The Role of Local Authorities in Fostering Sustainable Livelihoods in Urban Communities

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ABSTRACT

Urban areas are frequently regarded as centres of economic prospects, services, infrastructure, and amenities. Nevertheless, they also pose various challenges and risks for their inhabitants. In major Malaysian cities like Shah Alam, urban communities encounter issues such as poverty, health problems, inequality, crime, and the rights of people with disabilities. This paper outlines the findings of a study that formulated an action plan for the Shah Alam community. The objective of the study was to meet the community's needs and aspirations, facilitating the development of a sustainable community action plan. A qualitative research design was employed, utilising a case study approach. Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involved representatives from the community, stakeholders, and several development agencies. A total of 339 participants were chosen through Purposive Sampling. Furthermore, site observations were conducted to evaluate the community's way of life. The results revealed a strong call for local authorities to adopt a strategic action plan aimed at enhancing livelihoods. The final product was an action plan that acts as a crucial reference for the Shah Alam City Council in fostering sustainable community livelihoods.

Keywords: Action plan, livelihood, local authority initiative, sustainable community, urban area

INTRODUCTION

The cities in Malaysia are undergoing substantial growth, with both urban spaces and populations increasing swiftly. This growth presents various opportunities as well as challenges. For instance, Shah Alam is encountering a rise in population that creates a need for economic prospects, infrastructure, and public services. Initial

research has highlighted urban problems including poverty, health issues, inequality, crime, and disability rights, all of which affect community advancement. Community development is a prolonged process aimed at enhancing the living standards of the community (Riswan & Beegom, 2021; Silverman & Patterson, 2021). It is vital to have community development strategies that promote community participation in activities, problem-solving, and networking (Abiddin et al., 2022; Bhaktikul et al., 2021). The city government, particularly the Shah Alam City Council (SACC), has actively worked to tackle these issues through ongoing development initiatives that involve the community in decision-making, especially regarding community development.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The swift expansion of cities like Shah Alam presents various challenges, such as urban poverty, health issues, inequality, and crime, which jeopardise the well-being of city dwellers. The city is confronted with rising demands for economic opportunities, infrastructure improvements, and public services. However, the growing population continues to exert significant pressure on urban systems, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and sustainable strategies to promote balanced development and enhance the quality of life for all communities (UN-Habitat, 2021).

RESEARCH QUESTION

What strategies can a community plan in Shah Alam incorporate to promote sustainability while effectively tackling urban issues and enhancing the quality of life, social welfare, and economic resilience of its residents? This research therefore employed a case study method in Shah Alam consisted of two phases: 1) Community Profiling, and 2) Action Plan Formulation. This involved a series of Focus Group Discussions (FGD), expert participation, site observations, and data analysis to create a sustainable community strategy. The Shah Alam City Council (SACC) devised a comprehensive action plan for the community, following a two-year time frame and using a Bottom-Up Approach. The plan prioritised community participation through FGD sessions and site assessments to tackle various social, economic, environmental, and management challenges. Significant issues identified included low levels of community engagement, economic stagnation, environmental problems, and insufficient public services. The plan also highlighted the importance of inclusivity, targeting specific demographics such as the elderly, youth, women, children, and individuals with disabilities. Additionally, it emphasised strategies across 11 focussed thematic areas, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.
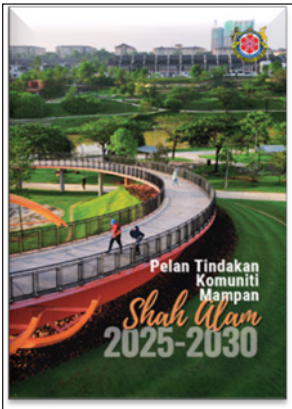
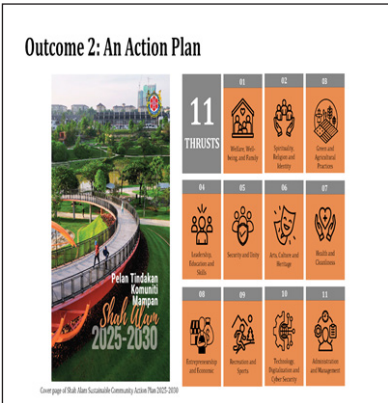Figure 1. Shah Alam sustainable community action plan 2025-2030

Figure 2. The 11 focussed areas for strategic actions

CONCLUSION

The Shah Alam Sustainable Community Action Plan 2025-2030 was created by the SACC to tackle the challenges resulting from urban expansion and a growing population. This initiative focussed on fostering sustainable living and enhancing the community's well-being. The plan employs a Bottom-Up Approach, developed over two years, with the Phase 1 concentrating on Community Profiling and Phase 2 on formulating the action plan. The process incorporated three FGD sessions and multiple technical consultations with experts. This action plan serves as a thorough community development strategy that incorporates community feedback to address the needs and demands of Shah Alam's residents for the next five years. It is in line with both international and local policies and prioritises specific groups, including women, children, youth, people with disabilities, and the elderly. By engaging the community in the planning process, the SACC has achieved noteworthy advancements in creating a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban setting, ensuring that growth corresponds with the needs of its diverse people.

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