

The Roles and Responsibilities in Natural Resources and Environmental Management of Local Government in Thailand

Chaitach Jansamood

Faculty of Liberal Arts and Science, Kalasin Rajabhat University, 46230 Kalasin, Thailand

Abstract: Currently, Thailand has promoted the local government to participate in natural resources and environmental management for the safety of life of all people under a great natural resource and environmental values. According to the Planning Act and the Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2) in Section 16 and 17 to include local government, Provincial Administration Organization (PAO), municipality, Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO), Pattaya city and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) to comply strictly.

Key words: Roles, responsibilities, environment, management, local government, decentralization

INTRODUCTION

Visible and apparent environmental degradation catalyzed the public's demand for environmental protection in the latter half of the 20th century. Although, the environmental movement can be traced back to much earlier origins, it perhaps began in earnest in the 1960s with legislators passing laws and creating regulatory agencies and with citizen-centric advocacy organizations campaigning for stronger public health standards and biodiversity conservation (Fiorino, 2001).

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) was launched in 1990 at the UN in New York as an International Environment Agency for the local government officers that is under sponsorship of UNEP, IULA and The Innovative Diplomacy Centre. ICLEI's mission is to build and support worldwide movement of local governments to achieve a tangible improvement in global environmental condition through the cumulative impact of local actions (Shem, 2000).

Local government practices in Thailand have become more participatory or governance oriented since the promulgation of the Constitution of 1997 and the Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999. Several local governments have applied modern concepts of New Public Management and participatory approaches in performing their tasks (Krueathep, 2004).

In recent years, many scholars have argued for an enhancement of public participation in the policy making process (Adams, 2004; King *et al.*, 1998). Public participation is a political and social arrangement in which people can have access to various stages of decision making in government agencies. Participation can be exercised in several forms, ranging from the narrow

conception of political participation through voting to the broader conception of self-initiative and self-mobilization. The promulgation of Royal Thai Constitution of 2007 and the Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2) has expanded the obligations of Thai local government to provide public services. According to these documents there are 6 core functions and 245 tasks to be devolved to local governments.

This study is therefore, aimed at achieving two purposes. First, it tries to identify and describe cases of Thai local government initiatives that have occurred during the recent decentralization movement since 1999. Second to identify and describe role and responsibilities in natural resource and environmental management of local government.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Local government structures in Thailand

Institutional framework: Thai local governments are classified into two main categories; general and specific. In the general form, there are three types of local authorities located throughout all 75 provinces except Bangkok. They are Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO, 75 units), municipality (1,156 units) and sub-district or Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO, 6,624 units) in the specific form there are two special units of local governments governing specific areas namely Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and Pattaya city.

The three general forms of local governments are divided into two tiers. The lower-tier governments, municipality and SAO, function as a single operating unit which is very close to local residents, providing local

public services within their defined territory. While municipalities are located in urbanized areas, SAOs are mostly established in less-developed rural communities. By contrast, PAO is the upper-tier local government which covers an entire province and is responsible for administering local public services at the provincial level as well as for working in development projects that need collaboration among several municipalities or SAOs within the provincial territory. In other words, the service functions that cross the boundaries of any single municipality or SAO are held by PAO.

Political and administrative structures of Thai local government are similar to those of other nations, each local government consists of the executive body and the local council, each of which is headed by locally elected persons from local residents and serves a 4 years term. BMA has a rather unique administrative structure, however it covers the whole Bangkok provincial territory and has partitioned its administration to 50 district units. Though, each district is composed of the executive branch and the council, only the council members are locally elected by Bangkok dwellers. The district heads are permanent staff and indeed appointed by the BMA governor.

Local responsibilities: According to two major laws, the Constitution of 2007 and the Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2), several tasks and responsibilities are mandated to local government. Section 281 of the constitution mandates that the state shall give autonomy to localities in accordance with the principles of self-government and the will of the people. In the subordinate law, the Decentralization plan and process act lays down that the Municipality, SAO and Pattaya city shall perform the following tasks:

- Local and community planning and development
- Promotion of local economic development, investment, employment, trade and tourism
- Local public services provision including local roads, walkways, public transportation system and traffic light engineering, public markets, ports and docks, waste treatment, water drainage system, public utilities, parks and recreation, garbage collection, pet controls, slaughtering, public safety, natural resource and environmental protection, disaster control, sanitation and cremation services
- Social welfare services provision including education, social welfare for children and for the elderly and disabilities, primary health care and medical services, housing and restoration, arts and cultures

- Promotion of democratic values, civil rights, public participation, laws and order and conflict resolution

The PAO should carry out these following tasks:

- Provincial development planning with respect to the principle of economic growth and efficiency
- Large-scale public services provision; the services that cannot be executed by any other smaller localities within a provincial territory. Their benefits should accrue to communities in a province-wide area
- Human services provision of public education, public health, social securities and social welfare at the provincial level
- Natural resource and environment protection in inter-local government activities
- Promotion of trade and investment in a province, tourism, culture and art
- Provision of technical and financial supports to lower-tier local authorities

The Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is a special case. It performs both lower-tier and upper-tier local government responsibilities. In short, its functions include municipality's urban services and SAO's rural services as well as the Bangkok provincial services like those of PAO.

The roles and responsibilities in natural resources and environmental management

Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO):

Provincial Administrative Organization Act of 1997 has provisions roles and responsibilities of the PAO relating to environmental management within the province clearly were in conjunction with Section 45:

- Development PAO plan and coordination of the development plan according to the Provincial cabinet
- Protecting care and maintenance of natural resources and environment
- The preparation of any transaction which other powers and duties of local government in the area PAO and business, it is appropriate to provide local government with other operating or the preparation of PAO

The Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2), environmental management in the area of the PAO. In addition, must comply with the provisions of

Table 1: The roles and responsibilities on natural resources and environmental management of municipality

Sub-district municipality	Town municipality	City municipality
Provide and maintain land and water	Provide and maintain land and water	Provide and maintain land and water
Cleaning of roads or paths and the public as well as solid waste and sewage	Cleaning of roads or paths and the public as well as solid waste and sewage	Cleaning of roads or paths and the public as well as solid waste and sewage
To provide and maintain the drainage	To provide and maintain the drainage slum improvement and keeping clean of the local	To provide and maintain the drainage slum improvement and keeping clean of the local Planning and building control

the law above. PAO must also comply with the rules, procedures and conditions of work in the case of environmental management in accordance with the provisions of Section 17 including care and maintenance of protected forest land, natural resources and environment. Promoting the participation of people in local development. Establishment and maintenance of waste water treatment system, waste disposal and sewage included, environmental management and pollution and the PAO has the authority and duty to organize public services for the benefit of local people in charge and must be governed by Section 16.

Municipality: Municipality Act 1963 and amendments to the Act (No. 12), Act 2003 has set guidelines for the establishment of the three types of municipalities.

- Sub-district municipality
- Town municipality
- City municipality

Environmental management is responsible for all three types in Table 1. The Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2), environmental management in the area of the municipality of all three have responsible to organize public services for the benefit of local people and their compliance with the principles of decentralized self-governing administration, pursuant to the provisions of Section 16 including providing and maintaining land, water and drainage, cleanliness and tidiness of the nation. Waste disposal of sewage and wastewater, security and public order, health and maintenance of public hospital and other entertainment, the use of forest land, natural resources and environment, planning and maintenance of public.

Sub-district Administrative Organization (SAO): The Tambon Council and Sub district Administrative

Organization Act 1994 and amendments to the Act (Issue 5) Act 2003 in respect of environmental protection to the SAOs have authority to act within the SAOs under provisions of Section 67 including providing and maintaining water and land, cleaning of roads, water, paths and public places including waste disposal and sewage, care and protection of natural resources and environment maintenance, provide and maintain the drainage.

The Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2) environmental management in the area of SAOs shall be have the same municipality under this Act.

Pattaya city: The Pattaya City Administration Act 1999 in respect of environmental protection has to Pattaya city have authority to act under provisions of Section 62 are to promote and maintain environmental quality and natural resources. Protecting property and maintaining public of which planning and building control, dealing with the housing and slum improvement, cleanliness and tidiness of the nation, waste disposal and sewage and waste water treatment, health and safety control in commercial entertainment shop signs and other facilities. The Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2) environmental management in the area of Pattaya city has the same authority SAO Act.

Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA): The Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2) environmental management in the area of BMA to have the same roles and responsibilities of SAO Act 1994 and shall have the roles and responsibilities to manage the PAO Act 1997 as PAO in every respect.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Considering the roles and responsibilities of local government in managing natural resources and environment under the law of the plan and the process of decentralization to local government and you will find that authority for the management of natural resources and environment of local government will continue to be a part of public service.

The majority of these activities are not viewed as a work of natural resources and environmental management as defined by the current because of these activities to be understood as a public service by regular daily local government only. Nantawat said that decentralization should mean more than the transfer of tasks to local government only in principle, it should decentralize decision making authority to the most appropriate level.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the roles and responsibilities on natural resource and environmental management has been defined in the Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 (Issue 2) of Section 16 and 17 that requires local government to comply strictly.

REFERENCES

Adams, R., 2004. Public meetings and the democratic process. *Public Admin. Rev.*, 64: 43-54.

Fiorino, D.J., 2001. Environmental policy as learning: A new view of an old landscape. *Public Admin. Rev.*, 61: 322-334.

King, C.S., K.M. Feltey and B.O. Susel, 1998. The question of participation: Towards authentic public participation in public administration. *Public Admin. Rev.*, 58: 317-326.

Krueathep, W., 2004. Local government initiatives in Thailand: Cases and lesson learned. *Asia Pacific J. Pub. Admin.*, 26: 217-239.

Shem, C., 2000. EIA training for urban local authorities in Africa. *J. Local Environ.*, 5: 97-106.