



# Thai Village Committee Administrative Reform for Promoting Public Service Delivery

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This research aims to analyse and develop a proposal to be used as a guideline for Thai village committee administrative reform for promoting public service delivery. Mixed research method was used to study eight cases of “Baan Suay Meang Suk” model village committees conducted by the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior. The data was collected from 400 questionnaires, in-depth interviews, focus group interviews and documentary analysis. The study found that the developing process of Thai village committee administration should be divided into 3 phases which are; Phase 1: Input aimed at creating democratic value, Phase 2: Process that focuses on integrated cooperation in organisational governance, and Phase 3: Development of operational system and organisational management to be legitimate and accountable for the village committee practice. These three phases are criticised on the basis of core theories of public administration reform and public services to carry out a specific result for the context, and apply to the village committee administration reform to maximise the quality and efficiency of public service delivery in Thailand.

**Key words:** *The Village Committee; Administrative Reform; Public Service.*



## Introduction

“**Village**” (*Moo Baan*) is the smallest local administrative unit of Thai bureaucratic administration (Jumpa, 2008). There are more than 75,000 villages in Thailand, serving public service provision and delivery in rural areas across the country (Department of Provincial Administration, 2017). A village headman is elected by village citizens. The village headman has duties to take care of their villagers and to coordinate with the district, a government agency that directly oversees villages located in its area. District (Amphoe), where governed by district chief (Nai Amphoe), is under the command of the Department of Provincial Administration, Ministry of Interior. Thus, public service delivery in the village is related to the Ministry of Interior authority as well as the national government, in respect of regulation and peacekeeping division.

Local Government Act, 1914 (1<sup>st</sup> rev., 1943) has set up “the village committee”, including the village headman as a president, a deputy headman, seniors, and group leaders in the village; a total of 8-30 people depending on each village. Authorities and responsibilities of the village committee are to give an advice and assist the village headman in any fields of work according to the law: 1) General Management, 2) Regulation and Peacekeeping, 3) Village Development Plan, 4) Economic Promotion 5.) Social, Environment, and Public Health 6) Education, Religion, Culture 7.) Others (Department of Provincial Administration, 2008). In a recent decade, the national government has had a number of policies concerning villages economic promotion, an inequality reduction in accessing the public budget, and income distribution. At least 200,000 baht of the annual budget has been directly allocated through various policies such as Thai KemKaeng, SML Village, Sufficiency Economy Villages, Pracharat Project, Project 9101, and Thai Niyom Yungyeun. The village committee is responsible for managing projects and solving the problems that each village faces. Legally, even though the village committee is an official public service unit, in practice neither government nor related agencies have paid adequate attention to them as can be seen from the lack of focus on enhancing efficiency and effectiveness of the village committee in any law amendments since the latest national government organisation reform (Suwanmongkol, 2017; Inan, 2018).

Contemporary trends of public administrative reform are greatly influenced into different forms of public service delivery (Perry and Buckwalter, 2010). The impacts of key concepts in public administration towards the forms of public service delivery in several countries, in this age of globalisation, were comparatively explained by Osborne (2010), Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) and Siriprakob (2016). In the United States, New Public Service (NPS) (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015) has become a concept that aims to



expand knowledge and managerial techniques aimed at the value of public interest and democratic citizenship. Since the 1980s, public administration of the U.K. had been successful with New Public Management (NPM). It has been used as a model in foreign governments. Currently, the U.K. is approaching a New Public Governance (NPG), a public administrative paradigm for a plural state. The plural state is defined as a society combining a number of actors in the network led by the state such as the business sector, civil society, community, etc. Their interdependence brings about quality public service provision and the ability to access more information for policy making. Such relationships between public organisations and networks will lead to an efficient outcome. The NPG, therefore, is the result of policy implementation and public service provisions; the latter is diverse and complicated. This shows a significant challenge facing public administration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Osborne, 2010; Higa & Shimojima, 2018; Nor Zaini and Kuppusamy, 2017).

Both above concepts are built upon New Public Management (NPM), which is the administrative reform paradigm which has a huge influence on various countries through aid and development projects from international organisations such as UNDP, IMF and World Bank. These projects have taken place since the 1980s, directed by the United States and the United Kingdom (Bevir, 2010; Taneri, 2018; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Lastly, European continental countries such as France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland discovered that New Public Management (NPM), which rose from the ideas of institutionalism and neo-liberalism, hadn't worked with their political context. Hence, Max Weber's principle was revived, namely Neo-Weberian State (NWS). A Neo-Weberian State prioritises public organisations and civil servants to provide public services, in the realm of Weberian Bureaucracy theory, with more flexibility allowing social changes under on-going market mechanism in the age of globalisation (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, 2011).

The researcher, thus, is interested in analysing and developing a new proposal for public administrative reform to accompany the operation of the village committee with the direction of universal public administrative reform.

### **Objective**

This research aims to analyse and develop proposals to be used as a guideline for the village committee administrative for promoting public service delivery in Thailand.



## **Research Method**

A mixed research method was used to study eight cases of “Baan Suay Meang Suk” model village committees. These cases are: 1) Baan Mhai Pattana, Moo 4, Nam Khien sub-district, Phu Phieng district, Nan Province; 2) Baan Whang Daeng Nhuae, Moo 12, Khao Sai sub-district, Thab Khlo district, Phi Chit province; 3) Baan Sub Yee Rah, Moo 9, Whang Mhai sub-district, Na Yai Am district, Chanta Buri province; 4) Baan Nong Nhae, Moo 7, Nong Sa Rai sub-district, Pha Nom Thuan district, Kanchana Buri province; 5) Baan Nong Wha, Moo 5, Non Daeng sub-district, Non Sila district, Khon Kaen province; 6) Baan Kok Samran, Moo 1, Kok Samran sub-district, Lherng Nok Tha district, Yasothon province; 7) Baan Bang Wan, Moo 1, Bang Wan sub-district, Kura Buri district, Phang Nga province; and 8) Baan Whang Lho, Moo 12, Kham Lon sub-district, Lan Saka district, Nakhon Si Thammarat province.

Data collection tools were developed by a group of supervisors from the Doctor of Public Administration Programme, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Mahidol University. The process of research ethics was also approved by the IRB centre of Mahidol University. There are 400 questionnaires provided by purposive sampling to 50 people whose hometowns are in the villages of the case studies, in-depth interviews with 3 related groups in each area. 1.) The village committee as a service provider, 2-3 persons; 2.) Citizens as service receivers, 2-3 persons; and 3.) Representatives from public, private sector and civil society that are involved in the missions of the village committee, 2-3 persons; 63 persons in total for each area as well as focus group interviews among those 3 related groups. Furthermore, for quantitative analysis, SPSS was used to interpret statistical data which presents the mean, percentage and standard deviation (S.D). The ranges of scores are grouped into 3 levels: Low (mean 1.00-2.33), Medium (mean 2.34-3.67) and High (mean 3.68-5.00). While qualitative analysis, data was criticised upon the theories of public administrative reform with a purpose to carry out a guideline for the village committee administrative reform for promoting public service delivery.

## **Summary and Discussion**

### ***General Information***

The survey showed that the majority of the sample consists of men (400) (53.3% of the sample). 134 of the men are aged 51-60 which accounts for 33.5%; 313 of the men are married which accounts for 78.3%; 165 of the men earn 5,000-10,000 Baht monthly which accounts for 41.3%; 179 of the men achieved elementary education which accounts for 44.8 %; 356 of the men are agriculturist which accounts for 89%; and 98 of the men are involve in the village committee regarding economic support which accounts for 24.5%.

### *Levels of the Village Committee Performance in Promoting Service*

**Table 1:** illustrates mean, S.D. and level of village committee performance  
(n = 400)

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Level	Priority
General Management	4.59	0.31	High	1
Regulation and Peacekeeping	4.47	0.34	High	5
Village Development Plan	4.49	0.42	High	3
Economic Promotion	4.34	0.47	High	6
Society, Environment and Public Health	4.49	0.41	High	3
Education, Religion and Culture	4.56	0.41	High	2
Others	4.26	0.58	High	7
Total	4.46	0.33	High	

Table 1 shows that the levels of the village committee performance in overall are in the high level, at 4.46. Specific consideration in each variable, General Management is the highest level at 4.59, the second highest is Education, Religion and Culture at 4.56, followed by Village Development Plan and Society, Environment and Public Health at 4.49. Next, Regulation and Peacekeeping is at 4.47, Economic Promotion is 4.34. Lastly, others such as child, disabled, elderly, or local tourism are at 4.26.

### *Level of Attitude towards the Trends of the Village Committee Administrative Reform in Thailand*

**Table 2:** shows mean, S.D., and level of attitude towards the trends of the village committee administrative reform in Thailand  
(n = 400)

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Level	Priority
New Public Service (NPS)	4.48	0.46	High	1
New Public Governance (NPG)	4.40	0.45	High	2
Neo-Weberian State (NWS)	4.29	0.51	High	3
Total	4.39	0.44	High	

Table 2 shows that overall, levels of attitude towards the trends of the village committee administrative reform are in the high level (Mean = 4.39). Considering each trend, the trend of New Public Service is at the highest level (Mean=4.48), the trend of the New Public Governance is the second highest (Mean=4.40), while the Neo-Weberian State is at 4.29.

### ***Results of Analysis and Guideline for the Village Committee Administrative Reform in Thailand***

As can be seen from Table 2, the level of attitude towards public administration reform reflected basic values and public will from those who have been affected by the process of providing public services in a village administrative organisation. The discussion is divided into 3 phases.

#### ***Phase 1: Input aimed at creating democratic value, using New Public Service (NPS).***

This concept focuses on public service which depends on two crucial input factors; mutual interest and creating democratic citizenship value. Kersting and Kuhlmann (2018) proposed that democratic tools and innovations from input process will strengthen the legitimacy of an output, which is an administrative reform; the key part of analysis. As a consequence, the working process of the village committee needs to be varied, from the top-down vertical organisations, in which the policy is dictated from above, and horizontal organisations that focus on decentralisation as well as collaborative work. This corresponds with Kuhlmann and Boukeart (2016), horizontal and vertical reorganisation are the results of local organisation reform. The former is to facilitate public services. The latter is to identify and draw a clear scope of functions and authorities for local public service division. Likewise, Getimis (2016) discovered that local administrative organisations, with Up-Scaling development plans, are a requisite.

Up-Scaling is based on horizontal organisation with a purpose of flaw detection, using Vertical Power Relations, and to widen the gaps. To be more apparent, in practice, the village committees need more flexibility and decision-making power to take social and cultural factors into account since they have to tackle with the diversity of ethnicity, language, history and customs. Moreover, Navarro and Pano (2018) presented that Spanish local public service units had successfully harmonised the use of community culture with managerial tools adhering to community way of life to support public participation in the creation of self-governance. Similar to Linder (2010), local administrative units, particularly the villages in Switzerland, applied the principles of self-management in each administrative unit in order to show their volunteer spirit helping their own villages. This made villages in Switzerland



become self-management societies amidst public working value and direct democracy (Khodaparasti, 2017). Therefore, at the village level, the more village citizens are encouraged to take part in community affairs, the more people access to learn and practice the principles of public participation and democracy. Meanwhile, they are getting more committed to the local community which will certainly grow the level of democratisation in the national level. From reviewing foundations of public administration through Denhardt and Denhardt' work, new public services are built upon the value of democratic citizenship and public interest to communities and society (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2000, 2003, 2007, 2011, 2015).

All above mentioned studies are in accordance with the findings of this research; effective policy implementation and public service delivery have been done under the village committee system that promoted democratisation by putting public service factor into the village operation. Such system ought to be modified, absolute power is no longer solely held by the village headman. The village committee works as a consultant and offers assistance as prescribed in the law. Also, the village committee plays roles on behalf of public sector organisations and self-community governance on the basis of public service provision and delivery. With reference to selected case studies, the implementation of the village committee has gradually created democratic values namely, direct democracy, through skilled village citizens who worked for the village matters. The constant involvement of village citizens in service production and delivery heightens both quality of work and citizenship value. Deliberate Democracy is also seen through the work allocation process during the village meetings, where members share opinions rationally, prioritise public values that contribute to the capacity of solving problems and responding to the demand of village citizens. Hence, the concept of reforming a New Public Service is in an input stage, introduced as a turning point of the village committee administrative organisation system (Terlicka, 2013).

***Phase 2: Process design focusing on integrated cooperation of village committee administration by using New Public Governance (NPG).***

To change the working process within the village committee administrative organisations. As prescribed in related acts and regulations, missions of the village committee (such as peacekeeping, village development plans, health operation, village funds) are disconnected from each other and parted from the Local Government Act, 1914, which prescribed the operation of the village committee. However, the findings conversely indicated that their operations were collaborated and perform in the form of networks. So, managements in public service delivery of the village committee are driven by governance mechanisms (Bevir, 2012). Frederickson (2007) has offered 3 considerations; 1) Consideration on working performances in vertical and horizontal organisation, 2) Role enhancement of public sectors



in dealing with supporting, monitoring and auditing either budget or contracts to facilitate private sectors and the community; and 3) Forms of policy making and policy implemented by related parties, not merely public sectors. These mentioned characteristics highlighted governance to be more powerful to public administration and any forms of organisations over the world (Pollitt, 2016). As a consequence, mechanism of the village committee was established in Thailand local politics since the Local Government Act, 1914 (1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1943). They were firstly designated to be a consultant and the deputy village headman. Their initial roles couldn't lead to organisational development and sustainable spatial problem solving. According to the study of Kersting and Kuhlmann (2018), organisations in levels of community and village in municipality areas are feeble because they have served as a consultant for the municipal council and the mayor of municipalities in the German Confederation which are overlapping with existing advisory boards of each division such as youth, women, refugees, etc. Obviously, from the study, the working process of the village committee has to be revised as follows:

Enhance roles and authorities of village headman, who is the president of the village committee, by designated position, to be in charge of coordination, monitoring, and auditing the implementation of the organisation with the aim of integrating all divisions of the committee to drive public mission in their area.

Enhance roles and authorities of the village committee in every division to ensure the efficiency and responsibility. Each of the village committees is directed by ministries, departments or other related government agencies. For examples, the Ministry of Public Health is responsible for Society, Environment, and Public Health. The National Village and Urban Community Fund Office looks after Economic promotion. The Community Development Department and Department of Local Administration are accountable for Village Development Plan. While Government and Peacekeeping take responsibility through the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation. As a result, roles and practices of the village committee have to be improved in order to enable integration and to drive the implementation of policies from metropolitan areas into practice in the village effectively and efficiently (Lynn, 2003; Lynn et al., 2001).

***Phase 3: developing operating system and administration of village committee by using Neo-Weberian State (NWS).***

To heighten legitimate roles and accountability of village committee, the following acts and rules need to be modified:





- *Local Government Act, 1914* to serve the village committee as a local administrative organisation who has authority and responsibility for decision making, implementing polices and providing basic public services to village citizens.
  
- *Organisation of Village Development and Self-Defence Volunteer Act, 1979 and Rule of Ministry of Interior on Supporting the Authorities to protect and maintain peace and order in the village* to enable the village committee on government and peacekeeping to issue the rules and measures according to agreements from village society corresponding to the principles of government, maintaining public peace and local morals.
  
- *Rule of Ministry of Interior on Local Organisation Development Plan, 2005 and 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2016* to designate members of a provincial council to be a president of the village committee on village development plan for their village hometown and enable the village committee to develop tools for village development plan as well as budget allocation. Thoroughly, the village development plan must be pragmatic, able to integrate with policy implementation and public service delivery of the village committee.
  
- *National Village and Urban Community Fund Act, 2004 and Rule of National Village and Urban Community Fund on Establishment and Management of National Village and Urban Community Fund, 2008* the village committee on economic promotion is responsible for village funds with an ability to make decisions on economic promotion, financial and fiscal system as well as sustainable self-management.
  
- *Rule of Ministry of Public Health on Village Health Volunteer, 2011* to appoint village health volunteers (VHV) as the village committee on society, public health and environment to systemically make a decision regarding social problems, Public health services and environmental measures.
  
- *Community Organization Council Act, 2008* to enforce the regulations for the village committee practice on behalf of village administrative organisation who led the cooperation among community organisations in the village and sub-district (Tumbon). Since such cooperation will drive the operation of the village committee in creating creative projects and activities, specifically, to encourage the use of wisdom, to promote public values in the village, last but not least, to create institutions in order to drive such policies concretely.



## Recommendations

Some useful recommendations for the village committee administrative reform in promoting public service delivery have been found from the research as follows.

- *Reforming an administrative system and the political status of the village committee* to work as a civil society with high potential in providing public services in the village level. Decision making power is transferred to the village committee who are more familiar to citizens. The village committee would eventually become the main public service provider for village citizens.

- *Planning and enhancing the mechanism of the village committee* to be able to provide services that meet the need of community. In fact, there have been existing tools in the form of unwritten and government traditions. These tools would effectively support the drive of policies on social inequality, poverty, economic access, and social welfare.

- *Promoting democratic value into the village committee administration* due to the fact that the village committee performance could be a source of democratic values at the village level. However, the appropriate democratic principle for each village committee needs to be designed and rooted from the practice of each village committee themselves.

- *Solving the performances and building responsibility in an operational system of the village committee.* This is to reform laws and rules related to public service delivery of the village committee. When a department of control and monitor separately operates, authorities and responsibilities are formed. Also a determination on wage and welfare for those who work for government organisations or other related agencies.

- *Reforming the administration of the village committee in providing local public services.* The present village administration is lacking clear standards and practices regarding the quality and standards of public service delivery. Both centralisation and decentralisation are compulsory with a focus on the authority and independence of the village committee in making decisions on the implementation of public policies and service provision in relation to the authority of central government (centralisation). The village committee would become both a policy practitioner and a representative, for government and village civil society respectively.

- *Reforming Administrative tools* to transform the village committee into a multidimensional mechanism for public service delivery, with a capacity to create tools integrated from hierarchy, marketing, and network. These would create village values, democratic norm,



profession standards and benefits of citizen as well as partnerships among government, private, and other related organisations to achieve their mutual goals in public service delivery and village development.

- *Reform the use of Authority* to achieve the rule of law in the operation of the village committee. As a result of clarifying the roles of village committees both in legal status and their authority in the scope of public services, there will be more effective law enforcement towards public service delivery. However, the most appropriate role of the village committee is to perform as “a manager” in solving problems and providing public services in the village level.

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