Introduction

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Malaysia has a multiethnic and multicultural population, and this pluralism influences the political fabric and administration of the country. Hence, public policy directions are constantly subjected to this composition of the population.

Malaysia has recorded massive development since its Independence in 1957. By the late 1980s, Malaysia had charted plans to achieve a developed nation status by 2020 under Vision 2020. From a country which relied heavily on agricultural produce and mining, its focus has shifted onto manufacturing, and more importantly the service sector. This change in economic focus coincides with two major factors. First is the increase in population size from only 10.4 million in 1970 to 13.1 million in 1980, and to 22.2 million in 2000. The population is expected to further rise to 32.6 million by 2020. In tandem, the urbanisation rates rose from 28.4 percent in 1970 to 71 percent by 2010 and 74.3 percent in 2015. This phenomenon is a serious challenge to urban managers to provide for the needs of its populace. With the increase in population size, there is always the need to safeguard the wellbeing of the citizens, particularly in accessing opportunities. Second, it is expected of the leadership of the government to steer the people out of the poverty faced by the country.

Meanwhile, the poverty was concentrated very much in the rural areas, largely due to heavy reliance on agricultural produce which was subject to volatile market prices causing further grievances to the people. Thus there were initiatives for social re-engineering and naturally a push to focus on exporting value-added products that fetched better prices and returns to the country.

Meanwhile, the poverty rate that was 51.2 percent in 1957 remained almost static at 49.3 percent in 1970, as pointed out by Yukio Ikemoto in the article, “Income distribution in Malaysia: 1957-80” (Ikemoto, 1985, 347-67). Hence, serious efforts were made on reducing poverty resulting