

Environmental Management: A Case of Yala Municipality

Jinda Wechrungsrikul¹ and Chanisada Choosuk²

¹College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University

²Faculty of Environmental Management, Prince of Songkla University

Po.Box. 50 Kohong, Hatyai, Songkhla 90110

Tel. 074 286832 E-mail: chanisada.c@psu.ac.th

Abstract

This qualitative research aims to study the environmental management in the case of Yala Municipality. The research methods include literature reviews and semi-structured interviews. The target group is comprised of 2 subgroups: 1) a group of 15 Yala municipal officials, including elected local officials, municipal officials and staffs; and 2) 19 representatives of community members from three communities. Yala municipality has started this project since 2002 aiming at i) building up the environmental awareness of the community people; ii) establishing the people involvement in managing the environmental tasks; and iii) generating more income for the community people who join in this project. This research tries to explore the role of the community organization representatives in handling the community-based environmental management projects of Yala Municipality. Main findings are the opportunity structures for participation provided by the municipal authority mainly rely on the utilization of state-mandated community organizations and their committees as the main channel for people participation in community projects such as environmental management projects.

Keywords: Environmental management, community organisations, local government, public participation

1. Introduction

The local government is the array of government, which is closest to the people. It is at the local level

where people interact with their local government on daily basic needs. Local authorities can be seen as the managers and providers of key infrastructural supplies preventing from the environmental damages. As city dwellers, people expect the local government to run in a functional way in order to fulfill their needs. [1],[2]

The importance of public participation in urban development project is widely concerned. In the 1990s, this concept has been promoted as a necessary component of public service delivery at the local level. This is as a result of the single local government is inadequate in dealing with urban environmental problems; the stakeholders should cooperate in the management system to work together in developing their city. Participatory approach is, therefore, important in every sector of development including education, health, water and sanitation.[3]

At the municipal level, in the Thai context, the community organization committee is the “major channel” linking between the public and the municipal authorities. The establishment of community organization was in line with the instructions and guidelines issued in 1987 by the Office of Urban Development of the Department of Local Administration (DOLA), the Ministry of Interior.

The formal organisations, community organisations, can be a channel makes the local government to be more responsive to the local people such as public health services and improving the people’s quality of life. The process will start at the municipal level then pass through the community representatives,

who act as mediator and then benefit the majority of people at the end. This system seems to be helpful in fostering the state-led development and support the municipal system to be more responsive to the local people.

These grassroots bodies are state-organized and state-mandated rather than self-initiated or independently organized groups. The basic concept of these particular community organizations is based on a putative participatory approach in local government's basic services delivery. Since the local governments have to deal with a large number of people in providing basic services, they need 'channels' at the grassroots level to undertake it effectively.

Yala municipality is located in Yala Province in the Southern part of Thailand. This city is well known for tidiness and clean conditions. It comprises an area of 19.4 square kilometers. The population is 62,991 with 22,162 households (2011). This city has population density of 3,266 per square kilometers. Currently, Yala municipality has 38 community organisations. Indeed, the municipal authority has continuously conducted the environmental management project, the solid waste management, in particular [4].

2. Research Questions

This research aims at exploring how local authority performs the environmental management projects. This is to focus on the community-based environmental protection project and the outcomes. This paper will also find out that the public participation of local people done by the channel of community organisations, what are the limitations and how we can ensure this channel can lead to the meaningful public participation.

3. Research Methodology

This case study principally employs qualitative research methods in seeking explanations to how the

local government authorities manage environmental management tasks. The research method was done through documentary research and semi-structured interviews. In here, the individual and group interviews were conducted. The target group is comprised of two subgroups: 1) a group of fifteen Yala municipal officials, including elected local officials, municipal officials and staffs; 2) nineteen representatives of community organizations were interviewed. The study focus on Yala municipality and five communities, namely, *Kuptasa*, *Lang Rongrien Jeen* (Behind Chinese School), *Koohamook*, *Talad Kow* (Old Market), and *Jaru Phattan* community.

4. Findings

4.1 The environmental protection project in Yala municipality

Yala municipality is well known for tidiness and clean conditions. As the Mayor of Yala City stated, the environmental policy of the city, therefore, is the guideline leading to be the healthy city. This is to be done via participatory-based and environmental awareness of the local people. This city has occupied the vast area of green space. His vision is to maintain the existing those mentioned outstanding and to get involved the community people in doing this. [5] As a result, the municipal executives then had an idea to get the community people involved in dealing with environmental management through the “environmental management project”.

Generally, the environmental management tasks are mainly the responsible of the Sanitation and Environmental Bureau. The tasks of this bureau are, therefore, comprise with three main parts: Firstly, the general environmental management tasks consist of trimming the trees, park, clean up the main roads which are still under the responsibility of the municipal staffs. Secondly, the promotion of the community's environmental activities is under the municipal duty. This task is to support the environmental

activities conducted at the community level by using the municipal budget and municipal environmental funds. Those activities include garbage for eggs, waste recycling shop, community development, and waste composting. Lastly, the community-based environmental management, follow through the “environmental protection project” is conducted aiming at allowing the community people to be staff in handling with certain tasks i.e. cleaning up the roads, footpaths, drainage ditches and public space in the community areas. Undeniably, in the second and last tasks, the municipal authority utilizes the community organisation as the main channel in mobilizing the environmental tasks.

Yala municipality has started the “environmental management project” since 2002. The objectives of this project are to 1) build up the environmental awareness in solid waste management for the cleanliness and tidiness of the community; 2) establish the people involvement in managing the environmental tasks by the community people; and 3) generate more income for the community people who join in this project. The way that Yala municipality has done is to allow the community organisations to select and hire 2-4 persons to do the community’s cleaning jobs for 5,500 Baht a month.

This project has been done starting at informing the community people the necessity of environmental protection. Later, the community people will then select the person living in the community to be the “community cleaning staff”. The criteria in selecting the person to run this task are the disadvantaged people who have to taking their family members and should be the responsible person. The person who will be the “community cleaning staff” should come from the consensus of the whole community members. The controlling and evaluating system will be done by the committees of community organisations and the municipal authority.

4.2 The results in running the environmental management projects

This environmental protection project has been done for almost 8 years within 21 communities in Yala municipality. Among those, there are both success and failure communities in running this project. Factors in identifying the success and failure in running this project include i) the consensus of the community people in selecting the cleaning staff, ii) the support of the community organisation committee in evaluating and monitoring the cleaning staff’s performance, and iii) the active in running the waste separation activities in the community. The results of the environmental management projects are as presented below.

1) Kuptasa community

The community people, with the support of community organisation, had selected the representatives to be the “community cleaning staffs”. The community people and the community organisation committee support in monitoring and evaluating the performance of the selected staffs. Moreover, the members of community organisation also launch the waste separation activities by providing information. As a result, some people then started to separate the waste. Every single month, the municipal authority will organize the truck to buy the collected recyclables from the community.

2) Lang Rongrien Jeen (Behind Chinese School) community

The community people had a consensus in selecting the head of community committee to be one of the “community cleaning staff”. This is because his outstanding in being responsible and working hard. He spends times for cleaning up and keeping the community tidy. There is a huge support from the community people. However, the community organisation committees do not play an active role in seriously initiating the waste separation activities.

3) *Koohamook* community

The community people complain the roles of the head of community organization committee. The “community cleaning staffs” were not selected by the consensus of the community people. The selected staffs do not put efforts in doing their tasks. The roles of the community people in monitoring and evaluating the selected staffs does not exist. Moreover, the community organisation committees have never paid attention in running the waste separation activities. This results in the conflict between the community people and the community organisation committees.

4) *Talad Kow* (Old market) community

When the community organisation committees have to select the cleaning staffs, no one wants to do this job due to low salary. This is why the head of community organisation committee and his team have to responsible for this task. This community is the Muslim community. The community people are satisfied with the result in cleaner and tidier of the community. As a result of this is Muslim community, the community committees try to ask for the cooperation from the people by using the religion concept. The sharing and meeting during the tea time and after praying time have been conducted in order to increase the community people’s awareness. Unfortunately, the waste separation activities have not yet been initiated.

5) *Jaru Phattana* community

The community people had selected the representatives to be the “community cleaning staffs” and also joined in monitoring and evaluating their performances. The roles of the community committees are obvious. Moreover, the community committees have paid more attention in waste separation activities. The children group is the targeted in building their environmental awareness. The children are encouraged to separate the recyclables and sell to the junkshop. As this is the rural community, its location is far from the city center. It is

then difficult for the children to carry the recyclables to sell. The head of community committee then provide some space in his house to be a recyclable storage in order to support this activity.

To sum up, the examples from five communities in Yala municipality confirm that the community organisation representatives play an active role in running the environmental management project. But, the results are varied. The success or failure in running this project depends on numbers of factors including the motivations, the efforts, and the support from the community people.

5. Discussions

5.1 Public participation through the local government system

It is clear that the municipal authority has put more efforts in adjusting the role from being main service provider to facilitator in getting the local people involved. It is the motivation of the local politicians in making the best use of the participatory approach.

However, it cannot be denied that in doing this, the municipal authority is running their tasks via the bureaucratic system. The top-down approach of the Thai bureaucracy is being challenged to be more participatory approach. This is because the current of participation in Thailand grew out of a concern that technocratic, top-down approach to development was proving ineffective, costly, and not sustained [6]. Undeniably, the bureaucratic characteristics via top-down approach fail to meet the needs of the poor because the decisions are made by experts far removed from the people and their needs. [6] Once the public participation has been brought to the wider discussion, it is obvious that public participation is not only participating in election or involving the ballot box, but it has to go beyond that. Getting the local people involved, since in designing in ‘what is to be done’ and in implementing it, is the genuine

partnership for the community development at the city level. [7]

Therefore, the basic concept in establishing the community as a channel to link the local governments and people seems to be good. But, the real role of community leaders tends to facilitate top-down development rather than encourage the bottom-up approach. They act as a channel of communication from the ‘state-led bureaucracy’ to the community people. Definitely, the role of community organisation and its formal representatives are widely criticized.

5.2 Main channel through formal representatives of community organisation

For the environmental protection project, the representatives of the community organisation act as the main actor in mobilize this duty since selecting the community cleaning staff, monitoring and evaluating their performance. Further, other important roles of the community organisation representatives are to conduct the waste separation activities, with the support of municipal staffs, in their community. But, the results from Yala case have proved that this channel is still being questioned.

The point to further discuss is the public participation in environmental project is usually defined as formal representatives and project-based organisations. [8] The main objective of the established formal organisations and the appointed or elected formal representative is to link the local people and the governments. This channel aims at balancing the relationship between the state and the people. Arguably, the access of local people in decision-making process was facilitated by the formal representatives cannot guarantee the meaningful participation of the people. Moreover, the formal institutions through community organisations can lead to the failure in involving the people in the decision making process. [8], [9]

The role of community organisation and its formal representatives are widely criticized. As Desai (1996) found, the community organisations are not the representative institutions that are made to appear at the community level. The community leaders live in a world from which most of the slum-dwellers are excluded. Some of those leaders are rarely seen in the slum. Many community leaders tended to not take their positions seriously. Some leaders seem to pay attention to establish their prestige, status, and contact with the outside world via the patronage system.

In fact, the channel of participation via the formal representative organisation is proved to be not effective. This is because the participation via this channel is always available to the small numbers of people in the community. The decisions made are limited under the domination of powerful people such as formal representatives of community organisations. The status of the local people as a member of community leaders and community committee is very minimal. There are only 15 persons acting as community leader and committee. Meanwhile, the majority people of each community are not being a member of any group.

This is to confirm the findings from Songkhla case in Thailand. The research found that, in Somwang community, the recycle bank committee has to find out many other channels in increasing the people involvement. It is suggested that, the informal network within the community should be encouraged in order to support the community’s activities. The active decision making of the people in the community can be done by the local decision-making activity network. This is why in making the best use of the local cooperative system via natural leaders and local key informants cannot be overlooked. Indeed, there is a need to involve a wider range of citizens in joining in the community projects [10].

5.3 Environmental concerns

The problem of environmental concerns can be another pitfall need to be overcome. It cannot be denied that the most communities exist in the urbanized context. The social cohesion of urban dwellers is not tight as the case of rural dwellers. The urban society is loose. Similarly, in the case of Yala, a huge numbers of migrants move into this city. Then, in mobilising the urban dwellers to get involved in the community projects, it will be far more difficult. This leads to the lack of public awareness. The problem of people awareness always affects on the success of the people participation in Thailand. If the people have more awareness, the level of participation will be higher [11].

Moreover, as Bureekul furthered, the accessibility to information about the proposed project is the important for all actors during the decision-making. In various projects, the level of participation is likely low due to the local people did not know about the details of the project. This is because the non-participatory culture can effect on the municipal system in running the environmental projects in the communities [11]. The people's perception is the local government, as a single actor, remains playing the main role in environmental management, solid waste problem in particular. As well as they do not understand the critical situation of waste problem. Then, they do not know their important role in joining in the modern system of waste management. [12] This will then lead to the lower level of participation as can be seen in the case of communities in Yala municipality.

6. Conclusions

The success involvement in specific community project, problem of environmental management in particular, requires the “participation of all”. The environmental management relies on the general

mobilization due to this problem is the combined actions. All people cause the problem by generating the waste in their daily life. The channel through community organisations representatives cannot guarantee the success of environmental management at the end. Indeed, the environmental problem cannot be managed in a preventive approach with the cooperation and participation of the local community due to the participation of the local community is minimal. It is essential for the municipal authority to promote consistent community's participation. This needs to ensure that many other channels should be available for the local to participate regularly, equally, and actively in the community-based environmental projects.

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