

Preliminary impact assessment of seaweed cultivation by the coastal communities in Sabah, Malaysia

Abstract

Seaweed is found in abundance and grows naturally in the east coast of Sabah. The local communities traditionally plant seaweed as part of their socio-economic activities. During the 10th Malaysia Plan or RMK-10 (2010-2015), this long endowed economic activity was identified to have a high yield potential and thereafter, was promoted as one of the most promising sectors in the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the Entry Point Project (EPP 3). Substantial seaweed funding allocations were given to several agencies and thereafter, seaweed farming was promoted with a two-pronged strategy: to increase the national income and to improve the socio-economic conditions of the local communities. This research was aimed at looking at the impact of seaweed industries among the coastal communities, with a case study in Semporna, Sabah. The methods used were mostly qualitative, with data being collected through interviews, field observations, questionnaire forms and secondary references. The survey results showed that four systems are being used by the state to implement the seaweed industry. Each system has its own weaknesses and strengths, and has had a different impact on the economy of the state as well as on the local communities. The efficiency of each system was compared and evaluated. The lessons learned should be useful in enhancing the visibility of the seaweed industry in Malaysia.