

# READINGS IN MALAYSIAN URBAN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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## **CHAPTER 12**

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN MALAYSIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

**Raja Noriza Raja Ariffin and Rustam Khairi Zahari**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

How should a piece of land be used, or an area be developed? What effects will that have on the local community or the environment? What difference will it make to the elderly, to school children, to the handicapped, to local councilors, to different ethnic and religious groups, to industrialists and societies at large? Such questions are raised whenever a decision is taken to construct a shopping complex, develop housing and industrial areas, locate a new infrastructure or provide a recreational facility. The issues involved are complex, encompassing practical, economic, political, legal, environmental and aesthetic agendas. Local government as the local planning authority for an area has to be prepared to face the above challenges.

Local governments face growing challenges due to population growth as a result of continuing urbanization. The rise in living standard has put a tremendous demand on local government to provide more and better urban infrastructure and amenities. Some argued that since its existence, local authorities in Malaysia have been given pressing roles but limited power. Despite the autonomy provided in the 1976 Act, the administration of local authority is still based on control administrative concept (Norma et al., undated). This concept stipulates that local authority performs its tasks on the basis of the authority divested by the state. Local authority does not really formulate policy, but implements and executes policy decisions. In other words, a top-down approach characterised policy formulation, planning, decision-making and implementation, and perpetuating concentration of power in the hands of the Federal and the State government. Eventually, this phenomenon hampers local government capability in providing efficient services.

The inefficiency of the local government in providing services despite several reform efforts continues to be the main focus of several studies in Malaysia. These studies have put forward several factors that seem to create these efficiency and the prevalent reasons are lack of financial independence and human resources. Therefore, this paper will specifically look at local government financial constraint and human resources issues and challenges faced by local authority in Malaysia.

#### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In the current scenario local government has to serve a community within a dynamic and volatile environment. A study by UNESCAP (2000) observed that it is rather impossible