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# An Analysis of Local Government's Involvement in Rural Community Development in Thailand

Parunyoo Kochkaew<sup>a\*</sup>, Wijittra Srisorn<sup>b</sup>, Sunthan Chayanon<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a,b,c</sup> College of Politics and Government, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University, Thailand

Corresponding Email Address of Corresponding Author: s59484944006@ssru.ac.th

## Abstract

Since the implementation of the Decentralization Plan and Process Act in 1999, local government's involvement in community development in Thailand has become more participatory. With the introduction of Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAO), the government aims to improve the local government's policy implementation, administration, and governance. Therefore, this article aims to analyze the local government's involvement in rural community development in Thailand. The article first explains the decentralization plan and process that were implemented in 1999 and then moves on to the function and role of TAOs in Thailand. The analysis found that the local government's initiatives have increased over the past decade, and they have somehow effectively managed to initiate policies and strategies that would develop rural communities in Thailand. However, the study also found the major problems TAOs encounter at the local level that hinder the development of rural communities, namely, insufficient funding from the central government. The central government's involvement in local governance also seems to be an issue for many local governments. Moreover, it was found that TAOs often failed to deliver services as per the expectations of the local people as a result of the poor management skills of local administrators. It was recommended that the central government should provide enough budget for local governments' effective management of developing rural communities. More importantly, local government administrators and stakeholders should receive adequate training in effective policy management to assist the development of rural communities.

**Keywords:** Local Government's, Rural Community

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Decentralization plans and Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs)*

The promulgation of the Royal Thai Constitution of 1997 and the Decentralization Plan and Process Act of 1999 have expanded the obligations of Thai local government to provide public services. These legal frameworks have transferred significant powers and responsibilities from the national government to local governments in Thailand, including the responsibility to deliver a range of public services to their constituents (Harding & Leelapatana, 2020). The specific services that local governments are responsible for providing can vary depending on the location and circumstances, but may include education, healthcare, infrastructure, public safety, and social welfare, among others. The decentralization of power and responsibilities to local governments in Thailand was implemented with the aim of making government more responsive to the needs and priorities of local communities and improving the delivery of public services. The decentralization plan in Thailand that was implemented in 1999 was designed to transfer power and responsibility from the central government to local government units, including the Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) that were established as part of the plan (Atthawong, 2019).

Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) are local government units in Thailand that are responsible for the administration of a tambon, which is a subdistrict or group of

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villages. TAOs are responsible for providing a range of public services at the local level, including education, healthcare, public safety, and infrastructure maintenance. They are also responsible for the development of local economic and social activities, and for promoting the well-being of the communities they serve. TAOs are elected bodies, and they are accountable to the Ministry of Interior as alluded to by Treetab (2019). The goal of the decentralization process was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, promote local economic development, and increase the participation of citizens in the decision-making process. As part of the decentralization process, the TAOs were given more authority to manage local affairs and to raise and allocate their own budgets. The decentralization plan also included the creation of Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs) and the transfer of certain functions from the central government to these local organizations (Meesook, Routray, & M. Ahmad, 2020).

### ***1.2 Tambon Administrative Organizations initiatives and policies that have promoted the development of rural Thailand (TAOs).***

There are several initiatives and policies that have been implemented by Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in Thailand that have contributed to the development of rural areas in the country. These include:

#### ***Infrastructure development***

Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) have invested in the construction and maintenance of local roads, bridges, and other infrastructure projects that have helped to improve access to markets and other economic opportunities in rural areas. Notably, TAO has played a crucial role in improving infrastructure in their areas of jurisdiction by identifying and prioritizing infrastructure needs, developing and implementing plans to address those needs, and working with the central government, the private sector, and other stakeholders to secure funding and other resources for infrastructure projects. They are also responsible for maintaining and repairing existing infrastructure, and ensuring that infrastructure is used efficiently and effectively (Meesook, Routray, & Ahmad, 2020).

#### ***Agricultural Development***

Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in Thailand have played a significant role in promoting agricultural development in rural communities. In Thailand, TAOs are responsible for a range of activities and services, including the promotion of economic development and the improvement of living conditions in their areas of jurisdiction. Agricultural development is an important part of TAO's efforts, as it provides economic opportunities and support for rural communities (Ko, 2022). Additionally, TAO provide technical assistance and support to farmers, such as training on best practices for crop production, pest management, and water conservation. They also work with other levels of government and private sector partners to secure funding and other resources for agricultural development projects, such as irrigation systems, storage facilities, and marketing support. By supporting agricultural development, TAOs have help to promote economic growth and improve the quality of life in rural communities in Thailand (Atthawong, 2019).

#### ***Promoting civic participation***

Tambon Administrative Organization (TAOs) promote civic participation by involving members of the community in decision-making processes, providing information about their activities and plans, and seeking input and feedback from stakeholders. By encouraging active participation from the community, local governments can better understand the needs and priorities of their constituents and make more informed decisions in regards to development. Civic participation is important because it allows citizens to have a say in the issues that affect their lives and helps to ensure that the government is accountable to the people it serves (Treetab, 2019).

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In an effort to ensure that TAO is delivering their mandate in the rural areas of Thailand, civic leaders are responsible for monitoring and assessing of Tambon Administrative Organization (TAO) operations by evaluating their performance and activities. Civic monitoring help to ensure that TAOs are accountable to the public and are meeting their obligations to provide public services effectively and efficiently in rural areas.

Therefore, the civic leaders and the members of community attend TAO meetings and forums, review TAO budgets and financial reports, and conduct independent evaluations or assessments of TAO performance. Civic monitoring and assessment can also be facilitated by civil society organizations, media outlets, and other groups that serve as watchdogs and advocates for the public interest. By providing a check on the activities of TAOs, civic monitoring and assessment can help to ensure that TAOs are responsive to the needs and priorities of the community at the local levels and are operating in a transparent and accountable manner (Michael, Richard, & Peersit, 2022).

#### ***Promoting the applications of public management techniques***

Public management techniques, such as performance measurement, strategic planning, and process improvement, can also help local governments in Thailand to perform their tasks more effectively and efficiently. In rural areas, public management techniques can be particularly useful for identifying and prioritizing needs, setting clear goals and objectives, and allocating resources effectively.

They can also help to increase transparency and accountability, and to engage community members and other stakeholders in the decision-making process. By applying these techniques, local governments and other organizations in rural areas can better serve the needs of their communities and promote economic development and social progress (Chuayprakong, 2019).

#### ***Social development***

Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in Thailand promote social development in rural areas in a number of ways. TAO is responsible for a range of activities and services, including the improvement of living conditions in their areas of jurisdiction. As such, they also work to promote social development by implementing programs and initiatives that address the needs of the community. Also, TAO provide support for education and healthcare services in rural areas, as well as social welfare programs for vulnerable populations (Michael, Richard, & Peersit, 2022).

They also work to improve infrastructure, such as roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, which can support social development by making it easier for people to access services and opportunities. In addition, TAOs engage with community members and other stakeholders to identify and address social issues of concern, such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. By promoting social development in these and other ways, TAOs has helped to improve the quality of life for the people living in rural areas of Thailand (Treetab, 2019).

#### ***Economic development***

Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in Thailand promote economic development in rural areas in a number of ways. These local government organizations are responsible for a range of activities and services, including the promotion of economic development and the improvement of living conditions in their areas of jurisdiction. As such, they TAO work to promote economic development by implementing programs and initiatives that support local businesses and industries. For example, TAOs provide technical assistance and support to farmers and other rural entrepreneurs, such as training on best practices for crop production, pest management, and marketing (Michael, Richard, & Peersit, 2022). They also work with other levels of government and private sector partners to secure funding and other resources for economic development projects, such as infrastructure improvements,

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business development loans, and marketing support. In addition, TAOs engage with community members and other stakeholders to identify and address economic issues of concern, such as unemployment, poverty, and lack of access to credit. By promoting economic development in these and other ways, TAOs has help stimulate economic growth and improve the quality of life for the people living in rural areas of Thailand (Meesook, Routray, & M. Ahmad, 2020).

### ***Environmental Protection***

Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in Thailand promote environmental protection in rural areas in a number of ways. Henceforth, TAO work to promote environmental protection by implementing programs and initiatives that address environmental issues of concern in their communities. For example, TAOs work to protect natural resources, such as forests, rivers, and wetlands, by implementing conservation measures and enforcing laws and regulations that protect these resources. They also promote environmentally-friendly practices, such as waste reduction, recycling, and energy conservation, through education and outreach programs.

In addition, TAOs may engage with community members and other stakeholders to identify and address environmental issues of concern, such as pollution, deforestation, and water scarcity. By promoting environmental protection in these and other ways, TAOs help to preserve and enhance the natural environment of rural areas in Thailand (Michael, Richard, & Peersit, 2022).

## **2. Challenges faced by the Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs)**

There are several challenges that Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in Thailand may face. Some of these notable challenges include:

### ***a) Lack of Central government involvement at local level (TAOs).***

Lack of central government involvement can be a challenge for Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in rural areas because it can limit the resources and support available to these local government organizations. TAOs rely on funding and other support from the central government to carry out their tasks and responsibilities, including the delivery of public services and the promotion of economic and social development in their communities.

Without sufficient involvement and support from the central government, TAOs may struggle to meet the needs and demands of their constituents, particularly in rural areas where the needs may be greater and the resources more limited. This can lead to frustration among community members and a lack of trust in the TAO's ability to effectively serve the community. In addition, lack of central government involvement can also limit the ability of TAOs to collaborate with other levels of government and private sector partners, which can be important for addressing complex issues and leveraging resources for the benefit of the community (Funatsu, 2019).

### ***b) Poor management skills of local administrators***

Poor management skills of local administrators can be a challenge for Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in rural areas in Thailand because it can limit their ability to effectively carry out their tasks and responsibilities. Management skills, such as planning, budgeting, and communication, are critical for local administrators to effectively lead and manage their organizations, as well as to engage with stakeholders and deliver public services to the community. Without sufficient management skills, local administrators may struggle to effectively manage the resources and personnel of their organizations, leading to inefficiencies and problems in service delivery. Poor management skills can also hinder the ability of local administrators to effectively engage with and respond to the needs and concerns of the community, leading to a lack of trust and support for the TAO. This can

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be particularly challenging in rural areas, where the needs and challenges may be greater and the resources more limited (Meesook, Routray, & M. Ahmad, 2020).

### **3. Recommendations**

#### ***3.1 Provision of enough budget by the central government for local government's effective management of developing rural communities.***

There are several ways that the challenge of lack of central government involvement in Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in rural areas can be addressed:

***Advocacy:*** TAOs and community organizations can work together to advocate for increased support and involvement from the central government. This may include lobbying for greater funding and resources, as well as raising awareness about the needs and challenges facing rural communities.

***Partnerships:*** TAOs can seek out partnerships and collaborations with other levels of government, private sector organizations, and civil society groups to access resources and expertise that can help to address the challenges of serving rural communities

***Innovation:*** TAOs can explore innovative approaches to addressing the needs of rural communities, such as using technology and social media to reach out to constituents, or partnering with private sector organizations to access new sources of funding and resources.

#### ***3.2 Adequate training for local government administrators and stakeholders in the effective policy management to assist the development of rural communities.***

There are several ways that the challenge of poor management skills of local administrators in Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAOs) in rural areas in Thailand can be addressed:

***Training and development:*** Local administrators can participate in training and development programs to improve their management skills, such as planning, budgeting, communication, and leadership

***Mentorship and coaching:*** Local administrators can seek out mentorship and coaching from more experienced colleagues or outside experts to help them develop their management skills and improve their performance.

***Performance evaluations:*** Local administrators can undergo regular performance evaluations to identify areas for improvement and to set goals for professional development.

***Professional associations:*** Local administrators can join professional associations or networks, such as the Thai Tambon Administrative Association, to access resources and support for professional development and networking.

***Collaboration with other organizations:*** Local administrators can seek out collaborations with other organizations, such as universities or private sector companies, to access training and development opportunities and share best practices.

### **4. Conclusion**

In conclusion, TAOs are responsible for providing administrative support and services to local communities in Thailand. This includes activities such as planning and managing infrastructure projects, such as the construction and maintenance of rural roads, water supply systems, waste disposal facilities, and storm drainage systems. TAOs is also be responsible for providing training and support to local governments and organizations in the management and operation of these facilities. The specific responsibilities of a TAO depend on the needs of the community or region that it serves, as well as any specific goals or objectives that have been set for the organization. Lack of commitment from the central government and poor management skills of administration is one of the challenges faced by the TAOs in Thailand. Lastly, Provision of enough budget by the central government for local government's

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effective management of developing rural communities and organizing training, mentorship programs, and collaboration with other organization is key to addressing these challenges.

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