ponds where unfortunate incidents, including the drowning of village children, have occurred.

The fourth segment delves into the emergence of oil palm cultivation as a novel developmental paradigm, experiencing rapid and expansive growth across Borneo during the 2000s. Sabah took the lead in introducing palm oil cultivation as early as the 1970s, a trend that proliferated across the entirety of Borneo during the 1990s. The 2000s witnessed a significant surge in Kalimantan, facilitated by policies on decentralization and privatization in Indonesia beginning in 1999. Subsequently, since 2000, the oil palm industry has experienced remarkable growth throughout Kalimantan. The rise of oil palm cultivation in Sarawak paralleled its expansion in Kalimantan. Major enterprises in Sarawak shifted their focus from logging to oil palm, seeing it as the new engine for accruing wealth and fostering economic advancement.

The oil palm industry has emerged as a fresh economic powerhouse, generating swift revenue for both Indonesia and Malaysia. However, this surge in the oil palm industry has come at the cost of the depletion of forests and peatlands. This transformation to the oil palm industry also poses challenges to long-term livelihoods, carries health risks, contributes to

enduring global climate change, and has been associated with the occurrence of fires during prolonged periods of drought.

Prior to 2010, Borneo had shown a degree of concern for its environment; nevertheless, it was only during the 2010s that the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia began to earnestly prioritize environmental protection. Over time, the notions of social and environmental sustainability have become integrated into various facets of economic development across varying tiers. This is the fifth segment, the transition to sustainable development.

The book also recognises that the governments in Borneo now have a distinctive opportunity to establish economies that possess greater sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience. The ongoing global digital revolution, including its impact on Borneo, is anticipated to facilitate the shift from land-based economies to sustainable development.

Finally, the book has been successful in offering insights into finding a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation. It also sheds light on how societies and industries can adapt to climate change and mitigate its impacts while ensuring that livelihoods are safeguarded. Additionally, the book advocates for increased cooperation among the countries sharing the island, encouraging them to work together on environmental protection, resource management, and sustainable development. It is a requisite read for policymakers, business professionals, non-governmental organizations, and academics engaged in the discourse surrounding the delicate balance between enhancing environmental quality, fostering economic growth, and ensuring sustainable livelihoods, for Borneo and beyond.