

# Thailand Decentralizes: Local Views

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# COLA

COLLEGE OF LOCAL ADMINISTRATION, KHON KAEN UNIVERSITY

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## Preface

We are especially pleased to see this important research report coming from our College of Local Administration (COLA), which in, itself, is one of our proud accomplishments. It is the only college of its kind in Thailand. The four authors have worked together in a number of research projects and in various other capacities for over two decades. In this research, they have shown the College's considerable achievements. This report will serve as one of the valuable required reading materials for our students in the international doctoral degree program in Public Affairs Management - the program which COLA has jointly developed with the University of Hawaii and the University of Missouri in the United States. We can see how COLA has become a global force in Thailand's higher education. We believe this is something of which we can be rightfully proud.

As of today, the College has trained approximately 10,000 local administrators, serving in virtually every province in Thailand. One set of findings in this book attests to the strength of that output. In the structured survey, the research finds that survey respondents in Songkla province are least positive about the ongoing decentralization process. This reflects the complex state-society tensions typically seen in the southern provinces. But the face to face discussions in the focus group sessions showed none of the tensions. In those discussions, people felt quite free to express their opinions openly and honestly. This is a tribute to the trust COLA has built among local leaders.

In other aspects, this research is especially welcome today. As we all know Thailand has been moving toward greater political and administrative decentralization over the past two decades and more, with laws and constitutional changes that are potentially of great importance. In this, Thailand is not alone, as the research report tells us very clearly. Not only in Thailand, but throughout Asia, there are movements to decentralize political and economic power. This is part of a wide democratization movement, which we applaud. This research, however, also shows us both the potentials and the problems of the process. We find that local leaders - both elected and appointed - have great respect for one another and feel they have greater capacities than are recognized to govern themselves effectively and responsibly. They also feel that the central government is somewhat reluctant to devolve the actual power and authority they need to make the decentralization process work. Here as in many countries, the democratic urges are strong, but they face powerful obstacles.

Kittichai Triratanasirichai  
President  
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# Executive Summary

## Background

Thailand's decentralization, mandated by the 1997 constitution, should be seen against a roughly 500 year period of western state building, transferred to the world through western imperialism and colonialism. That process of state building required a great deal of centralization of power and authority and the extension of that power and authority to the boundaries of the state. Today, this centralized state with its massive bureaucracy is the dominant political form throughout the world. We are also seeing wide spread attempts to decentralize that state power and to increase the strength of local government. Thailand is only one example of this wide spread process.

This history will have a significant impact on the decentralization process everywhere, and Thailand is no exception. We can expect that the central administrative systems built for the new states will strongly resist decentralization. For those systems, decentralization implies a loss of power and resources. They will surely resist those changes; again Thailand already sees this resistance. To move decentralization ahead will always require strong political leadership to overcome the resistance of the entrenched central administration.

In the summer of 2012, the Committee on Collaboration between the Department of Local Administration and Khon Kaen University made a grant to the College of Local Administration to examine local views of decentralization.

This study was designed to discover the views of local leaders on the decentralization process. It was carried out in four provinces: Chiangmai, Chon Buri, Khon Kaen and Songkla. In each province, surveys and focus group interviews were carried out in the Provincial Administrative Organizations, three levels of Municipalities and two Tambon Administrative Offices. In addition to learning about the local views on the character and dynamics of local government, we focused on three substantive areas of social service: Health, Education and Promoting Local Economic Development.

## Survey Data

Our survey data provided a view of a rich human resource currently engaged in the local government and the decentralization process. It also showed a marked difference between the political and the administrative systems. There is little decentralization related activity in the political system. It is only in the administrative system that decentralization appears an operative term. Others findings from the survey include the following:

The overall administrative and elected personnel show a high degree of education and experience. There is a rich human resource in the local political-administrative system. There is active horizontal communication with the system. Mayors and clerks, for example, know and understand each other's work.

Administrative officials have considerable respect for their elected colleagues. And elected officials respect the technical competence and dedication of the administrative officers.

Communication and coordination between the Governor and the Local Administrative Organizations (LAOs) is viewed as satisfactory.

Both elected and administrative personnel see the local units as highly capable of governing and budgeting without the interference of the central government.

All local personnel have a good understanding of the democratic process and its requirements, and they are highly committed to democratic values. The local population is not viewed as uneducated and ignorant. There is also a strong relationship between democratic values and views of the local governments' capacities to govern and budget.

Local governments are very inactive in passing local ordinances. Local councilors do not seem to understand how to identify local problems and to link those to local ordinances that can address those problems. This suggests a need for training on this subject matter.

Overall, we have what we can consider a quite positive view of the local governance process among Thai local elected officials and administrators. They appear to have a positive view of the way government works, of their autonomy and of the overall system's capacity to listen to the public. This is probably a highly useful resource - the positive orientation and good will among local leaders, both elected and administrative. This can be said to be good news for the Central Government. It does not have below it an angry discontented set of local leaders. They appear to trust the government and whatever they see to be the process of decentralization now taking place. This should encourage the Central Government to move ahead more steadily devolving both authority and resources to the local leaders. On the other hand, as noted above, if the local leaders are satisfied with the system as they now know it and as it now works, they might not press upward for greater decentralization.

Finally, we can say that the tensions seen surrounding Thailand's decentralization (World Bank 2012 p. 4) do not derive so much from the political system or from the relations between the political and administrative systems. They all seem to derive from within the administrative structure itself.

Throughout the analysis, we found that Songkla consistently was lowest in the scores concerning the quality of extent of local government. The differences were not large, but they were consistent. We attribute this to the long standing tensions between state and society in the southern provinces.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

We carried out 50 focus group sessions in the four provinces. We had a total of 188 participants from all levels of government - Province, Municipality and Tambon. The major findings from the discussions are as follows.

The general character of the discussions was very good. They were active and energetic, with extensive expressions of views. The participants were highly knowledgeable and fully willing to express their views, to agree and to disagree. We found it important that there were no differences between the studied provinces. Songkla participants were not less willing than others to express opinions, to agree and to disagree. Nor were there differences by gender. Thai women are as willing as men to speak, to agree and to disagree.

Some of the most active participants were the female Village Health Volunteers (VHVs). VHVs are the result of a Ministry of Health (MOH) program developed in the early 1970s to help extend health services throughout the country. It has been highly effective in bringing extremely high levels of health care to Thailand, to the most remote and poorest people and poorest areas as well as to the more accessible and wealthy. It has provided an added advantage as well. It has produced knowledgeable, trusted and respected local leaders.

### **Health**

On health, there is high priority in local government. Local units use their own funds to provide budgetary assistance to the health program. They also show general satisfaction with the system as it is and do not see any reason to decentralize it further. Many LAOs supplement the health service by creating their own local clinics to provide pain relief, traditional massage and herbal medicines close to the citizens.

In some areas there is a mild tension between local and MOH services when the local services cannot recruit MOH personnel for assistance. There is something of a status gap between these services that in some cases can weaken service delivery.



Some provinces have a rising problem with immigrants from poorer neighboring countries, who pose something of a burden on the system. They are typically served, as are all Thais, and their numbers add a special burden.

### **Education**

On education there are different issues at the three levels of government. PAOs currently try to transform MOE schools to their control. All municipalities have created their own schools to provide more education to their children. All municipal schools have the problem of more students than they should have given their population sizes. Rural children are often sent to the towns to give them a better education. Tambon Administrative Organizations typically do not have their own primary or secondary schools, but they do have their own preschools.

At all levels of local governments, education, like health, has very high priority. All LAOs use their own resources to support education.

We heard no discussion of the content of education or the need to reform the curriculum, although this is currently a popular topic in the Thai mass media. Our local leaders were not, however, a part of this major movement.

### **Promoting Economic Development**

On promoting local economic development, LAOs take virtually no action. Local leaders do not consider this their responsibility. We believe this reflects two basic conditions in local government that negatively affect decentralization. First, LAOs do see the need to reduce poverty, but they do not see the connection between economic development and poverty reduction. In effect they do not know how to stimulate economic development. Second, the Department of Local Administration (DLA) defines the tasks LAOs can undertake. LAOs may not undertake tasks not specified by the DLA. We believe this highly centralized administrative system undermines local initiative and limits what local leaders can do.

It is striking that many local elected leaders are themselves successful businessmen. Even to them, however, promoting development is the task of the central government not of local government.

## Recommendations

We make five main recommendations. They are stated here only in rough outlines, recognizing that implementing them will require fine tuning and full integration into the Thai governmental process. Nonetheless, we believe these are essential if Thailand's decentralization is to move ahead. It is important to note that these recommendations come largely from the basic orientation of this research project - obtaining **local views**.

### **A. The Central Government Should Increase its Leadership Activity**

Thai political leadership has been very weak in promoting decentralization. The process is directed by the *National Decentralization Committee*, which is chaired by the Prime Minister. Over the past decades no Prime Minister has been able to inject life and power into this Committee. **Nothing better explains the slow movement of decentralization in Thailand than this lack of political leadership.**

### **B. Train Local Council Members at Regional Universities**

Currently the MOI's Local Personnel Development Institution trains all key administrative personnel, including elected members of the LAO councils. It also puts those elected councilors in uniform, which the councilors must purchase. In effect, the councilors are being trained to be good government servants. They need, instead to be trained to be effective representatives of the people who elect them. This training can better be given by regional universities. Councilors should not be in uniform, since uniforms are the dress of civil servants. Councilors are servants of the electorate.

### **C. Allow All LAOs to Spend 25% of Their Budgets without Approval by District or Provincial Officers**

Currently Provincial Governors and District Officers must approve all local government budgets. This amounts to central control. LAOs should be given freedom to budget 25% without approval, for a trial period of 3-5 years. The process should be carefully monitored and evaluated by qualified and independent scientists, preferably from regional universities. As the process proves effective the proportion freed should be increased.

### **D. Allow Local Governments to Take Any Specific Actions They Wish to Carry Out**

Without the ability to take some actions they deem necessary for their areas, local government lack the ability to address their own problems. A simple executive order should be sufficient to provide LAOs with the capacity to act. It would merely state that all LAOs may undertake any activities they deem necessary, so long as they are not otherwise illegal under Thai criminal law.

## **E. Empower Local Governments to Promote Local Economic Development**

Three possible actions are suggested, but basically all LAOs should be charged with the responsibility of promoting local economic development and given wide latitude to create the structures and processes that will make this possible. This is designed to take advantage of Thailand's vast local human resources now available to promote development, which local governments now are wasting. The three possible suggestions include creating LAO development advisory committees, adopting "Economic Gardening" strategies, and allowing municipalities to issue municipal bonds.

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## List of Acronyms Used in Report

AIDS:	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CB:	Chon Buri
CH:	Chiangmai
COLA:	College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University
GPP:	Gross Provincial Product
HAI:	Human Achievement Index by UNDP
HDI:	Human Development Index by UNDP
HIV:	Human Immune Deficiency Virus
JICA:	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KK:	Khon Kaen
LAO:	Local Administrative Organization
MOE:	Ministry of Education
MOI:	Ministry of Interior
MOPH:	Ministry of Public Health
MP:	Members of Parliament
PAO:	Provincial Administrative Organization
SN:	Songkla
TAO:	Tambon Administrative Organization
TB:	Tuberculosis
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
VHV:	Village Health Volunteer



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# CHAPTER I

## DECENTRALIZATION IN THAILAND

### I. Introduction

This chapter will provide the background for our study of decentralization in Thailand. It begins with a 500 year perspective that traces the rise of the nation state as the basic political unity of our times. That rise began in Western Europe and was largely responsible for the dominance of the West. The empires established by the Western World from the 15<sup>th</sup> century exported and planted the political-administrative structures of the nation in the rest of the world. Building nation states required centralizing power through the creation of effective bureaucracies. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that was largely a centripetal process, with the center extending its power of control over ever larger areas and populations. From the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, a more centrifugal process emerged. We have seen this in the world wide democratization movement. Especially in Asia we are now witnessing major moves to decentralize political and administrative systems. Decentralization is the watchword of Asian governments today. Thailand is merely one nation engaged in this common movement. In Thailand we see both common and distinctive elements. In some respects Thailand is doing what many states are doing. In specifics, however, the details of the movement are distinctive to Thailand. Our study seeks to extend our understanding of both the common and distinctive characteristics of Thai decentralization.

We begin with a broad five century view of state making, then move to the Asian example. From there, we go to Thailand and finally to the specific perspective that is brought by Khon Kaen University's College of Local Administration.

### II. Background:

#### A. The Long View: From Subject and Official to Citizen and Civil Servant

The 2007 Thai Constitution devotes a chapter (XIV) with 10 Sections (281-290) to Local Administration. This chapter sets out a vision of political and administrative decentralization in which the government seeks to devolve power, responsibility and authority to local administration. The aim is to strengthen government at the Province, Municipality and Tambon (rural districts) levels to play a greater role in overall governance.

This is an integral part of broad historical social movements over the past half millennium and more as Empires dissolved into smaller, more powerful, nation states. (McNeill 1963, Tilly 1984, 2004, 2009). We have seen the increasing centralization of

power as the unprecedented rise of nation states occurred and has come to form the basic political units of modern society. This process began in Western Europe after the 13<sup>th</sup> century and now dominates the world political structure. The rise of nation states in medieval Europe demonstrated the power of this form of organization to mobilize resources and extend control over larger and larger land areas and peoples. It was those powerful nation states that formed the basis of the Western hegemony over the world from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ness and Stahl 1977). Western hegemony placed the stamp of the nation state on the rest of the world. Colonial systems built the organizational infrastructure of the state everywhere, and even non colonized polities followed that lead. The final breakup of the Western colonial system after World War II and the emergence of the United Nations as a global representative of more than 200 “sovereign nation states” completed a process that began half a millennium ago.

Asia has known empires, or state-like political systems for the past two millennia. They have often differed, however, from the Western State in the extension of power from the center. Especially in Southeast Asia, power was greatest at the center, gradually diminishing with distance from the center. They did not typically define boundaries clearly and control movement over the boundaries. These systems rose and fell over the past millennia, increasing their geographic scope each time they rose (Lieberman 2003). The transformation from ancient empire to modern states was the work of Western Imperialism and Colonialism. It was the British, Dutch and French colonial powers that built modern state bureaucracies with extensive specialization of function and increasingly extending power to the boundaries to control cross-boundary movement.

Though Thailand was not colonized, it followed a similar development in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Here we saw the development of a centralized Monarchy gradually extending its power to the current Thai national boundaries. This also involved building a distinctive administrative structure around the Monarchy and extending the sway of that structure to the state boundaries. In the process, a modern state Bureaucracy was born (Wyatt 2003, Riggs 1966). That bureaucracy developed a series of technically specialized arms capable of dealing with such things as taxation security, the physical infrastructure, health, education, finances, agriculture, transportation and all the specialized problems of the modern state. Until recently, that process has essentially been centripetal, drawing to the center increasing capacities to reach, monitor, control and even assist all individuals and communities within the boundaries of the state. That process has been so powerful in Thailand that it has given rise to a distinctive term in Thai politics, “The Bureaucratic Polity” (Riggs 1968). By this, Riggs implied that the bureaucracy itself has become the major instrument of power. The King was an absolute monarch, but it was the bureaucracy that actually held and exercised power. The transition from the absolute to constitutional monarchy in 1932 only emphasized the power of the

administrative structure to centralize authority and responsibility to itself. The state bureaucracy had replaced the King as the claimant of absolute power.

In the past half century we have begun to see a series of more centrifugal movements. In many parts of the world and especially in Asia, government decentralization has become the watchword, the fad, and the clarion call for political and administrative reform. This represents a radical change in public policy thinking of a relatively recent origin. It should be recalled that the rise of independent states in Asia following the imperial breakup after World War II was accompanied by a call for strong state planning and supervision to promote the economic development that all wanted. At that time, the Soviet model of state five year economic plans was highly popular, given power and in part extreme impetus by Asia's two giants: India and China. This emphasis on centralization emerged naturally since most of the leaders of the Asian independence movements were educated in the West in the 1920s and 30s. They witnessed the collapse of the Capitalist Market system, and the rise of the Soviet Command system. At the time, that appeared to be the model for the future. That the Soviet system was associated with the defeat of fascism only increased its attraction. The Asian leaders of national independence movements believed that this new state planning system would provide the way for the economic development that all leaders wished for their poor countries. It is also important to remember that state planning was associated with a distinctive "import substitution industrialization" strategy that was being promoted by the World Bank in its earlier and somewhat more naïve, days.

Import substitution industrialization quickly gave way to the much more effective export promotion as early as the 1960s, with Japan, Taiwan, South Korea and Malaysia showing the way.<sup>1</sup> Highly centralized government and state planning gave way later, and more grudgingly, in other major economies as first China in the late 1970s and then India in the 1990s turned from command economic visions and state control back to the free market as the more certain route to development. The great economic successes that have come with this return to the market have given considerable support to movements to decentralize power. In addition, the broader democratization movement has produced political pressures for decentralization. Political and social mobilizations have forced central governments to listen more carefully to the voices from below.

As the World Bank (2005) points out, there have also been broad structural changes adding to the pressure for decentralization. Economic development, urbanization and the growth of an educated middle class have forced governments to search for more effective ways to provide the services, incentives and support needed

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<sup>1</sup> Malaysia early followed the World Bank with weak efforts at important substitution industrialization, but its real success came with its transformation of the rubber industry that was a triumph of export promotion industrialization (Ness 1968).

for modern economic development. These same structural changes have provided governments with greater opportunities to recruit more active and capable lower level units to take part in the provision of services. Technical advances in communications, especially electronic computers and cell phones have only added to both the pressures and opportunities for decentralization. They have broken the government monopoly of communications and given masses of people the opportunity to present their views, both supporting and opposing governments. In effect, the new technology has fully democratized communications. We have seen examples in Thailand in the opposition to General Sujindra Kraprayoon's assumption of the position of Prime Minister in 1992. He was essentially forced to step down by a large scale popular opposition mobilized essentially by modern cell phones. We have seen a similar illustration in the South Korean elections of 2002 when an independent presidential candidate, won the election with the support from young voters called "Netizens." In Egypt, a similar public media movement saw the fall of President Mubarak and the widespread *Arab Spring*.

The current Democratization movement is only a logical extension of the ideological changes that brought an end to the Western Colonial Empire after World War II. It is important to recall that that war was in part a struggle between two diametrically opposed political philosophies. The Nazi touted a racial basis for governmental legitimacy. It was the racial superiority of the Arian that gave them the right to rule. Against this, the Allies proposed that the only legitimate government was that based on the consent of the governed. The governed were not subjects to be taxed, worked and sent to war for the greater glory of King and government. They were citizens whom the government was designed to serve. At the top, this implied that administrators were not *officials* to be obeyed, but *civil servants*, charged with serving the interests of the *citizens*. That the Allies, not the Axis powers, won the war meant that "Democratic" governments would be the rule. Indeed even highly totalitarian governments of today claim to be "Peoples' Democracies." We need only recall President Sukarno's *guided democracy* in Indonesia, and the establishment of the *Democratic Peoples' Republic of (North) Korea* to illustrate the popularity of the term.

Asia has a long history of strong central governments ruling far flung subject populations. The independence movements changed the basic legitimizing theory in order to gain independence from colonial rule. It was, then, but a short step to the broader democratic movements that have put great upward pressure on government to decentralize both political power and administrative authority. This massive, global transition from *official* and *subject* to *civil servant* and *citizen* lies behind the widespread demand for decentralization today.

This history also has an impact on the current decentralization movements. Everywhere we can expect that the strong central administrative systems that have been



created will actively resist decentralization. All central administrative systems see they will lose power and resources if decentralization actually moves ahead. They will usually find ways to work against decentralization. This means that all attempts to decentralize must come to grips with the resistance from the central administration.

## **B. Asian Decentralization**

In 2005, The World Bank published a review of decentralization in Asia, titled *East Asia Decentralizes: Making Local Government Work*. The review covered six countries: Cambodia, China, Indonesia, The Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Using the proportion of sub national expenditure as a share of total public spending, the Bank found an interesting anomaly. The most centralized political system, China and Vietnam, were the most decentralized, with local expenditures accounting for 69% and 49% respectively of all public spending. Indonesia and the Philippines were moderate with 32% and 26% respectively. Cambodia showed a low 17%, and Thailand was the lowest at a mere 10%.<sup>2</sup>

As noted above, the Bank argues that decentralization is being driven by economic development and urbanization. But the data for these six suggest something else is at work. If we rank the six countries on economic development and urbanization, there is clearly no relationship between the level of wealth or rate of urbanization and decentralization. The rate of development is somewhat U shaped with decentralization. The level of urbanization is an inverted U. The two measures of health or health service delivery impacts are also clearly unrelated to the level of decentralization.

Next, the Bank's report asks why local government matters and provides three well thought out arguments. First, economic development has been impressive in most of East and Southeast Asia, and the continuation of that growth will in large part depend on how successful local governments are. Second, it is largely in the areas of social service delivery (health, education, water and sanitation) that local governments have become most active. If local government is not effective, there will be a serious decline in the level of services that support human resource development. This would inevitably decrease the quality of life for many and also obstruct further economic development. Third, local government can be highly susceptible to corruption, which both saps public support and works against the economic development that is needed.

Finally, the Bank's report provides some analysis of the impacts of the moves to local government, though this is an unsatisfactory part of the review. First, the Bank points out that spending on health and education increased with decentralization in China, Vietnam, Indonesia and The Philippines. But the Bank's authors neglected to

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<sup>2</sup> The proportion has now risen to over 25 percent (Thailand PFMR 2012).

ask about Thailand, where health and education expenditures have also increased since 1998, when data are available. Thus it is unclear whether decentralization is really the major causative factor. The authors also point out that declines in infant and under-five mortality increased or held level with decentralization in China, The Philippines and Indonesia. That is true, but those mortality declines in highly centralized Thailand have been considerably greater in speed and magnitude for a longer period of time.<sup>3</sup>

It is apparent, then, that Thailand is an unusual case in this assessment of local government and decentralization. Despite having the lowest by far measure of local government expenditure, Thailand has produced an exceptionally effective social service sector, apparently in a highly centralized bureaucracy. In fertility control (Knodel et al 1987), HIV/AIDS Treatment (Knodel et al 2010) and TB control (Singha Dong 2004), Thailand has produced an exceptionally effective service delivery system that extends excellent health care to the poorest regions of the country and to the country's poorest as well as the richest citizens. This can be called a highly successful centrally directed service delivery system. It is unclear the extent to which such successes depend on the devolution of authority and the rise of local government. They do, however, depend on some kind of local participation, which we consider later.

### **C. Thailand Decentralizes**

As we noted at the outset the 2007 Constitution of Thailand dedicates a chapter of ten sections to local government in Thailand. These give to local units the authority to form elected councils, and give those councils authority to act for the citizens through creating local ordinances and assuming control of social services. The acts redirect a number of government functions from central to local responsibility. They also provide rights of redress for ineffective leadership. There are also a series of nine laws from the Municipal of 1953 through the 2009 amendments to three acts for Provincial, Municipal and Tambon Administrative Organizations.

As might be expected, there has been a substantial number of studies of this move to decentralization. We shall limit our attention to only a few representative studies. Michael Nelson (1998) did an in depth study from one Provincial capital of how local administration was working at that time. He made a number of observations that have been repeated in subsequent studies. For example, though the elected councils appear to have considerable autonomy, their clerical workers are all employees of the Ministry of Interior. A traditional view continues: The Ministry of Interior detests politics; it sees political movements as disruptive and chaotic. It prefers its own highly centralized control over all aspects of local government. Nelson's overall assessment of decentralization is contained in the following statement: "*The developments*

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<sup>3</sup> Comparable Thai data are from The World Bank, World Development Indicators on line 8/8/2010.

*which have been touched on here have shown that a strong, determined and forceful bureaucracy was countered only by chaotic and unstable political institutions that were unable to 'guide' the administration to any significant degree (p. 64)."*

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) conducted a large scale study of Capacity Building in support of decentralization in 2009, providing an executive summary with extensive recommendations for improving the decentralization process (UNDP 2009a, 2009b). The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has sponsored two very useful studies of the decentralization process. One of them (Kimata, et al 2007) reviews decentralization processes in Indonesia, The Philippines and Thailand. A second (Nagai 2008) reviews local government in Thailand. In both cases, excellent reports on Thailand were provided by Fumio Nagai, to which we shall return shortly.

Before turning to the Nagai studies, we can mention three other sources that have been most useful. Dr. Achakorn Wongpreedee (2007) published a useful article showing that decentralization had in effect increased the power of some MPs due to their increased powers of mobilizing a larger voting bloc. Weerasak et al (2008) examined network performance and accountability. They showed how local management capacity varies and affects the capacity to build local networks. Duhues et al (2011) note that one major stated reason for decentralization is to increase popular participation and bring greater upward pressure on governments for honest and effective service. They note, however, that decentralization in Thailand has not necessarily produced greater popular participation. In some respects decentralization became a tool for greater central control. Patamasiriwat (2010) discussed fiscal decentralization, showing how the financial system was being rearranged to provide resources to local government units. Finally, we must note an excellent study of Thailand's health system (Hawkins et al 2009) that helps us to understand how Thailand's health system has achieved such remarkable success, in part by mobilizing local communities and families to assist in patient care and service delivery.

#### **D. The COLA Approach: Listening to Local Leaders**

Fumio Nagai's studies have provided the major basis of this research project. In a chapter on Central Local Government in Thailand, he and his colleagues carried out an extensive survey of local administrators. This was one of the first field studies to seek out views of the administrators who were in the middle of the decentralization process. They sent questionnaires to all 7,800 Local Administration Organizations (LAOs) in Thailand. These were sent to the clerk who served the Provincial, Municipal and Township units. They received 2,677 replies in return, 387 from urban and 2,154 from rural areas (with 136 not identified). They asked about both vertical and

horizontal relations and found continuing vertical and only weak horizontal relations indicating continuing central control. They also found budgets were insufficient for their tasks and that they needed much assistance in infrastructure development and tax collection. They reported considerable popular contacts for environmental, sanitary and public health problems, and found they could indeed help find solutions to these issues in a majority of cases.

This was specially an intriguing study for us at Khon Kaen University's College of Local Administration (COLA). COLA has now trained some 10,000 local administrators serving throughout Thailand. The College maintains contact with its graduates and considers them a source of information. Moreover, it sees those administrators everywhere as the front line workers of the decentralization process. They are the ones who know how the process is moving and why. They know where the weaknesses and strengths lie, where the encouragement and resistance come from.

This focus on local administrators led us to a research project in which we would ask them to inform us of what is happening at the local level. Our institutional aims and experience lead us to go to the local administrators for information about the process of decentralization. We wish to know especially how the relations between elected and administrative personnel work. How do administrators and elected leaders manage their vertical relations; is the center helpful or overbearing? Are budgets sufficient and is there sufficient flexibility to allow local leaders to decide how best to use resources? These are the questions that led us to this research project.

Note that much of this focus is on communication. Our basic position is that much of the outcome of decentralization depends on the extent and quality of the communication especially between administrators and elected officials. There are both vertical and horizontal lines of communication and both are equally important. How often do local officials and administrators meet with and talk to Senators and Members of Parliament? What kinds of assistance do the national political leaders provide to local officials and administrators? At each local administrative level we can also ask about horizontal communications. How well do elected officials and their administrative counterparts know one another? How well do they understand the tasks and responsibilities of the others? Our training at COLA places much emphasis on good communications within the administration and between administrators and elected officials. This extent and quality of communication is something we at COLA feel is at the heart of the democratic process that we are trying to support. Communications are critical to coordination and to networking, two issues we know to be essential for more effective decentralization. This research project was informed by our focus on communications and we shall see much of this in what we find in the field. With this as a base, we plan to extend our field research into the issues of coordination and networking in the future.

## CHAPTER II

### THE RESEARCH PROCESS

#### I. Introduction

Here we describe how we turned our general interest in decentralization into a specific research project. We carried out a field survey in four provinces. In each province we conducted interviews at the Provincial Level and also in the three levels of municipalities and in the rural Tambon. In each case we interviewed both government administrators and elected officials. We begin here with a description of Thailand's overall structure showing the number of units at each level, and the specific units we included in our sample. This leads us to an analysis of the characteristics of the provinces overall and of the provinces we have sampled. This allows us to locate our sample in the overall political-social-economic system of the provinces. The questionnaire we developed is included in the appendix to this report. The chapter ends with the development of a new research strategy that meets the demands of Thailand's current decentralization process. We began the research with a simple idea of assessing extent of decentralization in the four provinces and then attempting to assess its impact on service delivery especially in health, education and economic development promotion. That proved far too simple a design, because the process of decentralization is much more complex and more fluid. This requires a somewhat different approach.

#### II. Thai Administrative Units

To discover how the decentralization process is moving, we decided on a field survey in which we would seek the views of the local administrators and elected leaders. There are basically five levels of local administration: Provincial, three levels of Municipalities (City, Town and Tambon), and the rural Tambon. At each level there are both *administrators*, appointed by the central bureaucracies, and *elected* members. We planned to seek views of each set. We decided to select four provinces, one each in the four major regions of the country: Central, Northern, Northeastern, and Southern. Table 2.1 shows the number of provinces in each region. Table 2.2 shows the total number of the various local administrative units in Thailand. Finally, Table 2.3 shows the local units we selected and the number of interviewees.

Table 2.1 Regions and Provinces in Thailand

Region	Provinces
Central	25
Northern	17
Northeastern	20
Southern	14
Bangkok Metropolitan Area	1
Total	77

Table 2.2 Thai Local Administrative Organizations

Type	Number
Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO)	76
Municipalities	1,162
Cities	22
Town	120
Tambon	1,020
Tambon Administrative Organizations (TAO)	6,616
Special Municipalities	2
Bangkok Metropolitan Administration	1
City of Pattaya	1
TOTAL	7,855

In each province we decided to include the administrators and elected members of the Provincial Administrative Organization (PAO). In addition we included three Municipalities, one from each of the three levels: City, Town and Tambon. In most cases there is only one City Municipality in the province. From the larger number of Town and Tambon Municipalities we wished to include a high and low performing city. This was to be selected by the number of awards received over the past five years. Awards are given by the King Prachatipok Institute for three categories of action: 1) Transparency and Engagement; 2) Peace and Reconciliation; and 3) Networking. We counted the awards given over the past nine years, implying a theoretical total of 27 awards<sup>4</sup>. We decided to choose the city with the largest number of awards. If more than one city had the same number, or if none had an award, we used a random process to select the city. We also used a random process to select one of the cities that had no awards.

In addition to the cities, we decided to examine two Tambons (Tambon Administrative Organization or TAO) in each province. Again we chose to select one

<sup>4</sup> Gold and Silver awards and Certificates are given in each category, but a city would, of course, win only one. The maximum of 15 awards could include both Gold and Silver.

high performing and one low performing Tambon. Selection was done as for the cities, by counting the number of awards received by the Tambon over the past nine years. For the Tambon with no awards we again used a random process for the selection, except that the Tambon should be roughly the same size as the one selected for its awards.

Table 2.3 Sample Areas and Units

Provinces Selected	Type of Local Government and Number of Units	Units Sampled (Awards)
Chiangmai	PAO (1)	Chieng Mai PAO
	City Munic. (1)	Chieng Mai (0)
	Town Munic (3)	Muengkanpattana (2)
	Tambon Munic. (93)	CherngDoi (3)
	Tambon TAO (113)	Baan Krang (4) Mae Tang (0)
Chon Buri	PAO (1)	PAO
	City Munic. (1)	Lamcharbang (0)
	Town Munic. (9)	Bantbueng (1)
	Tambon Munic. (29)	Bangphra (2)
	Tambon TAO (58)	Khongkew (2) Nongeiroom (0)
Khon Kaen	PAO (1)	Khon Kaen PAO
	City Muni. (1)	Khon Kaen (5)
	Town Munic. (3)	Chum Pair (0)
	Tambon Munic. (62)	Sri Chompoo (1)
	Tambon TAO (158)	Known Kra (2) Ban Pai (0)
Songkla	PAO (1)	Songkla PAO
	City Munic. (2)	Songkla City (3)
	Town Munic. (8)	Kuanlung (0)
	Tambon Munic. (27)	Prik (3)
	Tambon TAO (103)	ThaHin (0) Kradang-nga (0)

A questionnaire was constructed around the following issues:

1. Networking with Political Leader
2. Administrators - Elected Leaders Interrelations (horizontal relations)
3. Popular Participation
4. Capacity for Local Management (subjective evaluation)
5. Center - Local Relations (vertical relations)
6. Budget Management Capacity
7. Revenue Collection Capacity
8. Ordinance Making Capacity

Questions were pretested with the assistance on one City Clerk and a group of business and government leaders in Nongkhai.

### III. The Selected Provinces

#### A. Four Provinces

It is useful to examine the condition of the four provinces selected for the study. They cannot claim to be “representative” in any strict statistical sense. They were chosen for both convenience and for their location in Thailand’s four major regions: Central, North, Northeast and South. We have a number of objective measures that can tell us something about these provinces and where they lie among all the provinces of Thailand.

First, however, we shall consider a composite measure developed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Thailand. This is the Human Achievement Index (HAI), modeled after, though more complex than, the UNDP Human Development Index (HDI). The Index is composed of 40 variables from eight different areas: Health, Education, Employment, Income, Housing, Family and Community, Transportation and Communication, and Participation. The calculation is the same as that used in the HDI (Actual minus Minimum Value/Range of all values). This produces a fraction that in the Thai case ranges from a low of 0.4666 to a high of 0.7212. Provinces are then reported by their rank from 1 high to 76 low.

This allows us to compute one additional index, based on the HDI process. If we subtract the Income (Gross provincial product - GPP - per capita) rank from the HAI rank, we get a measure of the extent to which a province turns its wealth into welfare. For example Songkla is not only quite high on HAI (4), it is 10 ranks *higher* than its Income rank (14). Khon Kaen, on the other hand is not only relatively lower overall on HAI (56), but it also 14 ranks *lower* on HAI than on Income (42). In effect Songkla does a much better job of transforming its wealth into welfare than does Khon Kaen. Chon Buri and Chiangmai are also lower in Achievement than income, though the differences are considerably smaller than in Khon Kaen. At present we have no explanation for this set of observations.

Table 2.4 shows how our four Provinces score on the Wealth rank minus HAI rank score.

Table 2.4 Wealth Rank Minus HAI Rank

Province	Wealth Rank	HAI Rank	Wealth - HAI
Songkla	14	4	+10
Chon Buri	10	14	-4
Chianagmai	41	46	-5
Khon kaen	42	56	-14



The Human Achievement Index reports a number of other interesting data. It contains a figure for voter turnout, one for the number of organized groups per 1000 persons, one for participation in community activities and one for participation in social services like education and health. Our four provinces all rate very high on these measures, as, in fact, do all provinces. The number of organized groups ranges from 16 to 88; voting turnout is 70-80%, and community and social service participation are all over 90%. In effect, we see a substantial popular activity in these provinces.

### **B. The Measures of Provinces**

Thailand has 77 provinces including- Bangkok. The provinces vary in population size, growth rates, density, wealth and the rate of change in wealth. Here we review the conditions of the provinces on these measures and locate our sample areas in the national distribution. These are conditions that appear to have a direct impact on the process and level of participation. The size, growth rate and density of a population seem to be positively related to more effective decentralization. We have seen a number of observations that small units are not viable and must be merged to make decentralized government work more effectively. Similarly, it would appear that more wealthy areas have larger middle class populations, facilitating local initiative. These are the measures on which we shall evaluate our provinces.<sup>5</sup>

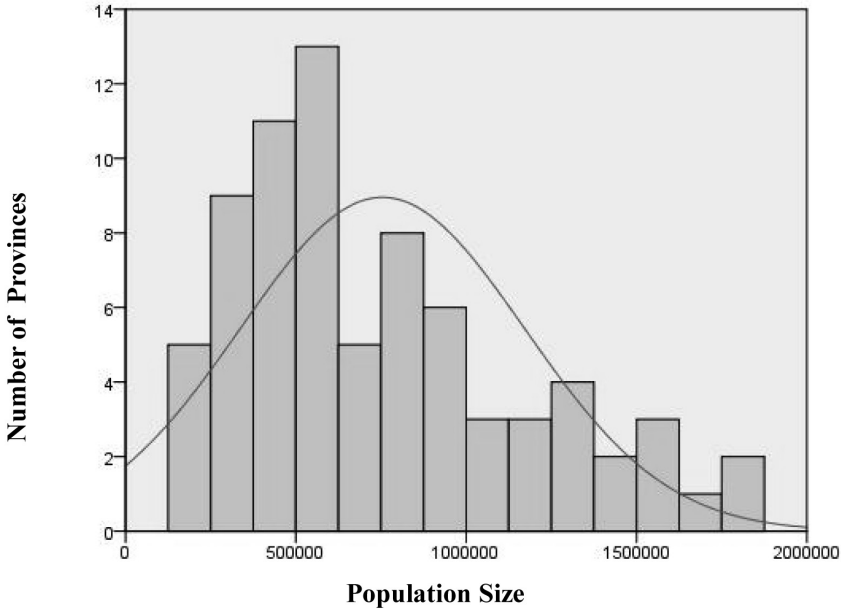
Below we will show a series of histograms of all provinces with relevant measures, indicating where our four lie in the overall system. For the histograms and the data we abbreviate the provinces as follows: CB:Chon Buri; CH: Chiangmai; KK: Khon Kaen, and SN: Songkla.

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<sup>5</sup> We examined the correlation between these provincial measures and found nothing unusual. As might be expected there was a positive correlation between per capita Gross Provincial Product and rate of population growth ( $r=.541$ ). Between 2002 and 2009 there was larger population growth in the wealthier provinces, most likely from in migration attracted by the greater wealth. There were no other correlations among the other variables, however.

### 1. Population

Figure 2.1: The Distribution of Population Size by the Provinces

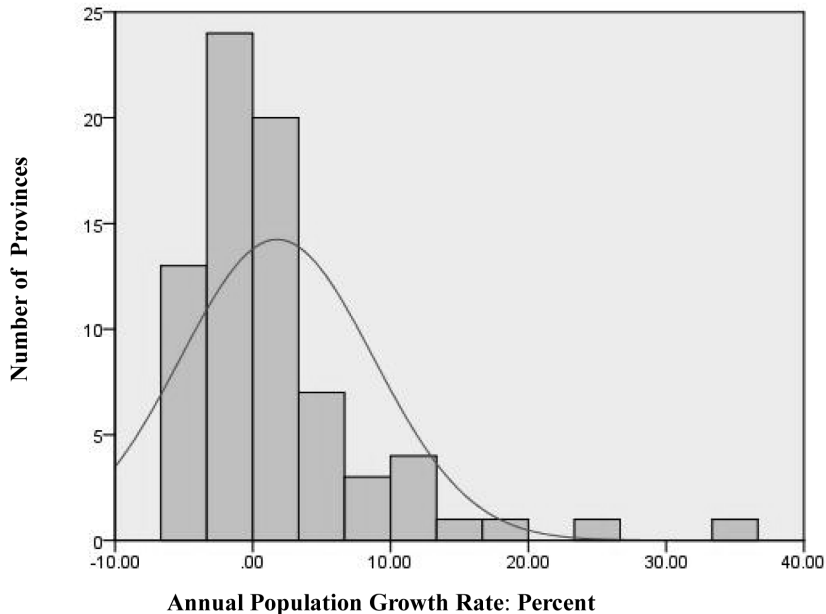


(CB: 1.3m; CM: 1.6m; KK 1.8m; SN 1.3m)

The range of population is from a low of 181,000 to 1.8 million, slightly skewed to the right. The mean is 754,000 with a substantial standard deviation of 414,000. Our provinces are all at the upper half of this distribution with values ranging from 1.3 million (Songkla) to 1.8 million (Khon Kaen).

## 2. Population Growth Rate

Figure 2.2: Provinces by Annual Population Growth Rate 2002-2009



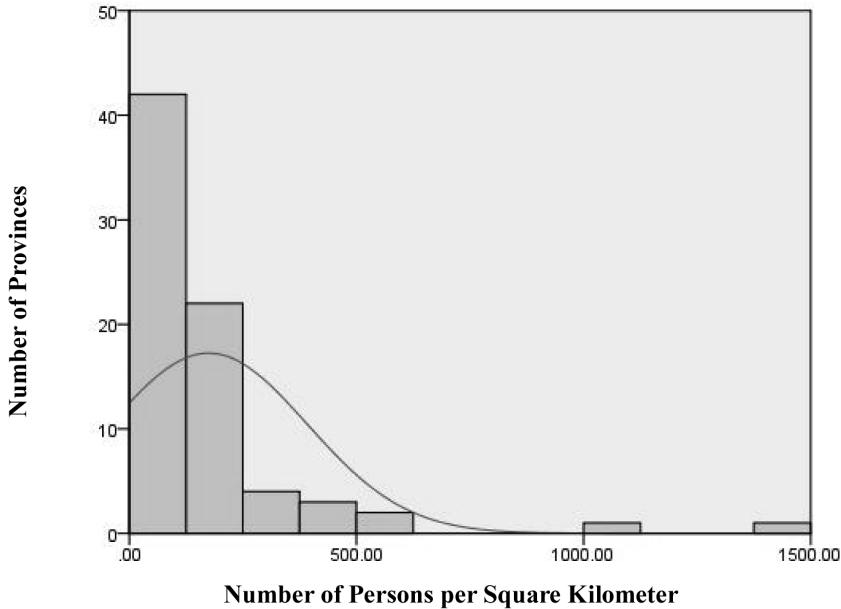
(CB: 14% CM: 2%; KK: -0.3%; SN: 6%)

Thailand's overall population growth rate has slowed dramatically over the past half century, in part, as a result of its very effective national family planning program, launched in the late 1960s. Its overall growth rate is now roughly 0.7 percent per year. The provinces, however, show considerable variance, from a minus 7% to a positive 35%. The overall unweighted mean is 2% with a standard deviation of 7 percentage points.

Our four provinces range widely though not as widely as the overall population. Khon Kaen is losing population, though very slowly; its growth rate is a -0.03 percent. Chon Buri has vigorous manufacturing and tourist industries, and experiences a robust 14 percent population growth rate whereas Songkla is growing at 5.7 percent and Chiangmai at a mere 2.3 percent. Clearly, we have seen considerable more political as well as economic activity in Chon Buri than in any of the other three provinces.

### 3. Population Density

Figure 2.3: Provinces by Population Density 2009

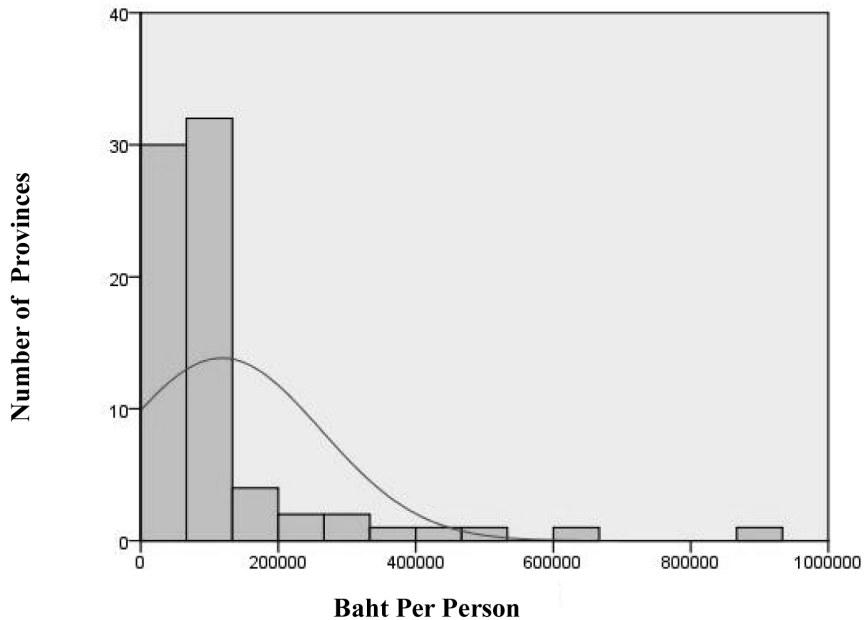


(CB: 280; CM: 283; KK: 162; SN: 182)

Thailand's overall population density is 132 persons per square kilometer. Its provinces vary considerably, however, from 32 to 1,454 persons per square kilometer. The mean is 176 persons per square kilometer, with a standard deviation of 215. The two special provinces, Bangkok and Phattya skew the distribution strongly to the right. Our four provinces go from a low of 161 persons per square kilometer in Khon Kaen, to a high of 283 persons per square kilometer in bustling Chon Buri.

#### 4. Gross Provincial Product per Capita, 2009

Figure 2.4: Provinces by GPP Per Capita 2009

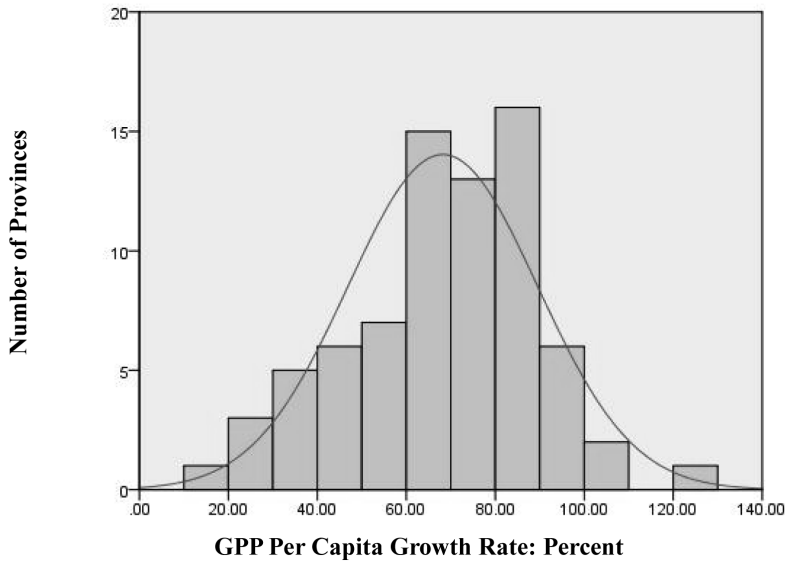


(CB: B398,025; CM: 79,236; KK: B76,385; SN: B105,782)

Thailand calculates a Gross Provincial Product (GPP) and GPP per capita on a periodic basis. Figure 2.4 shows the distribution is highly skewed to the right. The range is from Baht 34,000 to Baht 915,000, with a mean of Baht 118,000. Three of our four provinces are relatively close to the mean. Khon Kaen has the lowest level with Baht 76,385 followed by Chiangmai with Baht 79,236 and Songkla with Baht 105,782. The vigorous manufacturing and tourists industries in Chon Buri give it Baht 388,000 about three and a half times the overall Thai mean, and about four times greater than our other three sampled provinces.

## 5. GPP/Capita Growth 2002-2009

Figure 2.5: Provinces by Growth of Per Capita GPP 2002-2009



(KK: 68%; CB: 63%; CM: 44% SN: 6%)

The growth rate of per capita GPP from 2007 to 2009 shows a clear normal distribution and the values are quite high. They range from 15% to 126%, with a mean of 68% and a standard deviation of 21%. Our four provinces all show substantial growth rates in per capita GPP. Somewhat surprisingly, Khon Kaen leads with 68%, Chon Buri follows closely with 63%; Chiangmai has 44% and Songkla trails with 30%. That is still quite respectable, though it is less than half of the overall average.

This brief exercise shows the overall Thai distribution on a number of relevant provincial level statistics. It also shows where our four provinces lie in the overall distribution. We shall have occasion to return to these data as we move more deeply into the analysis.

## IV. A New Research Strategy

We began this project with a relatively simple positivistic research strategy. We assumed the process of decentralization would vary by province and that we could develop a useful measure of that variance. Then we would be able to assess the impact of decentralization by noting the relationship between the extent or character of decentralization and the level and quality of services in three major areas: health, education and the promotion of economic development.

That proved to be a highly oversimplified view of the decentralization process and its relation to social and economic services. Two conditions in particular have caused us to reassess this strategy and develop a slightly different strategy more suited to the actual conditions. These two conditions are the fluidity of the decentralization process, and the complexity of the government - social services relationship.

### **A. Fluid Decentralization**

Decentralization is an ongoing process and has been for some years. Prior to 1999, for example, all government employees were under a single unified system. The 1999 Local Government Personnel Act created a bifurcated system with two Civil Service Commissions controlling Central/Regional staff and Local Government Staff. The latter were further divided into three levels: Provincial, Municipality (with again three levels) and the Tambon. The two commissions control personnel matters, such as hiring, firing and promotions. Local administrative heads recommend hiring, firing and advancement, which the commissions must approve.

Alongside these administrative decentralizing changes came the election of local officials. This itself has a somewhat longer history. The Municipality Act of 1933 provided for the local election of municipal councils, which then elected the Mayor. In the 1970s the rural Tambons came into being, with a provision for the election of Tambon Councils, which then elected the Tambon Head. Mayors became directly elected in 2003; Tambon heads in 2005. Relations between elected and appointed administrative personnel have been evolving with substantial complexity. Mayors have gained considerable power through their capacity to decide on budgets. But Provincial Governors retain even greater power through his endowed authority to approve the budget. Much personal negotiation is the natural outcome. Mayors and Tambon heads also have the capacity to create some local services, such as schools and health facilities. Local and private schools and medical facilities may be established, but they must be accredited by the Ministry of Education or by a separate Health Care Accreditation Agency, somewhat independent of the Ministry of Public health.

Given this highly complex and fluid process, we found it difficult to develop rigorous measures of the extent of decentralization, or of the relation between extent of decentralization and any outcome in services delivered. In the next chapter we shall see that two measures: the degree of financial independence of local units and their freedom from central intrusion are highly correlated and the overall views of respondents on both issues are quite strong. That is, most people - administrative as well as elected local leaders - see considerable local independence and initiative. But these are views of local leaders; they are not objective measures. Two possible objective measures are available: the number of ordinances passed and the proportion of the local budget that comes from local revenues. The first showed almost no variance with virtually no

activity in passing local ordinances. The second does vary considerably, but it is completely unrelated to either of the expressed views of local autonomy.

### **B. The Government - Social Services Linkage**

Even more troubling is the complex pattern of social services that has grown up in Thailand. For example, The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) has established an extensive network of clinics and hospitals that deliver excellent services even to remote areas and poor people (Knodel et al 1987, 2010; Singha Dong 2004). This is a remarkable achievement that has relied upon an effective mobilization of local community and family groups to deliver the service (Hawkins 2009). In effect, the MOPH has developed its own decentralization process highly attuned to its particular needs. But at the lower level there is a considerable variety of service providers. This includes the Central MOPH, municipalities and even Tambon governments. Thus, any measure of health outputs - infant, child or maternal mortality rates, and disease incidence - cannot be directly associated with specific government units.

The same is true for education. There are Ministry of Education schools, municipality schools and private schools of many types and at many levels. No set of education outputs - literacy rates, enrollment percentages, advancement percentages - can be linked directly to whatever is the condition of decentralization.

Finally, the level and growth of economic development varies greatly among the provinces, as we have seen above. Among our four provinces, Khon Kaen is the poorest, but has the most rapid rate of recent growth in per capita Gross Provincial Product. Songkla is the second wealthiest, but has by far the lowest level of growth. A great variety of conditions affects both the level and growth of wealth. It seems impossible to link these conditions to whatever differences there are in decentralization.

### **C. A New Strategy**

Given these conditions, we need a new strategy that recognizes the fluidity and complexity of decentralization. We shall first carry out the survey described above to discover in a systematic fashion what local government leaders - elected and appointed - perceive as the conditions of decentralization. That will be reported in Chapter III. In addition, we shall carry out a series of in depth focus group interviews with a larger range of local leaders. We will include elected and appointed government leaders, as in the survey, but we will also include local business and community leaders in all four provinces. That will give us a deeper understanding of how the decentralization process is moving: where it is obstructed and where it is facilitated. It will also give us a better understanding of the impact of decentralization, and especially how we can improve the process to make it more effective in providing Thailand with a more efficient and more democratic government.



## CHAPTER III

### SURVEY DATA AT THE PROVINCE LEVEL

#### I. Introduction

Now we begin to examine the data that have come from the field survey work. We begin with a review of the respondents to understand who they are and where they lie in the overall administrative structure. Then we go to some of the fundamental issues of communication, but remain at the provincial level. We examine the vertical relations between local administrators and elected officials and the senators and members of parliament at the national level. Finally, we examine a variety of horizontal patterns of interaction, those between elected officials and their administrative counterparts, and some of those among administrators themselves.

#### II. The Respondents

We start with an overall description of the respondents, first examining them by their province, then by their position as elected official or administrator. This will tell us who the respondents are and whether they differ by province and position. The data are summarized in Table 3.1 and discussed briefly below.

##### A. Age

As might be expected, our respondents are in their middle years. Almost 80 percent are between 40 and 60, with rough equality between the 40s and 50s. Another 16 per cent are below 40 and just over 5 percent over 60. Songkla has a slightly younger group and Chiangmai slightly older, but those differences are slight and not statistically significant.

There is a rough similarity in the age structure between elected and administrated personnel, though the elected officials are slightly older. A fifth of administrators are under 40 but only 8 percent of elected official are this young. At the other end, 17 percent of the elected officials are over 60 while no administrators reach that age.

##### B. Education

This is a generally well educated group of respondents, which is a tribute to the Thai government's investment in education over the past half century and more. Over half (54 per cent) have post graduate degrees, usually a Master's degree. Another 30 percent have a Bachelor's degree, and only 17 percent have only some

college or below. Chon Buri has the smallest proportion with less than a Bachelor's degree (9 per cent), and slightly higher proportion with post graduate work (62 per cent), but again the differences are not statistically significant.

The differences between elected officials and administrators are more important, however. As might be expected the elected officials have slightly less education, 41 per cent below a Bachelor's Degree, compared to only 1 per cent for administrators. They also have fewer post graduate degree holders; 33 per cent compared with 66 per cent for the administrators.

This is one area where we might see some obstacles to lateral communication in the decentralization process, though the situation is rather complex. Given Thai respect for education, it is possible that elected officials will be somewhat reluctant to be assertive with their better educated administrative counterparts. It is also possible that the more educated will be less willing to listen carefully to their less educated elected colleagues. At the same time, age is also highly respected in Thailand and we saw that elected officials were slightly older than administrators. Thus administrators might be more deferential to their elder elected officials. We shall have to be attentive to this issue when we examine both horizontal and vertical communications.

### **C. Gender**

As in the rest of Southeast Asia, and quite unlike South Asia, Thai women are very much in public life. They are well educated and are fully active in the market place and in virtually all occupations and professions. In this respect our sample is no different. Males comprise overall 60 per cent of respondents; females 40 per cent. Khon Kaen and Songkla have slightly fewer women (35 per cent vs. 44 per cent) but the differences are not statistically significant.

Between elected officials and administrators, however, there are more significant differences, and those should not be surprising. Among elected officials only 25 per cent are females, compared with 49 per cent of the administrators. Given the relatively open lines of communication across gender in Thailand, we should not expect this difference to have an important impact on the decentralization process, but we shall be attentive to it nonetheless. Here is a typical question of a glass being half empty or half full. We can note that in our sample a quarter of elected officials are women and that women are indeed active in the political sphere. After all, Thailand does have a female prime minister. One can also be impressed at the number of women in the government bureaucracy, where intelligence exams are a part of the recruitment process. We shall, of course, be attentive to questions of the impact of gender on decentralization communications processes.

## D. Time in Office

Overall about a third of the respondents are relatively new to their positions, being in residence only one or two years. A quarter have three to five years in position; another one fifth six to eight years and only 18 percent have more than eight years in position. Khon Kaen respondents have a few more years and Chon Buri respondents a few less years, but the differences are not statistically significant.

Administrators are slightly younger in position than elected officials: 38 per cent of administrators and only 30 per cent of elected officials have 1 or 2 years' experience. Elected officials are more numerous at the 3-5 year level, but after that both groups have the same proportions in tenure greater than 5 years.

Table 3.1 Respondents' Characteristics\*

Characteristic	Khon Kaen	Ch'buri	Ch'mai	Sngkla	Elec	Adm
<b>AGE</b>						
<40	7 12%	10 14%	11 19%	13 21%	8 8%	33 22%
40-49	25 43%	30 54%	15 25%	26 43%	35 35%	61 41%
50-59	19 33%	25 36%	28 47%	21 34%	39 39%	54 36%
>59	7 12%	4 6%	5 8%	1 2%	17 17%	0 0%
<b>EDUC.</b>						
< BA	12 4%	6 9%	12 20%	13 21%	41 41%	2 1%
BA	14 24%	20 29%	17 29%	20 33%	25 25%	46 31%
>BA	32 55%	43 62%	30 51%	28 46%	33 33%	100 68%
<b>GENDER</b>						
Female	20 34%	30 43%	26 44%	21 34%	25 25%	75 49%
Male	30 66%	39 57%	33 56%	40 66%	75 75%	76 51%
<b>TENURE</b>						
1-2 Yrs	13 22%	32 46%	20 34%	21 34%	30 30%	56 38%
3-5 Yrs	14 24%	14 20%	22 33%	16 26%	31 31%	35 24%
6-8Yrs	18 31%	13 19%	7 12%	12 20%	20 20%	30 20%
> 8 Yrs	13 22%	10 14%	10 17%	12 20%	18 18%	27 18%
<b>AD. OCC.</b>						
Yes	27 47%	39 57%	26 44%	30 49%	85 85%	37 24%
No	31 53%	30 43%	33 56%	31 57%	14 15%	111 74%

\* Due to missing cases the total may vary.

## E. Other Occupations

The final bit of background information we collected concerns occupations outside of or in addition to their positions in the decentralization process. As might be expected the real difference lies between elected and administrative personnel. Overall half of the respondents report no outside occupation; half do. Chon Buri has a few more (57 per cent vs 47 per cent) with extra occupations, but again those differences are not significant. The real difference lies across the elected-administrator divide. Fully 86 per cent of elected officials have other occupations, only 25 per cent of administrators report extra work.

## III. Vertical Communications and Interactions<sup>6</sup>

We asked how often local administrators and elected officials had met their national Senator and Member of Parliament. We shall treat these as two different issues.

### A. Senators

Meetings with the Senator from the respective provinces were not very common. Only a fifth (50) of all respondents had met with the senator. Slightly more of the elected officials (23 per cent versus 16 per cent) than administrators reported meetings with their Senators. The smallest percentage (16 per cent) was reported in Khon Kaen; Chiangmai and Songkla reported 19 and 20 per cent; and Chon Buri reported a substantially higher level at 27 per cent. As we noted above in Chapter II, Chon Buri seems to stand somewhat apart from the other provinces, with greater political activity in general.

The number of meetings with the Senator were few, usually one or two times per respondent; but here again Chon Buri is above the average with 8 people reporting meeting 3 or more times in the past year. Chon Buri is also above the rest in respondents reporting that they are “close to” the Senator. Table 3.2 shows the data.

Table 3.2: Meeting with the Senator by Province

	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
Yes	9 16%	18 27%	11 19%	12 20%	50 20%
No	48 83%	50 74%	48 81%	49 80%	196 80%
Total	57 100%	68 100%	59 100%	61 100%	246 100%

<sup>6</sup> In all tables that follow, missing cases are not included. Virtually all tables having missing cases, but their numbers are usually below 5.

As might be expected, elected officials met more frequently with their senators than did administrators, which we see in Table 3.3

Table 3.3 Meeting with Senator by Position

	Elected	Administrator	Total
Yes	27 27%	24 16%	51 21%
No	72 73%	124 84%	195 79%
Total	99 100%	148 100%	246 100%

With relatively small numbers of meetings, we cannot say much about the type of support Senators gave. There are small numbers of respondents reporting assistance in budgetary issues, technical issues, and promoting local legislation.

It is not surprising that few elected officials or administrators report interactions with Senators. Senators hold a lofty position in government and are not really deeply embedded in the people. A recent survey of COLA asking people how they felt about government officers gave the lowest rating to senators. Without them, life would be no different.<sup>7</sup> Add to this the structural condition that Senators cannot serve a second consecutive term, and we see they have little incentive to go to the people for popular support.

## B. Members of Parliament

Local elected officials and administrators have considerably more contact with their local Members of Parliament (MP). The situation is almost the reverse of that with Senators. Table 3.4 shows meetings with MP by province, and table 3.5 shows such meetings by position.

Table 3.4: Meetings with Member of Parliament by Province

	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
Yes	38 68%	56 81%	40 68%	38 62%	173 70%
No	18 32%	13 19 %	19 32%	23 38 %	73 30 %

<sup>7</sup> This was a common view expressed almost everywhere by the survey respondents in a non published document, due to its sensitive nature.

Table 3.5: Meetings with Members of Parliament by Position

	Elected	Administrator	Total
Yes	83 84%	90 61%	173 70%
No	16 16%	57 39%	73 30%
Total	99 100%	147 100%	246 100%

Almost three quarters of all respondents have met with the MP. Again, Chon Buri reports the most activity with over 80 per cent reporting a meeting. The other three provinces report roughly two thirds meeting the MP. Again it is the elected members who dominate these, with more than 80 per cent reporting meeting. But the administrators are not absent since almost two thirds, a real majority, report such meetings.

Table 3.6 Mean Number of Meetings with Members of Parliament by Province

	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla
Mean number Of meetings	3.7	11.1	3.9	4.1

Table 3.7 Mean number of Meeting with MP: Elected and Administrator

	Elected	Administrator
Mean number of Meetings	8.7	3.7

We get much the same pattern when we count the mean number of meetings with the MPs reported by province and elected-administrator status. There is much more interaction in Chon Buri, with very similar levels for other three. And elected officials overall meet more than twice as often as do administrators.

With more meetings reported, it is reasonable to assume those meetings would be more frequent, more supporting and more helpful. A third of respondents report being “close” to the MP and two-thirds report that the MP is supportive. Meetings with the MP are more frequent, with some reporting monthly or more frequencies. In both cases Chon Buri is again the leader. Respondents report assistance in budgetary matters (53 per cent), but in other areas a quarter or less of the respondents report support.

Overall Senators provide little contact, support or vertical communication with local administrators or elected officials. Members of Parliament are more active in communication, meeting and support. Most of that contact flows through the elected

officials, but administrators are not excluded. With more than half of administrators and more than four-fifths of elected officials reporting contact and support, we can assume that the national political system is intact with local administration in Thailand. This level of communication and interaction is necessary for promoting the decentralization process and adapting it to the views and needs of the lower level workers.

#### IV. Horizontal Communications and Interactions

We asked a number of questions about the relations and interactions between various local officials. For example, we asked Mayors, Deputy Mayors (elected) and Clerks and Deputy Clerks (administrative) how well they supported one another and how much they knew about the others’ work. We also asked the administrators how well they knew one another’s work and how much they supported one another. These are two arenas in which we could ask about horizontal interactions. The responses are overwhelmingly positive, suggesting a positive bias or a reluctance to discuss difficulties. Here we also begin to face problems of relatively small numbers, which will increase as we go to more detailed positions. At least this allows us to simplify the tables, since it is usually not necessary to calculate percentages.

Tables 3.8 through 3.12 show us that both elected and administrative people feel they have good support from one another and that they understand each other’s work, and this holds across all provinces. If this is not simply a general positive speaking bias, it speaks well for the prospects of continued decentralization.

##### A. Mayor-Clerk

##### 1. Support Each Other

Table 3.8 Reported Mayor-Clerk Support by Provinces

Response	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
Yes	10	13	13	12	48
No	1	0	0	0	1
Total	11	13	13	12	49

(There were 2 missing cases)

Table 3.9 Mayor Clerk Support by Position

Response	Elected	Administrative	Total
Yes	24	24	48
No	1	0	1
Total	25	24	49

## 2. Understand Each Other's Work

Table 3.10: Mayor-Clerk Understand by Province

Response	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
Yes	10	13	13	12	48
No	1	0	0	0	1
Total	11	13	13	12	49

Table 3.11: Mayor-Clerk Understand by Position

Response	Elected	Administrative	Total
Yes	25	23	48
No	0	0	0
Total	25	24	48

### B. Administrators Views

We asked administrators two questions about the position of local government. First we asked about the extent of intra-administrative support and knowledge. Then we asked them their view on the elected officials.

#### 1. Intra-administrative Knowledge and Support

We asked the support and knowledge question of all the administrators themselves. How much did they support and how well did they understand each other's work. Again, we get suspiciously high positive responses. In these questions only 73 of the 135 respondents said there did little understand or support. This hardly needs percentages to tell the story.

Table 3.12 Intra-Administrative Support and Knowledge

Response	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
Support					
Yes	31	41	34	33	139
No	0	1	0	2	3
Understand					
Yes	29	40	33	33	135
No	2	2	1	2	7



## 2. Views of Elected Officials

We asked our administrators about their views of the elected officials in their areas. Here is an area commonly thought to contain much tension. It is often thought that the administrators do not value their elected counterparts and did not find them useful. Our experience was quite different. First we examine the administrators' views of the *Competence* and their views of the *Leadership Quality* of elected officials.

Table 3.13: Administrators Rankings of The Competence of Elected Officials by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
2 (Low)	0 0%	1 2%	0 0%	3 9%	4 2%
3	4 12%	5 9%	3 9%	8 25%	20 14%
4	9 26%	23 43%	18 51%	10 31%	60 42%
5 (high)	21 62%	14 26%	14 40%	11 35%	60 42%
Total	34 100%	43 100%	35 100%	32 100%	144 100%
Mean Score	4.5	4.2	4.3	3.9	4.2

Overall, the administrators are well pleased with the competence of the elected officials. The greatest satisfaction is found in Khon Kaen, the least in Songkla.

Table 3.14: Administrators Rankings of the Leadership Quality of Local Elected Officials

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
1 (Low)	0	0	0	1 3%	1 1%
2	0	1 2%	0	1 3%	2 1%
3	3 9%	3 7%	2 6%	9 27%	17 12%
4	7 21%	18 42%	18 50%	11 33%	52 36%
5 (high)	23 33%	21 49%	16 44%	11 33%	71 50%
Total	33 100%	43 100%	34 100%	33 99%	143 100%
Mean Score	4.6	4.4	4.4	3.9	4.3

In both cases local administrators gave rather high marks to the elected leaders for competence and leadership quality.

We probed for the reasons for the judgments. Only four characteristics received comments by a substantial minority of respondents. Visionary leadership (43) and Responsiveness to people’s interests (50), Conflict Management ability (41) and showing Respect for Others (32) seemed important. We show these by province. Chon Buri appears somewhat more impressed with these characteristics, and Songkla somewhat less than others, but we are reluctant to make much of these findings since there are so few respondents who gave answers.

Table 3.15: Perceived Visionary Leadership and Responsiveness of Elected Leaders by Province

Response	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
Visionary	13	15	8	7	43
Responsive	12	15	16	7	50
Conflict Mgt	8	16	11	16	41
Respect for Others	10	12	5	5	32

Other characteristics reported by a scattering of 14-28 respondents included effective networking and coordination and effective budgeting.

### C. Views of All: Central - Local Relations and Local Capacities

Now we turn our attention to a series of question we put to all elected officials and local administrators. They concern first the interactions with the Governor, or in some cases the District Officer, and secondly their views on the capacity for local government. This speaks to a core issue of the current decentralization process. It is well understood that Thailand has devolved considerable power and authority to local bodies, but that this is still “...subject to significant oversight by centrally-appointed official” (World Bank 2012, p. 4). In part this reflects a central bureaucratic perception that local units lack the capacity to govern effectively. This section asks local leaders to reflect of their own capacities.

#### 1. Governor - Local Administration Organization Coordination

We asked all respondents to evaluate the coordination between the Governor and the Local Administration Organization (LAO). Tables 3.16 and 3.17 provide the results by province and by status.

Table 3.16: Scores of Perceived Governor - LAO Coordination by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
1 (Low)	0 0%	1 2%	0 0%	1 3%	2 1%
2	3 6%	1 2%	2 4%	5 9%	11 5%
3	8 17%	6 9%	15 27%	20 34%	49 22%
4	17 35%	25 38%	21 38%	20 34%	83 37%
5 (high)	20 42%	32 49%	17 31%	12 21%	81 35%
Total	48 100%	65 100%	55 100%	58 100%	226 100%
Mean Score	4.1	4.3	3.8	3.6	4.0

Table 3.17: Scores of Perceived Governor - LAO Coordination by Status

Score	Elected	Administrative	Total
1	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%
2	9 11%	2 1%	11 5%
3	14 17%	35 25%	49 22%
4	24 28%	59 42%	83 37%
5	37 44%	44 31%	81 36%
Total	85 100%	141 100%	226 100%
Mean Score	4.0	4.0	4.0

Interestingly, and contrary to common expectations, there is substantial satisfaction with the Governor - LAO coordination in all provinces, and among both elected officials and administrators. Songkla and Chiangmai are slightly lower and Chon Buri and Khon Kaen slightly higher. (The differences are statistically significant.) On further probing nearly half (40-50%) reported good relations between the levels and a few (circa 15%) reported that they worked as a team. This is an encouraging finding. That is, we can be confident that as decentralization proceeds, the local officials and administrators can look forward to productive relationships between the local and provincial levels. On the other hand, if local leaders are satisfied with the ways the systems works now they may not wish to press for further decentralization. Also see the discussion of tables 3.20 and 3.21 below.

## 2. Views of Capacity to Govern

A second dimension of central - local relations is the autonomy from central prescription. In large part, this depends on the capacity of local government and to provide services without central prescription. Thus one asked how much *capacity* the local government has to govern without intrusion by the central government. Overall the respondents felt there was quite a high degree of local capacity. By province, Khon Kaen felt the most capacity, followed by Chiangmai and Chon Buri, with Songkla perceiving the least (but still substantial) capacity. By position, the elected leaders perceived greater local capacity than did the administrators, though the differences were not very large.

Table 3.18: Scores of Perceived Local Capacity to Govern by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
1 (Low)	1 2%	0 0%	1 2%	2 4%	4 2%
2	2 4%	2 3%	1 2%	5 9%	10 4%
3	8 17%	14 22%	11 19%	8 14%	41 18%
4	10 21%	28 44%	22 38%	22 39%	82 36%
5 (High)	27 56%	20 31%	23 40%	20 35%	90 40%
Total	48 100%	64 100%	58 100%	57 100%	227 100%
Mean Score	4.2	4.0	4.1	3.9	4.1

Table 3.19 Scores of Perceived Local Capacity to Govern by Status

Score	Elected	Administrative	Total
1 (Low)	2 2%	2 1%	4 2%
2	3 3%	7 5%	10 4%
3	14 16%	27 20%	41 18%
4	29 33%	53 38%	82 36%
5 (High)	41 46%	49 36%	90 40%
Total	89 100%	138 100%	227 100%
Mean Score	4.2	4.0	4.1

Probing further, we found about a fifth of respondents speaking specifically of capacity in policy formation (table not shown). All provinces were roughly equal, though more of the administrators than the elected officials (25% vs 10%) saw this type of capacity. Further, about half of the respondent noted high budgetary capacities; by province Chon Buri and Songkla reported the highest (65%) while Khon Kaen (37%) and Chiangmai (25%) saw less budgetary capacity. There was no difference between elected official and administrators on this issue, in both cases about half noted budgetary intervention.

### 3. Views on Budgetary Capacity

A third dimension of central-local relations concerns the perceived capacity of local government to engage responsibility in financial activities, or budgetary capacity. Does the local unit have the capacity to plan financial activities, to budget and to spend responsibly without prescription from the central government? Tables 3.20 and 3.21 show the respondents' scores on perceived budgetary capacity.

Table 3.20: Perceived Budgetary Capacity by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
1 (Low)	1 2%	2 3%	1 2%	1 2%	5 2%
2	4 7%	1 2%	0 0%	5 9%	10 4%
3	2 4%	17 28%	12 20%	12 21%	43 19%
4	10 19%	19 31%	23 39%	21 36%	73 32%
5 (high)	37 69%	22 36%	23 39%	19 33%	101 44%
Total	54 100%	61 100%	59 100%	58 100%	232 100%
Mean Score	4.4	4.0	4.1	3.9	4.1

Table 3.21: Perceived Budgetary Capacity by Status

Score	Elected	Administrative	Total
1(Low)	2 2%	3 2%	5 2%
2	3 3%	7 5%	10 4%
3	19 20%	24 17%	43 19%
4	27 29%	46 33%	73 32%
5(High)	42 45%	59 42%	101 44%
Total	93 100%	139 100%	232 100%
Mean Score	4.1	4.1	4.1

Most respondents (70+%) gave high scores for budgetary capacity. Most respondents feel they have a substantial amount of capacity to budget and use funds responsibly. Khon Kaen respondents are the most positive, those from Songkla the least, though even there two thirds give the two highest scores. There is little difference by elected or administrative position. This is an especially positive finding, since local discretion in funding assures that the people closest to the problem decide how to address it with the resources they have. It is always extremely frustrating when local officials find there are central resources whose use is rigidly designed and often quite inappropriate to local conditions. When probed further on this issue quite a number of respondents (58%) suggested that certain rules should be amended to provide greater flexibility in the use of central resources.

At present, the Governor must approve the budgets of the PAO, City and Town Municipalities. The district officers must approve the budgets of the Tambon Municipalities and the TAOs. District Officers and Governors are closely linked appointed officers of the central government. This gives the central government great power over what LAOs can do and the kinds of initiative they can exercise. We shall see in the next chapter that this issue raises strongly expressed opinions from local people.

These last two issues deserve more emphasis. The Thai government has devolved much responsibility and authority, but it has also retained powerful central oversight over the initiatives and actions of the local units. The center retains control in large part due to perceptions that local units lack the capacity to act effectively and responsibly. This is tantamount to suggesting the local units cannot do it. Here we find the local units responding with a very loud and emphatic, “Yes We Can!”

#### **D. Democratic Values**

We believe that Local government and decentralization are the foundation of democracy.<sup>8</sup>Therefore, in this study we assess the extent to which some basic democratic values are being put into practice. First we asked how much the local governance systems *listen to people's needs*. Another asked how much people are *encouraged to put forward ideas for communal benefits*. Finally a third asked if there were local *processes (such as community meetings) to encourage people to speak*. Tables 3.22 through 3.27 provide the data by provinces and by elected-administrative leaders. Let us lay out those tables then provide a discussion.

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<sup>8</sup> The Motto of the College of Local Administration is “Local Government is the Foundation of Democracy.”

Table 3.22: Listen to People's Needs by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
NR	1 2%	0 0%	2 3%	1 2%	4 2%
1 (Low)	0 0%	0 0%	1 2%	2 3%	3 1%
2	0 0%	1 1%	1 2%	7 12%	9 4%
3	3 5%	4 6%	5 9%	10 17%	22 9%
4	21 36%	21 30%	34 58%	24 40%	100 41%
5 (high)	33 57%	43 62%	16 27%	16 27%	108 44%
Total	58 100%	69 100%	59 100%	60 100%	246 100%
Mean Score	4.45	4.54	3.99	3.70	4.17

Table 3.23: Listen to People's Need by Status

Score	Elected	Administrative	Total
NR	3 3%	1 1%	4 2%
1(Low)	2 2%	1 1%	3 1%
2	4 4%	5 3%	9 4%
3	6 6%	16 11%	22 9%
4	35 36%	65 44%	100 41%
5(High)	48 49%	60 41%	108 44%
Total	98 100%	148 100%	246 100%
Mean Score	4.16	4.18	3.72

Table 3.24: Encouraging Communal Benefits by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
NR	3 5%	1 2%	3 5%	5 9%	12 5%
1 (Low)	0 0%	0 0%	1 2%	2 4%	3 1%
2	0 0%	2 3%	2 4%	4 7%	8 3%
3	13 22%	6 9%	13 23%	15 26%	47 20%
4	20 35%	27 40%	24 42%	18 32%	89 35%
5 (high)	22 38%	31 46%	14 25%	13 23%	80 34%
Total	58 100%	67 100%	57 100%	57 100%	239 100%
Mean Score	4.62	4.25	3.68	3.37	3.88

Table 3.25: Encouraging Communal Benefits by Status

Score	Elected	Administrative	Total
NR	5 5%	7 5%	12 5%
1(Low)	0 0%	3 2%	3 1%
2	3 3%	5 4%	8 3%
3	20 21%	27 19%	47 20%
4	35 36%	54 38%	89 37%
5(High)	34 35%	46 32%	80 34%
Total	97 100%	142 100%	239 100%
Mean Score	3.88	3.08	3.83

The six tables show an interesting pattern. First all measures are largely positive: most respondents in all provinces and both elected officials and administrators see much interest in the popular voice and good processes of eliciting that voice. Second, there is no difference between elected official and administrators; 70% or more of both



see high capacities for eliciting and hearing popular voice. By province, however, there is a distinct and stable pattern. Chon Buri rates the highest on all three with percentages from 70 to 90%. At the other end, Songkla rates lowest on all three with percentages 50-65%. Overall, then, our local leaders, both elected and appointed, appear to understand this fundamental link between democracy and local government and they seem quite firmly committed to sustaining this linkage.

Table 3.26: Processes for People Speaking by Province

Score	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
NR	1	2	5	1	9
	2	3%	9%	2%	4%
1 (Low)	0	2	0	4	6
	0%	3%	0%	7%	3%
2	6	3	0	7	16
	11%	5%	0%	12%	7%
3	15	8	10	12	45
	26%	12%	18%	21%	19%
4	17	20	28	15	80
	30%	30%	49%	26%	34%
5 (high)	18	32	14	19	83
	32%	48%	25%	33%	35%
Total	57	67	57	58	239
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Mean Score	3.67	4.06	3.72	3.60	3.80

Table 3.27: Processes for People Speaking by Status

Score	Elected	Administrative	Total
NR	3	6	94%
	3%	4%	
1(Low)	3	3	6
	3%	2%	3%
2	5	11	16
	5%	8%	7%
3	21	24	45
	21%	17%	19%
4	32	48	80
	33%	34%	34%
5(High)	34	49	83
	35%	35%	35%
Total	98	141	239
	100%	100%	100%
Mean Score	3.82	3.28	3.80

## E. Local Revenues and the Budget

One of the possible objective measures of the extent of decentralization is the proportion of the budget that local government generates from local revenues. Table 3.28 shows how the *reported* percentage of budget that comes from local revenues is distributed by our four provinces. Here we also have an opportunity to test the validity of our respondents' perceptions against actual proportions. For each of the six units<sup>9</sup> in each province that we sampled, we obtained the actual total expenditures and local revenues, so we can calculate the percent of the total budget that *actually* comes from local revenues. We show these *perceived* and *actual* levels in Table 3.28. There is remarkable similarity. Khon Kaen and Songkla are identical; there is a slight (3 percentage points) *under* perception in Chiangmai, and a somewhat larger (10 percentage points or about 40%) *over* perception in Chon Buri. We believe these are close enough to consider the perceptions highly valid.

Khon Kaen has a third of its budget from local revenues. The other have about a fifth. Recall our province level figures from chapter II. These showed Chon Buri with the highest per capita GDP at Baht 399,000 followed by Songkla at Baht 106,000 and Chiangmai at Baht 79,000 with Khon Kaen lowest at Baht 76,000. Here there is no relationship between wealth and the proportion of budget from local revenues. In percent growth of per capita GDP, however, both Khon Kaen and Chon Buri showed a very high 68-63% respectively; with Chiangmai showing 44% and Songkla lagging at 6%. It is possible that the rapid growth is in part responsible for Khon Kaen's higher *actual* proportion, and for Chon Buri's higher *perceived* proportion.

Table 3.28: Percent of Budget from Local Revenues by Province

	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla
Perceived % from				
Local Revenues	34%	34%	23%	22%
Actual % from				
Local Revenues	34%	24%	26%	21%

## F. Decentralization at Work: Passing Local Ordinances

One way of looking at how much decentralized management is at work for the benefit of people at the local levels is to count how many local ordinances have been passed, what the problems were and to what effect these ordinances had any impact. Our first observation is that 229 respondents (92%) said they had passed none. This, itself is both a striking and dismal finding and leads directly to some policy

<sup>9</sup> Provincial (PAO), one for each City, Town and Tambon Municipality and two Tambon offices (see Chapter II).

implications. The finding implies that local governments are either unwilling to or incapable of seeing local problems in terms that call for action through passing local ordinances. Local leaders apparently need training in managing local ordinances. They need to be shown how problems can be identified and how local ordinances can address those problems.

Table 3.29: Number of local Ordinances Passed  
by Province and Level of Government

Province > Level	Khon Kaen	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	Songkla	Total
PAO	0	0	0	0	0
City Munic.	0	2	3	0	5
Town Munic.	10	0	0	0	10
TambonMunic	5	2	0	4	11
Tambon	2	1	4	3	10
Total	17	5	7	7	36

There is no need to calculate and show percentages. The pattern is quite obvious. Upper levels of government, the Provincial Administrative Office pass no local ordinances. The lower two levels - Tambon Municipality and Tambon Administrative Office respondents report two-thirds of all ordinances passed. But there is a surprising finding in the provincial differences. Khon Kaen reports half of all ordinances and all ten Town Municipality ordinances are in Khon Kaen. Chon Buri, normally the more advanced and politically active province shows the lowest number of ordinances. There is no difference between Chiangmai and Songkla. It is also noteworthy that the second level of government, City Municipality, report local ordinances only in Chon Buri and Chiangmai.

### G. Relating Measures of Decentralization

We now have a number of measures of decentralization: two measures of perceived capacity (to govern and to budget without prescriptions from central government); three measures of perceived democracy (listening to people, encourage people to speak and processes for speaking) and a somewhat more objective measure of the percent of the local budget that comes from local revenues. It will be useful to examine the interrelations of these measures to see to what extent they are closely related and thus all point to some differences in decentralization with validity.

## 1. Local Revenues and Views of Local Capacity

First, we can ask if there is any relationship between local revenues in the budget and two perceived levels of local capacity. Table 3.30 shows the mean for each of the scores given for the two questions: capacity to govern and to budget. We should expect a relatively strong positive relationship, with stronger views of local autonomy related to higher levels of local revenues in the budget. This is clearly not the case. The views of local autonomy are not related to the proportion of the budget that comes from local revenues. However, the level of local revenues in the budget may not be a good measure of the extent of decentralization. Often where local revenues are collected, it is the central government that works to define those revenues, to assist in collecting them, and finally to determine how they will be spent.

Table 3.30: Percent Local Revenue in Budget by Perceived Local Autonomy

Capacity	Low 1	2	3	4	High 5
To Govern	7%	22%	27%	26%	30%
To Budget	19%	31%	27%	28%	26%

## 2. Local Capacity and Democratic Values

Finally, we can ask if there is any relation between views of local capacity and views on what we have called the Democratic Values. We first present a correlation matrix of the 5 relevant measures in Table 3.31

Table 3.31: Correlation Democratic Values Capacities to Govern and to Budget (Pearsonian r)

Var	Listen	Encourage	Process	Gov. Capacity	Bud. Capacity
Listen	X				
Encourage	.55**	X			
Process	.52**	.52**	X		
Govcapacity	.16*	.09	.16*	X	
Bud.capacity	.21*	.07	.11	.52**	X

\*\* Significant at the .01 level; \* significant at the .05 level

As we saw above the three measures of democratic values are highly intercorrelated, as are the two capacity measures. Of the six points between the two sets, however, the relationship is much weaker, though still positive. Only three of these coefficients (Listen and Process with Governing Capacity, and Listening and Budgetary Capacity) are significant at the 5% level, and even that those coefficients are quite small (+.16 and +.21). When we look at the cross tabulations of scores,

however, the relationship appears much stronger. Table 3.32 shows the cross tabulation of one of these: Listening and Governing Capacity. Two other tables showing the other relationships are almost identical to 3.32, but are not shown here.

Table 3.32: Listening and Governing Capacity

"Listening"	Governing Capacity					Total
	1 Low	2	3	4	5 High	
1 Low	0 0%	1 11%	0 0%	1 1%	1 1%	3 1%
2	0 0%	1 11%	2 5%	5 6%	1 1%	9 4%
3	1 33%	1 11%	5 12%	4 5%	9 10%	20 9%
4	1 33%	3 33%	13 32%	40 49%	36 40%	93 41%
5 High	1 33%	3 33%	21 51%	31 38%	42 47%	98 43%
Total	3 100%	9 100%	41 100%	81 100%	89 100%	223 100%

Here the relationship appears very strong. In the four High-High (scores 4 and 5) cells, we have 149 respondents or 67% of the total. In the eight deviant cells (upper right and lower left) we have only 16 respondents or 7% of the total. We could show seven more tables that would provide the same picture, but will not over Load these pages with the obvious.

In a sense, in the eyes of our respondents, the willingness and ability to listen to the people is closely related to the local perceived capacity to govern and to budget.

**V. A Useful Resource: Positive Orientation and Good Will**

What do these 32 tables tell us overall? They are the views of our respondents, who include both elected officials and government administrators. We saw that they are roughly in mid range of age and that overall they are quite well educated. That should give us some greater confidence in their replies. That is, we can assume that, like most educated Thai elected and administrative people, they know well that the country is deeply involved with the process of decentralization. They had no difficulty understanding our questions and they were on the whole happy to be asked their views and tried to provide thoughtful responses. Here we can try to summarize what they have told us in the context of both the Political and the Administrative systems.

### **A. The Political System**

There are only two interactions with what we can call the political system: relations with Senators and relations with Members of Parliament (MP). The political interactions (vertical relations) are quite distinct. Senators play almost no role here and that is quite understandable. They are lofty, have only one term in office and are not deeply involved in the daily process of local government and its problems and dynamics. Members of parliament, on the other hand are much more active. There are more activities in Chon Buri than the other provinces, and we shall have more to say about this throughout. The elected officials are more in touch with MPs than the administrators, but the administrators are not by any means cut off from these political leaders. This suggests that it is not so much the political system that drives the decentralization system.

### **B. The Administrative System**

Here we have reference to the complex set of five levels of local governing units and the elected and administrative personnel that staff these levels. At the top is the Provincial Administrative Organization, then three levels of cities - Municipal, Town and Tambon - and a rural level called the Tambon Administrative Office. In this analysis we did not disaggregate the five levels; all are treated together in this set of descriptions.

We begin with the relation between the elected and administrative heads of all levels: Mayor and Clerk. We asked about their relations: do they understand and support each other's work. Responses were overwhelmingly positive: virtually everyone said the Mayors and Clerks know and support one another.

We then turned to views of the elected officials - their competence and the quality of their leadership. All of these are reported to be relatively high, but there is difference between the provinces. Songkla reports the lowest scores, which should not be surprising given the tensions in the South.

Governor and LAO coordination were the next topics and here again we get high scores, with Chon Buri highest, and again Songkla lowest. There was no real difference between elected and administrative officials here.

We asked about local capacity to govern and to budget independently from central intervention. On both issues the scores again were quite high. Khon Kaen and again Chon Buri come out highest and Songkla lowest.

There were three questions on what we have called Democratic Values. Do local governments *listen* to the people, do they *encourage* them to request communal benefits, and are there standard *processes* for the expression of popular will. Here Khon Kaen and Chon Buri are consistently and significantly higher than Chiangmai. Elected official and administrators tend to feel the same except for listening, where the elected officials give higher scores.

The budget is always a critical issue and we were particularly interested in the proportion of budget that comes from local revenue. Here we have both *perceived* and *actual* proportions. It was reassuring to find considerable agreement between the two. Khon Kaen and Songkla had identical levels; Chiangmai showed a mild 3 point under perception and Chon Buri showed a higher 10 point over perception. Over all Khon Kaen had the highest level with 34% of its budget coming from local revenues. The other three provinces all showed 21-24 %.

We also asked what if any local ordinances have been passed and were somewhat surprised to find so few reported. The great majority of respondents reported no local ordinances. It appears that in all 24 governance units (five levels in four provinces, with two units of the lowest, Tambon, level) only 38 ordinances have been passed. These are overwhelmingly at the lower levels, and half of all reported are in Khon Kaen Province. This suggests a need to train local leaders to identify problems and search for ways to use local ordinances to address those problems.

Finally, we could examine some interactions among some of the questions. The two measures of financial autonomy (governing and budgetary capacity) were closely related, giving some validity to the questions and offering a possible measure of decentralization. But there is no real relationship between the perceived capacity and the proportion of the budget from local revenues. There is, however, a strong relationship between perceived governing and budgetary capacity and perceived democratic values. This may be said to indicate local leaders have a strong willingness to understand and to meet the needs of the people.

Overall, we have what we can consider a quite positive view of the local governance process among Thai local elected officials and local administrators. They appear to have a positive view of the way government works, of their autonomy and of the overall system's capacity to listen to the public. This is probably a highly useful resource - the positive orientation and good will among local leaders, both elected and administrative. This can be said to be good news for the Central Government. It does not have below it an angry discontented set of local leaders. They appear to trust government and whatever they see to be the process of decentralization now taking place. This should encourage the Central Government to move ahead more steadily

devolving both authority and resources to the local leaders. On the other hand, as noted above, if the local leaders are satisfied with the system as they now know it and as it now works, they might not press upward for greater decentralization.

In the final analysis, we can say that the tensions seen surrounding Thailand's decentralization (World Bank 2012 p. 4) do not derive so much from the political system or from the relations between the political and administrative systems. They seem all to derive from within the administrative structure itself. In the next chapter we shall examine that structure and its tensions more closely.



## CHAPTER IV

### DECENTRALIZATION IN ACTION: LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

#### I. Introduction

Through data collected in the Focus Groups, this chapter will unravel the intricacies of the decentralization dynamics in the Thai administrative system. We begin with a general statement on the emergence, growth and character of focus group interviews generally and specifically in Thailand. Then we describe the structure and schedule of our interviews for this study. Finally, we provide the results of the interviews.

#### II. Focus Group Interviews

Focus Group Interviews emerged as a distinctive qualitative research methodology in the United States at the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research in the late 1930s. The Sociologist Robert Merton is credited with developing the technique and holding the first group interview (Kaufman 2003). The term was coined, however, by Ernest Dichter (2013), a psychologist-marketing expert, who was known as the father of motivational research.

Focus Groups stand alongside large scale sample surveys as major research tools in the social sciences. The “Large Scale Survey” uses large numbers of people selected at random to select fixed responses to fixed questions, then uses inferential statistics to infer conditions and causal relationships. The “Focus Group” uses a small group of people, chosen for their specific demographic characteristics and poses questions in an interactive manner to obtain direct information of about conditions and their causes and effects. Focus groups are now widely used for a social science research and have been even more extensively adopted for market research. Targeting specific demographics characteristics (age, sex, educational groups), they seek to learn what drives consumption patterns.

Focus group interviews first came to Thailand, alongside the large scale surveys to examine population conditions and especially fertility in the early 1980s Thailand was embarking on its major and very successful national family planning program. John Knodel is rightly credited with bringing the technique to Thailand (Knodel 1984). That original study showed clearly how and why the fertility transition was moving so rapidly in Thailand. Older women reported on the economic value of children: they could help with the agricultural work in the busy seasons, and go to find other paying jobs during the off season. Younger women, on the other hand, reported that now that more education is available it is necessary to launch children by giving them a good education. This has its costs. This clearly reflects a major finding in the demographic

transition theory (Caldwell 1976). In traditional rural agrarian societies, children are a net benefit. They help with agriculture and they take care of aged parents when they can no longer work. In modern urban-industrial society, on the other hand, children are more a liability. They must be launched and this requires resources. Moreover, modern industrial societies find ways to provide for the aged to make them less dependent on their own children.<sup>10</sup>In the focus groups women of different ages described these differences fully and accurately.

### III. Structure of the Current Study

In this study, we conducted five Focus Group interview sessions in each province, one in each of our sampled administrative areas, except at the Province level. That is overall there were twelve sessions in the municipalities (City, Town and Tambon), and eight sessions at the Tambon Administration Organization. The sessions had between 9 and 14 participants, averaging about 10 per session. The COLA team specified the type of participant wanted and the local administrators chose the specific persons as participants. COLA asked for actively involved and knowledgeable local people. The sessions were held in the local government office and lasted 2-5 hours. The scheduled duration of each interview session was two hours, but some people came early and entered into discussion before the formal beginning and some stayed after the formal close to continue discussions. Local administrative officers were in attendance, but only for providing information and clarification upon the request from the COLA team. Their views were neither solicited nor recorded. The work was done in the months of July and August, 2012. Dr. Peerasit Kamnuansilpa was the team leader and principal questioner in all sessions. Two members of the COLA faculty were in attendance to take notes.

Table 4.1: Number and Composition of the Focus Group Sessions

Characteristics	Chon Buri	Chiangmai	KhonKaen	Songkla
Number of sessions	5	5	5	5
Total Participants	46	42	47	53
Gender				
Male	16	21	29	22
Female	30	21	18	31
Participants' Positions				
Village Health Volunteer	21	13	8	12
Community Leader	17	24	29	27
Village Headman	6	1	9	3
LAO Administrator	0	1	0	7
Member of Community	2	3	1	4

<sup>10</sup> Caldwell coined an interesting phrase for this change. He spoke of the net intergenerational capital flow. In traditional rural-agrarian societies it is upward, from children to parents. In modern urban-industrial societies it is downward, from parents to children.

Each Session began with an **I. Introduction** explaining the aims of the study and the rules of Focus Group interview discussion. There were three major areas of questions: Effectiveness and Efficiency, Meaning and Perceptions; and People's Roles. Effectiveness and Efficiency were further delineated into four main areas: Trust and Confidence, Responsiveness, and People's Participation and Decision-Making Processes. For each of these three sub areas, specific questions addressed the three major substantive areas of service delivery in this project: Public Health, Education and Promoting Economic Development. Appendix II shows these areas in detail.

#### **IV. Findings**

We organize this section as follows. First we provide a general view of the way the focus groups functioned: how much and how lively was the discussion. Next we review the three sets of findings - Efficiency and Effectiveness of Local Government; Meaning and Perception of Local Government and People's Roles in Local Government. In the first of these, we organize findings under the three substantive areas of the study: Health, Education and Economic Development. In section IV we shall turn to the implications of the findings.

##### **A. General Character of the Focus Group Discussions**

The overall character of the focus groups was highly active. Observers noted that people spoke clearly and intelligently, they were willing to agree and disagree across the table and took seriously their charges. There were sometimes one or two who tended to dominate the discussion, which was guided effectively by the moderator. On the other hand others were fully willing to voice agreement and disagreement with whatever was said.

Observers reported no difference by Province. This is important, since the survey data reported in chapter III did find a subtle but distinctive pattern. Chon Buri tended to show greater activity than others, followed closely by Khon Kaen. Usually, it was Songkla that lagged behind in evaluations of coordination, upper-lower levels of interaction and the many positive statements made by the elected officials and administrators. We saw this as evidence of the chronic tensions between government and society in the South, where religious differences - Buddhist-Muslim -- are marked and often show some tension. That difference did not manifest itself in the focus groups, giving us confidence that the participants always spoke with candor and with trust. We believe the major reason for this Southern trust and openness derives from the character of the College of Local Administration (COLA). All parts of Thailand have many alumni from COLA. It was COLA alumni in all levels of local administration who helped select participants, organized venues and made local arrangements.

The result was a high degree of trust of the participants in the focus groups. No one feared what they said might get them into trouble. This gives us considerable confidence that we shall have fairly accurate views of local leaders on the decentralization process.

*There was no difference in participation by gender. In Thailand, women are as willing as men to speak, to agree and to disagree.*

There was a subtle difference by level. In the rural Tambon, the discussion tended to be more dominated by the Village Headman and the Village Health Volunteers (VHVs). At the same time, others were quite willing to express openly support for points made by the headman. They did not, however, tend to express disagreement, though their silence at some points might be taken to reflect some reluctance to agree. In the municipalities there was somewhat less of the dominant speaker. All participants were more active and were more willing to voice complaints about government activities. This was not a heavily pronounced difference; it was more subtle but none the less real.

There is one additional important point to make. Some of the most active voices came from women who were VHVs. These are positions created by the MOPH in early 1970s to assist in bringing good health services to all parts of the country. We have noted in Chapter I how very successful this has been in reducing fertility, and virtually curing diseases like AIDS and Tuberculosis. They were successful in another way as well. When the Tambon Council Act of 1994 created elected councils at the Tambon level, many VHVs ran successfully for the office. Essentially these women had become knowledgeable local leaders, known and trusted by the community. In the Tambon focus group discussions, the Headman was usually joined by the VHVs in expressing opinions on all topics. Many VHVs are retired school teachers, with an intimate knowledge of local affairs.

Overall, the character of the focus group discussions gives us considerable confidence that we are hearing candid and knowledgably voices from the local governing units. They are not telling us what they think we wish to hear. Nor do they seem hesitant to voice disagreement or criticism of government. Moreover, they seem to have intimate knowledge of local conditions and of how government services reach or do not reach the local level. They also seem to have good ideas about what would work and would not work, and they are willing to suggest reforms that could be implemented.

On our three substantive areas - Health, Education and Economic Development -- the groups showed a high degree of procedural similarity. They had very different substantive things to say. Their complaints and suggestions varied greatly, but the vigor, openness, candor, and knowledge ability of the discussion did not vary.

## **B. Effectiveness and Efficiency of Local Government**

### **1. Health**

The Thai health system has evolved dramatically over the past 60 years. Under the MOPH, a system of provincial, municipal and rural service delivery units has been established, with a constant process of upgrading local units. There are now not only world class hospitals in the major cities, but each of the 76 provincial capitals and the 2,007 municipalities has one or more MOPH hospital. In addition each of the 5,770 (rural) Tambon Administrative Organizations has an effective Primary Health Care Hospital. Almost all of these 7,853 LAOs have an emergency ambulance service operating at all times around the clock, and usually without undue concern for administrative boundaries. We have noted the widespread use of VHVs. The Ministry takes basic responsibility for managing and staffing this overall system, and has organized local units to take on responsibility for Health Promotion and Preventive Health. The system seems to work very well.

Overall, the participants in the discussions voiced satisfaction with the system. The participants generally reported good cooperation between the local government and the central ministry. They also noted that all local governments recognized the basic importance of health for their communities. Often LAOs provide support to the centralized system from their local budgets. They gave local funds from local revenues because they saw the importance of health and wished to have more and better services for their communities. They also saw the advantage of providing financial support to a well-functioning system and for the most part did not wish to take on additional responsibilities of running the local health services. Asked if they would be willing to take over responsibility for medical care services, they indicated they were not very interested and said it would require extra financial support from the center. As one put it: “Transfer or not, we have to take care of our people.”

In Chon Buri, which has a substantial industrial base, a complex system of public and private health plans is operative. The large foreign firms controlling the industry provide funds for local health benefits as part of Corporate Social Responsibility. This is given rise to an important private sector, which seems well coordinated with the city and the MOPH in both funding and service provision.

Most LAOs - at all levels - are also augmenting the centralized health service by creating their own, relatively simple Basic Health Care Centers. They provide therapeutic massage, traditional herbal medicines and treatment for minor ailments. They aim in part to bring services closer to the people, to help them avoid long trips to the larger hospitals. They seem to have come primarily from the progressive evolution of local government. As elected councils arose and gained financial

resources, they sought ways to provide better services to their communities. Helping with health always seems a high priority activity.

In a few cases, Chiangmai is a notable example; the city has built its own hospital, in this case a small 30 bed facility that it staffs and runs by itself, without MOPH assistance. In this and other cases of locally created medical services, we see a problem that is quite pervasive throughout all government in Thailand. In Chiangmai the city cannot compete against MOPH in recruiting competent doctors and nurses. in terms of financial compensation and prestige. This is also true of the local basic care facilities that local units create. MOPH personnel are part of the central civil service system, which is separate from the local personnel system that is lower in prestige and salary. Central personnel are reluctant to serve under local personnel. There is essentially a status gap in the Thai government personnel system that is found throughout the government, in all services, and probably reduces coordination and cooperation across status lines. It is not clear from the discussion of health, however, that this status gap problem reduces actual service delivery. From the discussion, it appears a modest irritant in an otherwise highly appreciated and well-working system.

Three provinces - Chon Buri, Chiangmai and Songkla - have a special problem with immigrant workers. Both have substantial numbers of migrants from poorer neighboring countries, coming across the borders illegally to escape the poverty and repression they find at home. The numbers of these immigrants are placing some strain on the health system. They are essentially given free service by the Thai system, which produces some criticism from local Thais, who find they are being pushed out of their hospitals and clinics and have to their smaller primary care clinics to avoid the long waits for service in their more developed facilities. Given the current reforms in some of these sending countries, it is possible to project that the pressure of these immigrants will subside in the future.

#### **An Additional Note**

Although it did not come from the focus group discussions, we have another observation to make relevant to the decentralization process, which comes from a recent research project of one of the COLA faculty (Sudhipongpracha 2013). Under the MOPH Municipal Pilot Project of 2010, in 50 locations, control of the local Primary Care Units was passed directly to the LAO. In these LAOs, the local government had itself created two positions for Public Health and Medical Services within its own structure. The MOPH transferred control of the local Primary Care Unit to these municipalities. This gave them the power to hire and fire staff and to initiate specific programs. MOPH also transferred funds, but retained almost complete control over the actual expenditures. That is the transfer

was real, but limited. Sudthipongpracha saw this as an indication of the *empowerment* of the local community and wished to study its impact on health system outputs. He compared the activities in two municipalities in the pilot project in the Northeast with two where control had not been transferred. He focused on two activities that many local groups are undertaking: reducing the habitual consumption of raw fish (which brings liver flukes and liver cancer), and increasing local peoples' physical exercise regimes. The results were quite striking. When local communities had been empowered, there was a highly successful campaign to warn people of the ill effects of raw fish consumption: popular knowledge of the dangers was extensive and consumption of raw fish actually declined. In the non-empowered municipalities, knowledge was very limited and there was no change in consumption. Similarly, in the empowered municipality there were many locally organized physical fitness programs, which also spawned other initiatives such as back yard chicken raising. If broader and more systematic research on the pilot program provides similar findings, MOPH would do well to work out a series of transfers to that would empower local government units.

## **2. Education**

The discussions on education were especially lively, and as we shall see, the political decentralization that has taken place has had a powerful impact, especially since the enactment of the Tambon Council Act in 1994. It was from these locally elected councils that we saw extensive new upward pressure on government to improve education. Though the focus group discussions showed different concerns and different observations at the three levels of local government - Province, Municipality and (rural) Tambon - participants from all levels placed high value on education, expressed strong interest in education, and demonstrated that interest by including education in their budgets. It is a high priority item, on which local people have strong views and strong desires to allocate resources. It is also an area in which local governments wish to compete with Ministry of Education (MOE) school to give their children a better education.

As in health, we found very strong support for education. All local governing units place high priority in education and include it in their budgets. The discussions were especially lively on this issue. One of the participants in the focus groups discussion said that education is important; we must provide the best we can for our children.

There is one other important observation to be made before we review the discussions by government level. In 2000, Khon Kaen city took part in a five country

study that used dynamic modeling to examine Asian urban population environment dynamics (Chanawongse et al 2001, Ness and Lowe 2000). In that study it was found that enrollment in Primary and Secondary schools in Khon Kaen was *four to five times higher than it should have been*, given the population size of the city and the normal age-sex structure. This reflected a common condition in Thailand. Rural peoples recognize the low quality of the village schools. When they can, they will send their children to nearby towns and cities to live with friends or relatives so they can obtain a better education. Ness (2012) observed that this can be called an “exit strategy” (Hirshman 1970), which reduces pressure to improve schools. If parents can send their children away (exit) for better schooling, they are less apt to pressure government to improve schools. An additional Thai cultural trait also undermines upward parental pressure on the central government: status hierarchies. Teachers are high status people much admired as a class. Even higher in status are those who supervise teachers in the Ministry of Education. This makes it unlikely that anyone will criticize teachers, thus further reducing the pressure from below for better schools. This makes the political decentralization much more important. Political decentralization generates the pressure from below that is needed to improve education.

It should be noted that currently Thai law stipulates that all children have a right to 15 years of free education (3 years Pre-school and elementary through high school, grade 12). Local units that take over or create their own schools must adhere to this law. Moreover, the MOE specifies the standard curriculum and regulates to ensure that all local units abide by this prescription.

Unlike our discussions on Health, those on education differed considerably by level of government - Province, Municipalities and Tambons. The greatest activity is at the Municipality.

#### **a. Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAOs)**

At the Province level the greatest activity is not in building new local schools, but seeking the transfer of MOE schools to PAO control. In many cases the PAO is interested in improving education and uses the MOE schools as benchmarks against which to compete. All units under the PAO can opt to remove their schools from MOE control and bring them under Province control.

Over the past few years, PAO have transferred control of some schools from the MOE to themselves. We learned that in some cases MOE teachers did not initially wish to be under PAO control and transferred to other MOE schools. In a short time, however, the PAO schools became superior to the MOE schools; they had higher performance and higher salaries and benefits for their teachers. This led to teachers wishing to transfer back; the PAO was then in the enviable position of being



able to select which teachers it wanted and to choose only the best. All of our participants echoed the sentiment that local PAOI control actually improved the schools. There is also some empirical evidence of this as well, (Vasuwattana and Kamnuansilpa 2010). A before and after study of school transfer from MOE to PAO found clear evidence of improvement. Under the PAO five aspects of management had improved: academic affairs, budgeting and fiscal processes, general office business, personnel management and parent and community relations. PAO participants often expressed considerable satisfaction of being able to do a better job than MOE in managing their schools.

### **b. Municipality**

Virtually all municipalities (of City, Town and Tambon levels) have their own schools, including preschool, primary and secondary schools. They have used their own budgets to build and staff the schools, and provide extensively for operational costs from their resources.

It is at the municipality levels that we see the impact of numbers noted in our discussion of the exit strategy above. Virtually all see this influx of students from surrounding rural areas and they recognize these are a financial burden on the local government. But it is not only the exit strategy that overloads the schools. In Chiangmai, for example, it is immigrant children that flock to the schools and must be supported by the municipal budgets. In some cases the immigrant children bring pressure on the MOE schools and push local students to the municipal schools.

In Khon Kaen, it is the Khon Kaen City schools that are providing the benchmark against which nearby municipalities are measuring their performance. Here we see the reluctance of people to criticize. They did not wish to say their schools were weak; better to say they are trying to improve their schools and use the schools under the MOE as a standard. They provide resources to their own local schools and urge them to be as good as the larger municipal schools. Actually the urge to compete with MOE and to improve their own schools is common to all local governments. Education is important at all levels of local government.

In Songkla the local pride and competition with the MOE is quite striking. There the municipal schools are competing to be better than the MOE schools and seem to be winning.

An interesting observation came from one of the municipalities. On the issue of transferring MOE schools to local control there was one skeptic. One participant suggested the schools are better off run by the experts in the MOE. Local control of schools is fine IF there is a good mayor or elected official. But elected official come

and go, and if you have a bad one, perhaps education will suffer. This person seemed to echo a common perception of the central government in all areas: they tend to feel that local people, especially elected officials lack the technical capacity to govern effectively, therefore central control is necessary. What is especially telling is that this was a distinctly minority view, which was rejected by other participants. We saw in the last chapter that the surveyed elected official also almost universally reject this view.

### **c. Tambon Administration Organization**

None of the TAOs have their own primary or secondary schools. Many have, however, built and run their own pre-schools. In all cases participants expressed great satisfaction with their achievements. All TAOs have primary schools and some secondary school that are run by the MOE. In all cases the TAOs provide money from their budgets to support these schools. They buy text books, computers, uniforms and finance school trips. MOE schools are not generally well considered. Participants complain that they are weak and that MOE budgets are declining. In fact, when budgets decline, it is often because the number of children is declining. A combination of urbanization and low fertility actually means that the numbers of rural school aged children are actually declining.

Tambon level elected officials are said to be especially keen to invest their own government budgets on local schools. It is a way they can demonstrate their concern for the local people and get themselves reelected. Here is local recognition of the positive impact of political decentralization. Those local officials are doing what local people want them to do and should do!

## **3. Promoting Economic Development**

This set of questions elicited the least amount of and the least spirited discussion. In effect, LAOs and local leaders do not see it as their responsibility, nor do they really know what to do to promote development. There seem to be two basic positions here.

First, local governments do see a need to reduce poverty, but their ideas for this might be no more than building a central market for the town residents to buy or sell products. Or for a specific poor person, they may provide a push cart so the person can earn money as a local vendor. They have little sense of how to think about attracting investors or helping local companies to grow. They know the Community Development Department has programs for basic occupational or skills training, but that is not an area of their interest or competence. Another aspect of this view is that all of this is the task of central government. It is neither the responsibility nor the

authority of the local government. All local governments in Thailand see that economic development is the responsibility of the central government.

The second reason is more fundamental to the overall administrative system. Local leaders, either elected or administrative have clearly established and explicitly written statements of what they are supposed to do. The Department of Local Administration maintains this list. This basically tells local leaders what they can do. They do not, and may not, do other things that go beyond the basic list of actions. The list is in effect enforced by budget audits. If the auditors find expenditures for activities NOT prescribed in their work rules, that expenditure will not be allowed even with permission from Provincial governors. Here the highly centralized administrative system in effect severely undermines local initiative and limits what local leaders can do.

One Tambon has proposed to provide an extra service to its citizens to facilitate their bill payment. They proposed to have one office in the TAO where people can pay water, electricity, phone, gas bills and taxes. This is proposed simply as a convenience and a way to cut travel costs for the citizens. It is likely, however, that auditors will not accept this expenditure, because it is not within the legally stipulated list of prescribed actions.

Chon Buri provides an interesting illustration of the inaction on economic issues. It has a well-developed industrial and tourism economic base, with many foreign firms and many jobs. The economic engine is already there. Local government does not question this, it merely accepts what has been done. Local leaders do not know how to raise questions about increasing the economic base; nor is it even within their view. It would be correct to say that the issue is not on their radar.

It is interesting to note that many Mayors are themselves successful businessmen. But they do not see the need to promote other entrepreneurs or other local businesses. That is not their job as Mayors.

Throughout the developing world both the World Bank and UNDP have special programs to promote local business. In the United States and other developed countries as well, encouraging and empowering local governments (States and Cities) to promote economic development, help develop entrepreneurs and build local firms has become a widespread social movement. It is called Economic Gardening. It differs from the more common attempts of governments to lure big investors with benefits, which is often called Big Game Hunting. Although this can provide many jobs and economic benefits, it also has its problems. Economic Gardening, by contrast, seeks to find and support local entrepreneurs who will build successful businesses. This is a strategy especially appropriate for local governments. That is, unfortunately, a movement that has yet to take root in Thailand.

### **C. Meaning and Perception of Local Government**

This part of the focus group discussion was guided by the following questions.

In your view, what is local government?

Are your LAOs and their performance consistent with your expectations of local government?

Does your LAO help improve your quality of life?

What aspects of Thai government need improvement?

The views of what local government is and does are very much affected by one's position in the government and community. Civil servants, for example, felt their task, and that of local government is to follow the rules of government, to support the central government in Bangkok. Their "boss" as it were, is the central administration, often implying the Ministry of Interior. Moreover, they see themselves as permanent protectors of the society, while elected leaders come and go. Elected leaders, on the other hand view themselves as representatives of the people and their task is to work for the improvement of their lives. For them the "boss" is the people who elected them. The general population sees the LAO as something made to improve the quality of their lives. They view the civil servants as technical people who are there to make their lives better. They also view the elected leaders as their representations, not their bosses. At the same time, there was a small area of confusion. If elected officers wore a uniform, they tended to be identified as "government" leaders, somewhat removed from the peoples' representatives.

There was overwhelming agreement, however, on the benefits of the LAOs. All participants felt they had benefitted considerably from these governing units, directly elected since 1994. They found the benefits to lie especially in improving the physical infrastructure and improving the quality of life. They also found the LAO to be beneficial in instilling a democratic mind set in the population.

### **D. People's Roles**

This part of the discussions was informed by three questions.

How can local government in Thailand help improve peoples' lives?

What can local people do to improve local government?

What can the central government do to improve local government?

## **1. How Can Local Government in Thailand Help Improve the Lives of People?**

We noted above that people expressed great confidence in local government and found it very beneficial to the people. This was, they said, especially in the areas of physical infrastructure, and quality of life issues. Since local government is closest to the people it well understands the problems and the ways to address those problems. It is essentially by listening to the people that local government best helps to improve their lives.

## **2. What Can Local People Do to Improve Local Government?**

Here our respondents seem to be relating basic norms of democracy. They said people must be knowledgeable of the working of their local government. They must participate and watch closely the activities of the government. They have to be watchdogs. They must recognize that they are governing themselves and they need to work at that. Ultimately they must select good people to represent them in local government. There seemed to be no confusion about what local government is all about, and that it particularly requires popular participation and involvement.

## **3. What Can the Central Government Do to Improve Local Government?**

We heard the following phrase more than once. *The Central Government must be more serious about promoting decentralization.* Participants are basically saying that it is easy for the central government to devolve responsibility for issue but it does not provide the authority and resources for the local government to discharge its responsibilities. Central control of the budget and of the allowed activities is a critical area where the central government can make useful reforms. LAOs should have greater freedom to plan activities and to budget without the approval of the Governor or District Office. Closely related is the desire to reduce the powers of the Provincial Governor. Governors tend to have plans for the Province and also have complete power to approve or disapprove LAO wishes or desires. Often LAOs in effect censor themselves by planning and budgeting in ways they know the governor or the District Officer will approve, even when they know these are not the activities that would be in the best interests of the people.

According to the current law 35% of the total government revenues must be allocated to the LAOs. At present it is less than 28%. Thus increasing the allocation to the full 35% would be helpful. That would not solve problem of who actually controls that budget, however. If the governor actually controls the LAO budget, it is still central governmental control. Allocation to LAOs is in name only. If the Central Government were more serious about decentralization it would allocate more funds to the LAOs and give them real independent capacity to decide on spending independently of central government intrusion.

Taxation and revenues are areas closely linked to decentralization. The Central Government collects most taxes. Tourist revenues go to the central government, leaving LAOs with the problems of managing tourism. Revenues from mining go to the central government, leaving affected LAOs to deal with the pollution from mining. The LAOs do license all business activities and issue construction permits, but are able to tax only very few items such as billboards and households. In the case of large foreign firms, the Ministry of Industry manages permits and moves them through the LAOs with ease. Business taxes go to the central government. Income taxes all go to the central government. LAOs are not allowed to impose income taxes. In effect the capacity of LAOs to generate revenues from property taxes, business activities or any wealth producing activity is severely limited. With little capacity to generate revenues, LAOs have little real power to take the kinds of initiative that could best address their own problems.

A final point is that the Local Elected Councils need to be improved. Members need training to recognize the importance of their positions. Participants recognize that some people prefer a weak council, since they would rather deal with the Mayor or some other official and prefer to bypass a Council. In effect the council members are instruments through which people can elect good people, participate in government and perform the watch dog functions that are theirs in local government. At the moment The Department of Local Administration does some training of elected Council members and requires that they wear uniforms, which they must purchase. Local people see considerable weakness in this training. Council members are trained to follow the designs of the Ministry of Interior, not really to be representative of the people. This was the source of the mild confusion noted above. When the Ministry puts elected council members in *uniforms* it seems to be trying to identify them as representatives of the central government, rather than as representatives of the people. Though our participants did not make this point, it is also true that all Mayors are in uniforms and must attend Ministry of Interior training.

Overall, local people see great benefit in local government. They know what it is and that it requires their own active participation. They also see that the Central Government has a great responsibility to make local government successful. To do this it “...*should be more serious.*” This means giving local government the resources and the authority to identify and address problems. It means reducing the oversight power of Governor, District Officers and the Central Government.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### I. Introduction

This chapter begins with a brief review of what we have done and what we have found in our research on Thailand's decentralization process. It will then attempt to identify the problem or problems that challenge the process. From that we shall make some specific recommendation about how the Thai government can further the decentralization it says it desires.

#### II. Review

Over the past year we have scoured documents and studies about Thailand's ongoing process of decentralization. This itself was a formidable challenge, which we cannot claim to have mastered. Thailand's decentralization has attracted the attention of scholars, development agencies and government officers on a wide scale. There have been extensive studies, workshops, policy making exercises and administrative developments concerning how Thailand is moving to decentralize its political-administrative structure. That voluminous literature has been revealing and suggesting.

We have also talked with hundreds of the Thai people involved in or affected by the process. A formal structured survey elicited responses from 247 local administrators and elected officials in four provinces, at all levels from the Province to the Tambon. In addition, we had more open focus group sessions with 188 people, who were active, involved local leaders from all levels from the Province to the Tambon. Finally, we have had countless informal discussions with people from many levels of the Thai government, from Thai university scholars and representatives of such international organizations as the World Bank and the various agencies of the United Nations, and from our own rich reservoir of friends of COLA. Here we shall try to summarize the most important findings. We begin by talking about the views of those people who are now involved in Thailand's decentralization. Then we go to the process of decentralization, again as it is seen by the people involved.

##### A. The People and Their Views

There is a curious condition in which the political system seems divorced from the matter of decentralization. Neither local administrators nor local officials interact at all with the Senators. That represents a totally different issue of the significance and utility of the Senate, which is now under discussion, but a topic on which we have

nothing to say. There are slightly more interactions with Members of Parliament, but those interactions seem not at all to be related to the decentralization process. Whatever the legislature does regarding decentralization does not seem to seep into the lower level people who are experiencing and putting work into the process. Whether or not the legislature should be more involved is an issue we turn to in our recommendations.

It is in the administrative system that decentralization is working, or not working. Throughout the administrative system there seems to be good horizontal communication. People know and understand the work of their colleagues at different levels and in different special positions.

There is also considerable ability and respect within the system. Both administrative and elected officials are mature, well-educated people, often with substantial experience in business and public life. The respect is also notable. Administrators tend to view their elected colleagues favorably and have respect for them. On the other side, elected officials respect the technical competence of the government's administrative officers. In effect there is a high quality human resource in this political-administrative system, which should be seen as an extremely valuable asset. To the extent the government does wish to change the system and to decentralize it, it has a valuable local human resource with which to work.

The working between the Provincial Governor and the LAOs begins with a general statement that the coordination works effectively. It is not clear at this time, however, what that satisfaction really means, as we shall explain shortly. Below the Governor there is substantial confidence among both elected and administrative personnel that they have at their levels real capacities to govern, provide social services, and to budget responsibly and effectively *without* extensive intrusion by the central government.

Local revenue is a large issue in decentralization. We found local revenues to constitute between 20% and 35% of total revenues in our four provinces. This was also an area where local perceptions were found to be quite accurate, giving us further confidence in the responses of our survey participants. It is also a highly misleading statistic, at least in the Thai context. It becomes evident further on, that even budgets for local revenues must be approved by Provincial Governors or District Officers and thus are not really locally controlled.

It was striking that the LAOs acted very sparingly, to say the least, in passing local ordinances. We shall have more to say about training local council members later, but here it is clear that they need training. They need to be shown how one can identify local problems that can be effectively addressed with local ordinances.



We were especially gratified to find that basic democratic principles are well understood and their values are deeply held. People do know what local democratic government requires of them. It was also clear that those democratic values were closely associated with local views of the capacity to govern and budget. Again, here is a valuable human asset that can be effectively used by government to promote decentralization.

## **B. Decentralization Process and People's Views**

### **1. A Local Resource**

We talked about the process of decentralization in the focus groups and were especially gratified by the level, candor and quality of discussions. Here we were holding open, highly interactive discussions with nearly 200 local leaders at all local levels. They were deeply involved in the decentralization process; they were knowledgeable and had strong views. It was especially important to find this condition even in Songkla, where our survey data typically reflected the government - society tension that is a major problem in Thailand's southern provinces.

### **2. Health**

On health, there is generally high priority, with LAOs providing support from their own budgets for a variety of activities. Nor is there any strong desire to take over health activities. The MOPH has done a good job, especially evident in Thailand's health statistics, in building a system that gives high quality medical services to the most remote and poorest people and areas, as well as to the more wealthy and accessible. One small suggestion came from a very modest pilot project the MOPH began in 2010. It transferred control over 50 of its 2007 Municipal PCUs directly to the Municipal government. This was a very modest trial, and unfortunately not untypical of movements toward greater decentralization. A recent study shows that in two areas with local control there was greater success in two local health promotion schemes - eating less raw fish and increasing physical exercise - than in two municipalities without local control. This was an extremely limited pilot project, with an equally limited evaluation, but it does point to some possibly effective decentralization even in health where it has already been extensively achieved.

### **3. Education**

On education the process is substantially different at the three major levels of government - Province, Municipality and Tambon. At the Provincial level local government is often working to transfer MOE schools to PAO control. At the Municipal level, LAOs create and staff their own schools in an attempt to improve the

education for their children. At the Tambon level, there are no locally controlled primary or secondary schools; they do, however, have pre-schools and they provide financial support to MOE schools in their areas. There is a rising tension at the Tambon level, however, due to Thailand's powerful and successful demographic transition. Thailand has been a leading example in reducing mortality and fertility as part of its modernization. This inevitably means, however, a decline in the number of children and in education, a need to close small schools and consolidate small school districts into larger ones. The MOE proposes consolidation, which is often resisted at the local level. LAOs give voice to that resistance.

Currently there is much discussion in Thailand on the need for reform of the curriculum of the schools (Fuller 2013). There is concern that Thai students rank poorly on international comparisons and that the curriculum is very much in need of reform. There are also some interesting experiments in various parts of the country, often reported in the newspapers. We have nothing to say on this issue, because it does not emerge in the views of the local leaders we have surveyed. They value education highly and want more and better quality, but they have little to say about the actual process and content of education.

#### **4. Promoting Economic Development**

On promoting economic development LAOs are quite inactive. They tend to see this as the task of the central government and not their concern. We believe this derives, however, from two deep cultural aspects of the administration, which strongly and negatively affect the decentralization process. One is the government's tendency to define quite specifically the tasks that are the responsibility of the LAOs. If the rule book does not say you can do it, you cannot do it. The second is the common central government view that local governments are not capable of governing without strict oversight of the central government. Closely tied to this is the control of the Budget. Governors and District Officers must approve local budget proposals. This amounts to full central government control over spending. We noted above that the statistic using the proportion of total expenditures that are in the hands of local governments is a flawed statistic for measuring the degree of decentralization. Thailand's decentralization in this area is in name only. Without the ability to control the budget, to spend where local leaders feel they should spend, there really is no local government. There is responsibility, but neither authority nor resources to meet those responsibilities.

## 5. Views of Improving Local Government

We have seen that our local leaders have a very clear sense of what local government is. They value it for what it does to improve people's lives, and even for its ability to instill and support democratic values. They know what democracy means and what their responsibilities are to make local government work. Here they almost sound like textbook recitations of civics class in democratic societies. People must make themselves knowledgeable; they must be involved and watchful and must select good leaders.

It is when they turn to the task of identifying what the central governments need to do to promote local government that we get some of the liveliest and most serious discussions. Here they are basically telling us what the problem is.

### III. Problem in People's Views

The single most powerful expression we have of the problem is that "*The Central Government must be more serious about promoting decentralization.*" By this our participants were saying that the central government has devolved responsibility and placed it in the hands of local elected councils, but has been very reluctant, almost completely opposed, to devolving the *authority* and *resources* necessary for local governments to discharge that responsibility. This has been decentralization almost in name only.

It is not quite in name only. The decentralization especially through the locally elected councils has given voice to the people. It has allowed them to make known their priorities. They want good health and they want good education. These are usually the high priorities of local people everywhere. When people get a voice in government their highest priorities tend to be health and education, those things that make life better for themselves and the future more promising for their children. Thailand is no exception.<sup>11</sup>

It is in the areas of devolving authority and resources, and the area of training the Thai government's devolution seems aborted. The Department of Local Administration specifies what the local elected councils can do. If an activity is not specified it cannot be done. If a local council decides to develop a simple one stop payment counter for all local taxes and utilities, it will not likely be approved. If it is not on the list, it cannot be done. Local governments have only the power to develop initiatives in ways and in areas already prescribed. A local council with a restricted list of actions is one without sufficient authority to discharge its responsibilities. The devolution has been aborted.

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<sup>11</sup> In a highly insightful study of the forces that brought rapid mortality decline to China, Sri Lanka, Kerala, India, and Costa Rica, Caldwell (1986) found that government response to popular desires for better health and education was the major explaining factor.

More serious perhaps is the lack of independence in budgeting. All local Council budgets must be approved by the Governor or District Officer. As these are appointed members of the Ministry of Interior, it is essentially the central government that controls all spending. A Local Council without the real power to approve the budget independently of the central government is one without the authority needed to discharge its responsibilities. Devolution has been aborted.

Finally, we have the issue of training local council members. We have seen that local councils are singularly inactive in developing and passing local ordinances. Local ordinances are ways that local governments can effectively address problems that are unique to them and that need some redress. We have said above that the lack of passing local ordinances implies council members need training in identifying problems that can be solved with local ordinances. This is training that is obviously missing from the training now being carried out. The problem is the training. The Local Personnel Development Institution, under the MOI's Department of Local Administration, now trains all key positions of the local government. The way it is done, however, especially for elected council members, strongly suggest the MOI is attempting to train councilors to be good servants of the central government. Requiring uniforms, which local councilors must purchase themselves, only reinforces this inference. Councilors need training in being representatives of the people, not in being obedient servants of the central government.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

We make these recommendations in a rough and summary fashion. We only sketch out what needs to be done in broad strokes. In actual practice, of course, they will have to be finely tuned and legally integrated into the Thai governmental system. Nonetheless, these are recommendations we believe are vitally necessary if Thailand is to succeed in promoting greater decentralization.

##### **A. The Central Government Should Increase its Leadership Activity**

We have heard our local leaders say that the central government does not appear sufficiently interested in promoting decentralization. The best evidence for their view is their perception of the almost complete lack of vitality of the *National Decentralization Committee* which is chaired by the Prime Minister. This committee is housed in the Office of the Permanent Secretary, under the Prime Minister's Office. No Prime Minister over the past two decades has been able to give power and life to promote the process of decentralization process. Nothing indicates disinterest more accurately than this inactivity. Nothing better explains the slow movement of decentralization in Thailand than this lack of political will and leadership.

If the central government wishes to promote decentralization, it must lead and energize the process. This implies activating the *Committee* to plan and implement the legislative and executive processes required to promote decentralization. Political leadership is vitally needed. In the past it has largely absent.

Members of Parliament can also play a highly useful role in the processes. They can hold public sessions in the districts to hear the views of the local population on how best to proceed. They must recognize that their constituents are highly knowledgeable about local government and have good ideas about what is to be done. Listening to their constituents and acting on their suggestions will be the best service Members of Parliament can give.

### **B. Train Local Council Members at Regional Universities**

We have seen that elected Local Council members need training in activating and guiding local government and the process of decentralization. We have also asserted that the training now given by the MOI's Department of Local Administration is not adequate. In its form and process it seems more intent on making elected officials good servants of the central government. They need, instead, to be trained in how to be effective representatives of the people. Regional universities can be far more effective. They have the technical knowledge of legal and governmental processes to impart what is needed. More importantly, they have the cultural and philosophical capacity to understand what is required to be an effective representative of the people. Moreover, the training of Local Council members should be done periodically to sustain both their specific knowledge and their commitment. The training should be fully funded by the government.

It will be controversial and not universally appreciated, but the issue of the uniform must be addressed. There is throughout Thailand a deep respect for the uniforms of the government, and few would willingly forgo the opportunity to wear the uniform. But the uniform signifies exactly what the name says - uniformity. Bureaucracies and the military need uniformity in personnel so that they can be ordered to act in concert. They shun individual uniqueness and diversity of personal characteristics, which are seen as disruptive of obedient action. On the other hand democratic local government requires that individuals seek out and understand the unique conditions and problems of an area, a population and a time, and devise appropriate measures to deal with those conditions and problems. For these individual skills, interest and desires are important resources to be mobilized.

***Local Councilors should be taken out of uniform.***

### **C. Allow All LAOs to Spend 25% of Their Budgets without Approval by District or Provincial Officers**

The current system gives the central government complete control over local government expenditures. We have said that this amounts to an aborted decentralization. Loosening that control will give local governments the capacity to decide for themselves what their local problems and priorities are and how to address those problems and promote those priorities.

The central government has consistently argued that greater freedom in spending will lead to greater corruption. The argument is specious and self-serving. Common views are that there is already considerable corruption in central government, which the central control seems incapable of detecting or correcting. Giving greater control to local governments can help increase the transparency of actions and give local leaders an incentive to watch closely how their governments function (Phakdeewanich 2012).

We suggest a 25% level as an initial amount. We believe less than that would not be sufficient to indicate real commitment and more might unduly burden the local units. They will take some time to learn how best to use their new powers. Nonetheless, the specific proportion to be freed can be an item of negotiation. So too, can the period suggested for the trials. The period must be long enough to allow local councils to learn how to control spending and to see the impact of this freedom on their services and physical infrastructure.

The system should be carefully monitored from the beginning. Universities and research institutes should be recruited to develop an effective monitoring system and should be used to carry out the monitoring. One suggestion is to create a consortium of universities, representing different regions of the country. That consortium would then create a *Center on Local Government Evaluation*. The Center would have the responsibility for developing and carrying out the evaluation. It would have a small administrative staff and provide grants to specific teams of researchers organized on an ad hoc basis to include the technical and scientific skills needed for various parts of the evaluation.

### **D. Allow Local Governments to Take Specific Actions They Wish to Carry Out**

We have argued that the Department of Local Administration defines what a local governing unit can do and that prescription inhibits Local Governments from doing some things that would be highly appropriate for their conditions and problems. A simple legal change could stipulate that Local Governments may initiate any other

actions that are not otherwise unlawful, which they feel are appropriate to their conditions and problems.

### **E. Empower Local Governments to Promote Local Economic Development**

We have seen that Local Government units now take no action to promote local economic development. We believe this wastes a great opportunity and squanders a valuable national asset. Many local government personnel are active and successful business men and women. Moreover, every Province, Municipality and Tambon is rich with energetic entrepreneurs building businesses and creating wealth. This constitutes a great human resource that the local governments are not now using to promote economic development. With initiative largely in the hands of the central government, the tendency is to look for major national and international investors to bring in capital and technology. While this has proven effective and certainly should be continued, it fails to recognize the great potential for local and small business to generate the productivity and jobs that will make the country wealthy. Thailand is exceptionally well endowed with local business knowledge, skill and energy. Local government units can mobilize that great resource and assist local entrepreneurs to build successful businesses.

There are many specific ways the local government can be charged with promoting local economic development. Here we identify but three in what could be a long list. Our basic suggestion is to ask local leaders how best local government can help.

#### **1. Making Local Government an Engine for Economic Development**

All elected Councils should be given the power to create an Economic Development Advisory Committee. It would be made up of local business men and women, professionals and people with expertise and experience in promoting economic development. Members will be appointed by the local Councils. The general aim of the Committees will be to assist the local governments in finding ways to promote economic development. This can be done through identifying local entrepreneurs or groups of entrepreneurs that the government can assist. It can also be done by identifying projects that local governments can undertake. Assistance might be in technical matters or findings investment capital. The Committee can also identify technical assistance in such things as marketing and business organization that can be found in local individuals or universities. The exact form and function should be left opened; giving each LAO the capacity to decide for itself what kind of businesses and advisory groups it wants. LAOs should be encouraged to compete with one another to create effective advisory committees. The Committees should be provided with

investment funds that it can grant on a matching basis. Local Councils can also provide funds to the Committees. The basic principle is to encourage the local governments to find ways to mobilize their own rich human resources to promote economic development. It is also to charge local government with the responsibility for promoting development, and to give them the authority and resources to discharge that responsibility.

## **2. Adopt the Economic Gardening Strategy for Local Governments**

Economic Gardening (Ness 2013) has become a nation-wide movement in the United States and has proven highly successful in promoting local economic development. It does use local public funds to provide tax breaks or incentives to lure outside investors. Rather it uses local funds to identify and help its own local entrepreneurs to grow. In practice local governments create offices charged with finding and assisting local entrepreneurs. Assistance typically lies in areas such as marketing, creating business plans, and finding investment capital. Assistance usually makes extensive use of the Internet for searching data and information needed to make a successful business. As in point 1 above, local government should be given the freedom to create whatever type of organization they feel will be most effective, and local governments should be encouraged to compete with one another in finding ways to stimulate development.

## **3. Allow Appropriate Local Government Units to Issue Municipal Bonds to Mobilize Capital**

Municipal Bonds are a well-recognized and well used mechanism to mobilize capital to fund projects that will earn sufficient revenue to repay the bonds and provide interest. The process is a complex one hedged about with many specific constraints and will certainly not be accomplished easily or overnight. Nonetheless it is highly appropriate to consider the possibility now and to begin the process of providing the necessary legal framework and regulations.



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# **APPENDIX**

## **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDELINES**

Part	Topic (s)	Description/Question (s)
I	1. Introduction of the research team and research objectives	
	2. Focus Group rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderator’s roles</li> <li>• Recording of all conversations</li> <li>• There are no right/wrong answers.</li> </ul> <p>The research team focuses on comments/ideas/attitudes.</p>
II Effectiveness/ Efficiency	Trust and Confidence	<p>1. <u>Public Health</u></p> <p>1.1 Currently,</p> <p>1.1.1 What type of health services do your local administrative organizations (LAOs) provide?</p> <p>1.1.2 Are you satisfied with the health services offered by your LAOs? If yes, describe the type of health services with which you are satisfied.</p> <p>1.1.3 What area of the local health services needs improvements?</p> <p>1.2 In your view, are LAOs ready to take full responsibility of all public health services?</p> <p>1.3 If the management authority over all public health facilities (e.g., community hospitals, district hospitals, provincial hospitals) are to be transferred to LAOs, are you confident that:</p> <p>1.3.1 Your LAOs can manage all those healthcare facilities?</p> <p>1.3.2 Explain your answer to 1.3.1</p> <p>2. <u>Education</u></p> <p>2.1 Currently,</p> <p>2.1.1 What type of education services do your LAOs provide?</p> <p>2.1.2 Are you satisfied with the quality of education offered by your LAOs? If yes, describe the aspect of locally provided education with which you are satisfied.</p> <p>2.1.3 What area of the local education services needs improvements?</p>

Part	Topic (s)	Description/Question (s)
	Trust and Confidence (Continued)	<p>2.2 In your view, are LAOs ready to take full responsibility of all public schools in your communities?</p> <p>2.3 If the management authority over all public schools are to be transferred to LAOs, are you confident that:</p> <p>2.3.1 Your LAOs can manage all those schools?</p> <p>2.3.2 Explain your answer to 2.3.1</p> <p>3. <u>Economic development</u> In your view, can your LAOs create more jobs and organize income-generating activities in your local communities?</p>
	Responsiveness	<p>1. <u>Public Health</u> In your view, if all public health functions are transferred to LAOs;</p> <p>1.1 Would healthcare services provided by LAOs be as equitable as those provided by the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)?</p> <p>1.2 Would the quality of healthcare services improve? Why?</p> <p>2. <u>Education</u> In your view, if all public schools are transferred to LAOs;</p> <p>2.1 Would education services provided by LAOs be as equitable as those provided by the Ministry of Education (MOE)?</p> <p>2.2 Would the quality of education improve? Why?</p> <p>3. <u>Economic Development</u></p> <p>3.1 What are the income-generating activities that your LAOs have provided?</p> <p>3.2 Do you know how many people participated in those activities?</p> <p>3.3 Do you think those income-generating activities are helpful?</p> <p>3.4 Should LAOs offer more income-generating activities?</p>

Part	Topic (s)	Description/Question (s)
	People's Participation in Decision-Making Processes	<p><u>Public Health</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, do your LAOs allow you to participate in the decision-making process that involves healthcare services? How?</li> <li>• Do you participate in the decision-making process concerning local public health? How?</li> </ul> <p><u>Education</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, do your LAOs allow you to participate in the decision-making process that involves education policy? How?</li> <li>• Do you participate in the decision-making process concerning local public schools? How?</li> </ul> <p><u>Economic Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Currently, do your LAOs allow you to participate in the decision-making process that involves job creation and income generation policies?</li> <li>• Do you participate in the decision-making process concerning local economic development? How?</li> </ul>
<b>III Meaning and Perception (20 mins)</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your view, what is local government?</li> <li>• Are your LAOs and their performances consistent with your expectations of local government? If not, how should we improve LAOs?</li> <li>• What is your relationship with your LAOs? Do your LAOs help improve your quality of life?</li> <li>• In your view, what aspect of Thai local government needs improvements? How?</li> </ul>
<b>IV People's Roles (20 mins)</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can local administrative organizations in Thailand help to improve the quality of people's life?</li> <li>• What should be the local people's roles in improving the performance of local administrative organizations?</li> <li>• How should central government agencies (Ministry of Public Health, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Interior) change their roles?</li> </ul>
Part	Topic (s)	Description/Question (s)
<b>V Closing Remarks (18181810 mins)</b>		