KK more disabled-friendly but still lacks connectivity

Jason Santos
KOTA KINABALU: The city is becoming more disabled-friendly but needs to focus more on building-to-building connectivity.

This is the finding of a research group under Universiti Islam Antarabangsa (UIA) which has been researching the city environment since the year 2008.

"In Sabah, we had our research done at the Waterfront and the Filipino market," said Kulliyah of Architecture and Environmental Design (KAED) Director, Professor Dato’ Dr. Asiah Abdul Rahim.

"While the market is found unsatisfactory, the Waterfront still needs some improvements. As for hotels, they do pay attention to the needs of the disabled."

But overall what is lacking is connectivity between buildings in the city, she said, adding however that things will likely improve in new structures coming up in the city.

She was speaking at an Access Audit in Construction Line Workshop at the Taman Kingfisher Community Hall, Monday.

Dr Asiah said from the 16 case studies they had conducted for the whole of Malaysia, only 25 per cent were found satisfactory under the Facility Audit Access for Public Amenity.

The case studies entrusted to the university’s KAED Universal Design Unit (Kudu) by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development since its formation in 2008.

She said the studies were done at the Melaka Museum, Kota Kinabalu Waterfront, Kuching, Danga Bay in Johor Baru and Kuantan as well as commercial centres like Berjaya Times Square, the Bukit Bintang Walk and transport terminals like in Pulau Pinang, Bandar Tasik Selatan train station.

Also included was a housing area in Seremban and the Persiaran Perdana in Putrajaya, she said, adding that the research covered logistics, historical buildings, jetty, hotel and market.

"One of the strategies adopted from the research is to ensure the needs of the disabled are met during the designing stages.

"Thus, the workshop is created to expedite awareness of the community, especially professionals like architects, engineers, landscape engineers, academician, students, rehabilitation specialists, local authorities and individuals who are fighting for the rights of the disabled," she said.

Dr Asiah said the workshop comes under the collaboration of Kudu and the Malaysian Standards Department.

She said to date only four workshops have been conducted, namely in UIA, Seremban, Putrajaya and Kuching in 2011, while this year it is scheduled for Kota Kinabalu, Penang, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang and Negeri Sembilan.

Meanwhile, Mayor, Datuk Abidin Madingkir, who was present at the opening ceremony, said the disabled have the same rights and equal opportunities to lead normal lives.

"It is the responsibility of those who are physically and mentally able to aid the local authorities and government in ensuring the disabled receive the rights."

Madingkir said relevant parties should be exposed and trained about facilities for the disabled and apply them into their projects.

He said RM2 million was allocated by the Local Government and Housing Ministry in 2009 for such projects.

From there, Madingkir said, City Hall through the City Planning Department has constructed ramps, pedestrian paths, tactile and signal lights in areas like the City Hall compound, Jalan Pantai and Jalan Gaya.

"City Hall for several years has already imposed terms for the developer when approving building plans, taking into account aspects of universal designs and facilities for the disabled."

"This is in line with the Government’s effort on city design and planning to provide access to all groups, including children, elderly and pregnant women," he said.

He hoped a special unit or Access Audit will be established for local authorities and that City Hall would become the model for other town councils in the State.

The workshop, which will end on April 10, is being attended by disabled bodies, local councils and other professionals in the construction line.