

Implementation of Good Governance and Government Transformation Programs in Local Authorities: A Case Study of Kelantan, Malaysia

Wan Ahmad Tirmizi Wan Sulaiman¹, Nazli Aziz²

¹Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Kelantan, Malaysia

²Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Development, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the implementation of the Good Governance and Government Transformation Programs (GTP) at the local government level in Kelantan between 2010 and 2020. This timeframe reflects the implementation of the GTP by the Malaysian government. The study aims to evaluate how local governments implement The Government Transformation Programs within the framework of good governance. This research employs a qualitative case study approach guided by the UNDP (1997) good governance model and the Modified Political System Theory. The findings indicate that local governments, as the closest administrative units to citizens, functioned as mediators between federal and state governments, enabling impartial governance implementation. Their practices demonstrated an adaptation of federal and state approaches to local socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts. This coordination shows that elements of good governance emerged as the GTP's top-down initiatives were operationalized through bottom-up processes. However, the local governments' ability to implement key indicators of good governance participation, transparency, and accountability varied across the indicators.

Keywords: Transformation, good governance, local authorities, accountability, transparency, public participation

INTRODUCTION

Public sector transformation has become a central agenda for governments seeking to enhance governance capacity, stimulate socio-economic development, and achieve long-term national aspirations. In Malaysia, such efforts gained significant momentum under the leadership of the country's sixth Prime Minister, Najib Razak (April 2009–April 2018), with the introduction of the Government Transformation Programme (GTP). Launched on 28 January 2010, the GTP represented a major policy initiative aimed at reshaping the Malaysian public service into a more dynamic, efficient, and competitive institution. Although formally a non-binding policy, its implementation was effectively mandatory across federal, state, and local levels of administration, reflecting its importance within the Barisan Nasional (BN) government's broader reform agenda.

Anchored in the 1Malaysia philosophy of "People First, Performance Now," the GTP sought to prioritise issues of public concern and enhance the delivery of basic services nationwide. These objectives were closely aligned with the Federal Government's National Key Result Areas (NKRA), which addressed seven critical domains: reducing crime, combating corruption, improving educational outcomes, raising low-income household levels, strengthening rural infrastructure, enhancing urban public transportation, and managing the rising cost of living. The GTP was rolled out in three phases (2010–2012, 2013–2014, and 2015–2020), each designed to build upon earlier achievements while responding to evolving administrative and socio-economic challenges. Operationally,

the Performance Management and Delivery Unit (PEMANDU) within the Prime Minister's Department was tasked with driving the programme and ensuring that its targets were systematically monitored and achieved.

Malaysia's adoption of the GTP also reflected broader global trends in public sector reform that emphasise corporate-style management practices, performance measurement, and citizen-centric service delivery. These approaches resonate with the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to effective institutions, inclusive development, and sustainable governance. However, because the GTP was a non-statutory initiative, its continuity was not guaranteed beyond political transitions.

Within this national framework, Local Authorities (Pihak Berkuasa Tempatan, PBT) constitute a critical tier in translating top-down transformation initiatives into tangible, community-level outcomes. As the closest administrative unit to citizens, Local authorities play an essential role in operationalising bottom-up governance practices aligned with the 1Malaysia ethos of bringing public administration closer to the people. This study therefore examines the implementation of the GTP at the local government level, with particular attention to rural Local authorities in the state of Kelantan. By focusing on these local authorities, the study aims to deepen understanding of how national transformation policies are interpreted, adapted, and executed at the grassroots level within a predominantly rural socio-political context.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transformation Agenda in Malaysia

The transformation agenda within the government can occur in political, social, economic, and administrative aspects. Existing studies related to the transformation agenda in Malaysia are broadly clustered according to socioeconomic and sociopolitical elements. Comparisons are also made to provide an overview of research trends abroad regarding transformation agendas. Subsequently, the discussion focuses more specifically on the GTP.

The first aspect concerns socioeconomic transformation. In the context of policies involving governmental transformation, past studies in Malaysia have primarily focused on policies related to economic growth, poverty eradication, development planning, corporatization, and so forth. Generally, studies on the nation's socioeconomic transformation agenda can be divided into two groups. Recent empirical studies (Tahir, 2019; Adnan, 2019; Yusoff, 2018; Ishak, 2017; Mohamad, 2016) emphasize the transformation of the industrial and services sectors in Malaysia, touching on aspects of poverty within the context of Malaysia as an emerging economy. Meanwhile, studies from the late 20th century to the early 21st century (Hirschman, 2001; Drebble, 2000; Brookfield, 1994; Abdul Rahman, 1996; Salleh & Meyanathan, 1993; Leete, 1996) focused on transformation policies from the agricultural sector to the industrial sector, which successfully reduced the country's poverty rate.

Good Governance

Previous studies on good governance in Malaysia have focused on indicators, implementation, and public perception. In the early stages, when the concept of good governance began receiving academic attention, discussions primarily centered on its concepts and criteria. Over time, good governance began to be analysed within a broader context. Scholarly work gradually shifted toward the agenda of public sector transformation. The indicators of good governance used by researchers—either comprehensively or specifically—depend on the objectives of their respective studies.

Most early studies on good governance in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century concentrated on the concept, characteristics, and criteria of good governance. This is understandable, as the approaches and practices of good governance were beginning to gain traction in academic discourse. The works of the Asian Development Bank (1995), UNDP (2007), Al-Qudsy et al. (2008), and Mohd Yaakub and Chong (2004) are examples of studies that focused on the indicators of good governance.

From the perspective of public administration and management, there are several scholarly writings that are closely related to this study. Generally, good governance is used as a foundation to understand the level of efficiency, participation, and integrity of the public sector in Malaysia. Siddiquee & Mohamed (2007) examined administrative reforms in the Malaysian public sector in general, employing NGO involvement in government agency engagement processes as an indicator. The involvement of NGOs is said to have contributed to enhancing good governance practices in public sector reforms in Malaysia. Nen (2017) similarly emphasized the role of diverse actors in the practice of good governance within the public sector; however, he highlighted the engagement of the private sector together with the public sector in strengthening good governance practices in Malaysian public administration and management. Jamaudin (2019), meanwhile, focused on public acceptance of good governance in Malaysia. Said (2016) discussed the relationship between good governance and the overall integrity system of the public sector in Malaysia. Their works collectively emphasize the role of the government in applying the principles of good governance.

Local Authorities

Studies by Pang (1997, 1988, 1989), Hussain (1991) and Zahari (1991) are among the publications that serve as key references for understanding the scope of jurisdiction and administrative structure of local authorities (PBT) in the 20th century. In line with the years in which these works were published, the concept of NPM (New Public Management) was not applied in analysing the functions and powers of local authorities. Nevertheless, their studies are important foundations for understanding issues that continue to emerge in the context of local government governance in Malaysia today.

Academic discussions related to local authorities in the 1990s also revolved around financial matters. This line of discussion corresponded with Malaysia's development context at the time, which emphasised government revenues and expenditures as indicators of development. Tayib (1996, 1999) analysed problems faced by local authorities, particularly those related to financial reporting. Meanwhile, Pang (1997) and Abdullah (1992) elaborated on the local government financial system in Malaysia. These works provide an understanding of the sources of revenue and the financial jurisdiction of local governments derived from the State and Federal Governments.

In the 21st century, research on local authorities has been dominated by issues of governance (including Ali, 2020; Abdul Rahman, 2020; Meerangani, 2018; Daud, 2018; Phang, 2008). Ali's (2020) study emphasises the importance of public participation as decision-makers in local authority planning. The study uses NPM indicators to analyse decision-making methods within Malaysian local authorities. Meanwhile, Abdul Rahman (2020) focuses on the need to reinstate local government elections to ensure that local authorities in Malaysia democratically involve local residents in choosing their representatives. His view reflects the arguments put forward by Phang (2013, 2008, 2007). A similar study was also conducted by Manaf (2012) regarding public participation among local authorities in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

The foundation of this research methodology is the qualitative approach. The qualitative approach is used to gain an in-depth understanding of the research subject regarding the implementation of the GTP by examining its execution by local authorities (PBT) in Kelantan. This approach aligns with the goals and objectives of the study, which are to explore questions or statements rather than hypotheses. Question vocabulary such as the extent to which, to what level, how, and similar forms are employed to obtain, collect, and analyse data. The qualitative approach evolves, develops, and remains "open" in line with the advancement of case study research (Robson, 2011), which will be elaborated in the subsequent sub-topic. Qualitative methodology is also a popular method for analysing complex government policies (Connaway & Powell, 2010) such as the GTP.

The data collected and analysed were obtained from two main sources: primary sources and secondary sources. The primary sources were derived from interviews with informants. Interviews served as the main source to strengthen the findings of the study. In addition to interviews, the library method was used to obtain secondary data. Secondary sources such as government documents, directives, books, journals, newspapers (print and

online), and government portals were obtained from libraries/resource rooms in universities, ministries, and parliament/state legislative assembly offices.

Discourse analysis techniques were used to analyse data and information obtained from both primary sources (interviews) and relevant secondary sources (Malaysia Plans, annual agency reports, newspapers, and portals) (see Bryman & Bell 2007; Bryman 2008). The data obtained were triangulated to identify themes relevant to the study. Data triangulation involves collecting data using more than one technique. This study employs a combination of data through discourse analysis to strengthen the research (Ruenwai 2006; Creswell 2009). This combination of techniques provides a clearer picture of issues related to theory and practice in public policy. Robson (2011) states that triangulation helps address issues of research validity. Triangulated data from various sources form the basis for the evidential arguments of the study (White & Marsh 2006). Moreover, this approach is suitable for studies using a case study strategy (Glazier & Powell in Forrest, 2006).

The use of statistical data in this study does not indicate the adoption of mixed methods. Statistical reporting from various official reports and documents serves only as supplementary information and forms part of the recommendation process that supports the main qualitative findings (McNabb, 2004). Statistical data are not the primary focus of the research design; instead, they serve as an addition to the qualitative analysis obtained from the study. This research does not aim to demonstrate the success of the GTP through the government's specified NKRA's using quantitative data.

The number of informants involved in the interview for this study is 40 people. The sample of informants was divided based on their positions and scope of duties as follows;

- (i) 22 senior officers among the members of the local authority (PBT);
- (ii) 16 individuals consisting of JKKK Chairpersons / Penggawa / Penghulu / District and Land Office Officers;
- (iii) 2 officers from PEMANDU.

DISCUSSION

Awareness of the Implementation of GTP in Local Authorities in Kelantan

Based on the interviews conducted, all informants among the local authority administrators stated that they have implemented the Government Transformation Programme (GTP) within their respective local authorities. However, the level of implementation varies between local authorities. The methods of service delivery are carried out through collaborative networks between local authorities and other government and private agencies. Most administrators reported that the extent of GTP implementation depends on the financial capacity and available infrastructure of each local authority. The focus of GTP implementation is directed towards National Key Result Areas (NKRA's) that are relevant to the status and functions of rural local authorities, based on their socioeconomic development levels and geographical location in Kelantan.

Table 1.1: Awareness of GTP Implementation in Service Delivery at Local Authorities in Kelantan

| No | Local Authorities | Awareness of GTP Implementation | Level of Awareness |
|----|------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | Pasir Puteh District Council | Yes | 75% |
| 2 | Pasir Mas District Council | Yes | 75% |
| 3 | Tanah Merah District Council | Yes | 75% |
| 4 | Ketereh District Council | Yes | 70% |
| 5 | Machang District Council | Yes | 70% |

| | | | |
|----|------------------------------|-----|-----|
| 6 | Bachok District Council | Yes | 70% |
| 7 | Kuala Krai District Council | Yes | 70% |
| 8 | Jeli District Council | Yes | 70% |
| 9 | Tumpat District Council | Yes | 70% |
| 10 | Gua Musang District Council | Yes | 65% |
| 11 | Dabong District Council | Yes | 55% |
| 12 | Kota Bharu Municipal Council | Yes | 80% |

The analysis of interview findings indicates that rural Local Authorities (PBT), as implementing agencies for the Federal Government but operating within the jurisdiction of State Governments, frequently engage a wide range of stakeholders in the implementation of the GTP. This multi-stakeholder involvement in delivering services related to the two NKRA elements reflects the incorporation of participatory principles consistent with the Good Governance framework (Ossenbrink, 2019; Gisselquist, 2012; UNESCAP, n.d.). For instance, Local authorities routinely collaborate with Federal Government agencies such as JKR, PEMANDU, KPKT, JKM, KPM, KPT, KKM and others. At the State Government level, cooperation is established with agencies including the SUK, ICU, UPEN, District and Land Offices, and District Religious Offices. Private-sector partners include TNB, ECERDC, Syarikat Air Kelantan, SPAD and various others. Community representation involves mosque committees, schools, and local residents directly.

Good Governance and Information Technology

In line with advancements in information technology, Local authorities have adopted online system applications. All 12 local authorities examined in this study have utilised online systems since 2 July 2010 (<http://jkt.kpkt.gov.my>). Nonetheless, manual systems continue to be maintained. Both online and manual processes are used to handle applications, complaints, suggestions and other forms of public engagement. The gradual transition from manual to online applications is intended to allow communities to adapt progressively to the newly introduced technologies.

To enhance service delivery, KPKT through the Local Authority Transformation Plan introduced two high-impact initiatives. The first is the live streaming of PBT council meetings, enabling public access to proceedings in real time. The second is the introduction of PBT mobile applications, which facilitate faster and more efficient communication between the public and the agency. The adoption of information technology to support PBT governance systems is therefore aligned with contemporary administrative needs.

Table 4.3: Online Applications of Local Authorities in Kelantan

| No | Local Authority | Online Applications |
|----|------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Machang District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, Individual Garbage Bin Monitoring System (SPTSITP), e-PBT Online, Facebook, Twitter |
| 2 | Tanah Merah District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-PBT Online, Facebook, Twitter |
| 3 | Ketereh District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-PBT Online, e-Participation, e-Consultation, Facebook, Twitter |

| | | |
|----|------------------------------|---|
| 4 | Pasir Mas District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-PBT Online, e-Participation, e-Consultation, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram |
| 5 | Bachok District Council | e-Complaints, e-Tender, Feedback System, OSC Online, e-PBT Online, e-Recruitment, Facebook, Twitter |
| 6 | Pasir Puteh District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-PBT Online, e-Decision Making, e-Access, e-Price, My-Meeting, e-Consultation, Facebook, Twitter |
| 7 | Kuala Krai District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-Participation |
| 8 | Jeli District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, Forum, e-PBT Online, e-Inspection, e-SKT, e-Assets, Facebook, Twitter |
| 9 | Tumpat District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, Forum, e-PBT Online, e-Participation, e-Decision Making, e-SKT, e-Projects, e-Flood, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp |
| 10 | Dabong District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-SKT, e-Projects, Facebook, Twitter |
| 11 | Gua Musang District Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-Consultation, Forum, Facebook, Twitter |
| 12 | Kota Bharu Municipal Council | Feedback System, e-Complaints, OSC Online, e-PBT Online, e-Decision Making, e-Access, e-Price, My-Meeting, e-Consultation, e-Tender, e-Recruitment, Facebook, Twitter |

Public Participation in Local Authorities Online Application

The use of information technology in local authority (PBT) administration has significantly increased community participation. With digital platforms, residents can now engage with local authorities “without borders” at any time. This interaction includes providing feedback, offering suggestions, submitting complaints, and more through online systems.

In Kelantan, several applications have been introduced to make it easier for the public to submit complaints and access services. Among them are:

- i. **i-Kepoh** – An application that enables users to report issues such as potholes, faulty streetlights, malfunctioning traffic lights, garbage problems, signboard damage, and others directly to Local authorities via smartphone.
- ii. **Orang-E** – An application designed to help local communities search for and offer services such as landscaping, sewerage, education, and other community-based services.
- iii. **Teduh** – An application that helps locate buyers for unsold Bumiputera residential units.

Community engagement is also strengthened through PBT service applications accessible on their respective websites. Key systems include:

- i. **Feedback System** – Provided by district councils as a platform for the public to submit complaints, suggestions, inquiries, or feedback about services offered by the PBT.

- ii. **e-Aduan** – A public complaint system directly connected to the Kelantan State Secretary’s Office, functioning as a centralised reporting platform where complaints are submitted directly to the State Secretary instead of individual Local authorities.
- iii. **e-PBT Online** – A portal that allows the public to interact virtually with PBT services regardless of time, distance, or location.
- iv. **e-OSC (electronic One Stop Centre)** – A system for submitting and processing development project applications within PBT jurisdictions.
- v. **e-Participation System** – A platform that allows the public to engage with Local authorities through online forums and virtual discussions on issues of interest.

Additionally, individual Local authorities have implemented their own initiatives to strengthen bottom-up participation within their areas. Examples include:

- i. **e-Tender** – Utilised by the Bachok District Council.
- ii. **Individual Household Garbage Bin Monitoring System (SPTSITP)** – Implemented by the Machang District Council.
- iii. **Social media applications** such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, used as 24-hour communication channels for the public to reach their respective local authorities.

Transparency

Online applications enable information to be accessed openly without the need for direct interaction with PBT personnel. Various categories of information such as application status, tender openings, complaint types, and management improvement requirements are publicly displayed. This digital openness reflects good governance commitment to transparency, which has evolved through a bottom-up approach to information dissemination. Residents are able to retrieve service-related information, application procedures, public notices, and other relevant updates quickly and without intermediaries. These services are accessible to all segments of society, regardless of time or location, thereby strengthening the culture of transparency within PBT governance systems.

Transparency within the online system is demonstrated through several key features:

- i. **Live streaming of PBT council meetings**, which enhances transparency and reinforces accountability to the public.
- ii. **e-PBT**, which promotes transparency by enabling users to review licence and rental accounts, lodge complaints, and complete payments using the portal’s integrated menu options. The public can also view reservation schedules, submit reservations, track payment status, and print statements for reference.
- iii. **e-OSC**, which strengthens transparency by functioning as a centralized platform for two-way communication related to development control, thereby serving as an effective one-stop centre for planning and development matters.

Accountability

Accountability indicators for Local authorities are reflected through the extent to which agencies demonstrate responsibility toward the public. One key dimension of accountability involves the management of feedback—such as inquiries, complaints, and suggestions—received through online platforms, as well as the actions taken in response. Accountability is also evident when Local authorities assume the role of intermediaries between citizens and Federal or State Government agencies.

The level of accountability in GTP implementation varies across local authorities. Financial capacity significantly influences the extent to which local authorities can achieve accountability in delivering enhanced public services. Generally, rural district-level Local authorities in Malaysia rely on Federal Government allocations due to their limited ability to generate independent revenue. In Kelantan, funding for PBT-led projects and programmes is constrained by the state's comparatively high poverty rate at the national level. Financial resources determine staffing levels as well as the scale and scope of poverty alleviation programmes and infrastructure development projects undertaken by Local Authorities.

The implementation of the GTP within Local authorities is therefore largely contingent upon their respective capacities and resources. Financial resources constitute the most significant factor affecting the ability of Local authorities to strengthen awareness and maximise accountability towards their clients, particularly the local community. Local authorities with stronger financial standing are able to implement the GTP through a more bottom-up approach, whereas financially constrained Local authorities tend to adopt a top-down approach as a standard mode of service delivery.

For example:

- i. **i-Kepoh, Orang-E, and Teduh** illustrate the responsibility of Local authorities in facilitating the submission of public complaints and supporting local business-related services.
- ii. **e-Aduan** serves as a public complaint system that channels reports directly to the Kelantan State Secretary's Office. Under this system, complaints are submitted to the State Secretary's Office rather than being handled individually by the respective Local authorities.

Public Participation in Local Government Activities

Gotong-royong (community clean-up) initiatives organised by local authorities (Local authorities) involve participation from various government agencies, private organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities. These local-level efforts are aligned with the PBT Transformation Plan, which emphasises active citizen engagement (Department of Local Government, 2016). This approach is also consistent with the Plan's third strategic thrust, which seeks to strengthen community relations through resident-focused programmes and the expansion of corporate social responsibility initiatives (Department of Local Government, 2016).

Gotong-royong activities are conducted on a regular basis, typically once every three months to promote collaborative participation between residents and Local authorities. They are also organised in response to specific needs, such as in the aftermath of the major floods in Kelantan in 2014. Through such initiatives, Local authorities and government agencies are able to meet citizens' expectations for institutional support, particularly in assisting communities affected by disasters. Residents experiencing hardship due to disasters anticipate PBT involvement in cleaning and restoring affected areas.

The participation of Local authorities fosters a sense of closeness between communities and the government during post-flood recovery efforts. Numerous programmes were implemented, including garbage removal, clearing of drains and sewerage systems in residential neighbourhoods, and the restoration of cleanliness in homes and public spaces such as mosques, schools, roads, recreational parks, bus stations, and markets. These efforts collectively strengthened community resilience and reinforced the government's role in disaster response and recovery.

CONCLUSION

This research underscores that the administration and management of Local Government by the 12 Local Authorities (PBT) have effectively operationalized the Government Transformation Programs (GTP) at the grassroots level through a bottom-up approach. The good governance mechanisms adopted are consistent with the key indicators of participation, transparency, and accountability in public service delivery. The degree of achievement across these indicators varies, with participation emerging as the most successfully attained,

followed by transparency, and lastly accountability. As the lowest tier of government without autonomous authority in Malaysia, PBTs function as agents of both the Federal and State Governments, acting as intermediaries between governing institutions and local communities.

The research further demonstrates that PBT efforts to localize and democratize the implementation of the GTP are confronted with several issues and challenges. Foremost among these is the limitation of financial resources, which constrains the strengthening of bottom-up governance approaches within each GTP initiative. Budgetary constraints impede the capacity of PBTs to enhance participation, transparency, and accountability. Innovations in governance, technology, and human resource development require substantial financial investment, yet the budgets of PBTs remain limited. Consequently, financial allocations from the Federal and State Governments are crucial to support the transformation of PBTs in alignment with the objectives of the GTP. The neutrality of PBTs as implementing agencies is also significant in securing additional funding. A failure to maintain neutrality may complicate negotiations for supplementary allocations from either the Federal or State Government. Additionally, issues related to staff shortages and inadequate facilities, both closely linked to limited budget capacity, adversely affect the operational efficiency of PBTs in delivering services to local populations.

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