



**URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL
MANAGEMENT INITIATIVES
IN
SIBU, SARAWAK,
MALAYSIAN BORNEO**

Presented by

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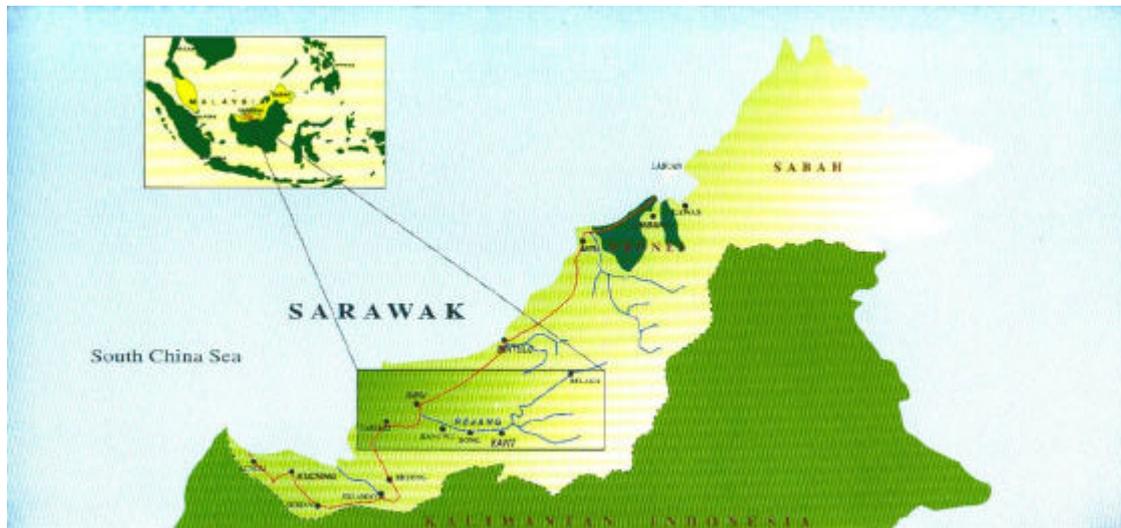
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URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT IN SIBU, MALAYSIA

1. GENERAL BACKGROUND OF SIBU

Sibu is the second largest town in the State of Sarawak, Malaysia. Today, it has emerged as the regional economic, administrative and social centre for Central Sarawak. Together with its hinterland, Sibu has a multi-racial population of about 700,000.

It started with a humble settlement depending mainly upon rubber and other cash crops until 1970s when it experienced a tremendous boom due to timber trade. Today, its main economic backbone is still timber-based but the trade has been diversified into many downstream products like plywood, particle board and veneer. Not less important are shipbuilding, aquaculture and palm oil cultivation which are the other important economic activities of Sibu.



Sibu, the gateway to central Sarawak, Malaysia

2. SIBU MUNICIPAL COUNCIL

Sibu Municipal Council is one of the three municipal councils in the state of Sarawak. It is a local government having jurisdiction over an urban area of about 130 sq km with a population of about 200,000. Led by YB Datuk Robert Lau Hoi Chew, the Chairman and 25 Councillors, the council aspires to attain a city status by year 2005. In order to realize such vision, tremendous effort is being put in by the government to develop the town in terms of infrastructure, economy and socio-culture.

3. A CLEAN, BEAUTIFUL, HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT

In the race for development, environmental management has been placed as one of the top priorities of the government. Many initiatives, though common, are the result of sheer commitment and determination of the government to provide a living environment which is CLEAN, BEAUTIFUL, HEALTHY and SUSTAINABLE.

To prove its commitment, SMC has earmarked the year 2003 as the Hygiene Year for Sibü. The main objectives of the Hygiene Year being to create awareness and to impart relevant knowledge and practices to the general public on the importance of hygiene and cleanliness in Sibü. In addition, it helps in promoting a smart partnership with the private sector and the community in general. SMC encourages the participation from many local NGOs by inviting them to be 'Partners' of the campaign. The invitation attracted 15 primary schools, 14 secondary schools, 11 service clubs and 20 associations/NGOs. Amongst activities organized are community health education, messages on light boxes and banners, anti-litter campaign, awareness campaigns in the form of drawing, speech, debate and essay contests, exhibition, etc.

In addition to the awareness and promotional activities, there are few areas of focus identified and worked upon by Sibü Municipal Council in the context of promoting a clean, beautiful, healthy and sustainable urban environment:

a. Continuous maintenance of infrastructure

Sibü being located on deep peat swamp, experiences a lot of constraints in development. Many parts of the town face sinking problem. This has made the cost of development and maintenance much higher than any other parts of the State. In view of the sinking problem in most areas, every year SMC has allocated a lot of provisions for upgrading and maintenance of roads and drains as they need upgrading every three to five years. In really bad areas, alternative methods are used in constructing drains by using belian retaining walls or leaving them as earth drains with frequent regular maintenance. SMC is also continuously searching for expert opinions on dealing with deep peat soil.

b. Efficient solid waste management

Refuse collection service is efficiently carried out three times a week for all residential areas by privatization. To ensure a clean and sustainable environment, a sanitary landfill refuse site with leachate treatment measuring about 5.5 hectares has been established in place of a controlled tipping site which has caused much environmental hazard in the past. The site with a capacity of about 256,000 cubic metres has an estimated life span of 10-15 years. The site is the first sanitary landfill system in the state of Sarawak. Other towns have emulated our success then after.

c. Vector Control

Due to the low-lying nature of the town, many areas have pockets of undrainable stagnant water which are ideal breeding ground for Aedes mosquitoes. As a result, they are high risk areas prone to major outbreaks of dengue fever. Regular surveillance is carried out

from door to door by full time health personnels with frequent control measures like source reduction and fogging were carried out. Many campaigns were launched to educate the general public of the 'Dos and Don'ts' for combating Aedes. Activities include health talk, exhibition, and formation of various Anti-Dengue Taskforces established in collaboration with SMC's Vector Control Unit. Strict enforcement is carried out by SMC to ensure compliance.

d. Poultry Control

Urban people are habitually keeping poultry at their limited backyard for self consumption. The habit has caused a lot of public nuisance in terms of smell and pollution. Sibü is the first town in Sarawak to have stopped all poultry rearing in urban residential areas. Another remarkable achievement is to stop all sales of live poultry in markets. Only dressed poultry are permitted since then. Poultry control helps to improve to a great extent the quality of environment.

e. Food Quality Control

All food outlets in Sibü are licensed and controlled by SMC. Grading of all food outlets has been implemented to ensure high standard of food hygiene. Those with Grade C and below will be served warning notices to improve or else face closure action.

f. Street Garden

Before this, many residential road verges are lined with abandoned household items or planted with fruit trees, vegetables, making it very untidy and unsightly. SMC has since started to promote the concept of street garden – a street environment which features properly planned greens, neat and tidy road verges. One should feel soothing, hazard-free and comfortable being on the streets. Since then, road verges are leveled and cleared of all odds and ends including unsuitable plants. SMC started to plant trees and shrubs featuring a particular theme for different areas. Refuse bins are no longer allowed to be placed on road verges during non-collection hours.

g. 'Spring Cleaning' Campaign

With a view to promote a clean environment, SMC has started to encourage people to clean up their houses and compounds. A few days in the year are designated as 'Spring Cleaning Days' where people can bring out all their domestic waste including old furniture, electronics, equipments, etc and also garden waste like branches, leaves, etc and dump them onto trucks of SMC. The service is free of charge to encourage more participation. Thousands of truckloads of bulk refuse, mainly domestic and garden waste are removed during these cleaning campaigns. In addition to a cleaner environment, it helps to educate the public on the importance to keep a clean environment on their own initiatives.

h. Meeting the people sessions

Local leaders believe that by going to the people and listen to them is very effective in identifying issues and problems of the town besides building a closer rapport and interaction with the people. Many planned and ad-hoc meeting-the-people sessions are organized in different residential areas to serve the above purpose. Dialogue sessions are often organized with clubs, associations and NGOs throughout the year.

i. Community participation – LA21

Sibu Municipal Council strongly believes that community participation is essential in ensuring a sustainable clean environment. Only, when the community is aware of the importance of a clean environment and take initiatives to improve and sustain the very environment that they dwell in, we would be sure of the sustainability of the efforts put in by the government in creating a clean city environment. One of the major tools used in achieving the above is Local Agenda 21 (LA21). An awareness seminar was organized to inculcate the importance of community participation and collaboration in ensuring a sustainable environment for all. Pilot projects will focus on three areas: recycling, parks management and markets management.

One of the greatest achievements and success in this area is the adoption and sponsorship of parks and gardens. Many associations have come forward to sponsor gardens and parks in the town. The community would come out with a certain sum and joint hands with SMC to develop the gardens or parks and have the gardens or parks named after them. However, the gardens or parks remain as the property of SMC. This is another form of coherent smart partnership between the community and the government.

j. Regulations and Enforcement

Regulations are put in place to facilitate a clean and healthy urban environment. Some important ones include:

- Local Authority Ordinance 1996
- Cleanliness By-Law 1999
- Food Act 1983
- Food Regulations 1985

An enforcement team is moving around the town to ensure compliance. SMC believes in education before enforcement. Offenders are compounded or prosecuted only after given ample awareness, reminders and warning.

SMC is also working closely with other government bodies such as Natural Resources and Environmental Board and Department of Environmental Quality.

4. 'SLUM' AREAS IN SIBU

Sibu being located on deep peat swamp, experiences a lot of constraints in development. Many parts of the town face sinking problem. This has made the cost of development and maintenance much higher than any other parts of the State. Some parts of the town are located in particular poor sinking areas and they require particular attention in the context of urban environment Management. They are:

- The old residential areas bound by Jalan Pedada/Brooke Drive/Kampung Nyabor and Oya Road.

The area measures about 300 acres with about 3000 houses. Many houses were built about 40-50 years ago and most of the owners have moved out of the area leaving their houses for rent. Most of the roads and drains here need relaying every two to three years. Otherwise, they will be subjected to frequent flooding during high tide or after torrential downpour. In fact, a number of houses have sunken beyond repair.

- Resettlement Schemes – Kampung Usahajaya at Jalan Sentosa and Kampung Bahagia at Jalan Teku.

These schemes comprise of local people who were resettled from squatters. There are about 2000 households staying in these schemes. The schemes are located in low-lying areas subjected to frequent floods.

a. Major urban environmental management issues

Due to the location in sinking and low-lying ground, the resettlement areas face some major issues in the context of urban environmental management.

- i. Poor roads and drainage - Roads are sinking and consequently, drainage of the area is very poor. Water-logged condition is common. They are subjected to flash flood after torrential downpour.
- ii. Vector Control - Being low-lying, water-logged and densely populated, these areas are ideal breeding ground for Aedes mosquitoes. As such, they are high risk areas prone to major outbreak of dengue fever.
- iii. Sanitation – Generally, the inhabitants in these areas are the low income group. The level of education and awareness on the importance of a clean environment is generally low and this hinders efforts to promote a clean and healthy environment.

b. Assistance rendered by SMC

i. Continuous Upgrading and maintenance of basic infrastructure

Government has given equal treatment to the 'slum areas' or rather areas requiring particular attention in terms of providing basic infrastructure and facilities. Amongst them are provisions of basic infrastructure like roads, drains, street lighting, etc. Every year, SMC tried very best to apply for more funding for such purpose. Other relevant authorities also provide basic utilities like water, electricity and telecommunication.

ii. Environmental sanitation

Maintenance of sanitation such as grass cutting, desludging, drainage clearance, poultry control, etc are always carried out by council to maintain a high standard of environmental standard in these areas.

iii. Beautification

Street garden concept is also being implemented by leveling road verges and clears them of odds and ends. Trees and shrubs are being planted wherever possible to beautify the place.

iv. Vector control

These 'slum' areas is the high risk area for Dengue Fever outbreak. Survey shows that about 50% of the dengue fever cases come from these areas. Particular attention is being paid to these areas by deploying more community education and surveillance inspections.

c. Urban Renewal Proposals



The old residential area comprises 300 acres of land bound by Pedada Road/Oya Road/ Kampung Nyabor Road/ Brooke Drive. Most of the owners have moved out of the area leaving their properties rented to others. As such, the area is inhabited by generally low income group. The area is low-lying, very densely populated and generally unhygienic. It is located in the immediate vicinity of the town centre making it quite an unsightly scene. This is an urgent

issue to be resolved for Sibü to attain the status of a city.

The local leaders are currently looking into proposals to redevelop the whole area in an urban renewal plan. The initial plan involves an area of about 180 acres. Mixed development involving residential and commercial development had been proposed. The development will avoid heavy structures on sinking portions of deep peat soil but capitalize on them as natural greens and water elements.

5. CONCLUSION

Sound urban environment management is vital to ensure a clean, healthy and beautiful city. To be effective, it requires close collaboration between the government and the community. While the government provides the policies, directions and resources, the community should provide the necessary support and participation in terms of resources, education and promotion of a sense of community and belongings.

Kitakyushu initiative network for a clean environment is undoubtedly an ideal platform for member countries to collaborate and share issues, concerns and best practices in working towards a clean and healthy environment. We pledge our continuous support and collaboration in the network.