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LOCAL URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS: AN EVALUATION OF ACHIEVEMENTS, CHALLENGES, AND OUTCOMES

Muhammad Hafief Hasbi, Muhammad Amar Mohd Hanafiah, Farah Izzati Kamal Hisham & Suzei Mat Nurudin

This study examines sustainable urban development initiatives implemented by three Malaysian local governments: Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ), Penang Island City Council (MBPP), and Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ). Guided by Agenda 21 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 and SDG 13, the study evaluates their achievements and challenges using qualitative analysis of secondary data, including Voluntary Local Reviews and strategic plans. The findings show that the three councils have made progress through initiatives such as greenhouse gas monitoring, age-friendly programmes, and low-carbon strategies. However, challenges remain in infrastructure, traffic-related emissions, staff capacity, and technology adoption. The study concludes that achieving sustainable and resilient cities requires stronger organisational capacity, stakeholder collaboration, social inclusion, and the effective use of technology to support the 2030 SDG agenda.

Introduction

Sustainable development depends greatly on actions taken at the local level. As countries work towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, local government authorities (LGAs) play an increasingly important role in building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable cities (UCLG, 2021). In Malaysia, where more than 77% of the population lives in urban areas, localising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is important for addressing the challenges of rapid urbanisation and climate change (Trading Economics, 2024). This report examines sustainable urban development initiatives implemented by three Malaysian city councils: Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ), Penang Island City Council (MBPP), and Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ). The study examines how these local governments translate global sustainability goals into local strategies and initiatives that address community needs and support sustainable urban development.

Problem Statement

Malaysian local governments face various challenges in achieving sustainable and resilient urban development. In Subang Jaya, MBSJ faces traffic congestion, high carbon emissions, and frequent flash floods that disrupt transportation, businesses, and communities. MBPP in Penang faces challenges related to littering, waste management, and limited accessibility for older people and persons with disabilities, particularly due to inadequate pedestrian facilities and increasing reliance on digital services. These issues highlight the need for stronger environmental management, inclusive mobility, and local-level climate adaptation.



Figure 1: Image of CCTV in local roads in Subang Jaya shows flood-prone areas disrupting traffic.

Meanwhile, MBPJ faces organisational and environmental challenges, particularly in adopting digital technologies, developing staff competencies, improving interdepartmental information sharing, and reducing carbon emissions. High energy consumption in commercial and industrial areas, together with older buildings, further complicates efforts to achieve low-carbon development. Overall, these challenges demonstrate that sustainable urban development requires not only physical infrastructure but also stronger organisational capacity, community participation, technological adaptation, and inclusive governance.

Discussion

The findings show that Subang Jaya City Council (MBSJ) has adopted a comprehensive approach to smart, inclusive, and sustainable urban development. Through its Voluntary Local Review (VLR) 2021, MBSJ has aligned local initiatives with the SDGs and strengthened evidence-based urban management. Key initiatives include the Integrated Command Centre for real-time monitoring of traffic, floods, and public safety; digital platforms for citizen engagement; improved pedestrian facilities through the Barrier-Free City initiative; and gender-responsive measures such as women-friendly facilities and safety infrastructure. These initiatives demonstrate MBSJ's efforts to combine technology, accessibility, social inclusion, and climate resilience in local governance.

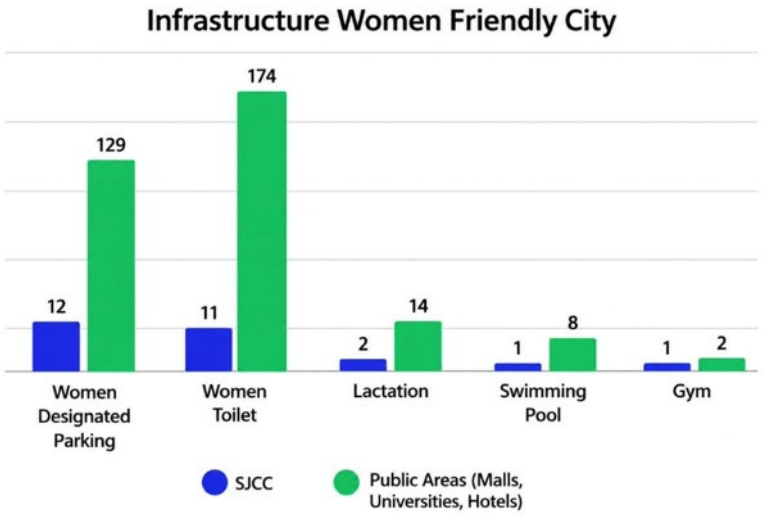

Figure 2: Statistics of women-designated facilities

Penang Island City Council (MBPP) has focused on creating an intelligent, liveable, and inclusive city. Its major initiatives include integrated public transport and green connectors to encourage sustainable mobility, revitalising George Town to maintain a vibrant heritage community, and its Age-Friendly City

programme. Improvements to public spaces, public transport, housing, digital access, and community health services support the needs of older people and other vulnerable groups. The adoption of Universal Design and nature-based climate adaptation further demonstrates MBPP's efforts to integrate social inclusion with environmental sustainability.

Petaling Jaya City Council (MBPJ) has placed strong emphasis on organisational capacity, low-carbon development, and climate adaptation. Its strategic plan promotes staff competency and more efficient management, supported by digital systems such as the Building Energy Data Online Monitoring System. MBPJ has implemented energy-efficient LED lighting, low-carbon development measures, and nature-based solutions through urban greening and improved drainage. These initiatives show that effective sustainable urban development requires not only physical improvements but also capable human resources, digital innovation, energy efficiency, and long-term climate planning.

Conclusion

In conclusion, MBSJ, MBPP, and MBPJ have implemented various initiatives to support SDG 11 and SDG 13, including smart city programmes, age-friendly policies, low-carbon strategies, and other sustainability initiatives. Despite these efforts, challenges such as traffic congestion, flash floods, carbon emissions, and accessibility remain. Achieving sustainable and resilient cities by 2030 therefore requires not only infrastructure development but also stronger staff capacity, public awareness, technology adoption, and collaboration among local governments, communities, and other stakeholders.

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