

ABSTRACT

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SANITARY DISTRICT LOCAL GOVERNMENT : POLITICAL ANALYSIS

By

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This study of Sanitary District Local Government: Political Analysis had the following objectives:

1. to study basic data on the structure, power, rural development roles and duties, operational methods, economic status, personnel administration, peoples' participation, and public attitudes toward governing body in the sanitary district;
2. to study strengths and problems, analyze causes of those problems, and find out solutions to the problems; and
3. to synthesize the above information in order to present the ideas of the local governing body to replace the sanitary district, that will be appropriate to the context and future development.

This study employed six methodological steps as follows:

Step 1 Study basic data on the structure, power, rural development roles and duties, operational methods, economic status, personnel administration, and peoples' participation in the governing body in the sanitary district through the review of related documents and research.

Step 2 Conduct survey research on people's attitudes toward the sanitary district, using the Sansai Luang Sanitary District, Sansai District, Chiangmai Province as a case study

area. A total of 385 persons was systematically sampled from the population of 12,902 (95% confidence level).

Step 3 Use the ethnographic delphi future research methods to study the past, present and future attitudes toward the sanitary district, from 15 samples of experts on the theory and practice of local government.

Step 4 Synthesize the above data regarding attitudes, decentralization of power in governance, and peoples' participation in rural development, and present alternatives appropriate for the future context. Particular focus was placed on decentralization of decision making power, local governance principles in accordance with the present Constitution, division of task between national and local government, financial systems directed at decentralization, rural development in the next century, and the role of community organizations in community development.

Step 5 Use the ideas and opinions of 20 former sanitary district administrators and 20 local residents in revising local governance methods to ensure appropriateness for the future.

Step 6 Propose a system of local governance appropriate for the local sanitary district level.

The results of the research were as follows:

Prior to changing its forms to a sub-district municipality in May 1999, the sanitary district was the smallest government unit vertically attached to the Ministry of Interior and regional administration. Its duties were to control, issue orders, regulate, monitor and support through a committee composed of locally appointed government officials and elected members. The person of the highest administrative position in some places with at least a minimum income was indirectly elected, and in other places, with an income lower than the minimum, the position was held by a local government official. There were no clear regulations covering employees of the sanitary district and government officials had to assist in the work. The Ministry of Interior decided the boundaries of the district, integrating urban and rural localities. Sources of revenue were under the control of the Ministry of Interior. The principal rural development duties included public facilities, sanitation, defense, welfare, and public health. These were fixed duties and not adapted to local conditions or societies. Local participation was restricted to voting for committee representatives only.

With respect to public attitudes, most people were familiar with the sanitary district as one of many government mechanisms. Elected committee members did not gain the

people's full trust in carrying out their duties. Only a minority of people voted in these elections. Appointed committee members were considered "administrators" more than persons responsible for the welfare of the people. The duties of the sanitary district were considered to be looking after the welfare of the public, especially sanitation.

In the perspective of the government, the strength of the sanitary district is the fact that it is the smallest arm of the state which is closest to the people. It is important in looking after the welfare of the people. The people are in favor of retaining this institution as it looks after their welfare at the local level. They felt that it is an important institution in integrating urban and rural areas.

An important problem of the sanitary district is the lack of local peoples' participation. Thus, it lacks strength as a true local governing body. The people see it more as a regional than a local government organization, because it usurps local decision making. The people do not expect it to perform abstract duties, such as developing awareness and political learning processes.

The following were considered appropriate for a future local governing body: lateral relations with national and regional government agencies in the interest of coordination; participation in some local development activities; committee structure, with all members elected; highest position directly elected; authority derived from a peoples' council responsible for policy; direction of activities; supervision; removing local administrators; recruitment and employment of staff; responsibility for suburban areas; increased responsibility for fund raising aimed at self-reliance; increased roles in rural development to ensure responsiveness to local needs; focus on improved quality of life, both physical and mental; management of local resources; and authority to change the direction of development to ensure compatibility with the local context.

To put these alternative ideas into practice in an efficient manner, it is recommended that efforts should begin with an instillation of good political perspectives into people to strengthen community political organizations.