

Assessment of Local Administrative Organizations with Good Governance

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Introduction

The purpose of decentralization to local administrative organizations (LAOs) is to decrease central government's mission and increase power to the community and local administration. This is due to the fact that the local administrative organizations (LAOs) were designed to be the main organizations to provide public services according to the Thai Constitution B.E 2550 Article 281. The local administrative organizations (LAOs) must possess the vision and strategies to provide public services creating innovations that serve the needs of the people efficiently through the process of public participation.

The Royal Decree on Criteria and Procedure on Good Governance B.E 2546 determines criteria and targets for good governance indicating that public administration, including local administrative organizations (LAOs) must provide responsive public administration efficiently, especially when there is a need to lessen unnecessary steps of work and when there is a need to provide convenient and favorable services to the people. This also includes the process of public participation and responsibility by consulting and providing information to the people for the purpose of transparency.

In order to promote and support the above to be in line with the principles of decentralization and good governance, the government has provided policies which allow all local organizations to be able to administer efficiently and become accepted by society. In addition, the Department of Local Administration, and the Ministry of Interior, together with the Decentralization of Local Government Organization Committee, set up a project on "**Assessment of Local Administrative Organization with Good Governance Contest**". Its purpose, which has been in effect since the start of the fiscal year B.E. 2546, is to promote and urge the provision of public services by the local administrative organizations to be implemented pursuant to the spirit of the constitution with good governance and management.

The assessment of local administrative organizations with good governance in past years has enabled every type of local administration to become more aware of its responsibility for good public administration. It is apparent that the assessment encourages local administrative organizations to compete with each other in order to develop more effective public service systems for their people and to increase their capacities for administration. It helps to encourage the implementation of new ideas in order to create better living conditions for the people and it also provides benefits for development at both the local and national levels. Prize money which can be allocated to local administrations is also a

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strong motivation for the management of local administrative organizations to be transparent and provide good and qualified public services.

Hence, it can be said that the project to assess local administrative organizations with good governance is a worthy one and one that also provides many benefits for local administrative organizations. This includes, effective management of the system for internal administration in the organization in accordance with the designed public administration, insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the administration based on data from the assessment giving the opportunity to improve and develop the local administrations by themselves. It also encourages the local administrators, council members and local administrative organization staff to become more active in developing and improving public services to bestow more benefits to the people. Additionally, it creates awareness at the local level for the provision of public services and encourages new local innovations that can be used as prototypes for other local administrations.

For this assessment of local administrative organizations with good governance, the writer, researcher at the Research Institution and advisor for Thammasart University, has conducted an assessment of local administrations which have been selected by core teams at provincial level in line with good public administration criteria and the creativity of local innovation of B.E 2550 year.

The purpose of this article is to present the results of this assessment for the local administrative organizations with good governance in relation to their course of public administration by using data received from the local administrations' public administration evaluation form and to present the results of the project evaluation and the outstanding local innovation activities which can then be used as a prototype for other local administrative organizations in order to improve themselves in the future.

Concepts and Principles for the Assessment of the Local Administrative Organization under the framework of good governance.

Good Governance Practices should at least consist of the 6 principles as follows:

1) Rule of Law: In order to modernize law, rules, regulations, ordinance and notification to be in line with the society, and the society to comply those law and regulations, the government agency shall take the result of public consultation into consideration.

2) Morality/Ethics: Officials shall hold on to this principle and become good examples for society. This shall promote capacity building, honesty, sincerity, diligence, patience, and discipline to become core values of the nation.

3) Transparency: Transparency in work and testing measures for each step shall be determined by the government agency in order to build trust among the nation. The government agency shall consult with, or provide information to, people in order to create understanding and that the information can be checked for accountability.

4) Participation: Information shall be disclosed to the people so that they can participate and provide opinions for any important decision making issues of the nation through public a hearing in order to improve the public administration method.

5) Accountability: The government agency shall ensure that all actions and decisions are subject to oversight. Officials shall be responsible and pay attention to each problem and make decisions without delay. Different opinions shall be heard and respected. The government agency shall be responsible and have the courage to accept the consequences of any action taken.

6) Efficiency/Value for money: The government agency shall maximize limited resources to their full capacity with efficiency and effectiveness. Thai citizens should learn how to economize and make use of resources, produce creative products, reserve and sustain natural resources and be able to provide services with a quality that can compete on the world stage.

Local Administrative Organization's Innovations

The criteria for the innovation of local administrative organizations has been set as follows:

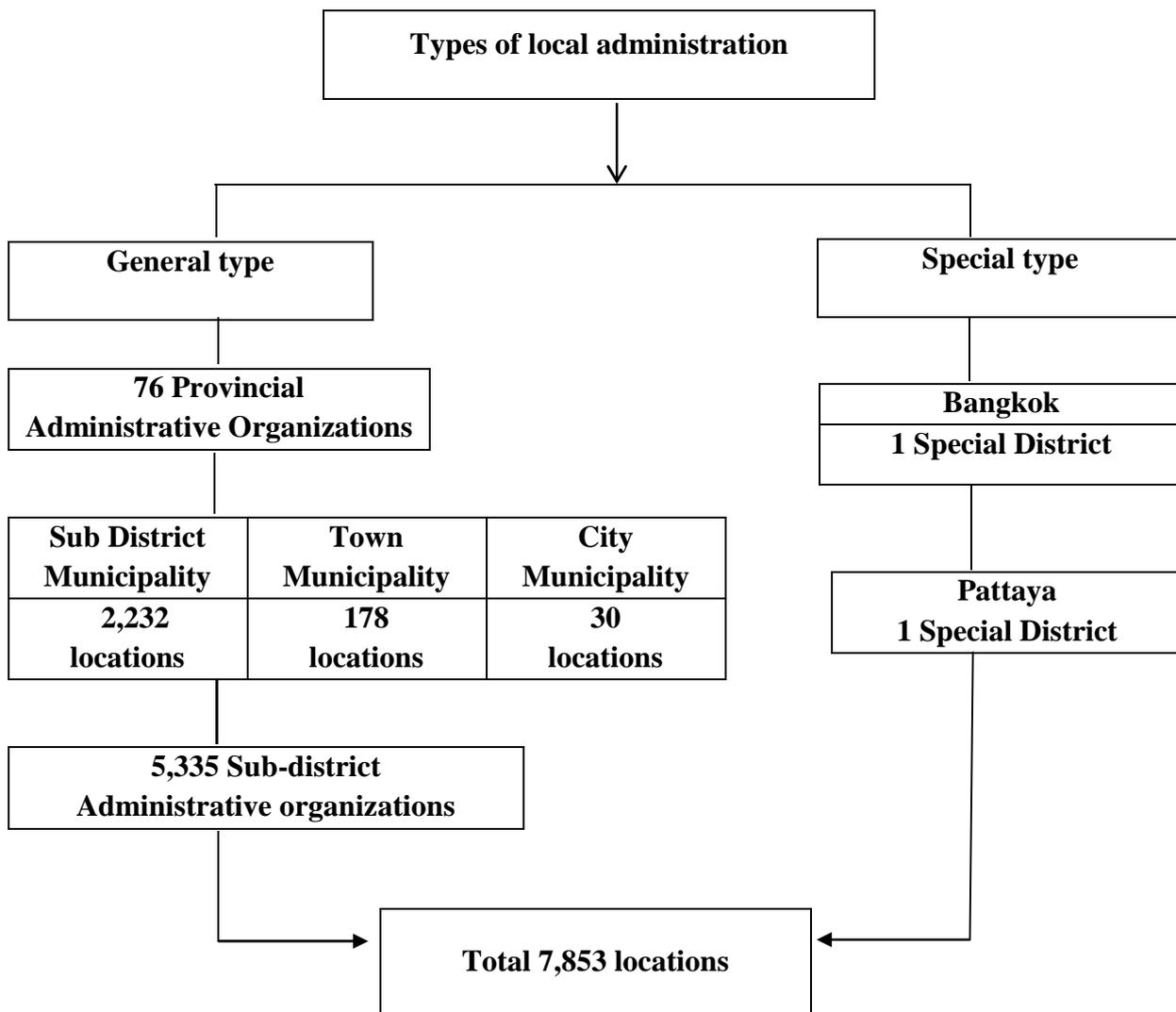
1) It must have newly created projects/activities to solve new challenging problems or successfully solve existing problems faced by LAOs.

2) It must have projects/activities that have been developed or modified from existing tasks or missions and new innovations or use of new methods or processes for efficient and effective results.

3) Work under items 1 and 2 must indicate that there has been an increase in value in that particular project/activity which contributes inclusive benefits; this also includes any contribution to the decrease of capital or ways to save on the budget.

4) It must use local innovations to create sustainability and become accepted by the community by making the innovations well-known through the receipt of special rewards.

Types and Quantity of Thailand’s local administrations



Assessment procedure

The assessment procedure specifies criteria for the selection of local administrative organizations as follows:

Round 1: A core team at the provincial level in each province will do a primary assessment to assess the public administration of the organization for the year 2555 (B.E). This should be done in line with the criteria and indicators for good governance that have been set by the Department of Local Administration. The criteria can be categorized into 7 areas: 1. Responsiveness of the public administration to make better living conditions for the people. 2. Result-based management for the effectiveness of the organization' mission. 3. Effectiveness and value for money. 4. Reduction of unnecessary steps of work. 5. Improvement of the organization's mission. 6. Provision of convenient and favorable services that serve the needs of the people. 7. Conduct of regular assessments/evaluation.

The selected local administrative organizations at this round should have the highest score of each type of the local organization.

Round 2: Visit the selected local administrative organization offices to assess their operations, mission and administration. The criteria for the assessment can be categorized into 2 parts:

Part 1 Examination of documents in line with the criteria set by the Core Team as indicated in Round 1 using a random check method of 6 items to be used as indicators in the assessment, as follows:

1) Information Service Center: the indicators for the examination of the information service center are location, readiness-to-use, availability of internet access and the collection of data on the number of service receivers that in the end is summarized as a report proposed to executives.

2) Information Public Relations Channels: the indicators consist of the variedness of the public relations channels (i.e., wireless, printing) of which there should be more than 5 channels available and it should be evidence-based that these channels are in use.

3) Improvement of the Local Administrative Organizations' Management based on the assessment: the key indicator can be either by bringing the result of the assessment into consideration but having not yet implementing it, being in the process of implementation, or having already implemented it for improvement; grading will be made respectively.

4) Receipt of complaint: the indicator largely depends on the number of channels provided to receive complaints from the people, whether it is 1, 2 or more than 3 channels; grading will be made respectively.

5) One Stop Service Procedure: local administrative organizations should have clear written procedures and publicize this information to the people. The procedures should also be practical, concrete and accountable.

6) Index of complaint and report of the result: the local administrative organizations should produce an index of complaint and this should be used in order to focus

on any existing problems. The solution and subsequent result of the problem should also be reported.

Part 2 Assessment of projects and activities based on the criteria of local innovations.

The result of the assessment.

The result of the assessment is presented based on the purpose as follows: 1) The assessment of the local administrative organizations’ public administration 2) The assessment of the projects and activities based on the criteria of local innovations.

With regards to the result of the assessment both in Round 1 and Round 2 to the Final Round with prize money, 404 out of 7,853 local administrative organizations have been considered to pass Round 1 as indicated in the table below.

Table: Local Administrative Organizations Assessment results categorized by rounds, and types of the organizations.

7,853 Local Administrative Organizations								
Type of LAO Round	PAO	Municipality			Sub District			Total
		City	Town	Sub-district	Large	Medium	Small	
Round 1	73	25	69	78	36	78	45	404
Round 2	28	19	35	46	19	45	12	204
Pass the criteria	12	8	12	20	9	28	7	96
Number of Prize	5	3	5	10	5	23	5	56

Assessment of Local Administrative Organization Management

The assessment result of local administrative organization management in terms of civil service found that, in general, many local administrative organizations, which passed the core team’s assessment criteria, prioritized civil service. The public services, in addition to building management, provided beautiful scenery and landscapes around the local administrative organization area, proper air ventilation, signage showing direction and service steps, and waiting corners with water and books provided. All of these things helped to create a good impression of the organization to the people receiving services.

In terms of information service centers and management, it was found that 47% provided computers with an internet connection, public relations through various forms of media, both wired and wireless e.g. radio broadcasting, community radio, mobile PR unit, magazine and a PR board within the local administrative organization and in the community. There were also different channels to file complaints, for example complaint boxes, hotline phone numbers or through community leaders.

Some of the local administrative organizations with enough budget managed to have a one stop service center for tax collection and other general registration sections. Having a center lessened the steps involved thus reducing the time consumed and brought more convenience to the public.

Another 53% of local administrative organizations need improvement in the following areas:

1. Information service center: the equipment (e.g. computers) in some local administrative organizations is out of order or in an inoperative condition which may have been caused by a lack of a regular maintenance plan. Furthermore, although, statistical data for information and the internet service receiver has been collected, it is not systematical, outdated or has never been generated into any report format.

2. Outreach: local administrative organizations have many communication channels; however, some of them had not been updated, especially websites and online tools. The communication boards found in the communities are often old and in bad condition.

3. Evaluation and follow up actions: some local administrative organizations conduct no evaluation and even in the ones that do, there is no action plan for development that is concrete and continuous enough to result in any visible improvement.

4. Channels for complaints: it was found that local administrative organizations have several channels to file complaints. However, most people only use a few main channels which are through local executive officials or by filling in a form at the office.

5. One stop service: Only few local administrative organizations could provide a one stop service due to the current workload. Instead, they focused more on providing outside services and reducing operational procedures. Furthermore, local administrative organizations which are responsible for civil service e.g. tax collection at its physical office had no signage showing the necessary procedures or estimated time for each service. Although handbooks/leaflets were available, they were not well displayed for public attention. Moreover, in many local administrative organizations, limited working space made it more difficult to arrange a convenient service area for the people.

6. List of complaints: although a list of complaints was made available, details of the cases and the topics are often not matched.

Assessment of Projects and Activities Innovated by Local Administrative Organization Innovation.

There is also an assessment of projects and/or activities of local administrative organization which have these following characters:

1. The project that is a local administrative organization initiative or community innovation. It has to be originally created from local knowhow and skills.

2. The project aims to solve local administrative organization's issues or be responsive of a community's current situation. The project should also result in value-added to the community.

3. The project is initiated or driven by the community or civil society

4. The project adopts local knowledge into its operation.

The assessment of local innovative project found that it could be divided into 3 groups as follows:

Group 1 - local administrative organizations which prioritize local cultural projects: this group focuses on new initiatives, and new ideas that are different from traditional practice. More importantly, it uses information to create solutions. This group is often found in local administrative organizations with teamwork where the local administrator pays attention to local innovation. An example of this group is the 'Do-Good Village Project' of the Mae Hong Sorn local administrative organization. This village develops better community management by encouraging public involvement in their community as well as a 'Sculpture Project for Travelling Promotion' of Krabi Municipality that draws on the charms of the province by using sculptures to promote tourism.

Group 2 - local administrative organizations which build new projects upon its basic responsibility with some enhancements that add more value: For example, the 'Project for Development of Senior Citizens' under the 'Senior Citizen Development Center', Nontaburi municipality. It extends its work in public service for senior citizens in the establishment of the 'Senior Citizen Development Complex'. Another example is the 'Senior University Project' by the Hua Ngom local administrative organization which is an extension of the 'Senior Citizen School for Sustainable Development'.

Group 3 - local administrative organizations which often misunderstand "local innovation": This leads to local administrative organizations failing to reflect on local innovation. They often propose a project that is:

- already the routine work of the local administrative organization.
- more like an activity (such as a religious ceremony or festival) than a development project.
- once "innovation" but repetitiously implemented without further development.

The projects initiated by local administrative organizations and were considered outstanding local innovations to be pilot projects for other local administrative organizations are as follows:

1. Samples of local innovation projects at provincial administrative organization level.

1.1) A learning and self-managing community 'Do-Good Village' by Mae Hong Sorn provincial administrative organization: By setting up a contest under the theme "Do-Good Village", the project aims to get public participation in managing their own community. It selects a community with good administration that has tried to strengthen the community toward self-sustainability. The contest appoints a committee by building up a network with the government agencies involved and civil society to help select the committee team.

This innovation reminds Mae Hong Sorn community to review its community administration and to make sure it moves toward learning, self-sustainability and consciousness to become a proud community.

1.2) The ‘Return the Elephant’ project for the development of elephant world by the Surin provincial administrative organization: This project aims to stop elephants wandering around the country by creating jobs for mahouts and their elephants and to improve the environment so that it is suitable for elephants at the Elephant Study Center. The area has become the biggest elephant village and live museum for learning. There are many interesting activities in the center such as elephant tour guide training, an elephant show, elephant bathing, and even an elephant taxi. It also supports healthcare and breeding for elephants and a training curriculum for mahouts.

This innovation helps to reduce elephant wandering around Surin and Thailand. It also generates work and income for mahouts and their families and other local businesses such as restaurants, souvenir shops, hotels, home stays and bus companies. Mahouts are made proud since the community now regards them as important persons to continue the tradition of the human-elephant way of living and to pass on this valuable and unique knowledge of elephants to the community.

2. Example of innovative project in city municipal level.

2.1) The ‘Project for Development of Senior Citizens’ under the Senior Citizen Development Center, Nontaburi municipality: This project creates public spaces for senior citizens of the same interests to get together and do some activities. The Senior Citizen Development Center provides social services for the elderly aged more than 60 years old and acts as a social club for general citizens aged 45 – 60.

The center organizes activities that support self-development and social participation for elderly persons such as aerobics and yoga. In addition, there are auto-massage chairs, gym equipment, and a library. Meditation, XO, Thai classical music/dance, Tai Chi, table tennis and other light activities like, hula-hoop, karaoke, singing, and ballroom dance are available. There are even English classes and you can get a free health check-up. The center also has volunteers who can share their experiences with the elderly.

2.2) The remedy and quality of life development project for marginal juveniles by the Khon Khen town municipality: This project opens up opportunities for children outside the developed zone of Khon Khen town (e.g. children with non-formal education, vagrant children, the poor, or vulnerable groups) by encouraging them to think and speak in a dialogue and mobile classroom.

This project helps these juveniles change their attitude and behavior, make them see the value inside them, improve their quality of life through taking part in group activities such as ‘Flow Milk’ (a milk shop), a motorcycle repair shop and an organic vegetable group. This is a local innovation aimed at solving the issues faced by marginal children using group activities and learning programs as a tool to draw them back into the education system. This project employs contemplative education, dialogue, an in-depth learning process and a new paradigm camp for personality development and positive attitude.

3. Example of innovative project in town municipality level.

3.1) The innovative sculpture and wall carving project to promote tourism by Krabi town municipality: To create sculptures related to history, way of life and natural resources telling the story of Krabi to the tourists. Examples of which are traffic lights sculpted as ancient humans, an elephant, sea eagle, and tiger, and other sculptures like Jatukam Ramathep, the three-spot swimming crab, abstract figures and low relief sculptures on the Krabi historical wall.

3.2) The Ta-pae canal conservation network project for integrative flood prevention by Tung Song town municipality: The project applies integrative methods and networking when implementing project activities which aim at maintaining the cleanliness of Ta-pae canal, and preserve the canal eco-system using EM solution, tree planning. There is also training for students (in the institutes under the management of the Tung Song town municipality) to become a 'Water Guardian', to build dams, organize ad-hoc activities and design a community participatory plan.

4. Example of innovative project in sub-district administrative organization.

4.1) The senior university project (developed from a senior school project) by Hua Ngom sub-district administrative organization, Pan district, Chiang Rai: It started as a senior school project by Hua Ngom sub-district and a community temple. The temple teaches three subjects; Buddhism, healthcare for senior citizens and social and culture, in the beginning phase.

The project is considered an innovation which extends the idea of the senior school project to become a more sustainable and concrete project for senior citizen development that integrates all involved agencies to optimize the benefit to senior citizens. The project helps the elderly to better understand themselves physically, mentally and emotionally, and to understand both the causes and effects of happiness.

4.2) The farmer school (school for agriculturists) project by Pakmai sub-district administrative organization: As a continuation from the Tabtan district, Srisaket in 2008, the Pakmai sub-district administrative organization established the 'Natung Moo 7 Rice Production and Development Center' to develop a high standard rice genus for public distribution as well as a rice genus exchange for better quality and production.

The innovation creates participatory learning i.e. learning by practicing in a real scenario so that the farmers think, act and solve problems together through experience sharing. Pakmai agriculturist school has a learning process that focuses on plantations, farming and land nourishing. It also extends its network outside the community to the Rice Department, Department of Agriculture Extension, Srisaket Land Development Department and other networks at district level.

The assessment of local administrative organizations with good administrative management could be considered as a process of self-development for the organization. It gives lesson learnt, at the same time being a self-assessment of the organizational level of development and its potential, strengths and weaknesses for further improvement. It also encourages the community to create innovation that will be acceptable both locally and to the broader society. This, in the end, answers the need to improve local administrative organizations as a foundation for future country development.

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