In current practice, policies created by the Malaysian federal government’s ministries will require continuance actions from the state government, which is the second-tier government in Malaysia’s government hierarchy. This continuation then requires actions and implementation by the local governments, which is the lowest or third-tier government in Malaysia. Karim (2021) has highlighted several policies that require interactions between all these three tiers of government during the current SDG implementation period, such as the Malaysia Smart City Framework, National Housing Policy, National Solid Waste Management Policy, National Cleanliness Policy, and National Community Policy. Taking the Solid Waste Management Policy as an example, its implementation involved the appointment of a concessionaire at
the federal level, followed by the state government’s agreement to hire the concessionaire, and the works of the concessionaire closely relate to the local government at the grassroots level.

Despite the existence of many policies that can be linked to sustainable development, the triggering factor of its awareness at the local government level in Malaysia lies heavily in the introduction of LA21 in the year 2000. LA21 requires commitment from the local governments, private sectors, and the community. Until now, LA21 still remains Malaysia’s local government’s most popular sustainable development agenda despite the introduction of newer sustainable development agendas, i.e., Millenium Development Goals (MDG) and SDG (Idham & Ariffin, 2020). Thus, it is unsurprising to see that many local governments in Malaysia have continued to portray LA21 activities on their organization’s website despite the existence of SDG initiatives today. Our checks on several of Malaysia’s local governments’ websites revealed that some of them did not feature LA21 activities but maintained an element of LA21, such as ‘Safe City’ as one of the highlights on the website. SDG ‘normalization’ in Malaysia’s local governments’ websites was more founded in big cities’ local governments such as those that fall within the category of city hall and city councils, while for most municipalities at the municipal and district council levels, they were keener towards LA21 initiatives.

Local governments in Malaysia can be categorized into four categories. The first three major types of local governments are ‘city hall’ (and ‘city council’), ‘municipal council’ and ‘district council’. The fourth and additional type of local government is known as the ‘modified council’. The categories of local government are defined based on the number of residents and the local government’s annual income achievement. City Hall is the biggest municipal entity in Malaysia, followed by the city council and municipal council. Kuala Lumpur City Hall is the only local government with ‘city hall’ status, while others that fall within the same group of categories as city hall, are categorized as city council. City hall, city council and municipal council are all located within urban settings, while district council can be found in rural or peri-urban settings. In addition to that, a modified council is the local government that was specifically structured and given the power as a municipality under the law to serve specific areas. For example, the Kulim Hi-Tech Municipal Council was established to serve the Kulim industrial area that is dominantly occupied by industrial and commercial buildings. Another example is the Putrajaya Corporation, a municipality formed specifically to cover the Putrajaya vicinity that housed most federal government’s offices.

In terms of local government roles in sustainable development, there has been significant research done by researchers on the matter, with two main categories of research ideas emerging. The first category, referred to as “general research,” focuses on broad and general issues such as the study on the extent of disclosure of integrity frameworks on local government websites in Malaysia and Indonesia that relates to SDG no. 16. In this study, it was found that the disclosure of integrity frameworks on local government websites in Indonesia is more prevalent compared to Malaysia (Joseph et al., 2019).

The implementation of sustainable development in local government has been widely discussed. Local governments are responsible for implementing appropriate initiatives to meet the needs of local communities in line with the goals of sustainable development. LA21 is one of the programs implemented by local governments in Malaysia that carry out various related activities (Kaur, 2007; Osman, 2008; Zainal et al., 2014). Another example is the content analysis study on Malaysia government policies on sustainable development that related to local government’s functions (Karim, 2021). Meanwhile, the second category referred to ‘functional research’ which research idea was on the involvement of local governments in sustainable development with focus on the core activities and responsibilities to taxpayers by the local government. For instance, such research examines the day-to-day work and chores of local governments, such as the study of the transformation of waste management under the scrutiny of the LA21 programme (Saat et al., 2018) and a study on good governance in recycling programmes (Seaw et al., 2022).

As for this study, the discourse would fall into both categories. The study will focus on the district council’s internal stakeholders’ views, perspectives and understanding on sustainable development terms as a whole and specifically on the Jelebu District Council’s (JDC) operational functions. On top of that, this study will also zoom in on the JDC’s external stakeholders’ opinions and experiences on the matter.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses qualitative methods to reach its objectives. Discussions in this section include study area, participants, and data collection.

2.1 Study Area: Jelebu District Council (JDC)

Jelebu is situated in a rural setting in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. It is a small region in Negeri Sembilan governed by the Jelebu District Council (JDC). Jelebu is the second largest district in Negeri Sembilan with an area measuring 135,353.60 hectares that covers 20.3% of the whole state of Negeri Sembilan. Jelebu is populated by around 44,000 people scattered all over the district.
which encompasses a sum of villages and a few small townships. The three most populated townships are Bandar Kuala Klawang, Pekan Pertang and Pekan Titi.

More than 60% of Jelebu is still covered by trees and green forests as development is limited and under close purview by the state as Jelebu is preserved as a rain catchment area for the state and mainly conserved as a biodiversity area for the state (Plan Malaysia Negeri Sembilan, 2017). Farming is the main economic activity in Jelebu, which is mostly popular for its fruit plantation, especially durian. Besides durian, sugar cane and other fruits, as well as vegetable farming, can be found in most areas in this district. Commodity plantations such as rubber and palm oil are also popular in certain designated areas. Meanwhile, light industrial areas are in two locations namely Sungai Muntoh and Pertang – both industrial areas are built and maintained by JDC. Heavy industries were not sighted anywhere in this district. Shops and banking facilities are available mostly in the three townships area mentioned.

2.2 Participants of the Case Study
This research involved informants who represent the internal and external stakeholders of JDC. Stakeholders are people who have interests and are usually affected by decisions made by an organisation (Freeman, 1984). The internal stakeholders in this study comprised the top management, heads of departments, workers, and councillors of JDC. The top management of a district council is the president and the secretary. 22 informants involved in this study consisting of the Chairman of the Council, Councillors, officials, NGO representatives, and local community representatives. Councillors for municipalities in Negeri Sembilan are appointed from members of the political parties that form the government of the day and a group of councillors who represent the non-governmental organizations. The external stakeholders in this research comprised personnel at the state level who work closely related to the functions of local governments. The involvement of these stakeholders was crucial as this research aimed to delve deeper into the thoughts and experiences of this group of people. The main process of primary data collection was carried out through face-to-face conversations with participants who had been nominated. The process was carried out using an open-ended question that had been provided in advance.

2.3 Data Collection and Analysis
Fresh primary data was collected using the face-to-face interview technique to enable the participants to apprehend real situations that they faced as individuals and as workers in an organization, ultimately in implementing a sustainable development agenda specifically within its environmental sphere. Sets of semi-structured interview questions were prepared in advance and were handy as guidance in carrying out the interview sessions. Different sets of questions were prepared to cater for different types of functions the stakeholders were involved in. For example, questions for the head of departments were slightly different from the questions used for participants among normal employees, even though the intention of asking the questions was predominantly similar. Prior to being used, the interview questions were referred to several relevant experts in the field of research for validation purposes. Participants were asked questions that enabled them to reflect on their knowledge, experience, and awareness towards sustainable development agendas, specifically focussing on their perspectives on the environmental aspect of this discourse. The semi-structured interview questions were divided into several sections to enable the participants to reflect on their understandings towards sustainable development agenda, i.e., LA21, MDG and SDG; share their experiences and ideas on sustainable development programmes in their jobs and daily lives; and recognize the challenges they are facing in implementing sustainable development agendas initiatives. The interview questions were emailed to the participants weeks before the interview date to give them time to prepare. All interviews were conducted in Malay language within private and conducive locations. Prior consent was obtained from the interviewees before recording the interviews using a Sony digital voice. The recorded voice data was transcribed verbatim using an online transcription application available at www.sonix.ai which has an average accuracy rate of 55% to 65% for transcribing Malay language. The transcribed data was then transferred to the Atlas-Ti (9th version) application, as well as Microsoft Excel applications for further analysis. In addition, relevant documents such as recorded minutes from the relevant meetings, financial statements and annual reports, papers works and reports were also checked by the researcher during the time of this research. On top of that, site observations and inspections were also made to triangulate the information gathered from the interviews.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The finding shows that the district council has significant roles at the grassroots level in implementing sustainable development, especially related to sustainable technology.

3.1 Participants’ Knowledge on Sustainable Development Concepts and Terms
Our findings revealed that LA21 is the most recognized global sustainable development initiative compared to the later versions such as MDG and SDG, particularly among the participants in this study. Almost all the participants in this research were found to have sound knowledge of LA21, except for Informant 5, Informant 6 and Informant 7. Informant 5 who is a labour worker for JDC, reflected on the matter by saying that he believed
that he might have been involved in LA21 programmes and initiatives without any knowledge of the LA21 term itself. As for Informant 6 and Informant 7, both mentioned that they were not aware of LA21 as no knowledge was given to them despite their presence as councillors for the district council. The fact that LA21 is known by the majority of the participants is not surprising, as it has been widely promoted and practised by local governments in Malaysia since its introduction in the year 2000. In fact, JDC still maintains periodical reports on LA21 and its related components such as ‘safe city,’ in the Full Council meeting. It was also brought to our attention that monthly meetings to discuss LA21 were held periodically but they have been suspended due to JDC’s lack of funds for organizing LA21 programmes. Our findings also revealed that all participants were unaware of the term ‘MDG,’ even though JDC was directly involved in supervising urban poverty matters, which are part of the MDG objectives. JDC is responsible for safekeeping databases for the urban poor and for channelling any funds or development projects to this target group, with the consent of a committee known as a ‘focus group,’ which is chaired by the Jelebu district officer.

In contrast, for SDG, our research findings revealed that participants Informant 2, Informant 3 and Informant 4 have some knowledge of the SDG term. Informant 2, who works as a town planner, gained most of his knowledge from courses, guidelines, and planning work he was involved in as SDG has become the basis for it. Recently, participants Informant 3 and Informant 4 have gained knowledge of SDG because they were required to comment on its elements in project briefs for the Ministry of Housing and Local Government (MHLG). This requirement from MHLG has indirectly forced them to do some homework on SDG. Based on these findings, we conclude that the later of sustainable development agenda terms, MDG and SDG, were still unknown to most participants in this research. The lack or non-usage of the terms in their jobs might be the cause of this condition. In daily working life, works are basically done as it needs to be done or because there are instructions to do it. Nevertheless, it was an injustice to deny any involvement of the districts councils in sustainable development agenda initiatives as they witnessed to have been committed to sustainable development programmes on many occasions. On the other hand, it can be safely said that they have been doing them all this while without being inspired by the actual cause of events that led to the initiatives. Lack of promotions and knowledge sharing by the relevant parties or authorities to the district council, which was not the case when LA21 was introduced might be the major factor for these discrepancies.

3.2 Sustainable Development Initiatives by JDC
JDC, like most other local governments in Malaysia, would be required to adhere to rules, regulations, and standards set by the relevant authorities at the state and federal government levels in relation to its district development. One of the major references for development at the district level for JDC is the local plan, officially known as Jelebu District Plan 2035 (Replacement). The documentation process of Jelebu District Plan 2035 (Replacement) is headed by PLANNMalaysia as the government agency prominently involved in land use planning for urban and non-urban areas in the country. Informant 2 who is the head of division for Planning Division in JDC explained that any development proposal in the district will need to undergo standard processes including the submission of planning documents through the One Stop Centre (OSC) department in JDC that will distribute the proposal for review by all members of the OSC meeting, a meeting which involves technical departments in the district and several relevant representatives from the state level and chaired by the president of JDC. Any development proposals that have fulfilled the requirements would be brought into the OSC meeting for approval. In certain special scenarios, the proposals need to be presented to the State Planning Committee (SPC), which is chaired by the state’s Chief minister, for further approval.

3.3 Sustainable Lighting Technology Implementation
Our findings also revealed that JDC is one of the earliest municipalities in Negeri Sembilan to opt for energy-saving lighting using light-emitting diodes (LEDs) in place of conventional fluorescent lights to illuminate its town area (Figure 1 and Figure 2). LED lighting is beneficial in reducing maintenance costs as it lasts longer (Edirisinghe et al., 2016) and has been installed in Bandar Kuala Klawang, the main town of Jelebu.

Figure 1: LED lights installed in Housing Areas at Jelebu Town

Figure 2: Kuala Klawang’s Bus Stop installed with LED lights
Informant 3, who is responsible for planning and administering the lighting processes for JDC, shared his experience in choosing the right supplier for the LEDs.

“There was a company which presented the use of LED technology to the Economic Planning Unit of Negeri Sembilan (state agency) and we were invited together with other local governments. Later, we made our own effort to contact the company to know further on their products. Upon received of allocation to upgrade street lighting facilities in Kuala Klawang area, we had appointed contractor for the work and specifically required the contractor to use LED lights supplied by the particular company. The LED lights come with five years of technical warranty that dissipate worries in terms of maintenance for us to install LED lights in replace of the old fluorescent lights, as the initial cost is not cheap for a small local government like us.”

Besides the installation of LED lights in its town area, all new housing projects in Jelebu are also required to use LED lights. The state government has made it compulsory for developers to install LED lights for new development projects. In standard practice, upon completion of a newly developed housing area, the said housing area will be commissioned to the local government to provide services for the taxpayers. The local government will then have to bear the monthly bills and maintenance for public lighting in that area. We were informed by Participant Informant 3 that the transition from conventional fluorescent tube lighting to LED lights had benefited JDC by reducing its monthly electricity bills by 10% to 20% each month.

Despite the challenges faced by Malaysia in transitioning to renewable energy sources, we found that JDC is actively pursuing such initiatives. For instance, JDC has leased its plot of land to a multinational company, Cypark, for the installation of solar panels that can provide electricity to the surrounding area. This decision reflects JDC’s commitment to promoting renewable energy, in line with the National Green Technology Policy (NGTP), which encourages research, usage and development of “green” technologies in Malaysia (Sood et al., 2011). It is worth noting that Malaysia still heavily relies on non-renewable energy sources such as fossil fuels and natural gas (Karmilla Kaman et al., 2019), making JDC’s actions even more important.

3.4 SWOT Analysis Toward JDC in Implementing Sustainable Development Initiative

This research uses the SWOT analysis technique to determine the contributing factors, obstacles, and challenges that JDC faces in implementing sustainable development initiatives, specifically within its environmental sphere.

3.4.1 Leadership Quality

Our findings revealed that all participants agreed that the head or president (as well as the secretary) of JDC showed seriousness in their leadership in safekeeping the environment and will always give undivided commitment to implementing sustainability in the Jelebu district. Any decision on development tasks that may have an impact on the surrounding environment would be referred to the relevant agencies or authorities for comment and further opinion. We were also told that the president will regularly address in the meetings the importance of taking good care of the environment.

3.4.2 State Policies

Our findings also revealed that most participants in this study agreed that the state of Negeri Sembilan really shows concern for the environmental condition of the state, including the ongoing situation in Jelebu district. Any environmental issues that need to be addressed will be discussed in the meetings at the state level if needed. According to Informant 8, the state of Negeri Sembilan has also been acting proactively to safeguard the environment by imposing a ban on imports of recycled plastics into the state. Informant 8 also mentioned that the state has recently come up with a pre-condition for all new housing areas main sewer to be equipped with sewer rubbish traps to prevent rubbish from flowing out from the sewer into the river. Such policies show that the state has always been concerned about the environmental aspects of the state. Informant 7 agreed with the statement and believed that the current government’s stands and actions on environmental issues were far better than the ones shown by the previous ruling government.

In addition to the state government, our findings have also revealed that the participants believe the federal government is equally concerned about the environment. They acknowledge that numerous programs and projects aimed at promoting a sustainable environment are being implemented within the district. These initiatives are executed either directly or indirectly through JDC or other government agencies. However, it is worth noting that some participants expressed concerns regarding reduced financial support from the federal government, particularly in terms of funding for initiatives like Local Agenda 21 (LA21) or recent sustainability projects.

3.4.3 Commitment Shown

Our findings also revealed that some of the participants in this study were impressed with the commitment shown by several sections of the community. Informant 1 has praised the attitude of the business community at the Kuala Klawang town area who managed to keep their building’s back lane in clean and tidy condition. Informant 1 mentioned that the situation has even attracted the attention of the auditor’s team from Johor.
Bahru, a major town area in the southern of Peninsular Malaysia, who came to Kuala Klawang for a working visit trip. Informant 3 shared a similar view by saying that he was impressed that the shop owners managed to keep their walkaway in clean condition even though they will usually keep the dustbin inside their premises after opening hours. Meanwhile, Informant 4 who lived in Kuala Klawang was impressed with the community where she lived who will voluntarily organized recycling items pick-up activities with relevant companies. Such actions really show that some section of the communities already has some positive values towards the environment instilled in them that can be nurtured and developed further for a bigger purpose.

3.4.4 Financial Limitation
Most participants in this research seem to agree that JDC’s financial condition can be relatively summed into one word – ‘poor’. JDC, all this while, has been fully depending on funding from the state and federal government. Their current financial status could only cover workers’ remuneration and their daily operations. The lack of new sources of income was obvious, and this problem was further burdened by some decisions at the state level, especially during the Malaysia Movement Control Order (MCO) period, during the spread of Covid 19 pandemic. Informant 1 stated the following.

“State decisions made it difficult for us. The state wanted us not to cause any more financial burden to the people (during the pandemic) …. Currently, our only hope is to survive (financially to cover employees’ yearly remuneration). We cannot increase the rate for assessment tax (as it is under state’s jurisdiction). We don’t have any new developed areas to charge new taxes…. in terms of income, we have been static for a long time. We are still applying the property valuation that was established in the 1980s.”

Jelebu district has been designated as a biodiversity and water catchment area for the state, which means that most of its area will remain in its present condition. This also implies that the district will not experience rapid developments in terms of new housing areas, commercial parks, and industrial zones, and thus will not generate new income for the district council. Economic activities will remain focused on agricultural activities. Eco-tourism is another potential source of income for the people living in the district, but it would not significantly increase JDC’s income. During one of the interviews, Informant 3 suggested introducing a new type of tax to enable JDC to gain some income from the large-scale agricultural activities carried out in the district. Nevertheless, such an idea will need further lengthy discussions as it may involve many parties, laws and regulations that can only be enacted at the state or federal level.

3.4.5 Lack of Training Opportunities
Lack of proper training and exposure that relates to sustainable development, either in understanding its depth or any practicum or technical training that relates to environmental care, is one of the weaknesses being identified in this research. This included either training organized within JDC itself for all its employees or training opportunities organized by other agencies or organizations. Due to this lack of training and exposure, we found that stakeholders for JDC were much more familiar with LA21 compared to the newer concept of SDG, or even MDG. Several participants in this research were aware of LA21 as they had been involved in LA21 programmes before but were mostly left unaware of MDG and SDG concepts as the continuation of LA21 to the newer sustainable development agendas had not materialized at the grassroots level. Furthermore, in comparison between officers and normal workers (labours) in JDC, we found out that the latter had less opportunity to be involved in training activities due to two factors. First is due to the lack of training programmes available that may suit their nature of work and secondly, due to difficulty for them to be allowed to leave for training as the organisation would have a shortage number of staff if they were allowed to leave for training.

3.4.6 Outdated By-Laws
JDC has several by-laws that are formed and gazetted under the law to govern its activities as a municipality. Most of these by-laws were created in the 80s, and several others were created in the 90s era. Examples are by-laws for hawking activities created in 1981 and by-laws to control vandalism activities in 1991. The recent by-law introduced is the by-law for public parks, which dates back to 2008. Although this research found that certain parts of the by-laws might still be relevant to be used today, it is high time that all these by-laws are reviewed by JDC and the relevant parties to suit the current development and present scenarios. The environmental elements need to be further emphasized in the by-laws, so do any changes that can benefit JDC in terms of increasing their revenue. Full commitment from JDC officers, the state and the state’s Attorney General office are needed to ensure the review of by-laws can be made within a logical time frame.

3.4.7 Local Politicians
The political will of local politicians that shows positivity towards the environment is an opportunity for better networking between JDC and them. Informant 7, in his sharing, revealed that the current elected members of the state parliament in Jelebu were more concerned towards the environment compared to the elected members prior to the country’s 14th General Election in 2019. The current politicians responded faster to complaints from the people compared to the previous elected members. This includes responses to complaints
on social media platforms such as Facebook, which really shows their concern and commitment towards the people’s livelihood. Informant 9 gave an example from a recent event that took place in Jelebu.

“Allocation for a new linked road from Gagu (a village area in Jelebu, Negeri Sembilan) to Beranang (a place located in neighbouring state of Selangor) has been approved and the road construction will be done by the Public Works Department (JKR), but the road needs to be constructed within the forestry area which is under the supervision of Forestry Department that initially opposed to the idea. The local politician at first agreed with the stand made by the Forestry Department, but later had a change of mind and had sought assistance from the state to conduct survey involving potential users of the route, and after a thorough consideration, it has been agreed that the road construction will pursue with minimum distractions to the forestry area as mostly suggested by the peoples, as the people are indeed in need of the new road and at the same time requested in to be sustainably constructed, and the politician had then sided with the people in the matter. Such action creates a win-win situation for the people who in needs of the new road and the livings in the forest area.”

Local politicians play prominent roles as the mediator and the right person with the authority to mediate between the government and the receiver of the decision, i.e., the local community. Local politicians could influence individuals, communities, and organizations to find an equilibrium that can benefit all parties, especially in implementing sustainable development (Salamun et al., 2021).

3.4.8 Cohesion Among Agencies

“It’s easier to foster unity when we have a smaller group” - this sentiment was echoed by several participants and deemed relevance when discussing the cohesion among government agencies operating at the district level. Working in a smaller group facilitates better acquaintance with one another. However, it is important to acknowledge that conflicts may arise in certain circumstances, as mentioned by Participant Informant 5. Nonetheless, the key emphasis lies in resolving such conflicts promptly and effectively. Informant 5 mentioned:

“There are times when we need to work together with the Public Works Department to clean up certain areas. We need to chop down some trees or prune the trees’ branches. We expect them to lead the task as they look to have better machinery and equipment, yet they aspect us to lead. After the trees were cut, they left the debris expecting us to clear, and at the same time, we are also expecting them to do the same. In the end, the debris was left there for a few days, and afterwards, we returned to the location to clear the debris. Such incidents did happen, but we still managed to resolve them and in future we need to have better arrangement for such jobs to avoid similar situation.”

In addition to that, participant Informant 6 mentioned that working in a small town in a rural area created extra advantages by making the bond between agencies’ officers closer as they tend to come across each other in daily life, thus improving networking and cooperation among them. This eventually becomes a key advantage for JDC in implementing sustainable development programmes.

3.4.9 District’s Potentials

Being a district area that is known and recognized by the state for its richness in biodiversity, Jelebu has vast potential, especially when it comes to environmental-related activities. For example, the state of Negeri Sembilan has reserved a forest reserve area in Kenaboi, a locality in Jelebu as the Negeri Sembilan State Park gazetted area. The outlook and nature of the environment in this area is well preserved and carefully managed to maintain its current state of biodiversity and enrichment of flora and fauna. Apart from this area, Jelebu has many other potential green and natural areas that can be used for leisure activities and even nature-related sports activities such as hiking and mountain climbing. As Informant 8 narrated:

“Jelebu has many untapped potentials that need to further exploit, preferably that is related to ecotourism. People like to travel short distances on weekends for weekend getaway, especially bikers or cyclists who came in troop. Our potential market would be Klang Valley inhabitants. It took them about an hour to reach Jelebu. We need to take opportunity of this situation. Tourism activities will eventually spur the economy in the community; thus, district council needs to be involved. Maybe by providing infrastructures for example to build new stalls, rest area in the locality.”
JDC has also been involved in managing its own recreational area named Jeram Gading, which has chalets and durian trees within its compound. Further enhancement of such area is needed, especially in terms of maintenance and promotion, as it could benefit JDC financially. Besides that, JDC through its tourism unit, need to further explore the potentials of the Jelebu district that can be developed to become new attractions to the district. Green and nature tourism should be the focus of the district development, as there are minimal activities of building development within the district.

3.4.10 Lack of Public Awareness
Several participants in this study have conveyed their concerns about the lack of awareness among the public regarding cleanliness. According to these participants, certain segments of the public continue to hold the belief that maintaining cleanliness in public spaces is solely the responsibility of the local municipal or district council. Informant 5, whose role entails overseeing the upkeep of a public park, shared an experience wherein visitors to the park irresponsibly relocated the provided dustbin from its designated location and placed it near their seating area. Consequently, the dustbin was left unattended, attracting stray dogs, and resulting in littering. Informant 5 also expressed his disappointment with some house owners who attended ‘gotong-royong’ (community clean up) activity organized by their own community with the help of government agencies such as JDC, which provided machinery and manpower for the cause. These house owners usually just observed while others were busy cleaning the place, but later, after all the work was done, they would complain about their dissatisfaction with the work that had been done.

As for participant Informant 6, he shared his experience and expressed regrets with several house owners in his community who easily shifted the problems that they created to the district council to solve.

“There are people who like to plant trees near the road in front of their house. But years later, when the tree had grown and become bigger and caused trouble with their neighbour, they would contact the district council, seeking help to cut down the tree thus settling their problem. Such action was very inappropriate. I would like to suggest the district council to use a binding declaration form that needs to be signed by the responsible party that they will be totally responsible for their action (planting the tree) and would not drag the district council into the problem.”

Notwithstanding the above, Informant 8 believed that early childhood education, such as the one practised in Japanese schools, needs to be implemented in Malaysia. This could create more awareness among the people towards the environment. Such knowledge for the young generation in this country is crucial to encourage them to preserve nature for future generations (Yusliza et al., 2020).

3.4.11 Lack of NGO and Private Sector Involvement
Due to its rural location and lack of commercial activities, sustainable development activities by NGOs and private companies in Jelebu district are at a minimum and almost non-existent. Some participants in this study noted that political parties are the only active organizations contributing to the community, although it’s debatable whether they should be considered NGOs. Informant 5 shared that there used to be a few active NGOs, but their focus was mainly focused on voluntary work in post-disaster events such as floods. These NGOs were typically formed by government agencies like the Social Welfare Department and staffed by their workers. Informant 5 also noted that there are no other active NGOs promoting environmental activities in Jelebu. Regarding private companies in Jelebu, some of the largest ones include branches of financial institutions like Maybank, Public Bank and Tabung Haji. However, they are rarely involved in activities organized by JDC. When asked whether JDC has tried to obtain cooperation and sponsorship from these companies to organize environmental events, Informant 1 replied that it’s not easy as it seems.

“These banks have their own criteria before doing any CSR or contribute to any event at the district level. They will usually investigate the financial service that we subscribed to them, and they also must get permission from their headquarters before willing to commit on any financial contribution for event at this district level”.

Informant 8 and Informant 9, who worked at the state level, are aware of the issue of low participation of NGOs and private companies at the district level, especially for rural districts. Informant 8 revealed that most NGOs and private companies tend to choose big cities like Seremban and Port Dickson for their participation. Additionally, she noted that larger companies like AEON shopping complexes are usually willing to cooperate with the state if requested to participate in any event. For example, AEON has established a CSR fund from the proceeds of sales of grocery plastic bags on ‘no plastic bag days’ and is willing to contribute financially if requested by the state government.

NGOs and private organizations play vital roles in sustainable development initiatives such as LA21 and SDG. Their commitment to sustainable development often involves community development activities, including funding and interventions that engage other stakeholders. These efforts require close monitoring for
4. CONCLUSION

Local governments need to emphasize more environmental sustainability and need to be more strategic to exceed people’s expectations of them. District council, like other local governments in Malaysia, is typically associated with four core duties: management of local town streets, lighting, drains and waste. In a way, this stereotyping of municipalities’ responsibilities is still relevant. Nevertheless, some of these functions have gone through further development either through privatization or outsourcing activities. Our findings also revealed that most participants in this study agreed that the state of Negeri Sembilan really shows concern on the environmental condition of the state including the ongoing situation in Jelebu district. Jelebu District Council has significant roles at the grassroots level in implementing sustainable development, especially related to sustainable technology, especially efforts in implementing the use of LED. Notwithstanding the above, by looking at the present condition, due to the lack of new income sources, the district council did not have other choices rather than to rely on financial support from the state and federal government. Certain forms of intervention and assistance need to be made, especially at the state level to prosper the local economy, which will indirectly create new sources of income for the district council. Joint efforts between large and small municipalities on several activities can be planned to minimize operating or administration costs, especially for the district council. An example is to organize a joint training programme for enforcement officers or to have a mentoring programme between the smaller municipalities and the larger municipalities. Apart from that, the district council also needs to be more proactive in attracting NGOs, private companies, and international bodies to be involved in environmentally-related projects and programmes in their area.

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