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PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN BORDER SECURITY MANAGEMENT: EVIDENCE FROM MUKDAHAN, THAILAND

Nattapol PROMWICHA¹, Somporn LUNGCHAROEN¹, Wattana RUANGKAEW¹,
Sorn INTHAWISET¹ and Wanee Luerattana ONGCHAI¹

¹ Faculty of Political Science, Bangkokthonburi University, Thailand;
nattapol.1925p@gmail.com (N. P.); somporn1212@gmail.com (S. L.);
ruangkaew11@gmail.com (W. R.); sorn_inthawiset99@gmail.com (S. I.);
wanee333@gmail.com (W. O.)

Handling Editor:

Professor Dr. Muhlis MADANI

Unismuh Makassar, Indonesia

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1) Associate Professor Dr. Banpot WIROONRATCH	PSU Hatyai Campus, Thailand
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Abstract

This research was conducted to study 1) the public participation in border security management and 2) obstacles related to public participation in border security management. The in-depth interviews were conducted on the samples of community leaders in the 3 border sub-districts of Don Tan, Mukdahan, Thailand. The research results revealed that 1) Public participation in border security management was very little because government agencies did not want public participation as the security issues were directly the authority of government agencies. This caused distrust in working with the people sector. The paranoia of confidential information is one of the most important issues. 2) Taking care of security in the area was influenced by the authority of each party which was not the same. Security Department and Regional Governments had different legal powers to make different work sets of data.

Keywords: Public Participation, Security Management, Border

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Background and Significance of Problem

Thailand's current security problems are a combination of traditional security threats, namely military threats such as border fighting or border conflicts. The new forms of threats (non-traditional security threats) are threats related to human security affecting the strengthening of national security, including long-term direction of national development. Some related factors are such as the borderless world arising from Globalization, technological advancement, catastrophic climate change, harsh nature and the spread that causes widespread harm such as emerging diseases, transnational crime and terrorism (Office of the National Security Council, 2017)

Among the current situations, Thailand's border areas have changed from a conflict zone to an important area. Trade with neighboring countries has increased after the ASEAN Community was formed in 2015. Efficient management of border areas is therefore important for relevant agencies to take action. The great importance must be given in order to prevent problems arising from the integration of ASEAN countries. As a result, border security management is considered an important measure for many countries in screening what is harmful and will affect the security of the state and people in order to maintain the country's security (National Defence Studies Institute, 2020).

According to the border security management plan (2016-2021) presented by General Prayut Chan-o-cha, Prime Minister, as a statement given to the Council regarding ASEAN security in border management, the plan has been implemented to create concrete solutions to resolve 1) the problem of unclear border lines, 2) the problem of illegal immigration into the country, 3) drug problems, 4) war weapon trade problems, 5) and transnational crimes. The problem situation was more severe. There are 6 urgent target areas in Phase 1, including the Mukdahan-Kham Ahuan Special Economic Zone area, Bang Sai Yai Sub-district, Mukdahan Sub-district, and Sri Bunrueang Sub-district, Mueang Mukdahan District, Bang Sai Noi Sub-district, Pong Kham Sub-district, and Wan Yai Sub-district, Wan Yai District, Don Tan Sub-district, Pho Sai Sub-district, Don Tan District, Mukdahan, Thailand, which are the areas with high potential are required to be improved to have the unity at the policy level and operational level from the central government, ministries, bureaus, departments, including local agencies. This can raise the potential in line with the capabilities of the area to be ready to receive increased border trade without affecting the operation of Thailand's border protection mission.

From the aforementioned information, it can be seen that the importance of security is highly emphasized by the government. Working to accomplish the plan or mission according to the plan extremely requires the participation of all sectors. Especially, the participation of the people sector in practical work in the area is not less important than the role of the security agency. Therefore, the research team would like to know about people's participation in security management in a remote area like Don Tan, which is an area the government gives the first priority and therefore researches this matter.

Literature Review

Security

Security is essential in managing a nation. It is important in ensuring the happiness of the people, focusing on environmental management, safety, sovereignty, democracy, and peace at all levels, from the national level to society and community. It emphasizes the development of individuals, tools, technology, and large-scale databases to be prepared to handle threats and disasters of all types and levels. It involves both prevention and solutions to current and potential security issues. This can be achieved through comprehensive problem-solving mechanisms involving the government, private sector, civil society, and non-governmental organizations, as well as neighboring and friendly countries on the basis of good governance principles (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2023). The term

“national security” refers to a state in which a country is free from threats and coercion against its sovereignty, democracy, territorial integrity, religion, monarchy, safety of the people, the normal happiness of the citizens, or anything that affects the national interests or the governance of a democratic system with the King as the Head of State. It also encompasses the preparedness of a country to face various situations resulting from threats of any form. Social and community security in each locality is vital. When communities are secure, the nation is entirely secure. Building mechanisms for people to collaborate in their communities creates a social foundation for mutual assistance (Norm Reciprocal). We called this process as the emergence of civil society. Social Space for civil society to play a role in their community, State/National Security is the situation of sovereignty in governing one’s own territory and be able to live in safety from all dangers whether it is a risk factor that occurs in various ways such as doubt, anxiety, fear, and paranoia. The advancement, having rights and freedom under various pressures will guarantee to create the responsibility and authority of each structure in the country for being able to move independently. It is certain and cannot be easily changed. There is strong unity with patience and toleration to pressure in different ways that affect the territorial integrity both sovereignty and independence. Regarding the welfare, security and safety, people can live happily with stability in politics and governance. Moreover, the government must have the potential and capacity to manage or encounter various affecting situations (National Security Act, 2016).

Security policies and plans that can maintain national security and interests in the border area focus on allowing the border area and people in the area to develop, be stable, safe, and have the potential to prevent and resolve all types of threats. It also includes creating an environment suitable for economic, social, and human development. Collaboration with neighboring countries to prevent disasters and address security issues is vital. The goal is to promote sustainable economic growth, trade, and cross-border transportation, as well as address border issues in a balanced manner between Thailand and neighboring countries.

Participation

The concept of public participation is interpreted and defined in a broad and diverse manner in various contexts. The researchers summarized it as follows. Social participation is a Western-oriented concept that emerged alongside the belief in democratic principles that uphold the rights and freedoms of individuals. Regarding the profound interrelatedness with the belief in individualism, each person possesses knowledge, abilities, and the capacity to think independently. They can express their own opinions in their affiliated community under the understanding that they must come altogether for the benefits of everyone under the rules set by society (Kaewsomboon, 2013). The community participation involves individuals actively participating in various stages of an activity. It is an involvement that contributes to the outcomes of the participating activity, be it decision-making, benefiting parties, or those who are involved in the activities. Community participation in development activities is not a matter of getting the public involved in activities organized for them. Communities already have their own activities and ways of doing things. People have the capacity to develop their own communities. Involving people in making decisions for community development is a basic process of community planning in the areas where they live. In addition, setting objectives and planning altogether is a form of participation, as well as participating in reaping the benefits of community services. This includes participating in controlling and evaluating community projects, which may involve representation or direct involvement (Chinsomboon, 2019; Ruangsom, 2019).

Collaborative Governance

In the current era, working that creates more efficiency in the work process and increases the results of state affairs administration is the matter. It cannot be denied that capital is an important factor. Therefore, the participation of the private sector should play an important role

in pushing forward various issues. The operation of the public sector is not except for stability. In order to achieve a balanced state in the administration of public affairs, there should be 3 sectors to work; 1) The public sector, which consists of public administration of all agencies, including ministries, bureaus, departments, localities, state enterprises, 2) The civil society sector consists of communities, 3) The private sector will participate horizontally with both the government sector and the civil society sector (National Defence Studies Institute, 2011).

Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study. The data for this research was collected from theoretical documents related to the subject and through in-depth interviews with a specific and focused sample group. A total of 15 individuals were interviewed, consisting of community leaders of 3 sub-districts of Don Tan, Mukdahan, Thailand including Pho Sai, Don Tan Phasuk, and Don Tan. The sample group was specifically selected. The permission was obtained to record the conversations. In the interviews, a total of 15 people used pseudonyms, including 3 village headmen, 3 assistant village headmen, 5 community heads, and natural community leaders to be analyzed.

Research Findings

The research results revealed that public participation involves joining only people trusted by government agencies. There is no formal process or steps for carrying out activities and participating in security work in all 5 areas: 1) disease outbreaks along the border, 2) problem of illegal immigration, 3) drug problems, 4) transnational criminals 5) problems with natural resources, the environment, large-scale disasters and epidemics along the border.

“There is only giving news or informing some news and the people do not have the opportunity to participate. Mostly, the authorities (government) do not trust the people and they are afraid of secrets being leaked” (Representative of community leaders from Pho Sai 1). The participants who came to participate in border management in all 3 sub-districts of Don Tan answered in the same way. Regarding the participation of the people sector in activities, when considering the issues that have arisen, it is possible to summarize that there is no participation of the people sector in the area at all.

For the benefits provided by the government or agency, people in the area still cannot receive benefits indirectly yet such as the problem of epidemics along the border. *“When COVID emerged, people did not participate in the prevention. Only some village health volunteers participated”* (Representative of Don Tan Phasuk 3). The process that causes the most problems or obstacles is distrust of local agencies. *“There are no channels or guidelines from government agencies that promote or encourage villagers to participate in the activities”* (Representative of Don Tan 1). The people do not see the benefits of participating in security. *“How can I join? Go take advantage of drug sellers. Taking a car into Laos can only get bullets, danger, and villagers do not want to join with fear”* (Representative of Don Tan 2). Moreover, the people sector is unable to participate in decision-making for policy-making in various areas of local agencies practically. *“The government (the boss as mentioned by people) comes from the city. When they want to do something, they just order it. They do not care what the villagers do and how they live. Various perceptions are completely ignorant. No matter what they do, they do not care if it will affect the villagers.”* (Community leader representative from Pho Sai 1).

In addition, for the large parts of the central government such as ministries, bureaus, and departments that are involved, it is even more distant from the word public participation. The obstacles are related to people participation in border security management. There is people mechanism to effectively enhance public participation. There is not enough information to use such mechanism to create stability, including the inability to develop a related database system,

imbalance in cultural understanding of people in the area, and an atmosphere that leads to the trust of the people in the area.

Conclusion and Discussion

Regarding the public participation in border security management (2016-2021), evidence from Mukdahan, Thailand, the problems along the border are in 5 areas; 1) disease epidemics along the border, 2) problem of illegal immigration, 3) drug problems, 4) transnational criminals, and 5) problems with natural resources, the environment, large-scale disasters and epidemics along the border. The participation process of people in the area was found to be limited by the government security agencies and mistrust between agencies. Problems that occurred in all 5 areas were not directly related to the people but had indirect effects, making participation found to be quite small. This is similar to the research on policy management related to security agencies (Ubalee et al., 2016) studying the good governance and management of border security problems of local administrative organizations, a case study of the border area of Chanthaburi, Thailand. From the process for solving problems in the area towards the public participation in taking part in security work, there are methods for using the principles of good governance to promote concrete participation, including allowing local government organizations to participate in administration and in the research of Muangchang (2015). Regarding the potential of local government organizations to participate in managing southern security problems under new threats between Thailand and Cambodia, the problems that arise are similar in nature to the research that has been done. With the support of local people, the work is effective. Especially in local government agencies, the local government agency is the middleman in management, both training and giving knowledge to the public, managing the problem of foreign workers entering the country. Local authorities have a moderate level of administrative power. In terms of economics, there is little as well. In terms of natural resource problems, the environment and large-scale disasters, epidemics along the border, in the research, local government organizations organized natural resource conservation activities. They watch the area to prevent intrusion. Because the boundary line is divided by a natural river, there is not much participation. In addition, the study area has Phu Pha Thoep National Park which is the Forestry Department as the agency that takes care of it.

The suggestions obtained from this research are 1) the government sector must promote people's trust in state security agencies to be an important force in security management and 2) the local administrative organizations should be allowed to play a more proactive role in drawing the masses to participate in security management along the border.

Suggestions for future research are 1) there should be a comparative study of the public participation in areas with different borders of different countries, such as the border with Myanmar compared with Cambodia, etc. and 2) there should be the study on the ways for citizens to be able to participate in policy making or participate in the people sector in guidelines or policies for border security management.

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