

## Environmental Education in Ayer Hitam Forest

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACT

#### *Introduction*

Public have been informed on the importance of forests. Protected forests are usually rich in their diversity of flora and fauna, serve as a source of fresh water, contain valuable products such as timber or wood, wildlife, nature and medicinal product as well as having cultural values. They are also natural laboratories for education purposes, climate and ecological balance, etc. The public's understanding about the forest is still inadequate. A lot of things can be learned from the forests besides their services to human life. A lot of people appreciate the importance of forests but they do not fully understand the forests thus they always forget or are not confident to advise the appropriate authorities when forest disturbances take place. They accept them as part of the development that they need to undergo without considering the long term impact on their local environment or surrounding areas.

Enhancement of public knowledge on forests can be done through many activities namely environmental education. Environmental education is not a new discipline but a new dimension in the education system (Palmer and Neal 1994). All levels of society should be involved in environmental education programmes.

Ayer Hitam Forest is one of the places that can be a venue for environmental education for Klang Valley and nearby areas. This forest reserve can be used by school children, youth, teachers or senior citizen to have greater understanding of the forest and its function to human life beside recreation activities. This paper is to describe briefly the activities on environmental education in Ayer Hitam Forest.

#### *What is Environmental Education?*

UNESCO-UNEP (1994) has identified the following definitions for environmental education:

According to Nevada Conference of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and National Resources in 1970, environmental education is the process of recognising values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture and his biophysical surroundings. Environmental education also entails practice in decision-making and self-formulating of code of behaviour about issues concerning environmental quality.

Organisation of American States Conference on Education and Environment in the Americas, 1971, defined environmental education as the activity that involves teaching about values judgement and the ability to think clearly about complex problems – about the environment – which are as political, economical, and philosophical as they are technical.

In the United States Public Law 91-516, the Environmental Education Act states environmental education as the educational process dealing with man's relationship with his natural and man-made surroundings, and including the relation of population, pollution, resources allocation and depletion, conservation, transportation, technology and urban and rural planning to the total human environment.

From the above definitions, it is clear that people have different opinions on the environmental education leading to conservation and protection of the forests. In the Malaysian context environmental education should be more

organised in order to develop uniformity in the understanding of the environmental education, appreciation, attitudes and responsibilities of the public on the conservation and protection of the forest.

*Why do We Need Environmental Education?*

Environmental education is to develop a clear awareness of social, political and ecological interdependence in urban and rural areas and economic concern on the environment, to make every person acquire the knowledge, values, attitudes, commitments and skills needed to protect and improve the environment and to create new patterns of behaviour of individuals, groups, and society as a whole towards the environment.

Public need knowledge on the environment to understand about the environment and try to develop the understanding of incidences such as flash floods, land slides, water shortage, climate changes, changes of water quality, increase of temperature, new diseases, imbalance in the ecosystem, biodiversity loss and pollution.

Through environmental education, the public will be more knowledgeable and confident to give views before they are faced with an environmental crisis, or motivated towards finding the solutions to the environmental problems.

*Example of Environmental Education Activities in Ayer Hitam Forest*

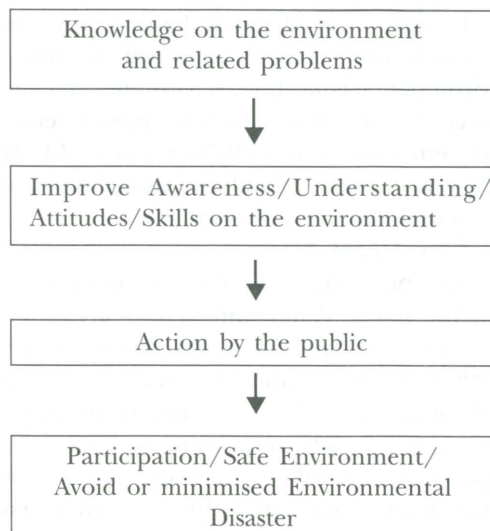
Environmental Awareness Programme is very important to develop public awareness and understanding of the processes and functions of the ecosystem. By using special modules, participants are taught to understand the role of forests and the importance of conservation or protection. Man-environment interrelationship covering different aspects of natural and socio-cultural environments are important to be introduced to the public. Among the participants involved in the Environmental Awareness Programme in Ayer Hitam Forest are adult public from different backgrounds, teachers (training the trainers) and school children. Examples of Environmental Education Modules for Trainers are ecological foundation, conception of awareness (culture, religion, economic, political, etc.), investigation and evaluation, and environmental action skills.

Ayer Hitam Forest can also be a natural laboratory for a school children. A special module can be designed based on the school curriculum to make teaching of sciences easier and more interesting to the students. This includes physical and life sciences. The module should also consider the teaching methodologies, activities, experiments and evaluation techniques. Teachers/supervisors need to have sufficient grounding in science especially in ecology.

*Why Ayer Hitam Forest?*

Ayer Hitam Forest is unique because it is the only forest left in the Klang Valley besides the 10.6 ha Bukit Nenas Forest Reserve. Its location is strategic in the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and is surrounded by rapid development areas. Its location in the Klang Valley and MSC can serve many people locally and as well as tourists. Ayer Hitam Forest is surrounded by high density population and heavy anthropogenic activities. Ayer Hitam Forest is reported to accommodate a high diversity of flora and fauna and has important aesthetic, economic, medicinal and other socio-environmental values. Since its location is unique and being the only forest in the area, it deserves to be protected and used not only for biodiversity concerns and research but also for education and tourism. In education, the forest can serve as a natural laboratory. The forest can also be used for extension services such as environmental camp and motivation/team building programme.

**CONCLUSION**



Ayer Hitam Forest can be a centre for public environmental education, natural laboratory for school children in the Klang Valley, and tourist attraction place. With these activities, Ayer Hitam Forest can serve the public directly and develop self generating funding besides protecting the forest.

**REFERENCES.**

- PALMER, J and P. NEAL. 1994. The handbook of environmental education. Rontledge London 267p.
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