

BOOK REVIEW

Conservation of Marine Resources and Sustainable Coastal Community Development in Malaysia by Muhammad Mehedi Masud. Singapore: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019, 139 pp.

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The purpose of this book is to advance an economically, socially, and environmentally integrated management policy on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in Malaysia. There are currently 42 marine parks in the Peninsula, five in Sabah, and three in Sarawak. However, this book meets its objectives via an overly long detour that takes in, among others, sustainable development, laws and policies, biological diversity, governance, and climate change. Some of the information provided is interesting, others less so.

As an environmental anthropologist, I longed for the author, Muhammad Mehedi Mesud, a political scientist working at Universiti Malaya’s Faculty of Business and Economics, to stop and examine Malaysian MPAs in more detail. I wanted him to clarify the issues of why MPAs in Malaysia so often fail. Indeed, we get sentences like the following: “MPAs are largely restricted by a series of problems and issues in Malaysia, such as climate change (Kaur 2006), inefficient management (Siry 2006), sociocultural factors, limited enforcement, lack of coordination, absence of awareness, poor socioeconomic conditions etc. [sic] which influence environmental conservation” (p. 80). This should then be complemented with a rigorous look at a few MPAs, to see how they work on the ground. Instead, we get a lot of literature review, little in the way of case studies and, most important, almost nothing on the people affected by MPAs.

That said, Masud’s intervention is a welcome addition to the literature on MPAs. It will be useful to students looking for background information. Chapter 1 is a

synopsis of the book. Chapter 2 explains the main concept of MPAs with a very brief overview of global MPAs, with Malaysia (and other ASEAN countries) receiving primary attention. Chapter 3 continues the background material, with an overview of sustainable development goals (SDGs), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and Coral Triangle initiatives of six countries. This chapter also highlights the major challenges to the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas, and marine resources, which poses a barrier to achieving SDG-14 by 2030. These three chapters could usefully be combined as one, as much of the background material is familiar from scores of other studies.

Chapter 4 highlights the economic, social, and ecological importance of MPAs. Here he makes an argument that we need to improve our understanding of the links between MPAs and local communities. Chapter 5 presents the primary dimensions of sustainable development for marine park communities. Chapter 6 details the major hurdles to sustainable community development within MPAs in Malaysia. Chapter 7 discusses the management approaches of MPAs across the world and presents the author's view that MPAs ought to be collaborative management systems that will promote community participation in management and decision-making processes. Finally, Chapter 8 proposes an economically, socially, and environmentally integrated management policy framework which is essential for the effective and sustainable management of MPAs as well as coastal community development.

Masud skims the material, but never quite gets to the social issues. As I mentioned earlier, the book lacks attention to people. Masud rightly points out that communities need to be integrated into management, but fails to identify what kinds of communities live in Malaysia's MPAs. One problem is that communities are fluid, that is, they are not bound to place. This raises a problem of how to develop community participation, when the notion of community is not clear. For collaborative management systems to work, all involved parties need to be equally committed.