

# Still a long way to sustainable development

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** Malaysia is more concerned with building shopping malls, skyscrapers and highways, than with ensuring that rivers are clean and forests are protected.

"We are still far away from achieving sustainable development," said Malaysian Nature Society executive director Dr Loh Chi Leong.

"However, it is not all gloom and doom as the policies are in place: the problem is in the implementation.

"Even though the environment is always mentioned, it's always the last to be implemented," he said, adding that the government's "sectorial approach" to handling issues was also a stumbling block.

"The government usually handles one issue at a time. We're still not thinking holistically."

Dr Loh stressed that policy makers understood the seriousness of green issues but this awareness did not filter down to lower officials.

World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia (WWF) executive director Datuk Dr Dionysius Sharma said Malaysia was still "too far off" from sustainable development.

"It's sad that the global indicator for development is still on the economics such as the gross domestic product."

He said since the first Earth Day 39 years ago, the same themes were cropping up.

"We're still talking about the same problems four decades on. What happened to the momentum?" he asked.

Environmentalism is not confined to just "saving the flora and fauna" as it also involves indigenous peoples.

"Sustainable approaches to life are part and parcel of the orang asal's *adat* (practices). When you destroy the environment, you affect the lives of the orang asal, too," said Indigenous Peoples' Network of Malaysia president Adrian Lasimbang.

He suggested that traditional practices be used to manage resources so "we can learn to tread lightly on the Earth".

Global Environment Centre director Faizal Parish said sustainable development was more crucial now with the shrinking global economy.

"In the current economic climate, we should look into improving energy efficiency. We reduce

operating costs while contributing to the environment. It's a win-win situation for Malaysia's economy."

But all four agree that the government is not solely responsible for driving these changes.

"Every individual must do his or her part. It's a collective responsibility," Sharma said.

When you save Mother Nature, you are saving yourself.

"At the end of the day, we can choose not to do anything about it. We can destroy it but be prepared to go down with it," Sharma added.



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— *Datuk Dr Dionysius Sharma*  
*World Wide Fund for Nature Malaysia executive director*

## THE ROOTS

- Earth Day was first celebrated 39 years ago
- Other countries were quick to jump on the bandwagon and marked every April 22 as Earth Day.
- Nowadays, Earth Day is celebrated for a whole week.
- United States Senator Gaylord Nelson, a passionate environmentalist, established the day to raise awareness and unite the people for environmental causes.
- It is believed that the initial celebration in 1970 marked the beginning of modern environmentalism.
- Environmental issues have become a collective responsibility, having grown from localised to global concerns, thus necessitating united initiatives.
- Malaysians started celebrating Earth Day in the late 1980s when species extinction was the main concern.