

Abstract

The dissertation titled “Civil Society Movements and Development of Democracy in Communities” has the following objectives:- 1) to study the work of civil society and its impacts on the development of democracy and community politics. 2) to study the relationship between civil society strengths and people’s participation in community affairs. The study adopted the concept of “The Civil Society Diamond (SVEI)” developed by Helmut Anheier who created “Civil Society Index” (CSI) for CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. The model was derived from the analysis civil society movements in 65 countries worldwide during the years of 2003-2005.

The methodology used in this dissertation is qualitative and includes data collection, documentary research, in-depth interview and participant observation in 6 communities of Ubonrachthani province in the Northeast. The communities are categorized as follows: - 1) Communities with strong identity in advocating certain ideology i.e., Rachathani Asoke and Lam Nam Kong Credit Union. 2) Community with strong identity in advocating counter government policy i.e., Dong Khum Kam Forest Community. 3) Communities known for cooperation with government i.e., Wang Ao Forest Community and Pa Aow Community. 4) Community with strong linkage with politicians i.e., Lap Lae urban Community. In data collection, theoretical definitions were transformed into operational definitions. Data were verified for validity and reliability by group interviews carried out by research assistants. In analyzing and synthesizing data using SVEI concept, it was found that the work of civil society has an impact on community politics and democracy development in the studied communities. The strength of civil society is related to the level of participation of people in community affairs. In each community, there are elements of democracy that co-exist. In this context, there are representative democracy, participatory democracy, and deliberative democracy. Whereas participatory democracy has been found to be relevant to the participation of people in community affairs, representative democracy seems to be more problematic.

The success and strength of civil society in studied communities depend on group size and the diversity of groups within the civil society. The main factor is the level of social capital that exists in the community such as kinship bond, horizontal interdependence, strong community values, as well as the abundance of natural resources or social capital which help flourish public concerns within civil society. They also depend on other factors such as 1) the level of people's participation in groups' activities. 2) the capacity of leaders in encouraging people's participation within and outside community as well as the number of active leaders with morality, integrity, courage and commitment, and 3) existing network and outside supports especially in the area of resources, funds and updated information. The network and outside supports include NGOs, state agencies, and politicians who have played significant roles towards strengthening the role of civil society. However, the capacity of community leaders in accessing the resources remains a key factor towards community development.

Lastly, I have come up with suggestions on how to strengthen civil society, especially in the area of political participation as follows :- 1) the government should have national policy to encourage people to participate in political activities. 2) to strengthen democracy in the community, there should be legal mechanism to ensure people's participation in political activities and 3) platforms for deliberation should be created to provide for "community political space" and to actually facilitate people's participation in political activities.