

SOCIAL SECTOR DECENTRALIZATION AND HUMAN WELFARE IN THAILAND

*Boonlert Leoprapai**

A. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THAILAND

In Thailand, the transfer of planning, decision making and administrative authority from the central government to the local administrative units, local government or non-government organization to a certain degree may have begun over forty years ago when the Municipal Act of 1953 was adopted. The country has six types of local self-government (LSG) namely, Changwat (provincial) Administrative Organizations (CAOs), Municipalities, Sanitary Districts, Tambon (sub-district) Administrative Organizations (TAOs), Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and Pattaya City. These six types of LSG are briefly described below.

(1) Changwat administrative organization

The changwat administrative organization is the provincial unit of local self-government. It was created by the Changwat Government Act of 1955 to provide governmental services to all inhabitants who are not within the geographical jurisdiction of a municipality, a sanitary district or a TAO. The CAO has two major components: the elected changwat assembly, which acts as a legislative body, and the provincial governor, who acts as its chief executive. The main function of the changwat assembly is to meet annually to pass an annual budget and to audit the previous year's expenditures. Since the CAO's budget comes from provincial revenues, which are usually quite small, it is supplemented by grants and loans from the central government through the Department of Local Administration. The CAO may also receive assistance under the Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) programme involving public work projects in the province. The projects are administered by the Office of ARD within the Ministry of Interior. The governor is responsible for presentation of the budget and implementation of the assembly's adopted programmes.

* Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University, Salaya, Phutthamonthon, Nakorn Pathom 73170

(2) Municipality

The municipality is the most important form of local government in Thailand. It is incorporated to provide large urban areas with limited self-government. Established by the Municipal Act of 1953, municipalities are divided into three classes on the basis of their population, revenue capabilities, and ability to provide services. They are: (i) city municipality; (ii) town municipality; and (iii) tambon municipality. City municipalities must have at least 50,000 inhabitants and an average population density of 3,000 per square kilometre, plus adequate revenues to support limited governmental activities. Town municipalities must have at least 10,000 people with the same population density as city municipalities, and necessary financial resources (or be the seat of the provincial government). Tambon municipalities may be established if the Ministry of Interior is convinced that the area's local problems and future development can best be met by the application of a municipal form of government. The establishment of tambon municipalities, therefore, does not require adequate local financial resources to support their assigned functions as they are supported by the central government's grants-in-aid.

Each municipality is composed of an elected municipal council and a municipal executive board. The council is the legislative body of the municipality like the changwat assembly. It reviews and approves the annual budget and passes municipal ordinances (consistent with central government laws). Members of the council are elected from citizens within its incorporated area with a term of five years. The number of members varies according to the municipality class: 24 members for a city, 18 for a town, and 12 for a tambon.

The municipal executive board acts as an executive body to administer all municipal functions. The council consists of a president, called the mayor, and two or four additional deputy mayors depending on the class of municipality. They are all elected from the members of the council and appointed by the governor of the province. The board has two main functions: to determine policies and present appropriate ordinances and recommendations to the council, and to supervise the operations of the municipality and its employees. Each municipality has a municipal clerk (city manager), possibly aided by one or two deputy municipal clerks, to administer its activities which are handled through a number of specific divisions. The number of divisions is determined by its class and total annual revenues.

(3) Sanitary district

The sanitary district is perhaps the oldest form of local government in Thailand. It is a quasi-urban local government jurisdiction, established by the order of the Ministry of Interior, where there is a concentration of population and an expectation of revenue that might support limited governmental activities, but not large enough to finance a small municipality. There are specific conditions for application of sanitary districts under the Municipal Act of 1953: (a) its size must be between one and four square kilometres; (b) it must have about 100 commercial stores; and (c) a population of about 1,500. In practice, the most important factors are population density and potential revenue.

(4) Tambon administrative organization

The tambon administrative organization is the smallest form of local government. It was first established by the Tambon Authorities Act of 1956, revised in 1968. The organization has as its legislative body a council composed of the kamnan and all village headmen, plus one elected member from each village. Since its boundary is identical with that of a sub-district, the kamnan acts as the chairman of the organization's council. They perform duties in accordance with laws and regulations issued by the Ministry of Interior. Their expenditures are financed through appropriations from the Department of Local Administration under the budget of the provincial council and from the Department of Community Development through its rural programme budget. Since its inception in 1956, the tambon administrative organizations have had limited financial resources and organizational capability. They have to depend heavily on grants-in-aid from the central government which are usually small. Most of them are unable to perform all their assigned duties.

(5) Bangkok metropolitan authority (BMA)

The Bangkok metropolitan authority is a special form of local self-government, created by the National Executive Council Order No.355 of 1972 and later revised by the Bangkok Metropolitan Act of 1975. The BMA was established by merging all local self-governments within the Bangkok and Thonburi boundaries into one government entity with its own unique organization and functions different from municipalities. The BMA government is made up of the BMA assembly and the

governor. The BMA assembly acts like a legislative body, to review and supervise all administrative duties of the governor and his staff and to propose and pass city ordinances. Members of the BMA assembly are elected by its citizens for a four-year term.

The governor is the chief executive for the BMA administration with assistance from four deputy governors appointed by the governor. The governor is elected by popular vote by Bangkok constituents with a four-year term. The operations of the BMA activities are, however, supervised by a permanent clerk (chief clerk), who is the highest official among the BMA officers. Under the permanent clerk are 12 bureaux, each with a director and having different functions ranging from planning to city police.

(6) Pattaya city

Pattaya city is also a special form of local self-government. It is a chartered city created by the Pattaya City Act of 1978 in the image of city management in the United States. The city itself was developed from the Pattaya sanitary district. But the rapid growth of the district as a major tourist attraction made the sanitary district type of local government incapable of handling local problems and urban development. Hence Pattaya city was established with greater independence and flexibility of functions and authorities to the local people.

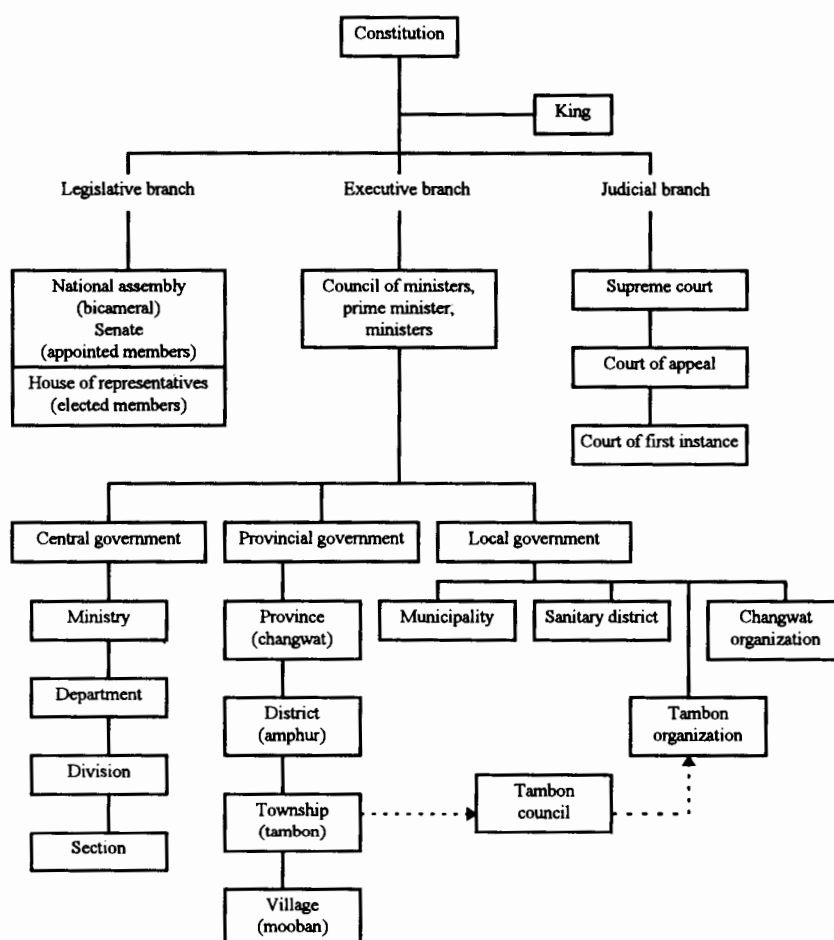
Pattaya city's administration comprises the Pattaya city council and the chief clerk. The council acts as a legislative body and the chief clerk as the chief executive. There is no governor, but a lord mayor who is also the president of the city council. The president is elected from council members of whom 17 members are elected and eight appointed by the Ministry of Interior. Both have a four-year term. The council's major activities are to oversee planning and policy implementations for city development and to pass city ordinances which are not in conflict with national laws.

From the chart of administrative structure presented below, the public administration of Thailand is divided into three branches: the executive branch represented by the council of ministers; the legislative branch represented by the parliament with an elected house of representatives and an appointed senate; and the

judicial branch represented by the courts of justice. The executive branch is divided into three levels: central, provincial, and local administrations. It can be seen that there are two types of local government. One is local government administration by the central government and the other is local self-government. The local government administration, which is divided into provinces and subdivided into districts and, further, into townships and villages, fits into the concept of "deconcentration". Thus, the provincial administration is a deconcentrated unit of the Ministry of Interior, which is further divided into lower levels of districts and subdistricts. Each of these deconcentrated units is headed by a professional civil servant appointed directly by the Ministry of Interior. In addition, there are a number of administrative offices of other central government ministries set up in provinces and districts to oversee and administer their programmes and projects.

Parallel to the local government administration is the local self-government, which is close to the decentralized form of government. There are altogether six types of local self-government units in Thailand, described above. These government entities are created with their legal status decreed by the national parliament. They have a specific administrative organization and functions to perform. They are empowered with limited fiscal authority, which is to some extent outside the direct control of the central government. They are also independent in making certain decisions within their legal boundaries. This form of local government is seemingly a devolution type of decentralization.

Administrative structure of Thailand (as of 1993)



Source: Chai-anan Samudavanija, "The Bureaucracy" in Somsakdi Xuto, ed., *Government and Politics of Thailand*. (Singapore Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 76.

The administrative relationship between the central government, exercised mainly through the Ministry of Interior, and local self-governments is very close financially and legally. The central government exercises a great deal of control over all administrative forms of local self-governments. Apart from financial dependence on grants and subsidies, the local government bodies are also subject to the central

appointment of representatives to supervise their operations and policies. For example, the governor is delegated with supervisory powers over municipalities and changwat administrative organizations; district officers chair the sanitary district committees; and kamnan chair the tambon councils.

Although the local self-governments are creations of law that grant them statutory authority to raise certain local revenues and make expenditures, the authority is subject to rules and regulations issued by the Ministry of Interior governing their functional responsibilities, revenue raising, financial practices, budgeting, asset management, and procurement of goods and services.

B. EVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON DECENTRALIZATION

Despite the tendency to emphasize "deconcentration" rather than "decentralization," attempts to decentralize public social and economic services are not lacking. These are evidenced in the policies stated in either the five-year economic and social development plan or in the form of the policy statement presented to the parliament by the newly-formed government. These two types of policy statement are not so different in substance but rather on emphasis.

(1) The Third Social and Economic Development Plan (1972-1976)

In the Plan, "improvement of social justice" was one of the six major categories of overall strategies of the Third Plan. The objective of which were to provide social services to the public in a more equitable manner and to reduce the differences in the standard of living among various regions and among different classes of people in the urban area. Important measures included : improvement of the standard of living of the urban population; improvement of the standard of living of the rural people; and, manpower and employment development. Two measures which may be considered as relevant to decentralization under the improvement of the standard living of the rural population category were the expansion of community development program to cover the whole country and more autonomy to local authorities (NESDB, 1973).

(2) The Fourth Economic and Social Development plan (1977-1981)

One of the five major objectives of the Fourth Plan was the reduction of income disparities through the adoption of measures to improve income distribution and to raise the living standard of target groups such as farmers, labourers, and others with low income. Various measures to spread the fruits of development as well as social services to people in the rural area to the greater extent were adopted. Consequently, the Fourth Plan contained three chapters on decentralization. The objective of the decentralized urban development strategies was to decentralize the growth from the Bangkok Metropolitan area by developing urban centers in other regions outside Bangkok to help check the flow of migration into Bangkok. The emphasis on decentralization of basic infrastructure (community infrastructure and economic infrastructure) was placed on the decentralization of infrastructure facilities to people in the rural areas. In the decentralization of social services, the policy was the delivery of social services to the rural population with the ultimate aim of eliminating the gap between the social services provided in urban and in rural areas. In educational development, one of the policies and guidelines stated in the plan was "the system of education administration will be modified so that there is more autonomy in policy matters concerning education in the central, region and local areas" (NESDB, 1977). In public health development, the policy emphasis was on provision of health services such as medical care and treatment, disease prevention and health programs for all sectors of the general public, particularly in rural areas. One of the measures adopted in the public health development plan was the decentralization of public health management which stated:

"Executive power will be more and more decentralized to provincial administration. This will include planning, implementation, decision making, budget allocation and personnel control. This should enable provincial administrators to make their own decision in solving local problems with more flexibility. Adequate assistance will be provided to the provincial administration so that it can carry out its functions as stipulated by the law.

Operation plans at the provincial and community level will be prepared and these plans will take into account local conditions and national development policies. Improvements will be made in the supervision and reporting system at various levels. Health workers of various categories will be trained and the private sector such as private colleges will be encouraged to participate in the training of certain types of personnel which are still in short supply such as nurses and nurse-aids," (NESDB, 1977).

In the social welfare development plan, only target groups of the plan such as children and young people, old people, crippled, handicapped and deprived people were identified. Decentralization was not specified as one of the guidelines and measures for implementation of the plan.

(3) The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh National Economic and Social Development Plans (1982-1986; 1987-1991 and 1992-1996).

Beginning with the Fifth Plan, major objectives of the development plans have been to create and maintain the balance between economic and social development, to distribute prosperity throughout provincial regions, to establish social justice and to alleviate rural poverty. Measures adopted to attain the above objectives have been several development programs such as population, social and cultural development program, program for the development of urban and specific areas and the rural development program. Decentralization of social services is mentioned in the work plan for adjusting the role of the government and the work plan for promoting public participation. Guidelines specified are: to adjust the government's role from that of sole provider and administrator of social service activities to that of supporter of private sector, community and individual implementation and to promote participation by the people, especially at the community and family levels, in order to prevent and solve social problems and encourage self-reliance in the long run.

(4) The Government's Policy Statment

The policy statements of the previous government, delivered to the Parliament on 21 October 1992, covers nine areas from political and public administration policy to national security, foreign affairs, economic and social policies. Decentralization of the administrative authority is one of the 15 measures under the political and public administration policy. It states:

"To conform to the principle of self-government, the government will decentralize the administrative authority to localities by having administrators of local governments at all levels being elected by the people and to increase the role and authority of the local governments in the formulation of development policies, the management of natural resources and environment. The government will also promote the status of the local public organizations at tambon level by making them juristic entities and local government bodies in order to enable them to be more flexible and more efficient in solving problems at tambon level," (Siam Archives, October 1992).

In the area of social policy which covers education, religion and culutre, health, consumer protection, workers, children and women and sports, statements on decentralization of the administrative authority of the sub-areas were made. In education:

"To decentralize more administrative authority on education from the central government to the regions and to educational insitutes by clearly defining the scope of responsibility, allowing education institutes more options in implementing policy as well as providing support to individuals and organizations in the community to participate in the administration of community's educational activities through the committee on education," (Siam Archives, November 1992).

In health:

"To decentralize administrative authority from the central government to the regions by establishing the regional health offices to be responsible for implementing curative, promotive and preventive health programs appropriate to problem and needs of the communities," (Siam Archives, November 1992).

The measure adopted by the government to implement the above policy on decentralization is the establishment of ad hoc committee or working group to study or to draft the necessary bills. The "Tambon Bill" which was unanimously supported by the House of Representatives on 3 November 1993 was seen as a breakthrough in self-government at the grass root level. An adoption of the bill at the first reading for further scrutiny by a 42-man special House committee is also considered "historical event" because "similar bills have been introduced in Parliament over the past 20 years but were never approved. A few times they were killed by a disbanding of Parliament by military coups," (Bangkok Post, 4 November 1993). The Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Bill was finally passed by the House of Representatives on 9 November 1994 and officially took effect on 2 March 1995 which was 90 days after its publication in the Royal Gazette. Under the Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Act 1994, there are two levels of tambon administration - the tambon council and the tambon administrative organization. A tambon council, with the status of a juristic entity, is chaired by the kamnan (chief) of the tambon (which comprises a number of villages). Other members of the council are the village chiefs of all villages, a tambon medic and one elected member from each village. The council is responsible for the development of the tambon. It is duty-bound to arrange basic necessities such as water for consumption and agriculture; protection and maintenance of natural resources and the environment; and, welfare for women, children, youth and elderly as well as handicapped people. Its income is allocated from the provincial administration organisation (PAO), the council's own income from management of properties and public utilities and the government's subsidy from the annual budget. The tambon council is duty-bound to prepare its own expenditure plan. It is eligible to enter legal contracts, to be owner of properties acquired from its operations and to have its own personnel without having to seek approval from the provincial administration organisation as before. However, the

tambon council is not empowered to collect taxes as the provincial administration organisation will be responsible for collecting taxes and allocating part of the income from tax to the tambon councils.

A tambon council with an average income of not less than 150,000 bahts per year for three consecutive years is entitled to become a tambon administration organisation (TAO). A TAO will be governed by a council of which members are the kamnan, village chiefs, the tambon medic and 2 elected members from each village under the tambon. It is responsible for the tambon development in the economic, social and cultural fields. It is responsible for providing land and water communication routes, garbage and waste disposal, public health care and public disaster prevention and relief operations. It must also provide water for consumption and agriculture and run commercial undertaking as approved by the TAO council. The TAO's income is from various kinds of taxes. It is also empowered to generate income from the tambon's natural resources such as ores, petroleum, forest and bird nests. There will be a TAO committee --- comprising the kamnan, not more than two village chiefs and not more than four elected members of the TAO --- to carry out projects under the TAO's development plan. There will also be tambon officials to handle administrative duties. Moreover, the TAO is empowered to issue tambon ordinances to facilitate its administration. It is noted that once a tambon council becomes a TAO it will no longer be under the jurisdiction of the provincial administration organisation (PAO). Of 6,781 tambon councils currently in existence, 681 became TAOs from 30 March 1995, according to the Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Act 1994. After elections of TAO council members in May 1995, the process of self-administration of 618 rural communities began. The extent to which these local administrative organizations with the full participation of the people will be able to function effectively remains to be seen.

The progress made in an effort to decentralize the administrative authority on education is "the Council of Social Affairs Minister yesterday approved in principle a bill to decentralize the country's education administration and management," (The Nation, 13 September 1994). According to article 6 of the draft bill which states "for the benefit of directing, administering and managing educational affairs, the Ministry of Education and its departments will decentralize, delegate or transfer the authority to administer and manage both the technical and general administrative aspects of education, including personnel, budget and finance administration to all educational

institutes under its jurisdiction with a view to making it congruent with the education program of the National Economic and Social Development Plan and the Education, Religion and Culture Development Plan of the Ministry of Education. In case it is not possible to decentralize, delegate or transfer the authority to educational institutes as specified in the clause 1 of this article, the Ministry of Education and its departments will decentralize, delegate or transfer the authority to the Changwat (province) Education Committee, Amphoe (district) Education Committee or other official units under the Ministry of Education, as the case may be," (A draft Bill to Decentralize the Ministry of Education's Administration and Management, no date). The draft bill is probably the output of a working group chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education (Daily News, 25 October 1993). Since the parliament was dissolved on 19 May 1985, the draft bill did not have a chance to be reviewed and screened by the parliament. It depends on the newly-formed coalition government to consider if it is still interested to pursue the matter of decentralization of social services further.

Responsibilities and functions for provision of social welfare services to the underprivileged groups of population including children, youth, women, the elderly and the disabled are entrusted to the Department of Social Welfare, Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare. The Office of Social Welfare in each province is acting as the field operating offices of the Department. In short, it is the deconcentration of functions and responsibilities not decentralization. It should also be noted that decentralization of social welfare services was not included in the policy statement of the newly-formed coalition government presented to the Parliament on 26-27 July 1995.

As may be seen from the political and administrative policy formulated by the new government quoted below, decentralization of the administrative authority to localities is one of the eight policy measures of the political and administrative policy area. The policy measure included:

"1. Decentralize more public functions which are concerned with people daily life to local government units with a view to enabling local people's participation in the administration and problem solving. Promote, support and cooperate with local government units in solving problems with consequences and having effects on nations' development such as traffic or environment problems;

2. Distribute more revenue to local government units step by step to enable them to administer their functions efficiently. Amend laws and regulations with a view to providing local government units more independence, flexibility and effectiveness in budget management to be able to cope with the increased income ;
3. Hold elections of local administrators at all levels, recognizing that kamnan (a town headman) and puyaiban (a village headman) have the role in linking provincial and local administration to create solidarity among the people;
4. Allow local government units to have more independence in formulating local policies and more authority in the formulation of policies on administration, development and management of natural resources; environment and town planning; and,
5. Support local government units at all levels to administer their authorized functions with a view to enabling them to respond to the public needs more efficiently and effectively," (Matichon, July 1995).

The fiscal and monetary policy measure formulated by the government to assist in the attainment of objective of decentralization of the administrative authority is "[to] decentralize fiscal authority to local government units to enable them to have revenue in an appropriate and adequate proportion for effective administration of their own affairs." Also at the first meeting of the Council of Economic Ministers on Monday, 21 August 1995, one of the measures included in the economic package proposed by Prime Minister Banharn Silpa-archa was "the Government must decentralize authority to allow local communities to manage local natural resources and decentralization of the fiscal authority," (Bangkok Post, August 1995).

Unlike its predecessor, the new government did not make any reference to decentralization of authority in health services. In education, the policy statement was:

"Support the decentralization of education by increasing the role of local government units in managing and administering education at the level and by type which are appropriate and congruent with local conditions and way of life," (Matichon, July 1995).

C. RELEVANT LITERATURE ON DECENTRALIZATION

Almost all writings on decentralization in Thailand to date tend to focus on transferring of administrative authority of the central government exercised mainly through the Ministry of Interior. At the level of central government, there are 15 ministries including the Office of the Prime Minister. Ministries which are mostly responsible for public social services are Ministry of Education, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and Ministry of Public Health. While ministries are located in Bangkok, most of them also have offices in provinces and districts, maintained by their staff and financed by their central budgets, to oversee their assigned functional responsibilities in the respective areas. The provincial administration is under the Ministry of Interior. There are 75 provinces (changwat); each province is headed by a governor, one or two deputy governors, and an assistant governor. A province is divided into several districts, each of which is administered by a chief district officer, also assisted by a number of assistants. Below the districts are two sub-units; township (tambon) and villages (mooban). Each township is headed by a town headman (kamnan) and every village, by a village headman (puyaiban). As the top official, the governor oversees general government affairs in the province; provincial and district officials from other ministries are also responsible to the governor. However, the governor does not have any direct administrative control over those officials; they are administratively required to report to their central departments in Bangkok, from which their funds are allocated, (see chart on administrative structure of Thailand in page 90).

As seen from the discussion on local self-governments made above, all types of local self-government, except the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration are either under the direct responsibility or intermediate supervisory responsibility of the Ministry of Interior through its appointed officials: governors, district officers, municipal (city) clerks and others. Attempts to amend the law requiring all members of the local administration organizations at all levels in every province to be directly elected by

local inhabitants have never succeeded. The last one was the proposed Articles 198 and 199 of the Constitutional Amendments Bill which had been rejected by the previous parliament (the one being disbanded on 19 May 1995). However, to achieve decentralization of all public services, it is necessary to change the existing relevant acts or to draft new relevant bills such as a draft bill to Decentralize the Ministry of Education's Administration and Management mentioned above. Consequently, most literature on decentralization are either in the form of article or background paper presented at the meeting or seminar. Kooptaratana (1993) proposed in his background paper entitled, "Decentralization of Authority on Education: From Concept to Practice," emphasizing the planned change whereas mobilization of local people's participation is one among six other major recommended activities needed to be taken. Wamananda (1994) also proposed in his article entitled, "Directions for Operations to Attain Health for All by the Year 2000" that decentralization of authority to the community and local people is the first among the four important issues to achieve the goal of Health for All.

From the discussion on the status of decentralization in Thailand, it may be seen that a stride in the provision of legal framework for decentralization of administrative authority has been made. As yet, no single public sector has actual experience in local authorities' implementation of activities. Consequently, results of the study presented below are perceptions of those who are or expected to be concerned with decentralized policies and programs at all levels. Before that, the study methodology will be firstly presented.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Three separate study phases, described below, were implemented in the Thailand country study.

1. The review and analysis of government documents and materials, papers, articles including newspaper articles and news items pertaining to decentralization policies and programs were conducted. Results of this phase of the study were presented in first section of the report.

2. The survey of key informants was conducted by two methods of data collection: an in-depth interview and the focus group discussion. In-depth interview

were personally conducted by the project researcher who has more than 10 years of experience in the collection of qualitative data. When the focus group discussions were conducted, the researcher had been assisted by two or three well trained research assistants. In so far as possible, the Thai survey of key informants tried to follow the type of key informants suggested by the Regional Coordinator in the "Mechanisms for Project Implementation." Altogether 45 key informants were interviewed with the following types of key informants and methods of interview:

Type of Key Informants	Number	Method of Interview
Provincial Governor	1	In-depth Interview (I-I)
District Chief Officer	1	I-I
Municipal/City Mayor	2	I-I
Village Leader (rural only)	2	I-I
Permanent Secretary for Health	1	I-I
Assistant Permanent Secretary for Health	1	I-I
Officer of the Regional Health Office	2	I-I
Deputy Permanent Secretary for Education	1	In-depth Interview (I-I)
Provincial Chief Education Officer	1	I-I
Assistant Provincial Chief Education Officer	1	I-I
Director (Principal), District Secondary School	2	I-I
Director (Principal), Municipal Primary School	1	I-I
Principal, Community Primary School	1	I-I
Permanent Secretary for Labor and Social Welfare	1	I-I
Inspector, Department of Social Welfare	1	I-I
Officer, Provincial Labor and Social Welfare Office	1	I-I
Chief, Provincial Labor and Social Welfare Office	1	I-I
Director/Chief of the Regional Office of Non-governmental Organizations	2	I-I
Village Leader	11	2 sessions of focus groups discussion (fgd)
Rural Village People	11	3 sessions of fgd

In addition to the above, views of 8 speakers participating in the debate entitled, "Is It Feasible to Decentralize Thailand Health System" organized by Chulalongkorn University were tape recorded and analyzed. The 8 speakers comprised one political scientist, two economists, one journalist specialized in environment and health, two medical experts and two directors of community hospital in two provinces.

An in-depth interview of central, regional, provincial, municipal officials and village leaders was conducted by using a questionnaire which was modified from the two data collection instruments originally developed by the Regional Coordinator. Questions in the questionnaire were also used as the guidelines for focus group discussions, the methods of collecting data and information from 6 remaining village leaders and 11 rural village people.

3. The case study in decentralization of health and family planning services of the non-governmental organization in the rural areas of one of the Southern provinces was conducted. Although it is highly desirable that case studies in social services (including health) of both public and private sectors in urban and rural areas should be conducted, it is not feasible because there is no such case. In our case study, decentralization may be due partly to the fact that the location of the project is over one thousand kilometers from the Association Headquarters and partly to the need for community participation. In addition to the content analysis of the Association's written materials, supplemented by an in-depth interview of the Executive Director and Deputy Executive Director of the Association, two types of interview schedule were used to collect the data. One interview schedule was used for interviewing members of the Coordination Committee of Community-Based FP/FLE to the Southern Population. Another interview schedule was used for interviewing religious leaders, volunteers and housewives in the communities. Fifteen coordination committee members and 50 religious leaders, volunteers and housewives were interviewed. Results of the case study are not presented here.

PERCEPTION OF SOCIAL SECTOR DECENTRALIZATION

As discussed earlier, the process of decentralization of administrative authority to a limited extent may have begun nearly half a century ago. At present, the country has about 7,976 local self-government units comprising 75 changwat (provincial) administrative organizations (CAOs), 138 municipalities, 980 sanitary districts, 6,781

tambon councils and 2 special local self-government units (Bangkok Metropolitan Authority and Pattaya City). The Tambon Council and Tambon Administrative Organization Act 1994 which became effective in March 1995 had provided the local self-government units of 618 rural communities more responsibility, authority, control and accountability for local administration and the management of social and economic affairs of the communities. Laws to decentralize responsibility, authority, control and accountability of other types of local self-government or of the central government's ministry responsible for government, social, economic and cultural affairs have yet to be introduced. Therefore, what will be presented below are only perceptions of key informants who are or expected to be concerned with decentralized policies and programs at all levels.

Key informants were classified into 4 types as follows:

1. Officials of the central or provincial governments who have been responsible for formulation, administration and monitoring of sectoral policies and programs at the ministerial, departmental and provincial levels. Included in this category are also provincial governor and district officer since they are appointed officials of the Ministry of Interior.
2. Elected officials of the local self-government units.
3. Officials of NGOs.
4. Rural village people or expected beneficiaries of the decentralized programs.

A. PERCEPTION ON ADMINISTRATIVE AUTHORITY

Depending on the background and experience and, to a large extent, on the knowledge and understanding of decentralization of the respondents, perceptions on decentralization of administrative authority vary. Only the appointed officials of the provincial government or elected officials of municipality understand the meaning of decentralization and its implications.

For appointed officials with only administrative background and experience, decentralization of authority is probably perceived as a threat. Being appointed by their superiors at either the Department of Local Administration or the Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior of the central government to head provincial administrative units in the province or district, they are accountable to heads

of their respective departments in Bangkok. Such observation is also applicable to a number of administrative offices of other ministries (education, labor and social welfare, etc.) set up in the provinces and districts to oversee and administer their programs and projects. Another reason for these appointed professional civil servants, especially those at the Ministry of Interior, to look upon decentralization of administrative authority as a threat is the concern of losing fringe benefits and privileges associated with the authority delegated by the central government. In addition to the delegated supervisory powers over municipalities, and changwat administrative organizations, the governor is also a chief executive of the changwat administrative organization - a position being remunerated by a certain amount of an honorarium with an access to expense account. A district chief officer is also a chair of the sanitary committee, a position enjoying similar benefits and privileges as those of the governor. When asked by the researcher about his perception on decentralization of administrative authority, a district chief officer sidestepped the issue by stating:

"In decentralizing authority of local communities, what should be done first is to educate and develop the grass roots to think rationally and behave with good discipline. From my experience in working with the people for a relatively long period, public agencies and public officials should treat the inhabitants equally. A good example of which is the compensation to the people affected by the dam construction. If the people at one dam are compensated more than people at other dams, people at the other dam sites will come back and demand more compensation. This will cause trouble for the local administrative officials who sometime have to deal with the mobs without any support from the superiors or the public agencies concerned..."

For an appointed official with a high academic qualification and a relatively long period of working experience in community development, decentralization was perceived by him as "the central government reducing its role in the administration of local government." As a head of the province, a governor is appointed by the Ministry of Interior. In principle and by virtue of law, all other ministries' provincial offices is under the supervision of a governor. In practice and in reality, a governor is delegated only limited functions and responsibilities in personnel and finance administration. The

governor does not have direct administrative control over officials of other ministries; they are administratively required to report to central departments in Bangkok, from which their appointment, promotion and transfer are made and their budget are allocated. For example, a governor is an ex officio Chairperson of the Provincial Teacher Civil Service Commission. His duty is confined to implementing the decisions made by either the National or Provincial Civil Service Commission by signing relevant documents such as a regulation, an announcement and an instruction. Partly due to the reasons just mentioned and partly due to his educational background and work experience, a governor who was interviewed by our researcher did not perceive the decentralization of administrative authority or authority on management of social and welfare services as a threat. He agreed with the proposal that local administrative chief at all levels (governor, district chief officer, subdistrict headman, village headman, mayor) or a local administrative team be elected by local inhabitants. His only reservation was that it has to be gradually implemented by stages: if and when the province concerned is ready which can be determined by a referendum. According to him, "the immediate step which the government should take is to provide opportunities for people to think and decide. Every cultural, economic, political and social projects or program has to be conceived, decided upon, executed and controlled by the grass roots."

For elected officials of the local self-government like mayors or city mayors, decentralization is perceived by them as a kind of magic lamp. They hope or expect that decentralization with legally financial and/or administrative autonomy will enhance their capabilities to solve many or all local problems. One mayor went so far as saying "If local problems could be adequately dealt with locally, it may not be necessary for mobs in the provinces to march to Bangkok to see the Prime Minister." One mayor who is the former university professor was of the opinion that despite limitations, be it legal, financial or administrative or all of these, local politicians could still get around if a person studies rules and procedures seriously. Mayors and deputy mayors are elected by local inhabitants of incorporated urban areas. Concerns expressed by urban local politicians are restrictions in finance and personnel administration. The financial capabilities of the local self-governments are still restricted by their limited revenue bases and collection efficiency. A municipal clerk and deputy municipal clerks are appointed by the Department of Local Administration, Ministry of Interior and are required to report to appropriate hierarchy within the Ministry of Interior. A substantial proportion of personnel to perform many functions are also recruited, appointed and paid by the Department of Local Administration in Bangkok. According

to the statement made by one mayor and it is more less concurred by another mayor who was not aware of each other:

"The government has not decentralized to the extent that it should be. How can we expect 50 members of the Council of Ministers to look after the welfare of over 50 million people and to perform functions as well as assuming responsibilities over an area of approximately 500,000 square kilometers. We can not expect our congressmen in the House of Representatives to do the job either because they belong to the legislative branch. Our town municipality covers an area of 20 square kilometers, yet a team of 3 members of the municipal executive board assisted by a large number of appointed officials could not fulfill various functions adequately....One of the major problems faced by us is the inadequacy of financial resources. The subsidy which we receive from the government in the form of general grants is only 100 bahts per head, and the specific grants we received for the current fiscal year is only 600,000 bahts. Although we have no conflicts with appointed officials, I am of the opinion that our municipality is overstaffed. ...I think that the governor should also be directly elected by local inhabitants. The election should be implemented gradually, meaning that in province where its inhabitants feel ready and willing to participate in provincial affairs democratically. In this case, the province must have full autonomy, perhaps like a state in the U.S."

Despite hope and enthusiasm of national elites on the prospect of decentralization when the Tambon Council and Tambon Administration Act took effect in March 1995, rural village leaders seem not to have adequate knowledge, experience and interest in local self-administration. At a seminar organized for 1,270 Local Administration Department officials including provincial governors, vice governors, district officers and their assistants, Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai, who has since July 2, 1995 become ex-Prime Minister, observed "today (1 March 1995) marks the milestone in the

history of the country's local administration." He stresses the need for the local administration organizations to be able to work effectively with the full participation of the people. Government representatives, be they provincial governors, districts officers or their assistants, will have to give the local administrators advice and support on various matters. He stated "I would like to ask all of you to give them advice and assistance so they can work effectively, but not to control them as in the past....This change is a major event in history. It is not an experiment because administrative affairs are not a thing to be put on trial. We must be serious and work toward the objective of seeing greater public participation (Bangkok Post, 2 March 1995).

Results of in-depth interview of 2 rural village leaders and 2 sessions of focus group discussion of 11 village leaders in northeastern and central regions indicate that they are not interested in and are not aware that the government has the policy of decentralization through subdistrict council, especially the tambon administrative organization. They would be pleased and welcome the idea that more funds will be allocated to support projects in their subdistricts. They do not fully understand the implications of more authority, especially responsibilities and accountability that go with it. What had been discussed at the focus group sessions concentrated mostly on how the projects are initiated, formulated, prioritized at the subdistrict council meetings. It has to be mentioned here that most of interviewees and participants of focus group discussion are elected subdistrict and village headmen and they are also ex officio members of subdistrict councils. Most of the projects submitted by them are based on suggestions made by district officers or community development workers. Members of one of the subdistrict council stated that the council still has to rely on primary school teacher in the subdistrict to work as secretary of the meeting and prepare minutes. A number of village leaders expressed hope that with technical assistance and counselling from district officers, they would eventually be able to handle all the subdistrict affairs by themselves.

Similarly, results of the 3 sessions of focus group discussion of 11 rural village people comprising 5 members of housewife groups and 6 members of village committees indicate that they were not aware of the opportunity for local self-administration. Housewives stated that the major objective of their grouping is to initiate and implement income generating projects. They always ask community development officials in their area to support occupational training of one kind or another. However, when asked by community development officials to write the

project proposal giving details on activities and budgeting they do not know how to do it. They had no idea what the functions of subdistrict council are. They, however, will participate in the subdistrict council's meetings whenever being asked to do so, especially when the meeting consider activities of the housewife groups. Members of the village committees are not more knowledgeable than housewives on decentralization, functions and responsibility of the local organizations such as subdistrict council or village committee. Some elected or selected members of the council or the committee even stated that they personally were not interested in community affairs. They were elected or selected to be members of the council or committee because their fellow villagers want them to.

From the results of the discussion with rural villagers or expected beneficiaries of social services, it may be seen that they will accept or go to seek services which they want from respective offices. For example, they are aware that the government is now providing a grant to the elderly at the rate of 200 bahts per month. For minor sickness or vaccination, they will go the nearby tambon (subdistrict) health center for services, mostly at no cost or nominal cost.

B. PERCEPTION ON DECENTRALIZATION OF SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

From the type of key informants presented above, it may be seen that social service providers at all levels (policy, administration and implementation) were in-depth interviewed.

Labour and Social Welfare Services

From the perception of a policy maker and top administrator of public labour and social welfare services, a person concerned was wholeheartedly for decentralization in the provision of services by encouraging local people and communities' participation in the provision of social welfare services. His perception on decentralization may be, however, considered as a variant of the generally understood meaning of "decentralization," or in other words, it is only the "delegation" of responsibility to communities. According to him:

"Consequences of demographic, social and economic change or development are that society is more complex; having diverse problems; magnitude of the problems are accumulated and become greater and so on. Moreover, people are receiving more information, comprehensively and in-depth. It may not be possible for any agency to be able to respond adequately to the needs of the people. For example, we have about 6 or 7 homes for the elderly which are able to accommodate about 10,000 elderly persons but there are about one million elderly persons wanting to live in these homes. One of the solutions is to decentralize the provision of services for the elderly by encouraging community participation in setting up "community welfare center". A qualified center will receive the subsidy in the amount of over 10 thousand bahts per year. The public social welfare workers will then take turn to provide technical assistance and counselling. The poor elderly is also entitled to receive a welfare grant in the amount of 200 bahts per month. The elderly can then live with the family in the community. The same method and principle can be applied to the disabled people and other disadvantaged groups of people."

In the administration of labour and social welfare services in the provinces, he planned to emulate the patterns of administration used by the Ministry of Public Health, namely all offices which provide labour and social welfare services in the provinces will be put under one command and report directly to the provincial governor with the coordination and technical supervision of the office of the permanent secretary. Resistance come mostly from lower ranking officials who are accustomed to reporting to their respective departments in Bangkok. He was wondering if he could achieve the partial decentralization during working life because he is due to retire by the end of this fiscal year, namely 30 September 1995.

The permanent secretary's perception on and plan to decentralize social welfare services are not shared by one of our interviewees who is one of the 10 public welfare inspectors of the Department of Public Welfare. One of the main functions of this

department is to provide assistance to disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, the destitute, the elderly, the hilltribe people and people who are affected by disasters. One of the major duties of a public welfare inspector is to supervise, monitor and follow-up the activities in the province on behalf of or as assigned by the director-general. The department was established over 50 years ago and was formerly one of the largest departments within the Ministry of Interior with over 10,000 staff members and the provincial public welfare office in every province. Although being one of the departments of the Ministry of Interior, its provincial offices still have to report and be accountable to the department in Bangkok. Like all other departments of other ministries which have provincial offices under the provincial government/administration, a limited extent of decentralization is authorized to the provincial governor. When being asked about his view or perception on decentralization, the response given is that if the policy makers and top administrators want to implement the policy of decentralization by transferring responsibility, authority, control and accountability to the newly established office of the provincial labour and social welfare, solutions on how to reorganize the existing units and deal with existing personnel have to be found. According to this interviewee:

"As I said, decentralization has both potential benefits and problems. Decentralization involves men, money and functions. When the Permanent Secretary for Labour and Public Welfare was the Director-General of the Department of Public Welfare, he used to experiment with decentralization by delegating authority on personnel of the provincial public welfare office to the provincial governor. A provincial governor was granted authority on personnel of all positions except the provincial chief public welfare officer. This has created a lot of conflict when the decisions on salary increase, promotion and transferring of personnel are made. The province has no experience in the recruitment of personnel which by nature of public welfare work requires specific qualifications, skills and aptitude...Another aspect which have to be taken into account when the decentralization of authority is made through the governor to chief of the provincial labour and social welfare office is the selection of personnel to this

position. While officials of the Department of Public Welfare occupy a relative high level in the position classification (PC) system of public civil service because it was established over 50 years ago, officials of other departments within the ministry occupy lower PC levels. How can a lower PC level person command or supervise a person with higher PC level? In our Department of Public Welfare, we still have a number of offices in the provinces such as the Tribal Research Institute, Chiangmai headed by a person with high PC level reporting directly to the director-general in Bangkok. Also a number of units such as the self-help land settlement centers report directly to the concerned division in Bangkok. If the administrative procedures and ways and means to solve various problems as I mentioned above could be found, it is alright to implement the decentralization policy and plan."

Views expressed by a public welfare inspector was, to a certain extent, corroborated by one chief of the provincial labour and social welfare office. According to this official, the objective of setting up the provincial labour and social welfare in the province is to decentralize authority by having the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare's representative in the provincial government implementing policy, plan and program on social and labour welfare by coordinating with other agencies. In reality, every labour and social welfare matters has to be submitted through the provincial governor which causes a great deal of delay, resulting in non-decentralization. Another problem perceived by this official is that it is difficult and problematic for a chief of this office to command and supervise the work of officers of the old department who sometime occupy the higher PC levels. He would like to see a post of vice-governor for labour and social welfare instead.

A chief of the provincial labour protection and welfare office was not happy with the prospect of reducing the status of his office to be a unit within the provincial labour and social welfare office. He thinks that the present arrangement of decentralizing authority through the provincial governor is satisfactory. He prefers a status quo rather than a new arrangement affecting his current authority and status.

From different perspectives on decentralization of labour and social welfare services discussed above, none except that of the permanent secretary is concerned with an attempt to improve service delivery to the people.

Health Services

The ministry of public health is probably the only ministry in the Thai government system where almost all functions for administration and provision of preventive, promotive and curative services in the provinces are technically supervised and coordinated by the office of the permanent secretary through the provincial governor. When interviewed by our researcher, the present permanent secretary stated that in so far as possible and practicable, decentralization has been implemented both at the central and provincial levels. At the central level, transferring of responsibility, authority, control and accountability for appropriate specific functions to all deputy permanent secretaries, department director-generals, health inspector-generals and assistant secretaries has been implemented. A provincial chief medical officer (PCMO) is granted full authority on the management of health services in the province. A PCMO is also granted authority to coordinate the work of regional offices of all technical departments located in the province. In fact, the 12 health inspector-generals, assisted by 2 assistant permanent secretaries, are in some way considered as a permanent secretary for health services of each region. For the purpose of health administration, Thailand is divided into 12 health regions. Each region covers about 5-8 provinces. Each health inspector-general has authority on all health management functions of the region in which she/he is in charge. One example of decentralization of authority is that the administrative personnel at all levels from chief of a tambon (subdistrict) health center to PCMO and the provincial governor is given authority to approve the disbursement of extra budgetary from 100,000 to 20,000,000 bahts. Similarly, the PCMO and the provincial governor are authorized to manage the budget on procurement of health equipment and supplies.

The permanent's secretary's perception on decentralization of health services was corroborated by one of his assistants. This assistant, however, had a slight different opinion from his supervisor. He considers the assignment of authority to 12 health inspector-generals a delegation of authority not decentralization. According to this interviewee:

"Our practice of decentralization is to put all health related activities under the supervision of the provincial chief medical officer (PCMO). Ours is different from that the Ministry of Education's conception on decentralization. People there want make each school a juristic body being able to perform many different functions legally. Our method of decentralization is to gradually increasing the responsibility, authority, control and accountability of the PCMO. Such practice has been adopted since 1964. For example, each hospital is granted authority to manage its extrabudgetary revenue....In my view, it is rather the delegation or assignment of duties to the health inspector-generals rather than the decentralization of authority. In fact, there is no formal organization structure at the regional level to implement the fuctions. Province has been our unit of administration. In my view, to treat a province as a unit of administration where all health related functions of the Ministry Publice must be under the responsibility of a PCMO is good and should be maintained."

According to two health officers who have been assigned to work at two regional health centers, the center has no official status with its legally specified duties, responsibilities, budget and personnel. It is an internal informal structure in the form of a committee called "the Committee for Coordination of Health Development for the Health Region (number)." The committe comprises a health inspector-general as the chairperson, PCMO of all provinces in the region and chiefs of all regional technical offices located in the region as members. A PCMO of the province where the committee is located will serve as the secretary of the committee. The committee's secretary is assisted by a small secretariat of 4-5 staff members. One of the major objectives of the regional center is to implement specific policies and programs designated or specified by the office of the permanent secretary such as the Health for All. The center is allocated certain amount of budget, depending on the number of assignments made. Problems faced by personnel of the regional centers is that while they are working for the regional center, they are still under the administrative supervision of the PCMO in their respective provinces who decide on their salary

increase and promotion. Staff members of the regional centers have to be competent administratively and technically to be able to coordinate and be accepted by their colleagues in other health offices.

Thus, perception of the two officers interviewed by our researcher was not on decentralization as perceived by the permanent secretary. They were rather concerned with how to perform their assigned duties effectively and being awarded accordingly.

Decentralization of health services was not perceived to be beneficial by a number of participants at the debate entitled "Is It Feasible to Decentralize Thailand Health System?" A professor of economics at one university was of the opinion that it is too early to think about decentralization of health services. We have to educate the people to be aware of their rights as well as responsibilities first. He stated: "It depends on the ability of each community to develop and mobilize resources, especially health human resources because it is extremely difficult to do so even at the national level."

A health expert from the Ministry of Public Health advocated that health service provision should be decentralized to community. Communities should be supported to be able to assume duties and responsibility by themselves. "In my opinion, the services performed by the communities are more economical." The health expert's perception, however, was not shared by an economist from the national planning agency. According to this economist, bottom up planning depends very much on the vision at the local levels which is now lacking. Result of which is that a development plan is nothing more than a combination of projects....If decentralized, the budget, personnel and general management will have no standard. "If planning is left to local level to decide, we won't have any standard on food and drug," he stated.

A journalist specialized in health and environment was of the view that the public sector does not allow participation of private sector resulting in more and more concentration of activities and power. A health system should be open. According to this speaker, "decentralization of administrative authority is the distribution of power. Directors of the two community hospitals were of the opinion that despite attempts to decentralize health administrative authority, the system is still not flexible enough to cope with the changing situations. In communities where their hospital are located, while AIDS is pandemic, more budget is still allocated for family planning and iodine deficiency eradication activities.

Interviews of two directors of the regional offices of nongovernmental organizations involving in health and family planning services showed that as far as their organizations are concerned, it is the delegation of duties and responsibilities rather than decentralization. Programs and projects are developed by the central office. The regional office is responsible for implementation only. The regional office is allowed to operate under some restrictions imposed by the central office in all matters, be it finance, personnel and general administration. As far as the two interviewees are concerned, they are satisfied with the present arrangement because decentralization or not they are able to work for the benefits of the people.

Education Services

In the period of rapid technological progress, if decentralization of education administration and management is not made, it may not be possible to solve local problems adequately and timely. The view seemed to be shared by those who are working in different positions in the province. For the school administrators, recruitment of personnel and procurement of supplies and equipment done by the central administration have caused them a lot of problems. For the administrators of provincial and district education services, the fact that each level or type of education such as primary, secondary and vocational education has its own district or provincial commission is a source of confusion and causes a lot of delay in the decision making. They concur with the principle that in each district and each province there should be only one education commission comprising personnel on primary, secondary, vocational, teacher training and non-formal education including representatives of departments of religious and cultural affairs. For decentralization to be effective and workable, full transfer of authority to the provincial body to administer and manage not only education services but also budget, personnel and finance must be made. A majority of them supports the idea of having the local people or people from private sector to participate in the administration of education services. Although some of them have reservations. They are concerned that local people with low level of education and lack of appropriate experience will tend not to be vocal and be easily dominated by the public officials in the commission. All of them were of the opinion that the draft bill to decentralize the country's education's administration and management is a compromised one, taking into account of the existing vested interests.

For the high level administrator at the Ministry of Education in Bangkok, each of 14 departments in the ministry has already decentralized limited authorities to its offices located in the province. Since every department has its own practice and standard, what the ministry is trying to achieve is the unified standard procedures by drafting a bill for decentralization of education services. Each "education unit" will be a "juristic person" having the legal authority to perform all administrative and management functions. Although the draft bill was approved by the Council of Social Affairs Ministers in May 1995, it still has to be approved by the parliament. The dissolution of the parliament a few months ago make the draft bill null and void. The Ministry of Education has to restart the process again. From the policy statement of the present government (see page 15 of the report), it may not be possible to resubmit the draft bill as it is. The present government policy stated that it will decentralize authority in education to local government units, not to create "juristic person," of all sizes under the coordination of existing departments within the ministry.

Thus, decentralization of education services as perceived by officials of the Ministry of Education seems to concentrate on how to make the local education units more independent administratively rather than how to respond and serve the local people and communities better.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Review of relevant literature on decentralization showed that attempts to decentralize administrative authority may have begun over forty years ago when the Municipal Act of 1953 was adopted. The current number of 140 municipalities comprises 3 cities municipality, 84 town municipalities, 53 subdistrict municipalities and two special forms of local self-government: Bangkok Metropolitan Authority and Pattaya City. Functions and responsibilities of each type of municipalities are specified explicitly through rules and regulations issued by the Ministry of Interior. The city municipality may even be required to provide vocational training, child and maternal welfare services in addition to the provision of compulsory education and training, prevention and control of communicable diseases, maintenance of roads, waterways, parks and so on. List of functions to be performed by each type of municipality may be extended beyond what are listed in the Act. There are also 75

changwat (provincial) administrative organizations and 980 sanitary districts. However, only the sanitary districts with an annual revenue of 5 million bahts or more are eligible to have chair persons of the sanitary district committees being elected. At present, only 95 sanitary district districts have elected chair persons and 895 sanitary districts have appointed chair persons. All types of local self-government, except the Bangkok Metropolitan Authority, are subject to the central government control and supervision through the Ministry of Interior. For example, the governor is delegated with supervisory powers over municipality and changwat administrative organization; district chief officers chair the sanitary district committees, and subdistrict headmen chair the subdistrict councils. It may be observed, however, policy statements to decentralize administrative, public social and economic services have repeatedly been mentioned either in the successive five-year national economic and social development plans or in the policy statements presented to the parliament by newly-formed governments. With elections of tambon administrative council members in May 1995, the process of self-administration of 618 rural communities began. In other social services sectors such as health, education and social welfare, legal framework for the implementation of decentralized activities has not yet been available. To date, to conform with the government-in-power's policy statement, some ministries of the central government have delegated and/or deconcentrated selected functions to their own units under the provincial governments or their field operating offices in the provinces. It is encouraging, however, to note that decentralization of authority in managing education and of the planning process and decision making authority to regional, local and community levels are two among several measures of the development strategies specified in the Development Guidelines of the Eighth National Economic and Social Development Plan. (NESDB, 1995). The recently issued Office of the Prime Minister's Regulations on Development Administration for Distributing Progress to Regions and Localities, B.E. 2539 (dated 1 February 2539) which establish committee at the national, provincial district, subdistrict (tambon) and village (mooban) levels is another attempt by the government to decentralize authority on and planning and implementation of development programs at different local levels.

2. At present, it may be state that no single public sector, either at the central and provincial governments or local self-government levels ever has actual experience in the implementation of decentralized policies and programs. Therefore, the survey of key informants has to confine itself to collecting information on perceptions of those who are or expected to be concerned with decentralized policies and programs at

all levels. In-depth interview, focus group discussion and tape recording of expert panel discussion are methods of data collection used. Information was collected from 4 types of key informants (see page 101 for detailed description of key informants). Results of the study indicated that except the elected officials of municipalities, officials of the central or provincial government or local self-government at the provincial level including officials of field offices of NGOs seem to be contented with the status quo. Some officials even perceived decentralization of administrative authority as a threat because of being concerned with the possibility of losing fringe benefits and privileges associated with the authority delegated by the central government. Almost all high ranking officials at the ministerial level tend to conceive delegation or deconcentration of functions and responsibility as decentralization. Officials at the provincial level seem to be interested in being delegated with more authority. Only elected officials of municipalities understand the full implications of decentralization that it involves not only authority and control but also responsibility and accountability. Elected and appointed members of subdistrict councils showed not only the lack of interest but also lack of understanding, knowledge and experience in the management of local affairs. What they are interested in is how much budget will be allocated by the governments for different projects submitted by their subdistrict councils. Beneficiaries of services seem to be contented with whatever services provided them with no interest to participate in deciding what should be provided and how as well as interest to assume certain responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the review and analysis of literature and findings of studies made above, it would not be presumptuous to conclude that after nearly half a century of existence, decentralization in Thailand is still at its infancy. What have been practiced to date are the delegation and deconcentration of functions and responsibilities with limited authority to local self-government units. Attempts to decentralize, mostly through legal and administrative reforms, have been made from time to time. Had the policy statement on decentralization made by successive governments been implemented in full, progress may be achieved. Bureaucrats, especially those who will be or expected to be affected by the decentralized policies and programs seem to be one of the two most important obstacles. Another obstacle is the grass root's lack of knowledge, understanding, interest and willingness to participate in the local affairs and to assume functions and responsibilities associated with decentralized policies and programs. The

recent incident on the elected central government's failure to amend the law requiring all members of the local administration at all levels in every province to be directly elected by local inhabitants clearly indicates that bureaucrats can not be relied upon. The possible alternative is that demand for decentralization must be made by the grass roots. Information, education and communication (IEC) programmes to create awareness, understanding and knowledge among the grass roots on potential benefits of decentralization on quality of life may be one of the possible means for demand creation which will eventually lead to the pressures on the national political authority to take necessary actions.

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