

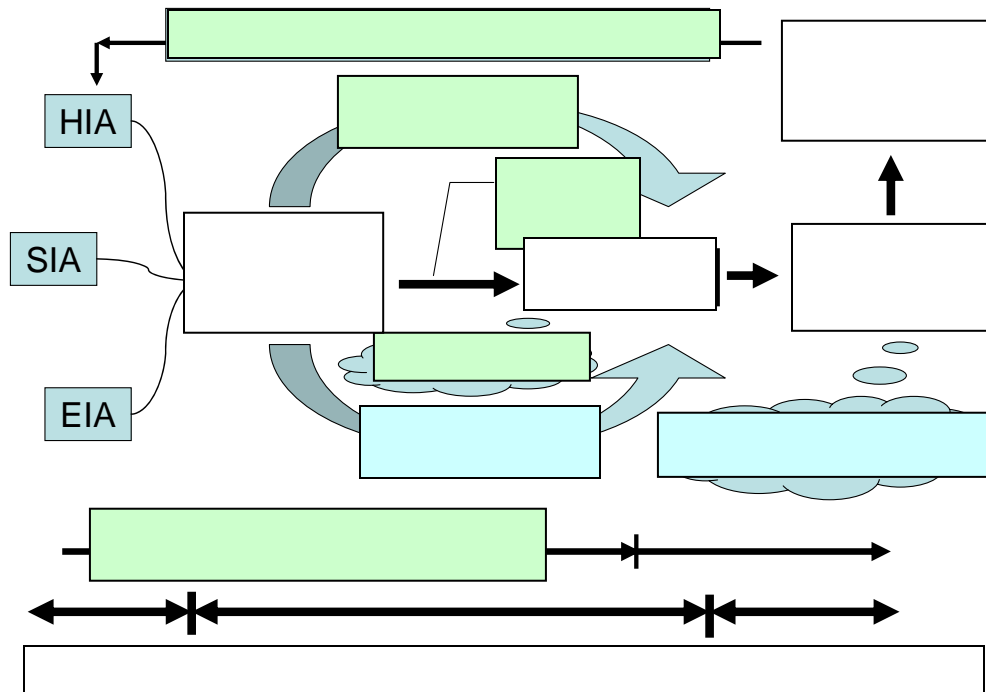
The Role of Local Administration Organizations in the Management of Health, Natural Resources and the Environment

1. Rationale

The National Health Act, B.E. 2550 defines the term “health system” as the system of all relations connected to health while Prof. Dr. Praves Wasi (Wasi: 2550) further elaborated on the 10 components to a health system: personal dignity and value, career, culture and environment, strong community, education, religion, science and technology, communication, public health and public policy and development trend. Consequently, the task of having all parties from every social sector formulate ideas in integrating health promotion into their main activities (All for Health) is considered an important health system strategy.

In a new age society where there is more public participation at national and local levels (Pooncharoen: 2544), the objective of developing “well-being” has been “...to support and encourage local communities to play a role in caring for one’s own health and the health of one’s family, community, environment and society as a whole, with true commitment and awareness, having faith in the development of local well-being...” The heart of well-being lies in the development of local community roles and participation, with a target to use local communities as base for driving development and civil society processes together with parties in the state, political, non-government organization, academic, local administration organization, social group/organization sectors working in the area, jointly implementing development activities and driving society in an on-going manner.

The Health Assembly process emphasizes creating understanding and creating conceptual frameworks for society through verbal communication and through various activities and processes. The result is a state of informing and learning aimed to change conceptual frameworks and paradigms about well-being. In recent times, the implementation of processes like “the Health Assembly process” and “the participatory health public policy process” all reflect the potential and role of local administration organizations in the management of health, natural resources and the environment, as shown in the following diagram.



2. Important Legislation and Acts supporting local administration organizations’ participation and mission in fostering well-being:

2.1 *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, B.E. 2550* clearly provides for decentralization in Chapter 5: Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies, Article 78 (3) and Chapter 14: Local Administration, Articles 281 to 283, prescribing that the state decentralize power to local administration organizations (LAO) and establish laws to clearly lay down plans and procedures for so doing.

2.2 *The Act Determining Plan and Process of Decentralization, B.E. 2542* prescribes local administration organizations’ roles and responsibilities in providing public health services. Local Administration Organizations have been continuously working to support people in their responsible areas to care for their own health and if they are able to link together the various implementation activities in an integrated drive, the outcome would be good life quality for the people in the area.

2.3 *The Public Health Act, B.E. 2535* provides authority and responsibility for local administration organizations, as local competent officers, to manage public health services, particularly in fostering good health and disease prevention in the locality.

2.4 *The National Health Security Act, B.E. 2545*, Article 47 focuses on the creation of health security for people in the area by supporting the participatory process, which is suitably implemented to correspond to the people’s readiness and needs and to their potential in managing local or area health security systems.

2.5 *The National Health Act, B.E. 2550* defines “**well-being**” as a state where humans are physically, spiritually, intellectually and socially complete in a balanced and holistic way, meaning that health or well-being is relevant to the responsibilities of all agencies and all sectors of society. The issue of creating good health or well-being is thus

an important mission for local administration organizations. From the provisions in the above legislations, we can see that “local administration organizations” need to have a role and participate in the management of health, natural resources and the environment.

2.6 The Enhancement of National Environment Quality Act, B.E. 2535 (1992) stipulates that the National Environmental Board shall prepare a national policy and plan for enhancement of national environment quality. The policy, approved by the cabinet on 26 November 1996, is used as the framework for overall environmental management of the country for 20 years (1997-2016). The Act also calls for a plan for environmental quality management in which the national policy and plan is translated into practice. Therefore, any project or activity likely to cause serious damage to the community in terms of environmental quality, natural resources and health must undergo an environmental and health impact assessment before and after the operation.

From the provisions of the law above, it can be seen that “local government organizations” have an important role to play and need to participate in the management of health, natural resources and the environment.

3. Health and environment

Today farmers use chemical pesticides at a high rate and in an improper manner. In addition, the control of pesticide sale is not effective. Farmers can buy strong chemical pesticides in small amounts easily and cheaply. Usually the origin of the pesticide manufacturers is unknown, thus posing unnecessary and severe health risks. Several research findings by Thailand Research Fund (TRF), Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI), and various NGOs confirm that the system of agricultural production is related to health and environment. Chemicals are used for agriculture in the highland which is the watershed area. Such practice caused chemical distribution and residues in the environment, including soil, water resources, forests, animals and plants as well as in produce. Through chemical agriculture, a large number of patients have suffered from the toxicity of pesticides.

Consequently, the locality should play a role in setting regulations for management of natural resources. The people in the community should participate in the issuance of rules and regulations to ensure a balanced use of natural resources (soil, water, and forest) and a presence of a law in pursuance of the 2007 Constitution.

4 Health Impact Assessments or HIAs³ are environmental health activities which efficiently link “**health**” with “**the environment**”. It is an important monitoring tool used in creating health security for the people, focusing on participation and creating community learning. Health impact assessments may be divided into two levels:

4.1 Policy Level Assessment The National Health Act, B.E. 2550, Article 111 and Article 25 (5) prescribes that all state sectors conduct health impact assessments before setting and driving any public policy towards implementation, part of which may be linked to the strategic environmental assessment (SEA).

4.2 Project or Action Level Assessment The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand B.E. 2550, Article 67, clause 2 prescribes that projects or actions which may create severe impacts on communities in relation to the environment, natural resources and health undergo environmental and health impact assessments before and after implementation. According to the Enhancement and Conservation of the National Environment Quality Act, B.E. 2535 and the National Health Act, B.E. 2550, Article 11, if the people request a health impact assessment, the state must provide information on health impacts before the project is allowed to proceed. This is done in order to provide health security and to provide explanations to the people, when requested. Health impact assessment tools must also be used in considering the approval criteria for the involved project. Examples of actions taken on projects affecting the health of local communities include the Udon Thani potash mine case and the Mae La Noi, Mae Hong Son rock crushing plant, etc.

There is a need for local administration organizations to have the capacity to assess health impacts so that they may develop options and take policy decisions to prevent and control health threat factors. In so doing, there is a need for standardized criterion, support from a “**fund**” system and support from an “**information communication technology**” system accessible to the people to provide learning and participation.

³ The World Health Organization (WHO: 1999) defines health impact assessments as a process which judges the value of a policy, plan or project by considering the possible impacts and impact distribution on the health of the people through combined usage of different assessment methods, processes and tools.

5. Health Management Actions by Local Administration Organizations

5.1 Community Well-being Management In 2007, the Ministry of Public Health transferred 22 health stations to the management of local administration organizations¹, from which the synthesis of lessons has been that the people accept this new format and are happy with the services, which are fast and closely accessible. Moreover, the health stations have been able to provide services that very well answer to area problems and needs, with fast and convenient coordination reducing procedures and local administration organizations have provided more budgetary support in health. The local administration organizations have good relationships with health stations, co-operating and putting their efforts into working for a common objective: good health for the people.

However, **problems found in the transfer** include lack of clarity in transfer policies between old and new systems in matters of management, finance and personnel systems; for example, payment for medical treatment, over-time, materials and medical supplies expenses. There are also issues relating to regulations, information documents, reporting systems, job security and promotion and loss of rights in position transfers. Other issues include professional licenses and delegating authority to provide medical treatment, communication between local areas and the central part, decision making powers and differences between Ministry of Public Health and Ministry of Interior regulations.

5.2 Development of the Public Health Workforce This is done through policy advocacy in 4 major agencies: the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education and the Nursing Council. There has been the signing of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) on the production of community nurses between 5 nursing schools at Khon Kaen University, Burapha University, Chaing Mai University, Sri Nakharinwirot University (Ongkharak Campus) and Princess of Narathiwat University and area community hospitals. Local administration organizations have provided scholarships for students in the community nurse program², where, upon graduation, students return to work for 4-8 years, in return for the scholarship, as community nurses, by the community and for the community. According to most local administration organizations, the scholarship program has not been on-going because of regulation issues.

5.3 Local Health Security Funds and Community/Tambon Health Funds The Local or Area Health Security System Management Committee supports local administration organizations in managing the local health security fund by organizing 4 types of activities:

(1) Providing health services which are part of the benefit package for 5 target groups: pregnant women, children newborn to below 6, children from 6, youth below 25, adults from 25 up and the disabled.

(2) Providing budgetary support for community health service units to enable them to develop their service quality or provide services corresponding to community needs. The fund provides suitable budget to supplement normal budget these service units receive from their commanding units.

(3) Encouraging the people and local communities to support good health by having community groups/organizations propose projects or activities relating to good

health creation, disease control and prevention or rehabilitation or local wisdom therapies. Initiated by community people, these projects will be eligible for budgetary support from the community health fund.

(4) Managing the fund/developing fund management systems and others to be more efficient through normal fund management activities such as personnel capacity building.

5.4 Traditional activities Community continuously supports activities related to traditional knowledge, such as traditional doctors network, conservation of traditional plants, herbs and natural resources relating to healthcare. Development and use of herbal products are promoted in many areas, e.g. Maela Noi, Mae Sariang, Khun Yuam and Pai District.

6. Action by the National Health Assembly

The National Health Assembly is invited to consider the Draft Resolution 1/7.