GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THAILAND: LESSONS FOR BANGLADESH

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Introduction

Governance has become a key concept in the international development debate over the past ten years. There is a growing recognition that 'getting the rule right' is at least a requisite for development. Recently, Thailand has widely discussed the concept of good governance and how to develop popular governance. The paper will concentrate on the development of popular governance in Thailand. The development of popular governance means fostering a constructive relationship between citizen and state, and the promotion of greater understanding, accountability and empathy between these two sectors. The public sector has abundant resources and manpower, which can be put to use to bring about positive social and economic change and alleviate society's problems. It is for this reason that the state has, until now, played the leading role in national development, determining the framework, mechanisms and processes of communication and interaction between members of Thai society.

However, the public sector has been and still is subject to a number of restraining factors, particularly those related to the very centralised power structure, administrative inefficiency, lax law enforcement, lack of popular participation, unethical and unfair use of administrative power, lack of administrative accountability
and lack of continuity in policy and implementation to meet the demands of national development plans.

In the past, and particularly during the Seventh National Plan period, Thai society has experienced several major political upheavals, such as coup d'état and dissolution of Parliament. In addition, conflicts have at times arisen between various social groups, and between social groups and the public sector. These disputes have highlighted a major obstacle to effective development administration that the public sector has lacked the mechanisms for managing mutual interest and setting conflicts between different stakeholders in society, and for giving the public a voice in the government's and its own affairs.

This problem bears directly on the people's rights, freedom and ability to participate in the national development process, and is symptomatic of the lack of transparency and high degree of centralisation in the public administrative system. These conditions have created a public sector which is unresponsive to the emerging needs and requirements of the people at large and, thus, have led to a general loss of faith, impeded the development of all sector in society and caused stagnation and delay in national development.

**Conditions for the Development of Popular Governance**

In the past, the public sector has formulated guidelines and provided services and development activities, which it believed, would benefit the people, but did not grant those people a role in the process of formulation and planning. For this reason, the
government sector's operations have become increasingly irrelevant to need and lack the recognition and commitment of the people. This has, at times, led to political conflicts and confrontations between the people and the government, which have significantly weakened development efforts.

The role of public sector in administering the country must now be based on righteousness and public acceptance, which is to be achieved through providing opportunities and creating an enabling environment for popular participation. This will entail establishing principles and norms for the relationship between the people and the state. The development of popular governance is one of the major strategies of the Royal Thai Government (RTG), aimed at ensuring smooth, fair and effective implementation of national development. The RTG proposes four strategies to achieve it which are as follows:

1. **Reinforcing Justice in Society, and Creating Opportunities and Enabling Environment for Popular Participation**

   This includes guaranteeing political and civil rights; ensuring effective and peaceful management of conflicts between various stakeholders in society and the government; and building up people's capabilities.

1.1 Guaranteering Justice and Liberty

a. Endorse and guarantee political rights, human rights and gender equality similar to international norms;
b. Enact laws that guarantee people's right to information, particularly that are held by the government;

c. Promote the protection of people's rights in controlling and scrutinising public administration. For example, guarantee people's rights to demand the government to organise public consultation, as indicated in the Office of the Prime Minister Regulations on Hearing of Public Opinion through Public Discussion, 1996; and

d. Promote the development of an Administrative Court system, to protect the people's rights when they are violated by government agencies.

1.2 Managing Conflicts in Society by Peaceful Means

a. Encourage efforts on all sides to ensure that disputes are settled peacefully based on equality and legality of all parties involved. This will include fostering mutual understanding between the disputants, and appreciation of the rights of all parties affected by conflicts to participate directly in the process of resolution.

b. Create a role for individuals, groups of individuals or institutes, either inside or outside public sector, distributed throughout the country, with skills in preventing and resolving social conflicts. This will involve networking of information and operations, transfer of experience, and coordination among various agencies.

c. Encourage local organisations and educational institutions to research, collect and disseminate guidelines for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. This will generate appropriate visions and attitudes, common understanding between the
majority of people in society and communities, and reasonable negotiation and compromise leading to mutual agreement among all parties concerned.

d. Foster proper attitudes and skills in government officials relating to peaceful settlement of social conflicts through reconciliation, negotiation and juridical arbitration;

e. Encourage government performance that emphasises prevention of social conflicts, dissemination of accurate information, and sincerity and willingness to co-operate with all parties, and widens opportunities for consultation and negotiation between all parties concerned at the earliest stage of the dispute.

1.3. Enhancing People's Capabilities and Social Power

a. Allocate government budget support for NGOs and other organisations engaged in activities that aim to build up people's capabilities;

b. Promote respect for rules and regulations, and disseminate information on legal matters among government officials and the public, especially concerning people's rights and duties;

c. Promote the dissemination and enforcement of government rules and regulations that actually benefit the people;

d. Protect freedom of the press and promote the development of independent media. Different social sectors should be given access to state-owned media and communication facilities, such as village public address systems and community and local radio;

e. Disseminate accurate knowledge and understanding of people's legal rights and duties, and of true social, economic and political conditions, both domestic and
international. This can be done by using both public and private communication channels including radio and television broadcasts and the public relations mechanisms of government agencies, the private sector and NGOs that can contribute to the relief of problems for the benefit of community and the country as a whole.

2. Promotion of Participation by all Sectors in Development

This strategy is aimed at encouraging private businesses and the general public to participate as decision-makers and actors in the process of national development, rather than to remain as passive beneficiaries. Both sectors will be involved in approving, initiating, decision-making, operation and monitoring and evaluation of national development. Both will also be given the chance to apply the results of monitoring and evaluation in order to continuously improve the national development effort. Through this participatory approach, the public and private sectors and the general public will get to know more about each other and develop a mutual understanding, which will allow government officials to adjust the working practices to be more responsive to the needs of all social sectors. It will also enhance greater social cohesion.

2.1 Promotion of Development Partnership

a. Encourage the creation of non-partisan partnership for development at regional, local and community levels, particularly the establishment of provincial assembly;

b. Make the formation of these partnership factors in the allocation of resources, requiring that government
agencies indicate their development partners for project formulation and implementation, especially related to occupational development, quality of life, natural resources and the environment.

2.2 Ensuring Equal Standing in Popular Participation in National Development

a. Provide greater opportunities for participation in the development process for communities and other groups which are currently under-represented, such as small farmers, conventional and coastal fishermen and the urban poor;

b. Increase the ratio of representative of private business and the general public in committees, sub-committees and working groups of the public development administration, such as the Provincial Development Committee and working groups for natural resource and environmental administration;

c. Provide opportunities for NGOs and people's organisation to obtain direct budget assistance for carrying out development activities jointly with the public sector, or to enhance development strategies established by the government, especially those in which the people take a leading role with the public sector giving support;

d. Encourage people's organisation in local area and communities to participate in local administration, and carry out development activities through local administrative units, such as tambon administrative organisation, tambon councils, municipal councils and sanitary district councils.
2.3. Encouraging Communities to Participate in Local Development

a. Legislate the rights of local people and communities to participate in the management of natural resources and environments and to participate in development activities and projects implemented in their communities. For example, those affected by government-initiated development projects should be entitled to participate in the assessments of environmental impact and in monitoring evaluating implementation of the project;

b. Assign increasingly larger portions of the national budget to local organisation as general subsidies while reducing the funds apportioned as specific subsidies. This budget approach will give local organisations the autonomy and flexibility to formulate action plans and manage development activities consistent with the specific conditions and needs of their areas.

2.4. Enhancing the Potentials of NGOs and People’s Organisation

a. Promote the establishment of NGOs and people’s organisations, both formal and non-formal;

b. Give NGOs government tax incentives and budgetary assistance;

c. Encourage private enterprises to support community and social development activities initiated by NGOs and people’s organisations via government tax incentive schemes;

d. Promote development of networking among people’s organisations for the exchange of information and experience and improving the administrative skills.
3. Upgrading the Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Public Sector

The RTG sets out the following development guidelines for upgrading the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the public sector by adjusting roles, emphasis, regulations and operational process and procedures, so that the public sector can more effectively serve and enhance the development of other social sectors.

3.1. Overhauling Public Administrative Units

a. Shift the role of government services from inspection and control to directing, supervising and facilitating, while limiting government activities so as to promote greater roles for the private sector and the people;

b. Downsize government services, by restricting the expansion of government agencies, limiting public sector recruitment, expedite organisational restructuring, in terms of function, human resources and operational procedures, consistent with current economic, social and political conditions;

c. Improve the administrative systems of central agencies at the ministerial and departmental levels, especially those involved in planning, budgeting, human resource development and provision of services. This new administrative system should allow greater freedom and the application of modern management styles;

d. Decentralise public administrative authority and delegate decision-making authority from central agencies to the operating units or officials in local areas, with respect to terms of reference at different levels, in order that they can apply their own
judgement, experience and knowledge of actual local conditions;

e. Encourage public inspections, checks and balances for government operations, so as to make them accountable to the people, society and communities they serve; and

f. Improve the efficiency of government services using the following methods:

i. Increase the role of local government units, such as the provincial authorities, and minimise the role of the central agencies and eliminate redundancy in operational procedures, especially those related to planning, budgeting and fiscal and personnel administration, so as to ensure greater flexibility in local administration. This should be implemented under a comprehensive and complete cycle;

ii. Increase the number of government officers in the units functioning in local areas, and redeploy or cut the manpower of the central government agencies, so as to improve the responsiveness of government service delivery to the needs of rural and regional people;

iii. Adjust public sector pay scales to come close or equal to those found in the private sector with clear operating procedures and guarantee equal opportunities for career advancement, in order to attract and keep capable an ethical public sector personnel.
g. Develop the public administrative system in order to bring it increasingly in line with the area-function-participation approach;

h. Develop the role of provincial administrative units, making provincial authorities the central administrative agencies for all development work in each province. The provincial administrative units should delegate, with consistency and continuity, responsibility for planning, budgeting, personnel management and development monitoring and evaluation to the performing units, in order to give the performing units more freedom and flexibility;

i. Redefine the roles of the central agencies and other government units responsible for strategic policy and planning, towards coordination and provision of technical support such as resources and moral support for local and regional government agencies;

j. Increase the role of the government authorities at provincial level and upgrade their capabilities, particularly in terms of planning, budget administration and personnel management.

3.2. Improve budgeting procedures for freer and more flexible budget administration in and between government agencies. Allow the provincial-level authorities to set and take their own portions of budget revenue.

3.3. Increase the number of qualified officers at the provincial level and reduce manpower in central agencies; promote manpower rotation network; improve opportunities for career advancement; and set pay scales for government officers working at
regional and local levels to match those of officers in central agencies.

3.4. Formulate efficiency criteria and performance evaluation indicators with which to gauge the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration at all levels.

3.5. Promote accountability in public administration by encouraging the private sector and the general public to engage in joint monitoring of implementation of the National Plan and work of government agencies in order to eliminate corruption and questionable conduct in the public sector.

3.6. Improve transparency in operations by urging various relevant organisations, such as community organisations, NGOs and private business groups to join together in commenting on, inspecting, assessing and, where appropriate, objecting to megaprojects and other significant government plans before implementation starts.

3.7. Adjust systems for implementing public policy by:

i. Encouraging the private sector to invest increasingly in education, public health and infrastructure services. Free market competition should be promoted, shifting the focus to providing better quality services and pricing appropriate for users rather than what benefits the government stands to gain from such activities.

ii. Setting up independent mechanisms at the national level to supervise the
delivery of public services, and so ensuring better efficiency, approved standards. With prices set which are fair to both providers and users of the services.

iii. Reviewing and amending regulations and laws, which present obstacles to private sector participation in the formulation of operational plans. Obsolete rules, regulation and legislation should be changed or abolished, and effective public policy administration fostered.

3.8. Develop legislation that promotes national development

The RTG proposes the employment of legislation as a key tool in achieving effective implementation of its national development guidelines. For this reason, the national legislative organisations must be restructured so that they can serve as sources of effective legislation consistent with the National Plan's national development guidelines. Furthermore, they should be able to establish an effective system to inspect the performance of government services and urge government officials to perform their duties in compliance with the word and spirit of the law.

4. Promotion of Continuity in Public Administration

The RTG seeks to generate continuity and stability in public administration by calling on the co-operation of all stakeholders in society. They should be given the opportunity to determine visions, commitments and
national agenda acceptable to all parties - which will in turn help them to formulate national development guidelines and to acknowledge the necessary supportive commitments. Relevant development guidelines include:

4.1 Creating an alliance for setting issues for national agenda, by:

i. Organising joint meetings between political parties, government agencies, state enterprises, the private sector, NGOs, people's organisations and representatives from various professions, which can regularly designate and review visions, commitments and national agenda.

ii. Fostering on-the-job training and conferences for personnel at all levels, so that they can learn about the operations of other agencies and exchange ideas and experiences in order to achieve common understanding.

iii. Disseminating techniques and experiences relating to the successful formation of alliances, including set the issues of national agenda which agreement to be used for increasing the management potential of their own groups and organisations.

iv. Determining measures of success for the co-operation of various stake-holders in society. By setting indices with their own groups and organisations.
4.2. Promotion of common understanding concerning public policy to generate a joint vision

i. Improve the dissemination of information concerning government policies, National Economic and Social Development Plans and the development plans of other government agencies and organisations. These should all be made clearly comprehensible for the general public.

ii. Foster policy-oriented research that helps in determining long-term policies, setting priorities and identification of emerging problems in communities and the country as a whole.

iii. Promote research, seminars and methods of information dissemination, which will enable all the public organisations participating in the development process to obtain knowledge and broaden their thinking and vision to be better prepared for the era of globalisation. Support should also be provided for manpower training in the public sector. This includes training and conferences for personnel at different levels of the above-mentioned government agencies to regularly witness each other's operations and exchange ideas and experiences in order to foster common understanding, cordial cohesion and creative collaboration between them.

To achieve the development of popular governance, it is necessary that an appropriate administrative scheme is created which can ensure that all stakeholders in the society are given the opportunity to take part in implementing process. The stakeholders should work
together as partners towards the achievement of real sustainable development for the Kingdom, taking into account conditions, restrictions and trends in social development, seeking guidelines and measures to coordinate the mutual relationships, roles and missions of the public sector, the private sector and the entire population. This will bring happiness and peace to individuals, communities, Thai society and the Kingdom as a whole.

**Lessons Learned**

More important to sound development management than anything else is the successful combination of good governance and sound economic and social fundamentals. For Thailand, realising such a template of policies would require a substantial adjustment in how the government sees itself - from government-as-controller to government-as-setter of the framework. To develop popular governance that contributes to the holistic development of nation will mean addressing the present problems in public administration by developing a more efficient public sector, which is committed to upgrade the development potentials and capabilities of Thai people. Government officials must be perceived as the allies of the people, working towards the sustainable development of the economy, society, culture and environment. Lesson from Thailand is that such development of popular governance is possible, and all that is required is the political will.