

# Policy Determination Process on Organic Farming of the Local Administrative Organizations: Cases Study of Maetha Sub-District Administrative Organization, Mae On District and Luangnuae Municipality, Doi Saket District, Chiangmai Province, Thailand

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## Abstract

This study aimed to explore the policy determination process on organic farming of MaeTha Sub-district Administrative Organization (MTSAO) and LuangNuae Municipality (LNM). Data were obtained through documentary study and in-depth interview conducted with 30 key informants from local leaders staffs and from both organizations and representatives of organic farmers. Obtained data were analyzed by using content analysis. Result of the study revealed that the policy determination process on organic farming of LNM consisted of 7 steps as follows: 1) an assessment of needs from organic farmers and consumers; 2) a campaign for local election and policy declaration of LNM administrative leaders; 3) an explanation about the importance of the organic farming policy to public; 4) a holding civic meeting at all villages in the sub-district; 5) a determination of projects/activities for the community; 6) an approval from the LuangNuae civic meeting; and 7) a review of all organic projects/plans in the final draft of the LuangNuae 3 years development plan. Meanwhile, the MTSAO's policy determination process had 6 steps as follow; 1) a need assessment and need priority of the organic farming group in the community; 2) a declaration of the policy to MaeTha organic farming strategic steering group and MTSAO; 3) a finding local consensus on the policy; 4) a presentation of consensus from each organic farming group to RDSI; 5) an approval from MTSAO's civic meeting; and 6) a preparation of the drafted three years development plan. The study had suggested that both local government should 1) Place high priority on each steps of the policy determination process 2) Employ a model of systematic policy determination on the organic agriculture policy determination process.

**Keyword:** Organic Policy, Organic, Local Government, Policy Formation

## Introduction

The local administrative organization (LAO) is a public organization which is important to local management particularly on local policy implementation (Ministry of Interior, 2005: 7-8). It can be said that the local administrative organization is the only public organization that understands all kinds of problems occurring in its area better than other government agencies. In

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the past decade, it was claimed that most of LAO policies were much more emphasized on physical structure development rather than “good livelihoods” such as public health and farming. In addition, majority of Thai rural communities still earn a living on problematic agriculture such as poverty, debts, poor health, environmental risk, etc.

Interestingly, there is an alternative way of agriculture that had been widely accepted by public that it can solve the above problems of typical agriculture which called is “alternative farming”. Organic farming is a successfully solved problematic agriculture, Chiangmai is a well-known area of organic agricultural products in Thailand. There are many organic farming groups and networks scattering in the province (Institute of Sustainable Agriculture Community, 2009). In addition, this province has a concrete and practiced organic farming policy which is currently implemented at a provincial level. Although, Chiangmai has strong plan and activities related to organic farming development, there still has a limitation on the expanding organic agriculture production and organic market. A constraint of the organic farming development in the area is a lack of concern and support from leaders of LAOs (Yossuck et.al., 2013).

Although organic farming development LAOs in Chiangmai are confronting with problems mentioned above, there are some prominent examples of the organic farming groups promoted by LAOs. These groups’ activities ranked from production, marketing and production, and consumption of both inside and outside the community. Two examples of well-known organic farming communities are in the area of MaeTha Sub-district Administrative Office (MTSAO) and LuangNue Municipality (LNM). These two organic farming areas were also successful in network management and implementation of local organic farming policies. With these reasons, the researchers was much more interesting in investigating of how and why the organic farming policy at MTSAO and LNM were formed. Find of this study will be an important basis for a better understanding about the development of organic farming policy in a LAO, which can be a guideline for other LAOs in order to enhance organic forming policy in their area.

## Objective

This study aimed to explore the organic farming policy determination process of MaeTha Sub-district Administrative Organization, Mae On district, and LuangNuae municipality, Doi Saket district, Chiangmai province.

## Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative research techniques. Data collected in this study were primary data by means of in-depth interview and participatory observation and secondary data collected from related documents, textbooks, and articles. The researchers joined several activities in both organizations focusing on the LAO policy development process, and also various activities in the communities related to organic farming. Informants in this study were;

1. community leaders or related staff who were involved in policy development process (mayor, deputy mayor, chairman of the municipal council, member of the municipal council, SAO chief executive, SAO deputy chief executive, chairman of the SAO council and member of the SAO council).

2. Local government officials (municipal clerk/SAO chief administrator, agricultural technical officer, plan and policy administration officer, and some staffs of organic agriculture development project).

3. Leaders of organic groups (chairman of organic groups, president of agricultural cooperative and trained organic farmers)

4. Representatives from organic farmers (10 local scholars).

The total number of respondent were 30. Content analysis was conducted for analyzing data about the policy determination development process on local organic farming (Chanthawanit, 2003: 129-130).

## Results of the Study

The study had found that the organic farming policy determination processes MTSAO and LNM were different. Details were as follow;

1. The policy determination process on organic farming of LNM. The process had begun in 2006 when there was an infection of pink snail and brown grass hopper in rice field which severely affected agricultural yields in the area. At that time, although there was a budget allocation to purchase chemical substances for eliminating pests and diseases, some council members viewed it as a short-term problem solving. They believed that organic farming could sustain agricultural development, and luckily leaders of the municipality agreed with them. Finally, the mayor of LNM declared and promoted organic farming policy as a former LNM council member informed

“...The important thing that contribute to the success organic policy in our sub-district because our administrative team had announced our policy during local election campaign. So, we need to follow the policy we had promised to our people”<sup>10</sup>

Based the data obtained from the interview, it was found that effective determination process of organic farming policy at LNM could have the following steps:<sup>11</sup>

1.1 Assessment of needs from organic farmers and consumers. This step reflected real problems of chemical use in agriculture in the community during the past 20-30 years. The problems were such as chronic ailment, soil contamination, and debts. The problems makes LN farmers be aware of several impacts raised for monoculture agriculture with chemicals usage. Since then, many agencies including LNM had begun to promote and enhance organic farming in the area.

1.2 Campaign for local election and policy declaration of LNM administrative leaders. This step is crucial for organic farming movement that would lead to the policy. Role of an coordinator is very important. The coordination must try to communicate between farmers and the LNM leaders in order to build common understanding and agreement on organic farming development vision and strategies that will lead to the policy. At this step, information about organic farming and also farmers' problems are needed in order to make a better understanding between the two groups.

1.3 Explanation about the important of the organic farming policy to public. This step is aimed to create better understanding about needs of forming the policy to local people in the community. The organic forming steering group had to “door to door” visit local residents,

<sup>10</sup> information by LNM Mayor : interview 29 January 2015.

<sup>11</sup> The information was synthesized from the interviews with key informants in LN areas mentioned in the research methodology.

and explain the reasons of setting the policy. This was a proactive working for the steering group.

1.4 Holding civic meeting at all villages in the sub-district. This step was to collect concerned problems, and needs from each village and take to consideration in the civic meeting holding at a sub-district level. The sub-district civic meeting was consisted of representatives from each village. In the meeting, proposed organic farming projects and plans were taken into its consideration, thus, participation from organic steering group was key factor of the meeting's approval.

1.5 Determination of projects/activities for the community. This step was in charged by the local organization called "LuangNuae Agricultural Technology Transfer Center", unit in LNM that responsible for all agricultural development in the sub- district. The unit is run by "LuangNuae Agricultural Technology Transfer Committee" This committee is consisted of representations of all agricultural groups in the sub-district and an agriculturalist who is an agricultural officer working at LNM." The operation of all organic plan/projects was implemented through "LuangNuae Sustainable Agriculture Committee (LNSAC)". This committee is also responsible for analyzing, prioritizing, and grouping all projects/activities proposed from each village, and then proposed to the LuangNuae civic meeting.

1.6 Approval from the LuangNuae civic meeting. This step had to be done after the civic meeting of each village. This sub-district civic committee was consisted of members from various parties in the sub-district such as administrative leaders of LNM, and the chairman of the LuangNuae Agricultural Technology Transfer Center Consensus from the meeting will be formal reported in the meeting minutes as an approval of the organic policy at the sub-district level.

1.7 Review of all organic projects/plans in the final draft of the LuangNuae 3 years development plan. This last step of the organic farming policy determination process was performed by the LuangNuae Sustainable Agriculture Committee in order to finally revise all approval projects/plans. Before recording into the three years development plan, which is a formal public policy of the sub-district.

2. Process on the organic farming policy determination process of at The MTSO had different process from the LNM. This community is much more focused on its local human resource development. With this concept, the very early stage, the MTSO organic forming groups sent a young member of the group to be a candidate running for the MTSO mayor, meanwhile they also supported its group members to run for MTSO civic members. On 29<sup>th</sup> February 2004, a young member of the organic farming group was elected to be MTSO mayor and also some member of the group were elected to be the civic members. Thus, after the election, the organic farming group was promoted to be "MaeTha resource Development and Sustainable Agriculture Institute" (RDSAI) which is the center of collaboration of all agricultural development in the sub-district (MTSO 2015: pp. 6-9). The MTSO mayor has confirmed this idea by saying.

"...All development policy in MTSO is related to organic agriculture. Covering economic dimension like promoting food security. Resources and environment dimension likes promoting environmental management such as soil, water, forest and also marketing dimension by increasing potentiality of organic market ..."<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> information by chief executive of the SAO : interview 26 February 2015

Based on the interview with concerned informants, it was found that the policy determination process of MTSAO could be classified into the following steps:<sup>13</sup>

2.1 Need assessment and need priority of the organic farming group in the community. This step was a survey of problems and needs of all members of the organic farming group. Then, there was a meeting between the MaeTha organic farming group members and RDSAI with aims to discuss and approve all concerned projects/activities ready to propose to MTSAO civic committee.

2.2 Declaration of the policy to MaeTha organic farming strategic steering group and MTSAO. This steps was the determination of a community organization and local government on the policy in order to data common direction for the policy implementation at a sub-district level. Meanwhile, the policy was presented to the RDSI with an aim to create common understanding among all local agencies, community organization, and public.

2.3 Finding local consensus on the policy. This step was taken place at RDSI for the determination and consensus on various plans, projects and activities related to organic farming. The RDSI board had to approve the drafted plans and projects of the policy.

2.4 Presentation of consensus from each organic farming group to RDSI. This step was the presentation of approved project plans, projects, and activities from the village level. At this stage, these plans and concerning organic farming development of MaeTha sub-district from all local agencies must be proposed to the RDSI for an approve.

2.5 Approval from MTSAO's civic meeting. This step was the approval of the various projects and activities which was approved from the RDSI. After this, the policy was brought into MTSAO's three years development plan which consisted of 2 steps: 1) an approval from each villages civic meeting which was a consensus from the whole villages. 2) an approval from the sub-district civic meeting which generally will be legal process of the policy determination. Thus, at this sub-stage, these were no major changes on the policy already approved by the RDSI.

2.6 Preparation of the drafted three years development plan. This step was the task of MTSAO staffs who took responsible for the bureaucratic preparation of the three years development plan.

## Discussions

1. The MTSAO's organic farming policy determination process is different from the LNM process. The LNM process keeps pace on rules and regulations of the bureaucratic local government, and the active operation of each step is reformed by LNM's administrative team, civic members, and staffs. This seems to accordance with a top-down analysis of public policy theory (Thongcharoen, 2012). In this case LNM administrators or leaders had played more important role of the policy determination process than the local community organization and farmers. In the case of MTSAO, the policy determination was focused on local consensus through the major role of the RDSI, which was accordance to a bottom up public policy. This research finding was consistent with the research of Sompot Kodwong (2010) who found that the factors related to success and fail use of the policy should have the consideration from different agencies from both public and private sectors. Participation from all involved stakeholders will allocate the policy direction and continuity. In addition, a good collaboration among concerned

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<sup>13</sup> The information was synthesized from the interviews with key informants in MT areas mentioned in the research methodology.

agencies will encourage local staffs to seek for more corporation from local people. The finding was also in accordance with finding of PradtanaYossuck (2014) who studied process of Thai organic agriculture policy development and found that one of the key success of organic agriculture policy was government agencies who should create a systematic policy process and social mechanism to drive organic development. Leaders and agencies involved in the policy should focus on the importance of developing organic farming policy and set up organic data base that related organizations could be easily accessed to.

2. The pattern of LNM organic policy determination, which is mostly arised from a support of local leaders and was implement through people, was conformed to the model of public policy determination by Thoman R. Dye called “Elite Model” (Worathepputthipong, 1998: 34). In the case of MTSOA, the process of policy determination was arised from the whole system of local community in which all organizations in the community were involved and it had great effects for both inside and outside the community. The MTSOA process was seemed to be conformed to the model of public policy determination (System Model) (Easton, 1957 as cited in Anumanrajathon, 2013: 75). The finding is also consistent with the finding of Jedsada Mingchai (2009) who analyzed organic farming policy formation in northern Thailand and found that external factors of management was more important to the policy of organic farming than the internal ones. The external factors were such as resources of the national policy, and content of the national policy.

3. Local politics relationships on the organic farming policy determination between LNM and MTSOA was also different. Local politics relation, in this case, includes politics relationships between agencies, local organizations, and local groups. At LNM, the relation is considered as “vertical relation” because this relation facilitates bureaucratic operation of the policy process which is based on decision-making of local administrators. In the case of MTSOA, the relationship is “horizontal relation” or networking. This relation is suitable for farmers. Also, kinship relation in the community allows local farmers to easily monitor the operation on organic farming policy. This finding is consistent with the finding of Chayaporn Wattanasiri et.al. (2009) that an approach to success of organic agriculture development is a seriously and continuity align involvement for all stakeholders. The support groups, both private and public, should provide various instruments, such as law, rules, database system, research, etc., to promote and support the development of organic agriculture.

## Recommendations

1. The LAOs should place high importance at all steps of the policy organic farming determination processes. Also, the LAOs process of bureaucratic rules and regulations should by adjusted in order to facilitate a policy operation between LAO and community organizations.

2. The LNM should employ systematic policy determination process on organic farming policy in order to prevent local politics sanction which may retard the policy determination in the future.

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