

# **RSOG Talk :**

## **“Local Agenda 21 in Malaysia: Is it Still Relevant?”**

By

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**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Speakers** : Dr. Aizi Razman Ismail

### **About The Seminar**

Malaysia is a signatory to the United Nations' Agenda 21 document, which was signed at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Malaysia implemented its pilot project for Local Agenda 21 from 2000 to 2002. Now, 12 years on, local communities are still asking if the principles of Local Agenda 21 – e.g. sustainable development, good governance and public participation – are being carried out effectively by local authorities in the country, as the lead agencies of Local Agenda 21. Although the Malaysian government has taken many steps towards the realisation of sustainable development and environmental protection (including the pledge to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, the promotion of green technology, the implementation of waste recycling, etc.), much still needs to be done at local authority level and among local communities. This begs the question whether the Local Agenda 21 initiative – 22 years after the Rio Earth Summit – is still relevant; or should it be forgotten and replaced with new and more feasible initiatives.

### **Summary**

Malaysia is a signatory to the Agenda 21 document, which was established at the Earth Summit, 1992. The Earth Summit, also known as the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), was a conference dedicated to the issues of environment, social and economics. Local Agenda 21, or LA21, is an agenda for sustainable development for the 21st century. Sustainable development is a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland Report, 1987). LA21 is under the directive of local authorities and local government. Chapter 28 of the Agenda 21 document states:

- Because so many of the problems and solutions being addressed by Agenda 21 have their roots in local activities, the participation and cooperation of local authorities will be a determining factor in fulfilling its objectives
- Each local authority should enter into a dialogue with its citizens, local organisations and private enterprises and adopt "a local Agenda 21"

Following the conference, the principles of LA21 were carried out by the local authorities (lead agencies) in Malaysia to strive for sustainable development. The New Economic Model also emphasizes the importance of sustainable development through several interlinked components, such as, high income, inclusiveness and sustainability. The speaker highlighted that the environment is a major factor for socio-economic development. Furthermore, LA21 also takes into consideration good governance. This concept is already adapted in Malaysia as the country moves into the 21st century. The government recognizes the importance of partnership between public sector, private sector and civil society. The government has certainly taken many measures to ensure the success of LA21, such as introducing the 3R project (reduce, reuse, recycle) and the no plastic day. However, the effectiveness and relevancy of the principles of LA21 are still questioned by the communities.

There are several processes that need to be followed through in order to fully implement / utilize the LA21. The processes are as follows:

- Community vision
- Community-based issue analysis (CBIA)
- Partnership
- Action plan
- Implementation & monitoring
- Evaluation & feedback

The local authorities, however, do not fully adhere to the processes. The local community and private establishments are not included in the discussion on community-based issues, as the discussion is held only for the members of the local authorities. Moreover, these local authorities do not have a concrete long term plans. Implementation and monitoring, and evaluation and feedback also could not be done as the action plan is not effectively developed and followed through.

The Malaysia Pilot Project on LA21 started in 1999. The project was funded by the UNDP for two years because there were very few sustainable development projects that were established after the Agenda 21 signing in 1992. The funding was intended to be used in four local authority areas: Petaling Jaya, Kuantan, Miri and Kerian. In 2014, the sustainable development project moves from sustainable / green cities to future cities. The concept of future cities has already been developed in Japan. These cities take into account the human aspect, which includes the welfare of the aging population. The government in Malaysia is also adamant in transforming the local authorities and moving towards future cities.

In conclusion, the speaker emphasized that LA21 is indeed still relevant in Malaysia. This is because a lot of sustainable development projects have not been implemented or carried out by the local authorities. It is crucial for these projects to be implemented for the future generations. Malaysia also needs to continue striving for good governance and engaging in fruitful partnership with the private sector and civil society for further development of socio-economic and environment.

#### **Issues Raised :**

- Although LA21 was established yeras ago, the agenda is deemed still relevant to Malaysia. This is because there are still manysustainable development projects that are not fully established in our country. Moreover, LA21 is still being discussed and analysed at the ministerial level. However, LA21 is not positively viewed by some governmental agencies because, while the LA21 concept is applied by the local authorities, the actions to develop projects remain to be seen. There are no standardization of how local authorities put forward LA21 in the respective cities.
- Partnership and engagement are some of the crucial components in LA21. In order for the agenda to be successfully implemented, there must be a partnership between local authorities, private entities and community. Representatives from each group should be chosen to be included as members in the local committee to engage on how to implement LA21 in their area. Moreover, partnership from all the government agencies and ministries are needed as the issue of environment development is cross-cutting. Engagement

is also required between the government and the public to understand the public needs, and thus, to develop projects based on those needs.

- The processes of LA21 must be followed thoroughly. It appears that local authorities are only able to succeed at developing visions of LA21, without any concrete action plans or any partnership and engagement with the public. This is why LA21 could not be implemented successfully. It is hoped that the Ministry of Urban Wellbeing, Housing and Local Government will take the initiative to publish a short, yet, comprehensive booklet detailing the must-do processes of LA21 so that everyone involved in the agenda understand what they need to do for successful local development projects

## **About The Speaker**

Dr Aizi graduated from Oxford Brookes University in 1985, went on to do his Masters at The University of Liverpool (1995-1997) and later his PhD in Urban Environmental Planning at the same university (2001-2005). His PhD thesis is entitled "Cultural Perspectives in Environmental Awareness: An Islamic Perspective of Local Agenda 21 in Malaysia". He has experience in the Malaysian civil service, having served at the Implementation Coordination Unit in the Prime Minister's Department, the Ministry of Federal Territories, the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) in the Prime Minister's Department and the Ministry of Urban Well-Being, Housing and Local Government (KPKT). He currently serves at the Malaysian Modernisation and Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) as Deputy Director-General (Transformation and Modernisation)".

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