

RSOG Seminar :

Public Management and Governance In Malaysia :

Transformation and Trends

With

Dr. Noore Alam Siddique, Flinders University Australia

When : 22 November 2013
Where : Razak School of Government
Speakers : Dr. Noore Alam Siddique

About The Seminar

Since the 1980s, the Malaysian government has made attempts to innovate and improve its governance so as to achieve its national development goals. The efforts to elevate to a high income nation have further intensified with the Government Transformation Programme that was launched three years ago.

Many reforms have been introduced to support Malaysia's aspiration to become a fully developed country by 2020. These reforms have led to changes in the public sector in the form of improving public service delivery; injecting accountability and transparency in its processes; and improving work performance in the public sector.

The seminar presented an overview of public service reforms in Malaysia. Dr Siddiquee examined the ways public sector management and governance in Malaysia has changed and is changing under contemporary reform models. He also focused on the nature of reforms that were introduced, the forces that have shaped their design and implementation as well as their impact and results so far.

Summary

Dr. Noore began his presentation by explaining the background of Malaysia's transformation programme. The programme has had a great push from the Malaysian Government, due to the fact that the administration emphasizes so much on

transformation, until it has become a philosophy for the Government. The Najib administration in particular, focuses on comprehensive reforms. However, later in the seminar, Dr. Noore discussed the areas in which the Government should focus on, in order to improve public management and governance in Malaysia.

There is no single factor that drives this transformation programme. The transformation initiatives are based on the fact that the government is trying to respond to domestic and international change. On an international scale, the world is becoming more globalized and therefore, the Malaysian Government had to reposition itself to catch up with other nations. At the same time, Malaysians have become more educated and assertive, hence are braver to demand for more services as they have higher expectations today.

Malaysia has had different and multiple waves of transformation initiatives starting from the 1980s until today. According to Dr. Noore, these reform trajectories are consistent with “managerism” and the “good governance paradigm”. These initiatives have generated a positive impact in the socio-economic spheres during the 1980s and 1990s. For instance, per capita income reached to \$7000 in 2010, poverty has declined to 3.7% while Malaysia’s literacy rate managed to achieve 92%. However, Dr. Noore stated that the implementation of the transformation programme in Malaysia does not resonate with the true spirit of the programme, thereby hampering the country’s development.

For instance, although Malaysia’s economy has been doing relatively well as compared to other developing countries, the economy has not fully recovered since the Asian Financial Crisis. After the crisis, there is a lack of incentives for foreign investment, a rising gap between the rich and poor and a rising cost of living, just to name a few. Dr. Noore highlighted that although the economy was able to recover rapidly, the crisis has exposed the defects in the nation’s political-economic system.

Datuk Seri Najib’s response to the current economic changes is by developing an inclusive approach on how Malaysians can reap the socio-economic benefit. He developed the 1Malaysia philosophy, with the GTP and ETP parked under it to further stimulate the growth of the country. In addition to that, PEMANDU was also established to oversee the implementations of the GTP and ETP. Dr. Noore stated that Malaysians were starting to lose faith in the administration which pushed the Government to re-strategize their movement.

Malaysia also tends to adopt new ideas very quickly but have weak consolidation policies therefore mitigating its full development. Dr. Noore added that the GTP is basically a repackaging of the previous transformation attempts and that the only difference is that now, there are more emphasis on KPIs. As an example, when new policies are carried out, previous policies are neglected all together thus creating an inconsistency of policies and implementation. These setbacks may have caused

Malaysia to slip in the Global Competitiveness Report, from the 21st to the 25th position, allowing other nations to overtake Malaysia.

Regardless of the mentioned shortcomings, Dr. Noore suggested that one of the many ways to improve the public service performance is by enhancing access to e-services. This may not be a priority among top leaders but since Malaysia does have one of the largest public service in the world, having e-services or an e-government can accelerate efficiency in the delivery of the public service. Apart from that, he also applauded the government for seeking consultation and having a diagnosis approach allows them to be sensitive to the needs of the people. They also focus more on clear and measurable performance, which enhances transparency. These are major attempts taken by the government at improving public service delivery and management.

Dr. Noore concluded by explaining that Malaysia's transformation initiatives have generated a positive impact for the socio-economic growth of the country. However, there are areas of concern where the government needs to look into in order to ensure the effective implementation of the policies is carried out.

Key Take Away

Transformation programmes have been impressive, but there needs to be more focus on its implementation. Continuous monitoring and review is key to ensuring proper implementation.

Malaysia must broaden reformation efforts to sustain the momentum of transformation.

Policy makers must think of innovative ways to enhance service delivery and transparency of the public service by taking the local context into consideration and focus less on imitating other countries.

Consultative and diagnostic approach are positive ways to understand the needs of the people and the different stakeholders.

About The Speaker

Dr Noore Alam Siddiquee is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Social and Policy Studies at Flinders University, Australia. He has published widely on public sector reforms and governance, public ethics and accountability, e-government, NGOs and development. He is also well-versed with the Malaysian civil service and has published over 20 journal articles and chapters in edited volumes on it.

Prior to joining Flinders University in June, 2006, he has taught public administration, policy and governance for over 15 years in the University of Dhaka, International

Islamic University, Malaysia and University of Brunei Darussalam. During 2001 to 2004 he has also served as the Head of the Department of Political Science, International Islamic University, Malaysia.

When not in the classroom delivering his lectures, Dr Siddiquee also conducts training for government officials in Indonesia, China and Brunei.

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