Public Administration:
Issues and Paradigms of Development
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Economic Development: Local Government Issues in Malaysia

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Introduction

Since the mid 1980's, Malaysia has been enjoying an impressive economic growth despite the two crises in the early 1980's and in 1997. Many suggest that it is attributed to the sound macroeconomic policies of the federal government, particularly the pragmatic ways in which the Malaysian government responded to economic crises. With the objective of achieving growth with equity, the laissez faire economic system was replaced by a more regulated economy. The macro planning of the Malaysian economy started with the New Economic Policy (NEP). This chapter will be divided into 4 parts: the first part describes the background of the Malaysian economy, the second part looks at the institutional structure of governance in Malaysia, the third part examines some of the reform efforts at the local government level and the final part the conclusion and policy recommendations.

In 1970's covering a 30 year period, the NEP became the guiding blueprint in subsequent planning including the Five Year Development plans, the Outline Perspective Plan and the Industrial Master Plan. The NEP essentially promotes growth with equity. The two pronged objectives were: to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty and to restructure the Malaysian society which was associated with race, profession and economic activity. The NEP could only be carried out in an expansionary economy and hence had forced the Malaysian government to elevate the economy from a commodity oriented economy to export oriented activities by attracting foreign capital and foreign owned manufacturing companies. Many incentives were introduced to induce foreign investment including the Pioneer Industry Incentives which grants tax holidays of between two to five years to firms, depending on the value of their fixed capital investment, plus additional tax relief of one year if they are established in a development area manufacturing priority products and have specified percentages of domestic content in their products. Several other incentives were