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FROM LOCAL AGENDA 21 TO SDG LOCALISATION: A PATHWAY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN MIRI

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Abstract

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was introduced in Malaysia in 2000 with four local authorities including Majlis Bandaraya Miri (MBM) selected as pioneers for its implementation. The purpose is to establish partnerships between local authorities and the community in achieving sustainable development. This initiative continues with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Few studies have examined the contribution of LA21 implementation by local authorities in Malaysia to enhancing their capacity to implement the SDGs in their respective localities. Lack of financial and institutional capacity, along with communities' limited awareness, potentially dampened the transition process between the two agendas. This research addresses the question "To what extent does the implementation of the LA21 contribute to the localisation of the SDGs by MBM?" A case study approach was employed, utilising reports and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, namely public officers, councillors, and academicians. Findings show that MBM's LA21 initiatives, such as solid waste reduction and pollution control, have laid the foundation for localising the SDGs. However, challenges such as financial constraints and a lack of political support hindered the full realisation of these agendas. The research concludes that while LA21 provides a platform for community participation, stronger integration of community involvement and institutional support is necessary to fully localise the SDGs in Miri.

Keywords: Local Agenda 21, Sustainable Development Goals, localisation, local authority, Miri

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INTRODUCTION

The global community has witnessed an increasing commitment to achieving sustainable development through the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as a comprehensive roadmap for addressing pressing environmental, social, and economic challenges worldwide. While the SDGs provide a universal framework, their successful implementation requires localisation efforts to address each country's unique socio-economic and environmental contexts (GTF & UCLG, 2021).

A key mechanism for localizing the sustainable development agenda is the adoption of Local Agenda 21 (LA21), a participatory framework that originated from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (Ningrum et al., 2022). LA21 encourages local governments to collaborate with local stakeholders in developing sustainable strategies.

As a nation with a diverse cultural and ecological landscape, Malaysia recognised the importance of localising the sustainable development agenda and hence embraced the principles of LA21 to achieve this objective. Thus, SDGs implementation at the local level demonstrates Malaysia's commitment to ensuring sustainable development practices aligned with the country's diverse and unique challenges and characteristics (Salleh et al., 2023).

This research paper examines the role of LA21 in localizing the SDGs in Malaysia, with a focus on Majlis Bandaraya Miri (MBM). By examining the current implementation and experiences of MBM, this research aims to provide insights for policymakers, local governments, and stakeholders in Sarawak, offering strategies to enhance localization efforts. The findings seek to contribute to a broader understanding of LA21's impact on the localization of the SDGs, fostering sustainable development in Sarawak and potentially Malaysia.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN LOCAL AGENDA 21 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The connection between LA21 and the SDGs demonstrates a significant shift in how the sustainable development agenda is approached, linking global objectives with local actions. While LA21 provided a strategic framework for community-driven sustainable development (Ningrum et al., 2022), the SDGs provide a structured approach in addressing the fundamental challenges of sustainable development – economy, society and environment (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

The introduction of LA21 acknowledges that most sustainability-related issues and challenges arise at the local level (Ningrum et al., 2022). It emphasises the importance of engaging local authorities with communities to enable a bottom-up approach to decision-making. It is based on recognising that local authorities are institutionally close to communities, which provides them

with better opportunities to communicate effectively and thus respond to local interests (Caruana & Pace, 2018).

In addition, community participation in the LA21 initiative will instil a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to increased community support and long-term commitment to the sustainable development agenda (Caruana & Pace, 2018). By incorporating the experiential knowledge of communities ensures that sustainability strategies taken today will not compromise future generations' ability to meet their needs. Additionally, LA21 promotes continuous evaluation, enabling consistent reviews and revisions of actions to ensure that any action taken is responsive to the dynamism of global challenges.

The successful implementation of LA21 relies on several factors namely community participation, institutional capacity, political commitment, stakeholder collaboration and continuous monitoring and evaluation (Guerra et al., 2019). Active community participation ensures that sustainable development initiatives align with community priorities. At the same time, well-equipped local authorities, armed with clear frameworks, funding, and skilled personnel will drive sustainability efforts. Political leadership, meanwhile, is essential for resource allocation and sustaining long-term commitment.

The formation of the SDGs in 2015, meanwhile, builds on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by addressing a broader range of global sustainability challenges (Ningrum et al., 2022). Although the SDGs represent a global agenda, their success depends on effective localization by translating global goals into actionable local strategies. SDG localisation involves setting context-specific targets, implementing mechanisms, and monitoring indicators (Guha & Chakrabarti, 2019).

Therefore, a bottom-up approach is critical to ensure that SDG initiatives align with local needs and aspirations (GTF & UCLG, 2021). It is because engaging local stakeholders promotes accountability and ownership, thus enhancing the effectiveness of sustainable development efforts. Subsequently, local authorities play a key role in leveraging local knowledge through strategic partnerships with local stakeholders, hence developing integrated sustainability solutions. Localization strategies for SDGs implementation include engaging communities in planning, strengthening intergovernmental collaboration, and promoting comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approaches (GTF & UCLG, 2021).

The link between LA21 and the SDGs highlights a paradigm shift where the former provides the groundwork for the latter. Nonetheless, both frameworks emphasize a bottom-up approach, encouraging partnerships between local authorities and communities (Ab Rahman et al., 2021). The success of the SDGs, however, depends on local strategies established through LA21 (GTF & UCLG, 2021).

Moreover, both frameworks emphasise the importance of continuous

monitoring and evaluation to ensure the effectiveness and adaptability of sustainability initiatives (Ab Rahman et al., 2021). Substantially, by adopting LA21's monitoring mechanisms, local authorities can create a solid foundation for tracking SDG implementation and ensuring policies remain responsive to local needs and challenges (Caruana & Pace, 2018).

MIRI LOCAL AGENDA 21 AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS INITIATIVES

LA21 in Miri was initiated in 2000 as part of Malaysia's pilot project (MBM, 2018; Md Zan, 2012). The MBM's ongoing commitment to this agenda reflects its integration of sustainable development principles in managing critical development issues, such as pollution control of the river, solid waste reduction, and improvement of the city's drainage network. These initiatives have involved various stakeholders including government agencies, the private sector, NGOs and communities. Moreover, MBM's transition from LA21 to SDGs initiatives demonstrated its dedication to the sustainable development agenda (MBM, 2020; MBM, 2018).

Local Agenda 21 Initiatives in Miri

The implementation of LA21 in Malaysia began with Projek Perintis LA21, which involved only four (4) local authorities (Md Zan, 2012). MBM started the Miri Local Agenda 21 (LA21) program in February 2000, involving various local stakeholders including government and non-government sectors, civil society, and communities (MBM, 2018). MBM's commitment to integrating sustainable development principles into its urban development is visible in the LA21 initiatives that are being implemented to this day. The aim is to enhance communities' and other stakeholders' awareness and participation in addressing sustainable development challenges.

A total of 58 issues are highlighted following a series of engagements such as forums, workshops, and town halls. Eventually, four (4) key areas, namely (i.) Pollution Control of Rivers in Miri, (ii.) Solid Waste Reduction and (iii.) Miri Drainage Network are highlighted as the most critical for the sustainability of the Miri city (MBM, 2018). In implementing LA21, MBM has established several committees composed of members from different backgrounds, including councillors, the corporate and private sectors, civil society, non-governmental organisations, schools and institutions, individuals, and other government agencies.

Generally, "Solid Waste Reduction" programs focus on educating the community about waste composting and recycling. A few workshops were held at various schools, including Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan (SJK) Chung Hua and Sekolah Kebangsaan (SK) Pendidikan Khas Miri, and in communities around

Miri, involving hands-on activities such as decoupage (Table 1). Likewise, programs and initiatives under the "Pollution Control of Rivers" also focus on workshops on soap production from used cooking oil. Additional workshops were organised in various schools and communities, such as Rumah Ayai Sg, to further extend the impact. Saeh Niah, and Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan (SMK) St. Joseph.

Table 1: Miri Local Agenda 21 Programs and Initiatives in 2018

Miri Local Agenda 21 Program				
Focus Area	Frequencies	Venues	Total Number of Participants	Method of Engagement
Solid Waste Reduction Implementation Working Group	1	Miri LA21 Seminar Room	34	Waste composting program
	4	Miri LA21 Seminar Room	102	Workshops on recycling products: Decoupage
	1	SJK Chung Hua Pujut	211	
	1	SK Pendidikan Khas Miri	82	
Pollution Control of Rivers in Miri Implementation Working Group	3	Miri LA21 Seminar Room	90	Soap production workshop from used cooking oil
	1	Rh Ayai Sg. Saeh Niah	35	
	1	SMK St. Joseph, Miri	243	
	1	SJK Tukau	80	
	1	SK Lambir Village	127	
Miri Drainage Network Implementation Working Group	1	Kpg. Nanga Angkari	132	Awareness campaign and community services
	1	Kpg. Lereng Bukit	132	
	1	Kpg. Pulau Melayu	118	
	1	Pantai Lutong	262	
	1	Kpg Lusut	42	
	1	Kpg Bersatu Batu 8	103	
Miri Local Agenda 21 Promotion Program	1	Kpg. Nelayan Kuala Baram	67	Exhibition on LA21 & Environment
	1	Padang Majlis Bandaraya Miri	482	
	2	SJK Chung Hua Miri	221	
	1	SJK Chung Hua Krakap	672	
	1	SMK St. Joseph	80	
1	SK Kuala Baram	53		

Source: Majlis Bandaraya Miri, 2018

Meanwhile, the Miri Drainage Network Implementation Working Group conducted several campaigns and community service activities to maintain and improve the local drainage systems around Miri. These campaigns were held in various communities, including Kampung Nanga Angkari, Kampung Lereng Bukit, and Kampung Pulau Melayu (Table 1). In relation to the promotion of

Local Agenda 21, MBM has organised several exhibitions and promotional programs to raise awareness and understanding of environmental issues and LA21. These exhibitions have been held in public areas, such as Padang Majlis Bandaraya Miri, which attracts a high turnout of 482 participants.

Continuity of Local Agenda 21 to Sustainable Development Goals

The MBM's continuity between LA21 and the SDGs reflects a progression in the city's commitment to sustainable development, building on past frameworks while adapting to the new global agenda.

Table 2: Miri Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Programs and Initiatives in 2020

Miri Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Program				
Focus Area	Frequencies	Venues	Total Number of Participants	Method of Engagement
Solid Waste Reduction Implementation Working Group	1	Kpg Melayu Beluru	60	Waste composting program
	2	SMK Merbau	69	
	1	Piasau Nature Camp	45	
	1	Jabatan Bomba & Penyelamat Zon 6	33	
	1	Kpg Long Apu	145	
	1	SJK Chung Hua	35	
	1	Sustainable Development Seminar Room	30	
	1	SK St. Joseph	30	
	4	Sustainable Development Seminar Room	105	
	Pollution Control of Rivers in Miri Implementation Working Group	1	SMK Merbau	
1		SMK Luak	47	
1		Facebook	319	
Miri Drainage Network Implementation Working Group	1	Marina ParkCity Beach	150	Awareness campaign and community services
	1	Brighton Cove	90	
	1	Miri Waterfront	110	
	1	Phase 5 Tudan	106	
	1	SMK St. Columbia	130	
	1	Kpg Muhibbah	130	
	1	Kpg Tudan Fasa 4 & 5	120	
	1	Pantai Lutong	194	
	1	Facebook	39	
	1	Bakam	65	
1	Balai Raya Batu 1, Kuala Baram	112		
1	Tanjung Batu	126		

	1	Kpg Senadin Jaya	136	
	1	Imperial City Mall	94	
	2	Jalan Bintang Miri	19	
	1	Miri Handicraft Centre	100	
	1	SK St. Joseph	80	
	1	Boulevard Shopping Mall	110	
Miri Sustainable Development Agenda	1	Miri Community Green Hub	27	Community awareness and empowerment
	1	SMK Dato Permaisuri	116	
	1	Wireless Walk Miri	64	
	1	SK St. Joseph	171	
	1	SK Pulau Melayu	72	
	1	SK South	164	
	1	Pullman Hotel	50	
	1	Facebook	143	
	1	SK Sungai Buri	30	
	1	Perumahan Interhill Park	80	
	1	Majlis Bandaraya Miri	35	
	1	Dylia Moxsin Restaurant	60	
	1	Long Lellang	80	

Source: Majlis Bandaraya Miri, 2020

MBM continued its commitment to sustainability by aligning its initiatives with the SDGs. For the initiative by the Solid Waste Reduction Implementation Working Group, similar to LA21 efforts, the SDG-related programs focused on waste reduction and recycling, but with broader engagement across different venues, including schools, fire stations and a few kampungs (Table 2). For River Pollution Control, MBM continued to educate participants on sustainable practices, including workshops on making soap from waste materials. These workshops also involve schools like SMK Merbau and SMK Luak. In implementing the SDGs, MBM has also used social media, such as Facebook (reaching 319 participants), for information sharing, thereby reaching a wider audience. This approach marked a shift towards using digital platforms to spread awareness of the sustainability agenda (Table 2).

Meanwhile, based on Table 2, the Miri Drainage Network initiatives highlight more public spaces, such as Marina Park City Beach and Miri Waterfront, which are selected as a venue to involve larger portions of the community (90 to 150 participants per event). Also, schools and communities like SMK St. Columbia and Kampung Tudan Fasa 4 & 5 are involved, thus highlighting the council's efforts to engage various segments of the communities in improving urban resilience and addressing the flood issue.

In addition, MBM has maintained initiatives to promote the sustainable development agenda through a series of community engagement programs held in close proximity to the community, such as at Boulevard Shopping Mall, Perumahan Interhill Park, and a few schools like SK St Joseph and SK South.

These programs have reportedly attracted large crowds ranging from 80 to 171 attendees. Selecting a few schools as venues underscores the importance of these institutions in fostering awareness of sustainable development from an early age. Besides physical engagement, MBM has also actively used Facebook as its primary social media platform to enhance community engagement, thereby expanding the information-sharing process. This reflected the council's adaptation to technology as a medium for communication.

In summary, the MBM SDG programs and initiatives are built on the success of the LA21 initiatives, with various stakeholders engaged and participating across different venues and locations. The promising number of participants is supplemented by the use of Facebook for engagement.

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the governance aspects of LA21 and examines current practices for managing and implementing the LA21 program at the local level. Moreover, this research will examine the challenges the MBM encountered. The research thus investigates the efficacy of the MBM in governing the LA21 program and how it contributes to their readiness to localise the SDGs.

Research Approach

This research employs a Case Study method and inductive reasoning. It is based on the suitability of the inductive approach for investigating the practices of LA21 and the SDGs by observing the current state of their implementation, thereby identifying patterns before reaching a tentative conclusion about the event (Babbie, 2010). MBM was purposively selected as the case study following MBM's status as one of the first four (4) local authorities to implement Local Agenda 21 in 2000.

Two (2) documents – the Miri Local Agenda 21 Annual Report (2018) and the Miri Sustainable Development Programs Annual Report (2020) – have been retrieved from MBM to analyse the current implementation and initiatives undertaken under both agendas. These documents were selected based on their availability and the potential of their data to indicate trends in participation during the transition period between LA21 and SDGs implementation.

In-depth Interview

A series of in-depth interviews with key informants among public official from MBM, local councillors, and academicians was conducted (Table 3). Purposive sampling is employed to ensure that qualitative data are gathered from those involved and knowledgeable about the implementation of the LA21 and SDGs agenda in Miri. The questions focus on their perceptions of the implementation of the LA21 program, especially its contribution to grounding the localisation of

the SDGs in Miri. The in-depth interview is selected as this method allows the researcher to gather a more comprehensive picture of a phenomenon through a small number of respondents, based on their experiences (Boyce & Neale, 2006). The in-depth interviews are conducted by establishing connections with informants, in person or via online platforms such as WhatsApp and Zoom.

Table 3: List and Background of Key Informants

ID	Position/ Agency	Role in LA 21/ SDGs
PO1	Senior officer Majlis Bandaraya Miri	Facilitate and directly involve in the LA21 and SDGs program and initiative by MBM
LC1	Local Councillor Majlis Bandaraya Miri	Committee member for LA21 and SDGs program and initiative by MBM
LC2	Local Councillor Majlis Bandaraya Miri	Committee member for LA21 and SDGs program and initiative by MBM
LC3	Local Councillor Majlis Bandaraya Miri	Committee member for LA21 and SDGs program and initiative by MBM
AC1	Senior Lecturer Universiti Teknologi MARA	Expertise in sustainability practices and implementation by local authorities
AC2	Lecturer Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	Expertise in LA21 and SDGs practices in Sarawak

Content Analysis

This research employed content analysis to analyse and interpret both primary and secondary data gathered. The content analysis approach outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005) will be adopted, in which transcribed data will be read several times to understand the entire dataset. It is followed with each line of words being read using the skimming and scanning technique (SST) to retrieve key information and the main idea of the in-depth interviews (Yusuf et al., 2017). It is done by familiarising hence categorising the transcribed data into broader themes that address the research question. Likewise, similar methods are used to analyse the secondary documents.

Data Source Triangulation

Data source triangulation in this research combines findings from primary and secondary data to gather multiple perspectives on a phenomenon, thereby validating the data (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023). In this research, findings from in-depth interviews will be triangulated with secondary data gathered from the LA21 annual report and the SDGs annual report prepared by MBM.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis highlights the current implementation of LA21 by the MBM, thereby preparing it for its transition to the broader sustainable development

agenda - the SDGs. At the same time, the challenges in implementing both agendas are also highlighted.

Current Implementation of Local Agenda 21

LA21's implementation by MBM showcases a multifaceted approach that is both community-driven and collaborative with various stakeholders. As stated in the document, MBM conducted its LA21 program and initiative involving various stakeholders, including civil society and communities. The involvement of the community has been highlighted by four (4) respondents as a cornerstone of LA21's success [PO1; LC1; LC2; LC3]. One of the respondents further emphasised the importance of broad-based community engagement, highlighting that the success of initiatives like solid waste reduction relied heavily on inclusive participation [PO1].

“LA21 mempunyai pelbagai peringkat masyarakat, semua gabungan idea, inisiatif, bergerak seperti mana yang dikehendaki oleh masyarakat itu sendiri.”

Respondent PO1

Three (3) respondents further highlighted that community leaders and NGOs are integral in fostering a sense of ownership among participants, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes [LC1; LC2; LC3]. However, despite these efforts, few key informants highlighted gaps in public awareness and education on sustainability issues, indicating that continuous efforts are needed to fully engage the community [LC2; LC3]. This corresponds to the argument made by Guerra et al. (2019) that active participation among communities is fundamental, as their experiential knowledge can ensure that any decision made by the government is sustainable.

Collaboration with the private sector and NGOs emerged as another critical element of LA21's implementation. Two (2) respondents highlighted successful campaigns such as "Say No to Plastic," which relied on supermarket and other business support [PO1; LC1]. One respondent also mentioned the collaborations with the private sector for biodegradable products and the involvement of NGOs in promoting environmental awareness [LC1]. It is displayed from a few programs and initiatives conducted close to the target group, predominantly the community (Table 1). These examples underline the importance of multi-stakeholder partnerships in enhancing community involvement in sustainable development, thereby building trust in the government as the decision-maker and policymaker (Guerra et al., 2019; Ab Rahman et al., 2021).

"... in politics, a lot of people go for gimmick, rather than sustain it. Get the publicity, move on to the next publicity, and then you do not care what happens. ..the advantage of NGOs is NGOs tend to go for something that is sustainable"

Respondent LC1

Both respondents from academia further supported this by noting that LA21 encourages a collaborative approach that brings together local authorities, communities, NGOs, and the private sector, enhancing the effectiveness of sustainable development initiatives [AC1; AC2].

Leadership and support from authorities are crucial in driving LA21 programs. Strong support from MBM management is vital for mobilising resources and sustaining initiatives [PO1]. One respondent also stated that feedback gathered from the community and stakeholders is essential in refining and improving LA21 implementation [LC3]. This top-down approach, supported with grassroots involvement, creates a balanced framework.

"Selain daripada masyarakat, sokongan daripada pihak atasan amat penting dalam memastikan kejayaan satu program."

Respondent PO1

As highlighted by Caruana and Pace (2018), the successful implementation of LA21 also depends on local authorities' capacity, both financial and institutional. It requires a clear institutional framework, adequate funding, and skilled personnel to drive the agenda.

The findings demonstrate that the implementation of LA21 programs benefited from active community involvement, effective collaboration with the private sector and NGOs and strong leadership. These insights contribute to a greater understanding of the current implementation of sustainable development initiatives at the local level, specifically MBM.

Implementation Challenges

The implementation of LA21 in Miri faces challenges, particularly due to financial capacity constraints and resource limitations. As several respondents highlighted, the local authority's reliance on tax-based revenue and limited external funding may have constrained the scope and sustainability of LA21 initiatives [PO1; LC3]. In parallel with previous studies, the significance of adequate funding to sustain the initiatives (Guerra et al., 2019). However, PO1 believed that stakeholder commitment, including from the community, could help MBM overcome this challenge.

“...tidak ada peruntukan. but, itu bukan merupakan satu alasan untuk tidak melaksanakan. Sebab konsepnya, apabila ada komitmen, suatu benda boleh dilaksanakan walaupun tiada sumber peruntukan...”

Respondent PO1

Apart from financial barriers, a few respondents also highlighted political influence as a critical factor in determining the success and continuity of LA21 programs [LC1; LC2]. The impact of political changes often results in shifts in focus and the discontinuation of ongoing sustainability projects. It requires political will and commitment, demonstrated by local leaders, to champion the sustainable agenda (Guerra et al., 2019).

“.... when political leaders change, sometimes the focus also shifts.”

Respondent LC2

This is shown in the "Say No to Plastic" campaign, which lost its momentum following different initiatives focused on due to a change in leadership. In other words, a lack of political will or a change in leadership might further undermine these programs' effectiveness and long-term sustainability, as short-term political gains often outweigh sustained environmental efforts [LC1; LC2].

Community participation and public awareness are crucial components of LA21. Nonetheless, ensuring continuous and consistent participation among the community has been challenging. It is due to difficulties in changing societal behaviour, such as reducing plastic use, which have faced resistance from the community [PO1]. Therefore, a few respondents have underlined the importance of community ownership for the success of projects [LC1; LC2]. Likewise, few researchers emphasised the importance of local authorities in encouraging local communities to actively participate (Guerra et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, the transition from LA21 to SDGs has diminished community involvement, shifting the focus from community or NGO-led to council-led initiatives [LC1]. It corresponds to other respondents' responses, which highlighted the need for increased public awareness and education on the sustainability agenda, as low participation rates in programs will hinder the effectiveness of LA21 or SDGs initiatives [AC1; AC2]. Furthermore, the current approach tends to be program-oriented and reactive, rather than based on long-term planning, thus posing significant barriers to achieving LA21's sustainability goals [AC1].

"I think the program should be rakyat oriented...means, it organised by people."

Respondent AC1

The shift from a bottom-up to a top-down approach in implementing sustainability initiatives has raised concerns among the respondents who represent their communities [LC1; LC2; LC3]. They believe the bottom-up approach of LA21, which involved NGOs and community groups in decision-making, was more effective at fostering community ownership and ensuring program longevity. The transition to a top-down approach under the SDGs framework has reduced community influence in planning and implementing the programs, making it more difficult to sustain [LC1; LC2; AC1]. As a result, two (2) respondents called for decentralizing the SDGs initiatives to enhance the effectiveness of sustainability efforts [LC2; AC1].

In summary, MBM's challenges in implementing LA21 highlight the need for increased funding, more substantial political commitment, and greater community involvement. Addressing these barriers will be essential to successfully transitioning from LA21 to the SDGs.

Impact of Local Agenda 21 on Sustainable Development Goals in Miri

Based on the findings, the programs under LA21 have successfully raised community awareness and instilled a sense of responsibility towards sustainability [PO1; LC1; LC2; LC3; AC2]. This shift in perception has provided a solid foundation for the transition to SDGs, with many LA21 initiatives such as solid waste reduction and pollution control, aligning with the broader, holistic framework of the SDGs (Table 1 & Table 2). LA21 has established local strategies that provide the platform for localising the SDGs (GTF & UCLG, 2021). Furthermore, the LA21 initiatives have laid the groundwork for community-driven sustainability, which has been progressively integrated into the SDGs agenda, particularly after 2020 [PO1].

“Di dalam Local Agenda 21, kebanyakan elemen tersebut boleh dicapai sebab seperti mana yang kita ketahui, penglibatan komuniti, ketidak ciciran, semua ada didalam elemen-elemen tujuh belas.”

Respondent PO1

However, the transition from LA21 to the SDGs faces challenges. It has been noted that aligning LA21 initiatives with the SDGs requires balancing local priorities with broader sustainability goals and securing sufficient resources [LC3; AC1]. Despite these challenges, the SDG initiatives have demonstrated resilience, particularly in adapting to emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 2). This corresponds to Ab Rahman et al. (2021) argument on the need for continuous monitoring and evaluation for both agendas to ensure the initiatives are adaptive and effective in terms of their implementation.

Several respondents, meanwhile, agreed with the importance of the

awareness built through LA21, noting that it made the community more receptive to SDGs implementation [LC1; LC2; LC3; AC2]. Noticeably, the number of participants in the awareness campaign and pollution control demonstrates high turnouts (Table 2). Nonetheless, a few respondents warned that a lack of sustained community involvement in current SDG initiatives could hinder their long-term success [LC1; LC2].

"As I mentioned, there is nothing wrong with any SDG initiatives. However, to make it more effective, bring back the LA21 structure into the SDG implementation."

Respondent LC1

Another critical aspect highlighted is the need for enhanced collaboration and resource allocation. It appears that the majority of respondents emphasised diversifying participation and strengthening partnerships among local authorities, communities, and private entities [CR1; CR2; AC1; AC2], with both CR1 and CR2 advocating increased involvement of NGOs, which played a pivotal role during the LA21 era. They believed that the sustainability of a program can be achieved if it is led by NGO or community. Meanwhile, a respondent highlighted the positive outcomes of LA21 in fostering social cohesion, suggesting that expanding these programs to cover a larger geographical area and more demographic groups could further enhance the localisation of SDGs [AC2].

"The implementation of LA21 have enhanced the social cohesion among the community as well as the sense of ownership among local communities."

Respondent AC2

As stated by several past studies, LA21 has laid the foundation for a more localized sustainable development initiative where this sustainable development agenda provides a comprehensive framework of SDGs to address various issues, especially concerning the communities (Ab Rahman et al., 2021; GTF & UCLG, 2021; Caruana & Pace, 2018).

Overall, the insights from the key informants suggest that while LA21 has laid a strong foundation for sustainability in Miri, the transition to SDGs requires continued community engagement, enhanced collaboration and resource allocation to ensure its long-term success.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research highlights the importance of LA21 in establishing a foundation for sustainable development in Miri, particularly in localising the

SDGs. The programs and initiatives implemented by MBM under LA21 have instilled a spirit of community participation, thereby embedding sustainability into local community culture. Through programs and initiatives focused on waste reduction, pollution control and drainage management, LA21 has demonstrated the role of local authorities like MBM in driving sustainable change with community involvement.

However, the transition process from LA21 to the SDGs uncovers both opportunities and challenges. While the SDGs offer a more holistic framework for the sustainable development agenda, it requires stronger community-driven programs and initiatives, similar to LA21, to ensure effective and sustainable localisation of the SDGs. The findings suggest that MBM could benefit from decentralising implementation structures and enhancing resource allocation to foster a wider, more inclusive approach to the sustainability agenda.

Overall, the lessons learned from MBM's LA21 experience provide valuable insights for policymakers, local authorities and stakeholders in Malaysia, particularly in Sarawak. By reinforcing collaborative networks and adapting to local socio-political dynamics, cities like Miri can advance SDG localisation efforts rooted in community involvement and aspirations.

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