



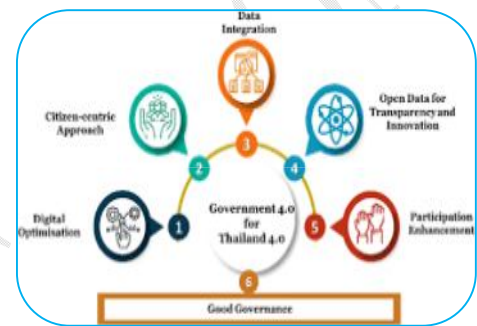
## GOOD GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND

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### ABSTRACT:

The aim of the paper is to explore good governance as it is obtained in the local governments in Thailand by examining the performance of the local government which holds the future of government being the grassroots offshoot of development in governance. As the most important tier of government, it is expected that good governance should start from the local government. The paper observed that there are three essential elements of good governance namely accountability, transparency and citizen participation. It is the view of the paper that in the absence of these three elements of good governance there will be no meaningful development in the local government administration. Having identified these elements the paper posited that it will be the duty of the other tiers of government to provide the enabling environment for the local government to exhibit these elements of good governance in their administration. However, the paper made some recommendation to achieve the attributes of good governance in the local government.



**KEYWORDS:** good governance and local government transparency and citizen participation in Thailand.

### INTRODUCTION

The continued existence of myriads of problems such as corruption, high level inefficiency in government agencies, poor and inadequate provision of infrastructural facilities to slow manpower development experienced in developing nations have led to the question what is good governance and what actually entails good governance administration? Thailand is a country highly endowed with natural resources ranging from

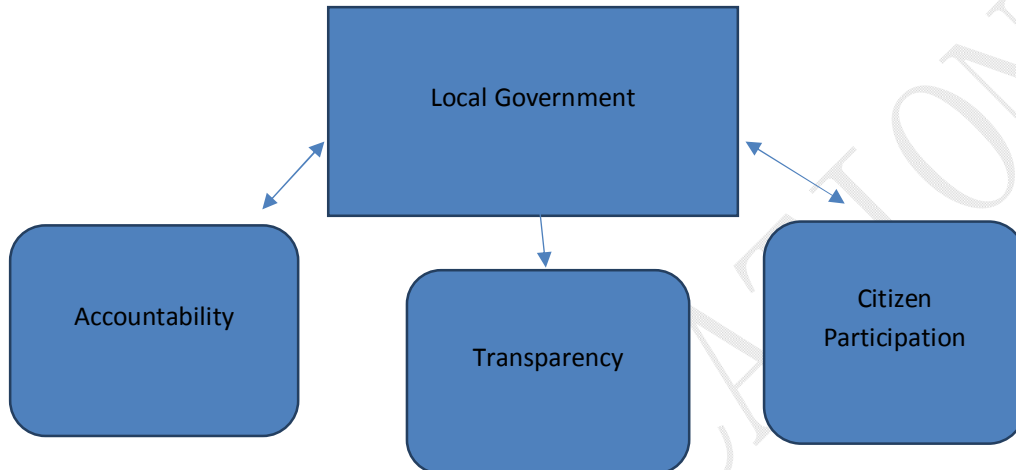
cocoa, palm kernel, lime stones, coal and petroleum to mention a few.

However, despite the abundance of these natural resources the nation is still battling with problems such as unemployment, inadequate infrastructures: lack of good roads, high rate of maternal and infant mortality and general poverty resulting in diseases and disabilities amongst its citizenry. The government in a bid to reduce the menace caused by these problems identified the major reason why there is inadequacy of infrastructural facilities or under development in general was due

largely because of corruption and corrupt practices from its teeming leaders. Hence the establishment of different agencies to tackle corruption and enshrine good governance have been established. Some of the agencies include; The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission- ICPC, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and recently the adoption of a Singular Treasury Account popularly known as TSA to allow every government revenue to reside in a singular account.

The idea of the TSA, is that in any case the failure of the two major

agencies for financial crimes: it can be monitored through the singular treasury account. But it has been observed that despite this measures good governance eludes the nation and as rightly observed by (Carsten 2005, & Klien 1987) good governance can only be achieved and better be experienced when it start from the grassroots- the local government area. As already identified good governance consists of three essential elements of Accountability, Transparency and Citizen Participation. These three key elements must be available in the local government for good governance to be appreciated as shown in fig1 below.



The renewed interest in good governance was borne out of the need for elective officers to be answerable to their electorates and be accountable for decisions taken while in office. This it is presumed will enable effective decision making and proper policy implementation (Asika, 2017). The paper will examine the administration of local government in Thailand based on this three principles of good governance.

### Local Government

According to Emetic, 1984, local government is a system of local administration under local communities in charge of maintaining law and order and Aug (2009) gave a broader definition of local government to be the democratic legislative institution in the grass roots consisting of elected representatives that are expected to give account of their services to the electorate based on the government resources entrusted in their hands.

The implication is that as an elected officer in the local government you are expected to show high level of transparency and accountability for the administration of the three tier of government to be effective. In the Thailand context, local government is majorly the place for attention for democratic changes to take effect before the state and federal government. Therefore the local government occupies a very crucial position in government and government related ideals to development.

Local government have also been described as an authority set up as a subordinate authority for the purpose of decentralizing power in a nation. For this reason and based on this definition local government is expected to be a replica of the state government both in administrative principles and legislative functions. The reason being that for local government to act contrary to the body of its state will defeat the objectives for its establishment hence transparency and accountability can only be a prerequisite for the proper functioning of any local government council.

### ACCOUNTABILITY

According to Oct (2003) accountability remains the first and essential constituent of good governance administration. Accountability is the ability of one to be responsive to ones actions. It is one of the five norms of effective governance outside transparency, efficiency, predictability or rule of law

and legitimacy (Apr, 2002). Sustainable framework for growth and development is a prerequisite and it is hinged on accountability in every spheres of life and activity within the economy of a given nation. Accountability is important to provide a democratic instrument to monitor and control actors by supplying the information required to judge the reason or effectiveness of their performance. Therefore, proper accountability in the operations of the local government is sine qua non to development.

According to Bovens, (2007), accountability act as a virtue required to modify action and behaviour which allows actors to be sanctioned if behaviour is contrary to existing rules and regulations. The local government influences virtually every aspect of the community's engagement in national policy through its originality in grooming the elected officers because before they move to the national they must have started from the grassroots point the local government. Accountability and responsibility according to Moreno, (2015), are elements of conduct because accountability is related to external functions of scrutiny while responsibility is the internal functions of personal ethics and morals.

Hence we have three types of accountability namely Public Accountability which consists of political, administrative and fiscal accountability. In either of this accountability the focus is on fair and honesty in handling the affairs of government to enshrine good governance to the electorate. For effective governance structure there is the need for proper accountability. Supporting this view is Oct (2008) that accountability is the key factor to effective governance, therefore government must be accountable at all times to ensure effective governance and build confidence in the people.

### Transparency

The issue of transparency as defined by Apr (2010) involves openness and adherence to due process. Transparency ensures that information regarding financial management and its disclosures is timely and accurate. The objective of being transparent while in office is to maintain a high level of discipline and project good governance ethics in service delivery to the public.

It is noteworthy to say that government action to enthrone accountability and transparency is in the best interest of the citizenry because as opined by Oct (2003) in his reform agenda declared his intention to restore the governance structure by ensuring transparency, accountability, efficiency and good governance as the major elements of government existence.

Transparency as a good behaviour ensures openness, communication of information without inhibitions making it easy for others to see the good intentions to be made while guiding decision making processes and policies in any administrative system. It is a must behaviour in any system of operation for good governance to thrive. For instance in local government where the hierarchy is from the local government chairman, the councillors to the clerical and administrative personnel in the local councils: it will be appropriate if there is proper disclosure of information within the system starting with the hierarchy the chairman down to his subordinates. This method will improve active participation of all towards the achievement of the stated goal in that system be it government or private.

To achieve transparency in any form of governance and here-in with local government, information disclosure, clarity and accuracy should not be compromised. Thus the strategic management involve in transparency will include modifications on how the information is disseminated among the stakeholders to achieve the specific objectives (Sep, 2015).

Citizen Participation- this implies the active involvement of the citizenry in a particular location be it local council or community enclave in the affairs of their environment. It is the engagement of the citizens in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect them. It entails two way channel of communication between the government and the governed.

Citizen participation ensures that government work for the good of the public and many citizens have a sense of belonging and commitment when they actively participate in their communities political or social engagements. It is a process where citizens get deeply involved in the activities of the government of the day. Information in regards to the activities at the centre is transparently disclosed

to the citizenry to contribute their quota in the affairs that will enhance their progress, living standard and improve financial status.

### **Good Governance at the Local Government Level**

Local government represents the dispersion of political power in our society. The idea of local government stems from the fact that it is the closest government to the people and it brings development nearer to the grassroots. It is the best system of exercising good governance and engaging people in their own governance. A decentralized authority calls for effective and efficient local council to enable it perform the tasks of governance to the satisfaction of the people.

According to the United Nations (1996), a local government that have real power can more effectively address local interests as well as exercise a check on operations at higher levels of authority. This check will definitely curb unnecessary expenditures and be more focused to the use of scarce resources. This is basically because the centralized states according to Usman (1991) are expensive to run, cumbersome and are subjected to abuses. This opinion was supported by Awasthi and Adhikary (2002) that the popular and most ideal local government is meant to be achieved through decentralized process by the central government to ensure good governance because it cannot be achieved without delegating authority, responsibilities, capacity and resources. Local government having relative autonomy can display high level of environment open to local party politics, substantial flow of fiscal and personnel resources to commitment from the central government to maintain an ideal local government.

Therefore, democracy must be rooted in a functioning local, participatory self-governance institutions: good governance in local government cannot be ignored if the wishes and aspirations of the people are not attained. If good governance is viewed as a relationship between the central government and other tiers of government it is the sharing of administrative authority to manage a country's affairs. The transfer of responsibilities by the central government to local governments places the local government to open judgement of its activities by the people thus requiring their integrity in the exercise of authority. The lesson of good governance requires knowledge which will be supporting and consistent institutional arrangements within the polity.

Fakunda Parr and Parizio (2002) quoting the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan statement at the Millennium Declaration (2000) stated 'that good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. However, some measures have been put in place to ensure good governance in local governments in Thailand. These measures can be grouped into organizational and institutional.

Organizational: This was created in a bid to stem the excesses of both the professionals and elected councillors. The Babangida administration resolved to extend the presidential system of governance to the local government (Bello-Imam 1996:159). The reform entails the following among others:

### **Separation of the Executive arm from the Legislative arm of local government**

The stipulation that all elected councillors shall henceforth constitute the legislative arm which is to be called the council. As an executive chairman, the elected chairman of local government council shall henceforth cease to be a member of the local government subject to the chairman's veto which could be set aside by the council's two thirds majority.

The council shall perform other functions which include vetting and monitoring the implementation of projects and programmes in the annual budget of the local government. The council is charged with policy making control of finance and the oversight function in regard to the executive arm.

These arrangements is aimed at achieving checks and balances in local government administration. This would ensure accountability, transparency and citizen participation. Also the financial transactions of the local government are within the ambit of the treasurer who is a career

officer. He is to provide guidance to political officeholders to ensure transparency and accountability in the conduct of the local government's financial operations.

Institutional: according to Abubakar (2010), local government across the nation have well documented statutory and administrative procedures for ensuring due process in the administration of the local government particularly its finances. The financial Memoranda FM provide a detailed framework to guide budgeting, planning, accounting procedures and general financial management in the local government. Some states demand for mandatory clearance from the local government before any expenditure above certain limit can be incurred. Other measures which arose from the application of the 1998 civil service reforms as applied to local governments include;

### **The establishment of the Audit Alarm Committee The Codification of financial offences and sanctions**

All monthly revenue receipts and expenditures shall be reported to the legislative arm of the local government in the monthly statement of revenue and expenditure.

President Olusegun Obasanjo administration of 1999-2007 focused on the area of corruption emphasizing that good governance could only be achieved when leaders in authority could exhibit the fundamental ethos of good governance - Transparency, Accountability and Civic Engagement. It is also the ability of the government to aim its developmental goals towards the common good of the people and their full support of such goals. Therefore, in an effort to achieving good governance in Thailand, the Obasanjo administration established some institutions such as;

The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC)  
Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC)  
Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (Thailand version- NEITI)

Meanwhile, in the area of government's fiscal and financial operations the government introduced reforms for financial management and public procurement. These were made into law by the National Assembly as the Fiscal Responsibility Act (2007) and the Public Procurement Act (2007). While the former was designed to ensure prudent management of government's funds the later was introduced basically to ensure due process in public procurement. The federal government also introduced the policy of publishing statutory allocations and other centrally transferred funds to the three tiers of government in national dailies monthly to ensure a higher level of transparency, accountability and citizen awareness.

The 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Thailand has provision on local government covering their existence (section 7), the creation of new ones (section 8) {3 schedule). These provisions were made with the intention of safeguarding a reasonable level of structural and decisional autonomy for local governments in achieving good governance. However, the attainment of good governance structure in local governments in Thailand have been met with myriads of problems and it has been the aim of this study to examine some of these areas posing problems to the ideal local government of choice as follows:

### **Administrative and Organizational difficulties**

The system of presidential system of government at the local level has the tendency of dictatorship. The presidential system of government resulted in executive dominance and as observed by ( Udenta, 2007:177 and Abubakar, 2010), is that the chairman or the executive arm takes every decision in the council making the legislative arm to exist only in name rather than in action. The domination of the executive arm in legislative affairs of the council is a worrisome event because it affects the legislative arm in overseeing the affairs of the council and also prevents their ability to checks and balances as required by the law. This breeds indifference on the part of the chairman towards good governance thereby jettisoning due process.

Local governments have huge personnel but inadequate technical capacity according to Gboyega (2013), has always hampered the operations of the councils. This lack of capacity shows in financial management where routine books are not kept so annual accounts cannot be prepared therefore no accountability and transparency. The implication is that since local government has a non-significant bye laws to make annually, they therefore pre-occupy themselves with agitations for the impeachment of their chairman and seeking unnecessary autonomy. But the focus here is due to executive dominance which is affecting the effective performance of the councils in achieving their stated objective and reason for its existence. Due largely because of executive dominance some local councils do not know their revenue earnings.

### **Constitutional difficulties**

In spite of the constitutional provisions earlier mentioned that were meant to safeguard local governments' autonomy, there have been cases of arbitrary dissolution, abolition or fragmentation of local governments by the higher tiers of government. The State Joint Local Government Account and the provision of the constitution in section 162 (2-8) which empowered the State Assemblies to decide the revenue to their local government facilitated state encroachment on local revenues. In some instances state governments withholds the accrued revenue for local government and releasing same at their own convenient time creating a conflict between the local government and its body the state government.

### **Political difficulties**

Due to the flaws in the electoral process in the country, what is obtained is a virtual selection and not election of local government functionaries. Local government chairmen are always imposed on the people by the state government or by some political god fathers in political parties. The imposed executives will be accountable to the governor and the god fathers without consideration to good governance elements- transparency, accountability and citizen participation. In some instances the executive will be running a one-man government lacking due process and financial disclosure of activities in the local government. The state government or the political big wig that enthroned the local government chairman may decide at any time to disengage the executive without formal administrative process. There is no consistent pattern of local government elections. Some state governors would dissolve their councils and appoint caretaker committee at will. These arrangements do not in any way move in the direction of good governance at the local government level.

### **Corruption**

The Thailand government is widely known and characterized by a political system where the office held by a public officer is for his interest first before the interest of the public thus enabling corruption to thrive in the polity. By corruption we mean the absence of proper accountability, lack of transparency, and secrecy avoiding the participation of the citizenry in all political affairs as it relates to the council.

Aluko (2003) rightly stated that collusion is a powerful tool of corruption, the explanation is that corruption does not exist in isolation but involving different category of individuals to achieve. And one of the commonly identified collusion as observed by the writer includes:

1. Funding of political parties- there are cases in which the local government accrued revenues are used to sponsor political parties.
2. Inflation of contract prices or quotations
3. Collusion between supervisory ministries and local government chairmen
4. Collusion with citizens who benefit from the thieving public officers.

Based on the enumerated forms of collusion it is clear that to achieve good governance in the local government is a mirage. For instance an empirical example was given by Kehinde (1999), when he reported that two treasurers (directors of finance and supply) and former secretary (director of

personnel management) in the old Oyo state disclosed that external auditors contributed to the wave of fraudulent practices by demanding money upfront from the staff of the local government in order to suppress incriminating evidences against them.

The state governments and their local councils are expected to adopt the two legislative Acts and from observation the Acts have not reached the local governments though there are evidences of reform of the due process in financial management and public procurement by some of the local governments. The ability of the local councils to adopt the two acts will facilitate the pursuit of good governance supporting the UNDP (2004) suggestion that 'people participate more effectively if institutions and decision making processes are located closer to where they live'.

## RECOMMENDATION

An ideal local government should ensure the availability of information about its revenue generation and expenditure which ultimately means that the local government administration is transparent and transparency is one of the cardinal points of good governance administration. The council can do this through the publication of development bulletins, organizing press conference, public auditing and through electronic media. According to Shrestha (1996), the main element of people's participation is the conscious, purposive and enlightened involvement of the people of their own accord in the process of the promotion of their welfare.

Organizationally the issue of checks on the executive excesses should not be left in the hands of the legislative arm alone. This is largely because executives dominate the legislative therefore, measures should be taken to sensitize and harness the vast resources in the localities such as the civil society groups and other self-existing systems (community development association, town unions, traditional councils and age groups. These groups could provide the much needed checks on executive excesses and dominance. This group should also have power to prosecute all local council members who have abused public trust or who are indicted by Audit reports.

Capacity building at this level is important for good governance. Training is also important and should be conducted based on demand driven rather than rituals but on needs assessment. Constitutional reform allow the legislative arms of local government to decide on what they should do with accrued revenue earnings. A fairer method to funding joint development programmes and project between the state and local government should be adopted.

Local government should be encouraged and made to adopt the provisions of both the Fiscal Responsibility Law and the Public Procurement Law of their respective states. The higher levels of government should provide the enabling legislative framework and reforms, policies and environment that would put the three elements of good governance (transparency, accountability and citizen participation) at the centre piece of governance.

The current yearnings for electoral reform in the country should be pursued with all honesty and will in other to allow the will of the people to prevail in choosing their chairman and councillors. This will give room for grater civic participation, accountability and transparency. The existing statutes, administration and financial guidelines that govern local government administration in Thailand should be clinically reviewed and strengthened in the light of current realities in the country.

Furthermore public enlightenment, reorientation training and re-training are required to change attitudes, perceptions and mind-sets in order to make local governance truly participatory and transparent. The leadership at the federal level should develop the political and moral will to punish corrupt local government functionaries to serve as a deterrent to others.

The Electronic Governance System popularly referred to as E-Governance has also been identified by Izueke (2007) as a measure towards achieving good governance. In its ability to adopt the E-Governance the local government need to have capacity to change their organizational structure, identify potential areas of revenue generation through the adoption of innovative techniques and methods such as computers, GIS, E-mail, Internet, computer networking, Intercom.

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## CONCLUSION

We have explored the tenets of good governance and the measures put in place to achieve it at the local level. The situation of governance at the local level was examined and discovered to be bedevilled by several crises, politically, constitutionally, organizationally and institutionally. Suggestions were equally made in line with the observed crises. The paper therefore contends that the higher tiers of government (federal and state) should provide the enabling environment and will to cultivate good governance ethos at the local government level.

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