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The performance of the environmental management of local governments in Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the performance of the environmental management of local governments (EMLG) in Thailand and examined the relationship between specific management factors (context, input, and process) and output. Data were collected by using questionnaires with 385 local governments consisting of municipalities and sub-district administration organizations (SAOs) selected by multistage sampling and systematic random sampling countrywide. The findings revealed that the performance of the EMLG in Thailand was at a moderate level ($\bar{x} = 3.05$, $SD = 0.442$). The performance of both municipalities (urban areas) and SAOs (rural areas) was at a moderate level. However, the mean score for the overall performance of municipalities ($\bar{x} = 3.18$, $SD = 0.391$) was higher than that of the SAOs ($\bar{x} = 3.00$, $SD = 0.453$). The structural equation model (SEM) analysis indicated a significant relationship ($R^2 = 0.88$) between the context and the outputs (t-test = 7.59, $p < .01$) and between the inputs and the outputs (t-test = 2.07, $p < .05$). However, the SEM analysis indicated that there was no significant relationship between the process and the outputs (t-test = 0.40, $p > .05$). This study suggests four strategies for enhancing the performance of the EMLG: building sustainable culture; environmental learning organization (ELO); decreasing cost and increasing revenue; and precautionary environmental management.

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Introduction

Decentralization has been an important strategy for achieving development goals, providing public services,

and pursuing environmental conservation, and it has become a dominant theme in the discussion of environmental policies (Wittayapak & Vandergeest, 2010). Chapter 28 of Agenda 21 (United Nations Sustainable Development, 1992) has become a main concept which promotes local government responsibility for environmental management. In line with the decentralization process, environmental management has become a main function of local authorities.

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Local government management performance significantly affects the quality of life (QOL) of the people for whom local governments are responsible regarding basic public services, including town planning, provision of social and health services, education, water supply, business development, and environmental management (United Cities and Local Governments, 2008). This is important, especially today as the world is becoming increasingly urbanized. Rapid economic development causes environmental degradation, pollution, and also global warming, and therefore, the environmental management of local government is of high value for improving the QOL of people through good environmental quality.

Although many local governments are attempting to develop their environmental management systems, they face several problems that affect their environmental management performance (Emilsson & Hjelm, 2002; Lutz & Caldecott, 1996; Mitchell, 2002), such as a lack of clarity of goals, inadequate management structure, inadequate access to information, and conditions specific to developing countries. Thailand is classified as a developing country and has promoted decentralization for more than 80 years since the promulgation of the Municipal Administration Act, 1933. Local governments in Thailand are important organizations for promoting and conserving environmental quality because they are close to the people. However, some local governments in Thailand face environmental problems that cause various types of pollution, community waste, and land use problems which in turn affect the QOL of people (Pollution Control Department, 2013; Regional Environmental Office 4, 2013; Regional Environmental Office 11, 2013).

The evaluation of environmental management is an important measure for monitoring, analyzing, and evaluating the environmental management system (EMS) of local government. Such evaluation helps check the degree of achievement or value in regard to the aim, objectives, and results of any action that has been implemented. Further, the evaluation results help in decision-making to reduce the problems and enhance the environmental management. This study suggests ways to enhance the performance of EMLG based on the evaluation results of environmental management.

In order to obtain a better understanding of the performance of the EMLG, the researcher addressed two important issues: (1) the extent to which local governments in Thailand have succeeded in environmental management and (2) the factors affecting the performance of the EMLG.

Literature Review

Stufflebeam and Shinkfield (2007) stated that evaluation helps improve all aspects of society. They considered evaluation as the process of giving assertions on reliability, effectiveness, and efficiency among other things. During the 1960s, researchers began to analyze organizations from a system perspective, a concept taken from the physical sciences and presently, when we describe organizations as systems, we mean open systems (Robbins & Coulter, 2005). System theory has become a critical concept for the

analysis and evaluation of organizations, both public and private.

One model that has been applied is based on the evaluation of the entity's context, input, process, and product (the CIPP model) and consists of: (1) context evaluations, which assess needs, problems, assets, and opportunities to help decision makers, and outcomes; (2) input evaluations, which assess alternative approaches, staffing plans, and budgets for their feasibility and potential cost-effectiveness to meet targeted needs and to achieve goals; (3) process evaluations, which assess the implementation of plans to help staff carry out activities and to help the administration make decisions regarding program implementation; and (4) product evaluations, which identify and assess the outcomes—intended and unintended—in the short term and long term, to help the staff keep focused on achieving important outcomes and to help the administrative board gauge the success of goals (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

The environmental management system (EMS) is the international standard specifying the requirements for an environmental management system to enable an organization to develop and implement policy and objectives, which take into account legal requirements and information about significant environmental aspects (International Organization for Standardization, 2004). It is intended to be applied to all types and sizes of organizations and to accommodate diverse geographical, cultural, and social conditions (International Organization for Standardization, 2004). These operating principles of an EMS follow a Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle (PDCA cycle).

Environmental management following the PDCA cycle would be beneficial to local governments by creating better opportunities to work more efficiently regarding environmental issues, decreasing negative environmental impact, and saving natural resources (Emilsson & Hjelm, 2002).

Materials and Methods

According to the literature, this study adopted the CIPP model (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007) for evaluation of the performance of the EMLG. The context consisted of the condition of the environment and public participation. The inputs consisted of human resources, budget, tools, and equipment. The process consisted of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and review and improvement. The outputs consisted of management results or environmental management performance regarding solid waste, wastewater, excreta, pollution, land use, and water source management (Department of Local Administration, n.d.).

By integrating the evaluation of the EMLG with the CIPP model and environmental management standards for local governments in Thailand (Department of Local Administration, n.d.), this study proposed three hypotheses:

(1) context affects the performance of the EMLG; (2) inputs affect the performance of the EMLG; and (3) process affects the performance of the EMLG (Figure 1).

The study was carried out to examine the performance of EMLGs in Thailand. The study covered all types of municipalities and SAOs. From 7,775 local authorities, 2,440 municipalities, and 5,335 SAOs (Department of Local

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