

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF DECENTRALIZATION POLICY: A CASE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND

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## Abstrak

Makalah ini memiliki tiga tujuan. Pertama, bertujuan untuk meninjau secara kritis kerangka kebijakan konseptual desentralisasi pemerintah daerah di Thailand. Menurut perspektif para cendekiawan, istilah “pemerintah daerah” dipandang sebagai pemerintahan mandiri. Dengan demikian, makalah ini menyajikan konsep singkat Thailand dengan konteks pemerintah daerah yang terdiri dari bentuk umum -PAO, Municipality, SAO dan khusus bentuk BMA dan Kota Pattaya. Kedua, tulisan ini membahas kebijakan desentralisasi di Thailand. Dengan demikian, lima taksonomi utama otoritas telah digambarkan di pemerintahan dan pikiran, infrastruktur, ekonomi, perdagangan dan keuangan, masyarakat dan kualitas hidup, dan sumber daya alam dan lingkungan hidup. Selain itu, dua studi kasus Ulasan untuk menggambarkan kebijakan desentralisasi di pemerintah daerah Thailand. Akhirnya, tulisan ini memberikan saran untuk arah masa depan kebijakan desentralisasi di Thailand.

**Kata kunci:** *kebijakan Desentralisasi, Kewenangan, Pemerintah Daerah Thailand*

## Abstract

This paper has three purposes. First, it aims to critically review the conceptual framework of decentralization policy of local government in Thailand. According to the scholars' perspective, the term “local government” is viewed as a self-governance. Thus, this paper presents a brief concept of Thai local government context consisting of general form –PAO, Municipality, SAO and special form-BMA and City of Pattaya. Second, this paper discusses decentralization policy in Thailand. In doing so, five major taxonomies of authority have been portrayed on governance and thought, infrastructure, economic, commerce and finance, society and quality of life, and natural resources and environment. Moreover, Two case studies are reviewed to illustrate decentralization policy in Thai local government. Finally, this paper gives the suggestion for future direction of decentralization policy in Thailand.

**Keywords:** *Decentralization policy, Authority, Thai Local Government*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ideally, public policy is initiated by government which viewed as a roadmap of country to indicate the direction of governance as defined by Dye (1995) “*the public policy is whatever governments choose do or not to do*”. Similarity, Levin (1977) expressed that the various persons are able to use policy is the various means. Particularly, the internal and external civil groups are different indication such as internal groups who are the politicians and government officials always initiate and ought to implement the policy, while the external groups such as scholars are unnecessary conducting. Therefore each country should designs the public policy in different way, which depends

on the role of citizens, phenomena, and environment as stated by Denhardt (2008) that

*“those in government must be willing to listen and to put the needs and values of citizens first in our decisions and our action; they must reach out in new and innovation way to understand what citizens are concerned about, and they must respond to citizen needs and interests”.*

Decentralization is certainly crucial public policy both for central government and local government. Thus decentralization policy has various different perspectives to present. It needs to shift accountability, power, and financial capital from the central government to local government. A related question would be whether prevailing local accountability have sufficiency ability to operate recently allocated duties in terms of human and finance capital. In sequence to operate exact duties currently allocated to local accountability along with decentralization, prevailing local accountability maybe very small and lacking ability in terms of both human and finance capitals (Hayashi, 2002).

Presently, local government is facing more responsibilities, which forced by decentralization policy from central government and it is also certainly significance for the national development as Elcock (1994) described since World War II. A number of local government has been more increasing together with an important task which is to arrange several local services with itself-operation by purposes to a wide range of local authority. Additionally, more scholars stipulated that the objective of local government mainly focuses on the social and economic area operated by official worker and citizen needed to provide certain public services. Also, it is not limited only the role of community service but the responsibility is extended to combine with economic, culture, and healthy welfare for locality citizens. Particularly, an achievement of economic in undeveloped countries needs to be decentralized more responsibility from central government into local government (Wilson & Game, 1998; Hampton, 1987; Lewis, 1966).

### **1.1. Definition and Authorities of Local Government**

Initially, the review on the definition of local government is presented in order to give a background idea of the decentralization policy of local government in Thailand. The term local government has been given in two brief meanings by scholars. The definition of local government is able to mention that it is a part of the government of the country, which the pattern of administration and management relevant to citizen living permanently in the community and demand self-governance (Clarke, 1969). Moreover, it is a form of sub-central government or a sub-structure of each state set up facilitate to its community (Wilson & Game, 1998).

Additionally, authority of local government is an important mechanism to spread public services into all grass root citizen. Its characteristics are complex units and more variety basic public services such as education, social, accommodation, planning, transportation, streets and lighting, commerce standards, environment, health, and knowledge (Brennan & Douglas, 1998). The following scholars have mentioned that English local authorities are the paramount subnational governing preparation and a significant transferor of civil services. Politically elected bodies with a Westminster-style cabinet system of political management directly govern local authority. They are miscellaneous organizations transferring social services, education and knowledge, regulatory services, accommodation, libraries, transportation services, and welfare benefits in special geographic areas particularly at urban zones, authorities transfer all of these services. Whilst at rural zones, a two-layer system overcomes, with county councils offering environmental, accommodation, welfare, and regulatory functions. Authorities are not all-intension such as separating authorities

to provide health. As such, they enroll professional career staff, including public managers, and receive around two-thirds of their income and guidance on the implementation of legislation from the central government (Walker, Andrews, Boyne, Meier, & O'Toole, 2010). And McAdam, Walker & Hazlett (2011) also discussed that across the European Union, the pressure for local government responsibilities to enhance under the broad umbrella terms of modernization and reform shows no signs of abating. The key tenets of such changes concentrate on value for money, enhanced and sustained performance, and improved stakeholder satisfaction.

## 1.2. Thai Local Government Context

Thai local government context is critically reviewed in this section for a deep understanding. The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand is legislated that Thailand is a unitary state system ruled by government which is based on foundation of parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy. Presently, Thai public administration system is divided into three administrative levels. First, the central administration compounds with twenty ministries and some independent agencies, which all headquarters are located at capital city - Bangkok. Second, the provincial administration is the system of central government officials appointed to govern the 76 provinces, and 878 districts. In addition, the provincial administration is responsible for governing the geographic areas under its guidance. It performs as representatives of the central administration and has an authority to control the certain basic public services such as police, health care, and irrigative services, which involves resources beyond what local governments can afford. Third, the local administration performs at a local level. It is local authorities and affairs that have a regional or community effect. And also, is based upon the principle, which citizens living in a community should be able to govern themselves in all matters of local involvement. (Setabutr, 2002)

Additionally, three administrative levels of Thailand play differential orientation. The central administration is centralization orientation, the provincial administration is deconcentration orientation, and the local administration is decentralization orientation (Kanjankul, 1980).

Thai local administration is a self-governance, which could be compound with two forms of local government while each form should be combined with different organizations. The first one is a general form combining of the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), the Municipality, the Sub-District Administrative Organization (SAO) and the second one is a special form consisting of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and the City of Pattaya (Krutchon, 2013).

PAO was established by Thai act (Provincial Administrative Organization Act B.E. 2540, 1997), which has accountabilities to cooperate and arrange public services in its province. The importance of PAO power and authorities are the variance responsibilities such as to legislate preparation without contradiction to law, to provide and coordinate master plan of PAO, to encourage the developing of the sub-district council and another local government organization, to operation and function on another local government organization, to distribute the budget to another organization, and to conserve and retain the natural resources and environment compounding with local arts, wisdom, custom and culture.

Municipality was settled by Thai act also (Municipality Act, B.E. 2496, 1953). It is a general form of local government and self-governance, which able to administer and manage its areas as well as must serves public services that specified by law. There are three forms of municipality; Subdistrict municipality, Town municipality, and City municipality. The responsibilities and duties of municipality are various and directly depends on citizens, i.e. to construct and maintain the road, foot-part, and river, to prepare the water supply both for consumption and agriculture, to provide the

electricity, to keep the road and public area clean, to conserve and retain the natural resources and environment, to promote the education, religions, culture for children, senior citizens, and disable persons, to manage its commerce, and to support green zones as well as public park for rest and recreation.

SAO is a general form of local government which was established by the act (Subdistrict Council and Subdistrict Administrative Organization Act, B.E. 2537, 1944) effected on March 2, B.E.2538 (A.D.1945) as a juristic person. It is consisted of the SAO council and the Chief Executive of SAO who directly elected by citizens. In addition, its major accountabilities compound with economic, social, and cultural development. Furthermore, SAO missions must be commanded by 2 types of law. Firstly, permanent responsibility is to provide and maintain roads and by water, to keep the cleanliness of roads, by water, pavements, and public area including solid waste and sewage, to prevent and stop spreading diseases, to prevent and mitigate public disaster, to promote the education, religion, and culture, to support the women, children, senior citizens, and disabled persons, and to conserve and retain the natural resources and environment. Secondly, optional responsibility is to provide the water supply both for consumption and agriculture, to provide and maintain the public electricity, lighting or by other means, to prepare and maintain the public meeting and recreation place and green park, to provide and encourage of farmers' groups and cooperative, to encourage household industry, to cultivate and encourage vocation, to protect, care and maintain the public properties, to make benefits from SAO asset, to provide the market, piers, and crossing, and to manage commerce, tourism, and planning.

BMA was founded by lastly act on 1985 (Bangkok Metropolitan Administrative Act, B.E. 2528). It is a special form of local government, which was established to provide several public services for the capital city of Thailand. It is subdivided into fifty districts. The Bangkok governor is able to appoint a district director for managing in each district. The district director is consulted by a district council, whose members are elected by the citizens who live in their jurisdiction.

The City of Pattaya is an also special form of local government, which administered by a strong mayor form like BMA. Previously, the City of Pattaya was upgraded from Na Klua sanitation district, Bang Lamung district, Chonburi Province in 1978. When the City of Pattaya had out grown the managerial capabilities of a sanitation district, due to its exploding tourism industry, a city manager system was introduced to cope with the social, environmental, town planning and building control problem. However, the city manager system was unsuccessful due to conflict between the city manager and the city assembly speaker. In addition, there were inconsistencies between the establishment of the City of Pattaya and the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2540 (A.D. 1997). Consequently, the act of the City of Pattaya Administrative Act B.E. 2521 (A.D. 1978) was replaced in 1999 (The City of Pattaya Administrative Act B.E. 2542, 1999) and a new was legitimated to create an administrative system as BMA (Setabutr, 2002).

According to Thai public administrative system, the table 1 is shown a percentage of each classification for governmental organization.

**Table 1 The Governmental Organization in Thailand**

Administrative level	Frequency	Percentage
1. Central Administrative Organization	34	0.4
1.1 Ministries (20 units)		
1.2 Independent agencies (14 units)		
2. Provincial Administrative Organization	954	10.8
2.1 Provinces (76 units)		
2.2 Districts (878 units)		
3. Local government	7,853	88.8
3.1 PAO (76 units)		
3.2 Municipality (2440 units)		
3.2.1 City (30 units)		
3.2.2 Town (176 units)		
3.2.3 District (2,234 units)		
3.3 SAO (5,335 units)		
3.4 BMA (1 unit)		
3.5 City of Pattaya City (1 unit)		
Total	8,841	100.0

*Source: Department of Local Administration, (2015)*

In conclusion, Thailand is a unitary state and has three administrative systems. The local government is one crucial organization of public administrative system in Thailand hence it is the largest unit and its accountability is able to direct into grass root citizens.

### **1.3. Decentralization Policy in Thailand**

In order to clear the topic of decentralization policy in Thailand, let us summarize and discuss its features here. Decentralization of governmental performance has been organized most important consideration in the Kingdom of Thailand. It presents on both the constitution in 1997 and the decentralization act in 1999. The major purpose of decentralization policy is to encourage social and economic development in the nation thus as to enhance quality of citizens' life there through the encouragement of the conclusion of local organization in their own operative and developmental responsibility. Department of Local Administration (DLA), Ministry of Interior is supposed to perform an important capacity in strengthening the role of local accountability in term of planning, fiscal, human capital, and administrative responsibilities (Setabutr, 2002).

Thai local governments are affected by the decentralization of central autonomy. The decentralization brings about five aspects of change and must be discussed to give some background to public sector innovation in Thailand. First, the extension of local government's responsibilities and power is more explicitly and comprehensively. Second, the balance between supervision of local government and its independence must be reached. Third, local government must provide its performance and administrative systems. Fourth, public space for citizen, community, and civil society as a part of local administration within local government must be provided. Fifth, transparency in local politics must be upheld (Tanchai, 2008).



Accordingly, the conceptual framework of decentralization is able to clear discussion on Thai phenomena. The decentralization goal is well-being and security for locality citizens and also is a mean, not a goal. Decentralization is particularly significant to measure and compare with centralization. The administrative autonomy of local government must be balance with internal audit and external assessment. Thus, decentralization is decentralized accountability for greater managing public services and initiating development. In addition, the decentralization in Thailand could illustrate with 3 concepts as following (Chiangmai, 2008);

1. from democracy education to sense of citizenship and self governance;
2. from state affairs to public affairs; and
3. from local administration to local governance.

As mentioned above, decentralization concept in Thailand is transferring central autonomy to local accountability, particularity provide several important public services to meet truly public need.

#### 1.4. Authority of Thai Local Government

The contributive perception and knowledge of authority of Thai local government are complement due to a more critical feature here. Presently, the Royal Thai Government is forcing more authorities into local government by decentralization act since 1999 (Decentralization Plan and Process Formulation Act, B.E. 2542). It is able to analytically classify into five taxonomies and two types of local government form as also show in Table 2.

**Table 2 The Authority of Thai Local Government**

<b>Type of Authority</b>	<b>Municipality/SAO/Pattaya</b>	<b>PAO</b>
1. Governance and Thought	1.1 local development planning	1.1 local development planning and provincial development
	1.2 encouraging democracy, equality, and citizen right	coordinating
	1.3 citizen participation for local development	1.2 encouraging democracy, equality, and citizen right
	1.4 city planning	1.3 citizen participation for local development
		1.4 encouraging development of another local government
		1.5 coordinating together with another local government performance
		1.6 being facilitator for another local government, public and private agencies.

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2. Infrastructure	2.1 managing land, water, and drain route	2.1 constructing connective land and water route between another local government
	2.2 providing marketplace, port, landing stage, and car park	2.2 managing land and water transportation station
	2.3 public utilities and building	2.3 setting up central marketplace
	2.4 public facilities	2.4 logistic and traffic engineering
	2.5 improving crowded community and housing	2.5 developing appropriate technology
	2.6 proving rest and recreation place	
	2.7 providing cemetery and funeral place	
	2.8 logistic and traffic engineering	
	2.9 building control	
3. Economic, Commerce and Finance	3.1 career training and development	3.1 promoting tourism
	3.2 commerce and investment	3.2 commerce, investment, and business
	3.3 promoting tourism	3.3 separating and distributing money for another government
	3.4 controlling animal husbandry	
	3.5 managing slaughter	
4. Society and Quality of life	4.1 education	4.1 education
	4.2 social work and developing quality of life for children, women, senior citizen, and disadvantage person	4.2 social work and developing quality of life for children, women, senior citizen, and disadvantage person
	4.3 conserving art, custom, local wisdom, and good culture	4.3 promoting sport, custom, good local culture
	4.4 encouraging sport	4.4 preventing public disasters
	4.5 public health, family care, and treatment	4.5 serving security for life and property within province
	4.6 maintaining security, readiness, and cleanness of entertainment place	4.6 providing provincial hospital, treatment, protecting and controlling infective disease
	4.7 preventing public disasters	

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	4.8 serving security for life and property	4.7 providing museum and library
5. Natural resources and Environment	5.1 maintaining cleanness and readiness of public zone	5.1 managing forest, land, natural resource and environment
	5.2 eradicating garbage and waste water	5.2 establishing a combination of waste water system
	5.3 managing forest, land, natural resource and environment	5.3 eradicating combinative garbage
	5.4 protecting public area	5.4 managing environment and pollution

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Based on the taxonomy of authority of Thai local government, which is critically analysis from decentralization act. It is able to classify into five dimensions compounding with 1) governance and thought, 2) infrastructure, 3) economic, commerce and finance, 4) society and quality of life, and 5) natural resources and environment. However, the authorities of local government is separated and appointed into two groups of local government but most of authorities still are blur to perform within two groups and very difficult interpretation through the right practices for local government.

### 1.5. The Voices from Local Government

This session would present and discuss the selected twocases of administrators voice for decentralization policy at Thai local government.

The first case is from Kaewmanee a director of Department of Policy and Plan, Donsak SAO, Suratthani Province. He argued that

*“...Decentralization act is crated by Royal Thai Government to decentralize more authorities to local government. It rapidly pushes more responsibilities but slowly allocate budgeting to local government even though it must serves several public services at present. In my opinion, the main authority of local government is servicing only infrastructure i.e. road, public light, water supply, is enough performance”.*

However, if Royal Thai Government decentralizes more authorities together with budgeting to local government, it is truly possible driving all appointed responsibilities. As well, it is very good hence local government isbasically public organization, which exactly knows and understands the citizens’ problem or need. It looks like a primary government. Sometimes, local government needs to perform projects or activities for its citizens but central government strictly commands and not allows to response even they initiate from citizens’ need and useful for developing their local and social. I know that central government works for controlling local government because of highly corruption from chief executive of SAO and administrators at local government, however, it must considertas case by case, no need to anti-perform all projects or activities from local government, which are really useful and state from grass root citizens” (Kaewmanee, 2014).

The second case is from Tinprapa, a chief administrator of the SAO, Phichit SAO, Songkhla Province. He discussed that *“...Presently, the authorities from decentralization act is a major*



*problem for SAO. The regulation of central government also enforces SAO must explore the citizens need before setting the public services for them. Thus, SAO attemptsto survey the citizens” need or the problem-basedand then creates the projects or activities under the result of studying. While, central government as National Audit Organization (NAO) points out those projects or activities are not the authorities of SAO. For example, last year, at Phichit Village, all citizens need to build paddy fields and then request SAO to support their work. Chief executive of SAO already wrote that requirement into master plan for subsidizing farmers such as plow and rice seeds.*

In fact, when I look back into the objectives of SAO, found that it is not truly meeting with SAO authorities and this issue leads to be a problem. It is not truly role of SAO since the regulation of Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior never be written and also general SAO never practices. Thus, NAO always mention that the projects are able to create but cannot perform even citizen need, if they don't have specific regulation allowed. For example, SAO is unable to subsidize the labors and also farmer even SAO refer to the role of social development following a SAO act. Similarity, a case of local government at Northeast of Thailand, which bought harvest machine to support paddy farmer. Then, NAO entered assessment and appointed that it is not SAO authority.

As I mentioned above they are the problems of SAO that related with authority under decentralization act and another regulation. SAO must takes truly action within regulation, cannot responses all citizens' need even they require that.

Moreover, SAO must beware a set of criteria that consisting of value, efficiency, and economy. SAO should consider it together with creation of projects or activities. If SAO needs to help citizens, SAO must look back at authority under regulation.

Most of SAO's projects, especially social development and welfare, establish from public hearing and voices of citizens.

However, SAO attempt to subsidize some money driving the concept under the local plan and budget. Not only SAO cannot run any project if it is not sure or not relate with SAO act and another regulation. But also, SAO have to stop some project if it is not truly pipeline authority as interpreted by Provincial Office.

For example, a case of the village committee, the regulation is stated that SAO is able to pay money for the village committee. The committee needs the budget for setting up the village meeting. Thus, SAO must deeply look at an authority of SAO. The conclusion of this feature, SAO is unable to pay the money for the village committee hence it is too broad and not authority of SAO to pay the money for this committee. In fact, a village committee is a crucial mechanism of SAO who will be able to drive its policy and plan through exactly grass root citizens. If SAO cannot support any budget for them, it is so difficult to drive successfully project under citizens' cooperation (Tinprapa, 2014).

## 1.6. Dialogue for Future Direction

Let us discuss the future direction of decentralization policy for Thai local government based on two cases of administrators' voice and empirical information.

Presently local government is facing more challenges from decentralization policy, thus the Royal Thai Government must be reform the decentralization policy for solving those obstacles together with all sectors of Thailand.

Thailand must reforms the decentralization policy within 3 parts, which are fiscal and budgeting, human capital, and authorities.

Accordingly, the Decentralization Act of 1999 mentioned that local government would increase the budget to 35% within 2006. In fact, currently local government never reaches anymore. Thus, central government must be clear a percentage of budgets for local government and increase more the budget to support local authorities particular senior citizens society and ASEAN community.

Central government must increase a number of officers in local government to support more authorities of decentralization policy. If government needs to succeed implementation, must add more quality of human capital into local government.

Lastly, central government must revise a certain extent of local government authorities. A research related to a success of its authority must be conducted in order to find out the proper group of authority in different area.

## 2. CONCLUSION

This paper reviews the conceptual framework of decentralization policy base on a case of local government in Thailand. The local government is a self-governance and its core authority basically focuses on several public services. Thai local administration compounds with two forms of local government. The first is a general form combining of the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO), the Municipality, the Sub-District Administrative Organization (SAO) and the second is a special form consisting of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and the City of Pattaya. This paper discusses decentralization policy in Thailand. The term of decentralization policy is transferring authority from central government to local government. This paper illustrates authorities of local government in Thailand. Five major taxonomies of authority have been given a focus on governance and thought, infrastructure, economic, commerce and finance, society and quality of life, and natural resources and environment. In case of Thailand two local administrators voices are highlighted to showcase challenging from decentralization policy in local government. Finally, this paper gives the suggestion for future direction of decentralization policy in Thailand.

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