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Our task is to inform public opinion by a broad hospitality to divergent views and ideas that promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the dissemination of knowledge unreservedly. Papers adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary approach will be especially welcome. **Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit their work for consideration.**

* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

Government and Citizen Engagement at the Local Level in Thailand: Nan Municipality's "Roundtables" and "Expert Panels"

by Alex M. Mutebi, Ph.D.

Abstract

This article presents a case on decentralization and citizen participation in local government decision-making in Thailand. Recent developments in Thailand have aimed to decentralize responsibilities and finances to local governments in order for them to deliver services to the citizenry with greater efficiency, social equity, accountability and responsiveness than was the case before the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution. That constitution specifically made public participation an important objective at the local level. In theory, fiscal and democratic decentralization coupled with citizen participation are supposed to translate into local government that not only delivers better services, but one that also engages citizens in the design and implementation of policies, programs and projects. This paper presents the case of how the citizens of Nan municipality—years before the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution—incorporated the use of voluntary citizen "roundtables" and "expert panels" into municipal decision-making, and discusses some of the lessons we can learn from that experience despite major barriers (legal, institutional, financial).

This article presents the case of decentralization and citizen participation in local government decision-making in Thailand. Recent developments in Thailand have aimed to decentralize responsibilities and finances to local governments in order for them to deliver services to the citizenry with greater efficiency, social equity, accountability and responsiveness than was the case before the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution. That constitution specifically made public participation an important objective at the local level. In theory, fiscal and democratic decentralization coupled with citizen participation are supposed to translate into local government that not only delivers better services, but one that also engages citizens in the design and implementation of policies, programs and projects. This paper presents the case of how the citizens of Nan municipality—years before the promulgation of the 1997 Constitution—incorporated the use of voluntary citizen "roundtables" and "expert panels" into municipal decision-making, and discusses some of the lessons we can learn from that experience despite major barriers (legal, institutional, financial).

The northern Thai municipality of Nan undertook a local and innovative response to the policy of the Ministry of the Interior's Fourth Master Plan (1987–1991) which called for the establishment of "community committees" as part of Thailand's early decentralization efforts. Unlike anywhere else in Thailand, Nan municipal-area residents decided to form their community committees on a

cultural basis according to the communities' proximity to and their relationship with their neighborhood's Buddhist temples. In addition, they sought for and were granted exemption from the Interior Ministry to form their Community Committees according to local conditions. In consultation with the municipal authorities, local communities elected chairpersons for their temple-based communities who would volunteer their services without any form of compensation whatsoever. The chairpersons in turn invited other community members and experts to sit on these community groups. In turn, each of the newly created community groups then began setting up roundtables (or panels) to deal with various community issues as well as to try to influence local budget priorities, according to the wishes of the local community.

Today, there are regular "Roundtable" meetings between the Nan municipal authorities and the chairpersons of every community committee. The municipality uses these roundtable meetings to consult regularly with the community on several municipal activities and on policy implementation as well as to encourage community initiatives through public participation. This has reinforced and strengthened Nan municipality communities for which the roundtable technique is now part of the administration's culture and is a practical and valuable initiative that could be replicated with little effort elsewhere in Thailand and perhaps even beyond.

Before a fuller discussion of Nan municipality's experience with roundtables and expert panels, as well as the lessons the case offers, this paper will first provide some context on where Nan Township fits into the wider Thai context. First, the paper provides some relevant data about the recent process of decentralization (reforms and new laws and social services transferred from central to local government). Likewise, additional information on the emerging new framework for citizen participation (new mechanisms and structures of citizen participation at the local level of government) is also provided along with a brief description of Thai civil society. After the presentation of the Nan case, some conclusions and lessons learned are discussed.

1. Context

A . Background Information about Provincial Thailand

Nan municipality is located in Nan Province, the latter a rather sparsely populated mountainous area with a population of approximately half a million people and an area of 11,472,076 square kilometers. The province is divided into 14 districts (*amphoes*) and one sub-district.

Known as Siam until 1939, Thailand is the only Southeast Asian country never to have been taken over by a European power. A bloodless revolution in 1932 led to a constitutional monarchy with a bicameral legislature and an executive branch led by a prime minister. The National Assembly or Rathasapha consists of the Senate or *Wuthisapha* (200 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms) and the House of Representatives or *Sapha Phuthaen Ratsadon* (500 seats; members elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms).

After enjoying the world's highest growth rate from 1985 to 1995—averaging almost 9% annually—increased speculative pressure on Thailand's currency in 1997 led to a massive financial crisis, out of which the country started to emerge a couple of years thereafter. (A table summarizing some basic data is appended as Appendix 1).

Thailand is administratively divided into 79 provinces (excluding Bangkok), of which Nan Province (the site of the case study in this paper) is one.¹ The titular head of each of the various provinces is a governor, who is a permanent official of the Ministry of Interior. Provinces are divided into districts (*amphoe*) each of which is headed by a district officer (*nai amphoe*). The *nai amphoe* is subordinate to the governor of his or her province. Below the districts, are the sub-districts (*tambon*) and villages or hamlets (*muban*) (except in metropolitan areas where there are municipal governments (*tesaban*)). The heads of the sub-districts are called *kamnan* and are elected from village headpersons by members of the sub-district. Village headmen are called *pooyaiaban* and are elected by members of their villages. Power flows in a hierarchical formation such that the village headmen are subordinate to the sub-district headpersons, who in turn are subordinate to the district officer. In essence, the relationship between the central government and the provincial- and district-level governments is almost a deconcentrated, principal-agent one, in which the former are field administrative outposts of the latter. This is underscored not only by the fact that the majority of the personnel of provincial and district governments are appointed by the central government, but also by the fact that their budgets are also largely the responsibility of the central government (see section 6).

In terms of society and culture, there are generally three major and significantly different subsystems operating alongside each other throughout the country.² One end of the spectrum features Bangkok, which, in general, is highly westernized and has almost all the trappings of a modern society. On the other end of the spectrum, and by far still the largest of the three, is rural Thailand, which is largely still very traditional and quite removed from many of the modern aspects of the urban areas. The third subsystem operates in the provincial towns and cities such as Nan, and falls somewhere between the other two subsystems.

In general, the bigger and more politically and economically important a town is, the more likely that its social structure will mirror that of that of Bangkok. In small municipalities such as Nan, there are essentially three social classes and little class identification. The upper classes consist primarily of two groups. At the very top, are central government bureaucrats who are only indirectly involved with local affairs but who reside locally. Were it that most of these individuals had been assigned to Bangkok, they would most probably fall somewhere in the middle class. Yet, given their positions in various deconcentrated central government organs, these individuals carry out roles comparable to those of the elites and aristocracy in Bangkok. Even today, many provincial people still tend to liken the modern central government to the monarchy and look upon its bureaucrats as delegates of the King.³

The rest of the upper class in provincial towns is comprised mostly of townfolk who have climbed the social ladder to become community leaders, for example, elected municipal officials such as those involved in municipal politics and administration. As is the case in rural Thailand, one's social status in a place like Nan is most probably more dependent on credentials and achievements than on other more abstract measures. The middle class is made up primarily of mercantile, professional, and white-collar labor. The crest of the lower class is comprised of craftsmen and laborers, while unskilled and frequently under- or unemployed labor lies at the bottom. To be sure though, the lines between these groups are less clear and more flexible than they are in Bangkok.

Ethnic Chinese minorities in provincial towns maintain characteristics, social roles and institutions similar to their counterparts in Bangkok and tend to be well represented in the middle- and upper-classes, in part because of their mercantile and political achievements. Nonetheless, the usually clear differentiation between the middle and lower classes that is of great significance in Bangkok is not nearly as important in provincial towns such as Nan. Among the ethnic Thai majority, the same factors that help determine both family structures as well as individual status in the villages are more or less the same in the towns. In general, affairs concerning religion and the Buddhist temple in particular have a more primary role in small towns such as Nan than is the case in Bangkok, although they are still not as important as in rural Thailand.⁴ Likewise, individual townfolk are more likely than villagers to participate in various social and civic organizations beyond the family and community, although not as often as Bangkokians.⁵ Indeed, Thailand's civil society today is both large and diverse, in Bangkok as well as elsewhere. Indeed, as in many so-called "developing" countries, it is virtually impossible to count the vast number of civic organizations and associations as a large proportion of the Thai citizenry participates in religious groups, professional associations, women's groups, trade unions, human rights groups, and civic associations. Even in relatively small municipalities such as Nan, there is a vast array of formal and informal organizations, autonomous both from the state and from political parties, engaged in a wide range of activities to achieve economic, cultural, educational, and developmental goals. Sometimes, these civic groups aim at pressing for state and economic reforms. In fact, these groups are essential building blocks of civil society and of national and transnational social movements for democracy and human rights.

In general, society in provincial towns such as Nan tries to mirror patterns set in the larger metropolitan areas, particularly in Bangkok. Yet, it should be pointed out that the mirroring fails to yield exact reproductions of Bangkok, in part because of the inherent conservatism of smaller social systems still firmly anchored in the traditionalism characteristic of the rural areas on their outskirts. The very rapid changes that have increased the total stock of modern socio-economic infrastructure in the provinces, especially during the last 25 years, coupled with the much improved transport-

tation and communication networks, have served to accelerate the rate of change and modernization of provincial Thai society.

B. Political Context & Constitutional Basis of Decentralization and Increased Citizen Participation

The transfer of planning, decision-making and administrative authority from the central government to the local administrative units in Thailand began over forty years ago when the Municipal Act of 1953 was adopted (Krongkaew, 1995; Kokpol, 1996).⁶

However, real reforms to decentralize responsibilities and finances to sub-national governments only gained momentum in the latter half of the 1990s, and are generally attributed to former Prime Minister Chuan Leepkai's first administration (1992–1995). In 1994, or two years into his term as Prime Minister, Chuan Leepkai inaugurated the most far-reaching proposals for local self-government reform than had ever been proposed in Thailand. An abortive crackdown of pro-democracy demonstrators in 1992 had helped concretize the expectations of the general population regarding political and economic decentralization. In fact, almost all the major parties in the 1992 national election campaign had embraced electoral platforms promising to advance decentralization through local elections and sub-national fiscal autonomy.⁷ Apart from the failed coup attempt in 1992 and the subsequent emboldening of sections of the Thai populace, particularly the urban middle classes, there were several other reasons that compelled the then government to begin a serious reexamination of the relationship between the central and sub-national governments.

First, Thailand's rapid economic development during the two decades before 1994, as well as the concomitant spread of democratic ideas and ideals into much of the country, meant that much of the citizenry had become more keenly aware of their rights and freedoms (Krongkaew, 1995). Bangkok-based pro-democracy groups such as the Confederation of Democracy Movements and the Committee for the Promotion of Democracy were also lending their support to Thais elsewhere who also wanted to help the spread of democratic ideas in both the countryside and the country's administration (Krongkaew, 1995). Thus, by the time Chuan Leepkai's government came to power, Thai politicians from across the ideological spectrum recognized that they had to champion the notions of expanded democracy, one of which was greater self-government at sub-national levels along with the necessary decentralization of financial and human resources.

A second, and perhaps more immediate reason than the desire to enhance democracy, was the recognition by the country's leaders that the central government could not solve the various problems of provincial Thailand without substantial alteration of central-local relations. In particular, central government politicians recognized that the ability of sub-national governments to deliver services both effectively and efficiently would at the very least require a fundamental rethinking of the problems facing local governments. Thai local governments had long faced a multiplicity of problems: inadequacy of revenue, low popular support and participa-

tion, internal conflicts within the bureaucracy, poor cooperation with external agencies, weak and inadequate authority to perform functions, and unsuitability of administrative structures.

In December 1992, the Chuan government established a committee to review the sub-national government system and to recommend reforms with the ultimate aim of increasing the efficiency and capacity of local government units in the changing environment (Kokpol, 1996).

The real era of decentralization and greater citizen participation however, did not begin until the promulgation of a new constitution in September 1997. The new constitution replaced the one promulgated in 1991 following a military coup, and was Thailand's sixteenth since becoming a constitutional monarchy. The new constitution was a compromise between liberals and conservatives and was enacted by both houses of parliament following a long constitutional reform process. It sought, among other things, to greatly enhance public participation in government affairs. Specifically, the new constitution set out to promote new channels for democracy. For the first time, basic laws provided for the accountability of the state to citizens and for greater participation by people in public policy at all levels. Local officials were made more independent of the Ministry of Interior, and a new independent National Counter-Corruption Commission with prosecutorial powers was created.

The 1997 constitution provided for at least eight sections for decentralization and public participation. It states that:

"The State shall promote and encourage public participation in laying down policies, making decisions on political issues, preparing economic, social and political development plans, and inspecting the exercise of State power at all levels."

"The State shall decentralize powers to localities for the purpose of independence and self-determination of local affairs, develop local economics, public utilities and facilities systems and information infrastructure in the locality thoroughly and equally throughout the country as well as develop into a large-sized local government organization a province ready for such purpose, having regard to the will of the people in that province."

(Sections 76 and 78, Chapter 5: Directive Principles of Fundamental State Policies, Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand).

Indeed, section 78 unambiguously states that the state shall not only decentralize powers to localities but also promote local self-government.

Not only does the constitution grant localities the right to formulate their own self-governing bodies in section 283, it also explicitly states that central control over local authorities should be secondary to the principle of local self-government.

Local autonomy is addressed in sections 284 and 285. First, these sections clearly state that local authorities shall have autonomous power in policy formulation, administration, finance, and personnel management of their affairs. Second, the sections mandate the passage of a Decentralization Act to delineate the functions and responsibilities of local authorities as well as the nature of central-local tax mix. Lastly, the sections also mandate the establishment of a National Decentralization Committee, which in turn would

not only prepare a Decentralization Plan, but also review, monitor, and provide policy recommendations for the Cabinet concerning the plan's implementation. The constitution clearly states that the decentralization committee would be comprised of an equal number of representatives from local authorities, central government agencies, and qualified private citizens. The constitution also mandates that local council and executive bodies should be locally elected to four-year terms and expressly proscribes employees of the central government, local authorities, and state enterprises from running for seats on those bodies.

The right of local residents to recall votes and, where necessary, throw out of office elected local officials deemed dishonest is provided in sections 286 and 287.

Section 288 provides for the drafting of local civil service laws that will, among other things, allow for the establishment of local personnel committees, to be comprised of equal numbers of representatives from local authorities, central government agencies, and qualified persons.

Lastly, sections 289 and 290 authorized local authorities to take on additional service provision functions, including the preservation of local arts, heritage, and culture, the providing of education and training, the preservation and managing of natural resources, environment, sanitation, and the promotion of livable communities.

C. Fiscal and Democratic Decentralization

Reforms enshrined in the 1997 constitution opened opportunities for a greater number of Thai citizens, particularly in provincial Thailand, to organize and advance their interests. Before these reforms, the privileged tended to have greater access to services—and patronage and dishonesty were widespread given, in part, that government departments were fairly autonomous.

Ten separate pieces of legislation were enacted during the two years after the promulgation of the 1997 constitution. First, four laws had to be amended in order to harmonize their content with the constitution. These were:

- Act Changing the Status of Sanitary District to Municipality, B.E. 2542 (effective 24 February 1999);⁸
- Provincial Administration Organization Act (No. 2), B.E. 2542 (effective from 10 March 1999);
- Municipality Act (No. 10), B.E. 2542 (effective 10 March 1999); and
- Sub-district Council and Sub-district Administrative Organization (TAO) Act (No. 3), B.E. 2542 (effective 20 May 1999).

In addition, six new laws had to be drafted in order to fulfill the rest of the provisions of the 1997 Constitution concerning local government, accountability, and political and fiscal decentralization.

- Bill for the Request of Local Ordinances, B.E. 2542 (effective 26 October 1999).
- Bill on Voting for the Removal from Office of Members of a Local Assembly of Local Administrators, B.E. 2542 (effective 26 October 1999).
- Bill on Bangkok Metropolitan Administration Civil Servants Administration (No. 2), B.E. 2542 (effective 26

October 1999).

- Administration of Pattaya City Act, B.E. 2542.
- Bill on Local Personnel Administration, B.E. 2542.
- Bill Determining Plans and Process of Decentralization, B.E. 2542 (effective from 17 November 1999).⁹

The National Decentralization Act of 2000: The Decentralization Act of 1999 became effective on November 18, 1999, as a direct outgrowth of Chapter 284 of the 1997 Constitution. The act was, in essence, the foundation of decentralization in Thailand. The Act has 5 sections dealing with; (i) the National Decentralization Committee (NDC), (ii) local services responsibilities, (iii) the allocation of taxes and duties, (iv) the decentralization plan, and (v) measures for the transitional period.

Fiscal Decentralization: A key element of the Decentralization Act of 1999 is perhaps its financial decentralization benchmarks. The act mandates that the share of local spending (including intergovernmental transfers and relative to total government revenues) will increase to 20 percent in FY2001 from the previous level of approximately 14 percent. By the end of 2006, local spending is expected to increase to 35 percent of total government revenues. In the 2000 fiscal year, the figure was still about 12.

During the period between 1974 and 2000, the share of local expenditures in the Thai public sector and in GDP had been considerably low, about 5% and 1.6%, respectively. However, in 2001-2002—the first two years of implementing the Decentralization Act of 1999—the share of local expendi-

Table 1: Thai Government Expenditures by Level of Government (1975-2002)

	1975-80	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1999	2002
Central Government	93.1	142	164.2	177.9	192.5	216.8	750	910	1100
Local Government	9.2	12.7	13.6	14.6	15.7	16.8	108	160	178
State Enterprises	83.8	167.5	194	310.6	256.6	265.6	720	820	850
Consolidated Public Sector	186.1	322.2	371.8	503.1	464.8	499.2	1,578.0	1,890.0	2,128.0
<i>(Percent of total)</i>									
Central Government	50	44	44	35	41	43	47.5	48	51.7
Local Government	4.9	4	4	3	4	4	6.8	9	8.4
State Enterprises	45	52	52	62	55	53	45.6	43	39.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>(Percent of total)</i>									
Central Government	15.8	18.1	19.4	19.2	19.4	20.7	17.3	16.7	18.4
Local Government	0.8	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	2.1	3.1	3
State Enterprises	13.6	21.3	22.9	22.8	25.9	25.4	20.1	15.9	15.3
Total	30.2	39	48.1	41.9	45.3	46	39.5	35.8	36.7

Source: Suwanmalla (2002)

tures dramatically increased to 9% and 8.4% of the national public sector budget, as illustrated in the *Table 1 below*.

The regular revenue sources of Thai municipal governments such as Nan can be classified into several categories, namely (i) tax revenues taxes, (ii) non-tax revenues including licensing fees and fines, (iii) income from properties, (iv) income generated by public utilities, (v) central government transfers and, (vi) income from borrowing.

Taxes are either collected and retained by the municipality, or are collected by the central government before being redistributed to municipalities. Traditionally, there have been four types of taxes retained by the municipality: The Building and Land Tax (Property Tax), the Land Development Tax, the Signboard Tax, and the Animal Slaughter Tax. Of these, the Building and Land Tax is the most significant as it, up until recently, typically accounted for nearly half of the revenue raised through all these taxes combined. It is assessed on the gross rental value of a property, the exception being owner-occupied housing.¹⁰

Centrally collected taxes that provide revenue for the municipality include surcharges on the business tax (VAT), the liquor and tobacco tax, a gambling tax, and an exercise tax on nonalcoholic beverages. Furthermore, Nan municipality also shares the proceeds from a motor vehicle with the Nan provincial government. However, the largest revenue source by far is central government subsidies.¹¹ The municipality also augments its revenues with proceeds from feeds, fines and permits, for example, slaughter fees, licensing feeds, hawkers fees, and fines from illegal deeds. Some revenue is also generated from rents of properties owned by the local government such as markets, as well from interest from any government bonds and deposits. Revenues from public utilities and municipal businesses consist of local assistance funds from pawnshops, water supply services, fuel sales, and so on. There is also some miscellaneous income that is at times generated from the sale of drugs, donated funds, sales of obsolete materials, and from carryover balances from previous years.

The National Decentralization Committee adopted two immediate measures to enhance local revenues. First, it recommended that some taxes be shifted from the central to local governments. Second, it also recommended that central government grants to local authorities be increased.

The transfer of central government tax bases to local authorities was instituted in two ways. First, the receipts from several central government taxes such as the mineral resource tax, land registration fees, the gambling tax, underground water fees, and birds' nest tax were shifted to local authorities. Central government agencies still collect most of these taxes, but they now have to transfer all proceeds to local authorities. None of these tax bases however, generates any significant amounts of revenue. Second, local authority portions of two significant share taxes, the value added tax (VAT) and excise taxes, were increased thereby considerably increasing local revenues. (*See Table 2 below.*)

Elsewhere, the central government also drastically increased the amounts of grants to local authorities. As illustrated in Table 2, the last two years have seen the largest

Table 2: Sources of Thai Local Government Revenues

Sources of Local Revenues	1999	2000	2001	2002	% Increase in 2002 from 2000
1. Locally collected revenues	17,804.90	17,175.76	18,969.60	24,551.60	42.94
Taxes	9,512.40	9,656.50	11,072.00	12,362.30	28.02
Non-tax	8,292.50	7,519.30	7,897.60	8,144.50	8.31
2. Centrally collected local taxes	44,873.40	45,189.50	52,746.30	61,477.20	34.17
3. Revenue sharing tax, according to Decentralization Act of 2000 (VAT)	0	0	11,532.30	14,020.60	100.00
4. Grants	38,127.10	33,300.03	73,729.80	77,926.00	134.01
Through central departments	0	0	32,339.60	27,001.80	100.00
Directly to local authorities	38,127.10	33,300.03	41,390.20	50,924.20	52.93
5. Totals	100,805.40	96,295.30	156,977.90	177,975.50	84.82
Percentage increase from previous year	0	-4.47	63.02	13.38	

In MILLIONS OF BAHT. Source: Suwanmalla (2002)

increases in local grants ever, even though most of those funds were in "specific" grants allocated through central government departments—a practice regarded as not truly complying with the decentralization law (Suwanmalla, 2002).

2. Case Study: Public Participation at the Local Level in Nan Municipality

A. Background on Nan Municipality and the Thai Local Administration Structure

The town of Nan belongs to what is probably the most important form of local government in Thailand today: the municipality.¹² It is one of over 1,100 municipalities, incorporated to provide large urban areas with limited self-government. Established by the Municipal Act of 1953, municipalities are divided into three classes on the basis of their population, revenue capabilities, and ability to provide services (see Table 3 below). They are: (i) city municipality (*Nakorn*); (ii) town municipality (*Muang*); and (3) township municipality (*Tambon*). Towns such as Nan, must have at least 10,000 people with the same population density as city municipalities, and possess the necessary financial resources (or be the seat of the provincial government) to qualify as municipalities.¹³

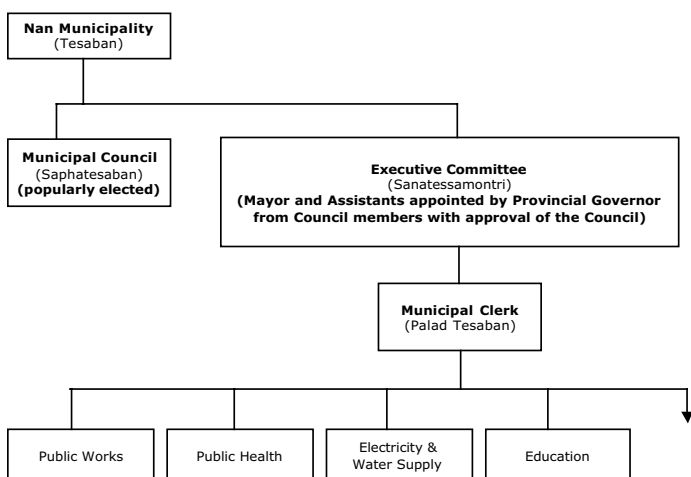
Table 3: Categories of Thai Municipalities

	City (Nakorn)	Town (Muang)	Township (Tambon)
Population	> 50,000	> 10,000	> 7,000
Density	3,000	3,000	n/a
Revenues*	n/a	n/a	> 7.0 million baht

Source: Department of Local Administration (DOLA) (1999)*

As of 2002, the Nan municipality had a total population of 22,357 (11342 males and 11015 female), comprised of 8,278 households. In comparison to many other Thai provincial capitals, the Nan municipality is actually considered small. However, like all other Thai municipalities, Nan is composed of an elected municipal council and a municipal executive board. The council is the legislative body of the municipality that reviews and approves the annual budget in addition to passing municipal ordinances (consistent with central government laws). Members of the municipal council are elected from among citizens within its incorporated area with terms of five years. The number of members varies according to the municipality class. The Nan council has 18 members, as is the case for all town-type (*Muang*) municipalities.¹⁴

Figure 1: Structure of the Nan Municipal Government



Nan’s municipal executive board acts as the municipality’s executive body in the sense that it administers all municipal functions. The council consists of a president, the mayor (*Nayok Tesamontri*), and two additional deputy mayors.¹⁵ They are all elected from the members of the council and formally appointed by the governor of the province. The Nan board has two main functions: to determine policies and present appropriate ordinances and recommendations to the council, and to supervise the operations of the municipality and its employees. As is the case for all other municipalities, Nan municipality has a municipal clerk (city manager), aided by a deputy. It is the city clerk that administers the municipality’s various activities via several specific divisions.

Nan’s municipal government is expected to provide a wide range of services and facilities for municipal citizens. It is required to provide primary education, prevent and control communicable diseases, dispose refuse, maintain roads and canals, help maintain public law and order, and fight fires. Because of the size of the municipality, local authorities are also expected to provide additional responsibilities including providing health services, street lighting, slaughterhouses and pawnshops, and, in the last decade, such big-ticket items as proper wastewater treatment systems, building and mainte-

Table 4: Mandatory and Discretionary Functions of Thai Municipalities

Township Municipality (Tambon) Compulsory Services	Town Municipality (Muang) Compulsory Services	City Municipality (Nakhon) Compulsory Services
1. Maintain law and order	1. Maintain law and order	1. Maintain law and order
2. Provide and maintain roads/sidewalks and public places; cleaning, refuse and garbage disposal	1. Provide and maintain roads/sidewalks and public places; cleaning, refuse and garbage disposal	2. Provide and maintain roads/sidewalks and public places; cleaning, refuse and garbage disposal
3. Prevent and suppress communicable diseases	2. Prevent and suppress communicable diseases	3. Prevent and suppress communicable diseases
4. Provide firefighting services	3. Provide firefighting services	4. Provide firefighting services
5. Provide educational services	4. Provide educational services	5. Provide educational services
	5. Provide clean water	6. Provide clean water
	6. Provide slaughter houses	7. Provide slaughter houses
	7. Provide/maintain medical centers	8. Provide/maintain medical centers
	8. Provide/maintain drainage	9. Provide/maintain drainage
	9. Provide/maintain public toilets	10. Provide/maintain public toilets
	10. Provide/maintain public lights	11. Provide/maintain public lights
		12. Provide/maintain mother and child welfare services
		13. Provide other public services
Optional Services*	Optional Services*	Optional Services*
1. Provide market, ferry and harbor facilities	1. Provide market, ferry and harbor facilities	1. Provide market, ferry and harbor facilities
2. Provide cemeteries and crematoria	2. Provide cemeteries and crematoria	2. Provide cemeteries and crematoria
3. Provide employment	3. Provide employment	3. Provide employment
4. Engage in commercial activities	4. Engage in commercial activities	4. Engage in commercial activities
5. Provide clean water	5. Provide/Maintain hospitals	5. Provide/Maintain hospitals
6. Provide Slaughter houses	6. Provide other necessary public utilities	6. Provide other necessary public utilities
7. Provide/Maintain medical centers	7. Provide/maintain stadiums and fitness centers	7. Provide/maintain stadiums and fitness centers
8. Provide/maintain drainage	8. Provide/maintain vocational schools	8. Provide/maintain vocational schools
9. Provide/maintain public toilets	9. Provide/maintain parks, playgrounds and zoos	9. Provide/maintain parks, playgrounds and zoos
10. Provide/maintain public lighting	10. Provide/maintain mother and child welfare services	
	11. Provide/maintain other public health services	

Source: Department of Local Administration (DOLA) (1998)

nance of sanitary landfills, and a whole host of other environmental responsibilities. As indicated in Table 4 below, the list of the required and discretionary functions for Nan municipality is almost analogous to that of larger municipalities.¹⁶

For its part, the central government is responsible for public peace and policing, trunk road construction and maintenance, education, public health care, job creation and economic promotion, traffic management and land-use planning. Various central Bangkok-based public enterprises are also responsible for telecommunications and electricity, as well as public housing and slum development.

Table 5: Functions of the Public Enterprises, Municipal and Central Governments in the Nan Municipal Area

Functions	Central Government	Municipal Government	Public Enterprise
Public Peace and Policing	✓		
Road Construction and Maintenance	✓	✓	
Refuse Collection and Disposal		✓	
Street Cleaning, Lighting and Fire-Fighting		✓	
Drainage System		✓	
Education	✓	✓	
Public Health Care	✓	✓	
Job Creation and Economic Promotion	✓		
Telecommunications and Electricity			✓
Water Supply		✓	✓
Traffic Management	✓	✓	
Land-Use Planning	✓		
Public Housing and Slum Improvement		✓	✓
Civil Registration and Identity Cards		✓	

Source: DOLA

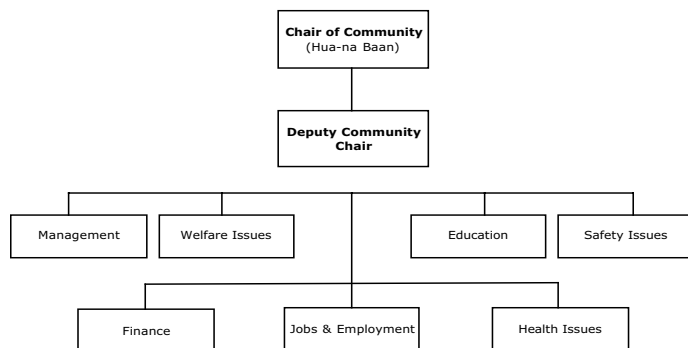
B. Nan Municipality’s “Roundtable” Discussions and “Expert Panels”

The Thai Interior Ministry’s Fourth Master Plan (1987–1991) set out to revamp and empower local communities. In an almost textbook case of top-down administration, the plan called for the establishment of “community committees.” Most provincial municipalities responded the way they normally would to central government directives: they set up committees, complete with paid executives—committees that soon became just another layer in local decision-making, and largely unconnected to the local residents they had been meant to empower in the first place. Nan municipality residents undertook an innovative response to the central government’s policy.

As mentioned, the Nan municipal-area residents decided to form their community committees on a cultural basis according to particular communities’ proximity to and their relationship with the municipality’s 27 major Buddhist temples. To that end they sought for, and were granted, exemption from the Interior Ministry to form their committees according to such local conditions. In consultation with

the municipal authorities, local communities then elected chairpersons (*Hua-na Baan*) for their temple-based communities who then volunteer their services without compensation. The Interior Ministry’s only directive was that each committee should have at least seven sub-committees to deal with various issues (see diagram below).

Figure 2: Structure of the Nan Municipality Core Community Committees



The Chairpersons in turn invited other community members and experts to sit on these community committees as either expert panelists or ordinary members. Members of the new community committees in turn started a system of forming (and when necessary, disbanding) various roundtables¹⁷ to deal with various issues of concern to people in the respective communities. At any given time, there can be in excess of 200 members of various issue-specific panels from the 27 Nan municipal communities.¹⁸

Today, there are also regular “roundtable” meetings between the Nan municipal authorities and the chairpersons of every community committee. The municipality uses these meetings to consult regularly with the community on several municipal activities and on policy implementation and budget prioritization, as well as to encourage community initiatives through public participation. This has reinforced and strengthened Nan municipality civic activity and, in the process, has made the roundtable technique part of the administration’s culture.

i. Characteristics of Nan Municipality’s “Roundtables” and “Expert Panels”

In general, Nan’s roundtables can be said to simply be special forums where a variety of interests are represented in a non-hierarchical setting. Virtually all the roundtables are comprised of local community members, many considered “experts” because of either specialist skills in a particular area, due to age, experience, academic achievement, or even socio-economic standing. The purpose of these roundtables is:

- To be a temporary body that addresses specific issues. (For example, there are currently several panels that have been set up to address various issues on public health, aging, anti-drug campaigns, cultural conservation, housewife issues, tourism promotion, open spaces in the municipal boundaries, and the protection of certain fish

- species in the Nan river);
- To act as an advisory board to the municipal (*Tesaban*) administration;
- To give informed advice in respect to a specific issue, problem or project, and;
- For municipal residents to participate in free discussions and to reach a consensus through negotiation.

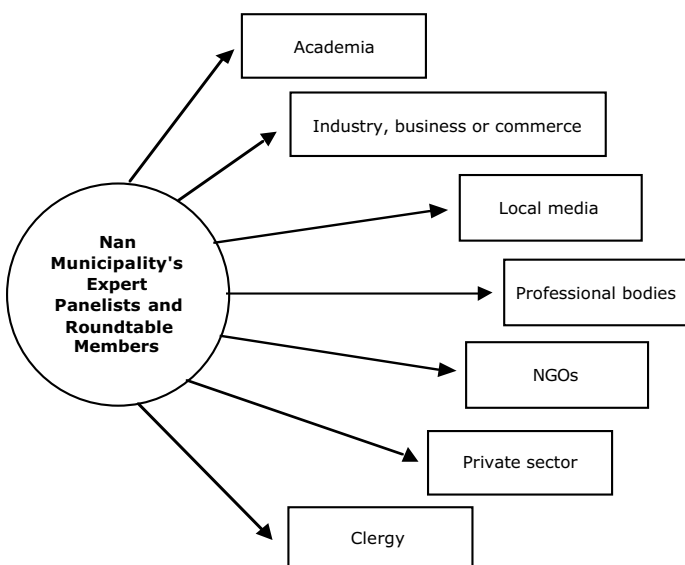
ii. Membership of the Citizen Roundtables and Expert Panels

Many of the members of the various community committees include municipal officials who usually already have experience in specific issues; representatives from any sector of the municipal community who are known to have the required expertise; and academics from both primary and higher education are also often called upon to contribute their expertise. Though all are volunteers and receive no compensation, community committee members' terms run for two years following an election.

Initiators of new roundtables and expert panels can be either municipal officials who need specialist information, or roundtable members wishing to "spin off" the discussion of an issue that needs more consultation and input from elsewhere. Typically, officials within each department of the municipal administration will know of experts within their own area of work—often the starting point for selecting members. They may also be aware of non-governmental or community-based organizations or, even, members of the public in the locality who have specialist knowledge and skills.¹⁹

When selecting members of an issue-specific roundtable or expert panel, care is taken to ensure that: there is clarity about both what is to be achieved by the panel as well as about the type of expertise required; panelists represent a broad range of expertise to achieve a wide perspective of the issue in question; potential members represent as far as possible, in the context of the issue, the different sectors of the public; and they have the time and commitment for the work.²⁰

Figure 3: Backgrounds of Members of Nan's Expert Panels and Roundtables



iii. Roles of Various Stakeholders in Nan's Roundtables and Expert Panels

Any member of any of Nan's 27 community committees wishing to establish a panel to tackle a particular concern in his or her community also has the responsibility for determining what the key issues are and what he or she wants the members of the committee to achieve. Then, he or she establishes a panel from the community and helps to find volunteer members with whom he or she then formulates a term of reference. Members of the panel (including the community committee member who organized the panel) agree on several things:

- i) Abiding by their terms of reference;
- ii) Agreeing on the objectives for their future deliberations in dealing with the community issue they have set out to tackle;
- iii) Participating and contributing their expertise as needed to achieve those objectives while seeking the assistance of other experts if it is required; and
- iv) Completing and submitting final reports to their respective community committees, and via the committee, to the municipal administration.

iv. Mechanics Used in Nan's Citizen Roundtables and Expert Panels

The various roundtables and issue-panels hold regular meetings, typically after regular work hours or on weekends. Over the years, community committee members have come to agree that the first meeting, in particular, is very crucial.²¹ Accordingly, first meetings are usually set aside to decide the format for the conduct of future meetings, to agree on reporting procedures, discuss and set the objectives for panel's work, learn in general about each others specializations, and identify any relevant documentation they may need. Agendas for each meeting indicating the topics to be addressed are sent to all members a few days in advance to allow time for reflection on their contributions. The agendas provide focus for the purpose of the meeting and ultimately the achievement of the objectives. Record-keeping depends largely on the purpose for which the roundtable or expert panel was convened. Typically, the leader of a panel records the minutes of each meeting. These minutes are then either used as input for the reports that are eventually sent to the municipal administration citizen's concerns, or they are circulated among the members of the panel while the panel's task is still ongoing.

Examples of Terms of Reference

- The objective of this panel is to recommend solutions to the problem who currently have no liesure activities to occupy them outside their homes.
- The members shall select a leader to guide the process, a deputy and a secretary from amongst its members.
- Meetings shall be conducted in a participatory manner and decisions be reached by consensus.
- The municipal (Tesaban) administration shall provide a meeting room and materials.
- The time-scale is one-and-a-half months, and documentation in the form of a report shall be submitted to the Community Committee, and through the Committee, to Mayor on 31 October 2002.

v. Impact of Nan's Roundtables and Expert Panels on Municipal Administration

In part because of the numerous institutional constraints that Thai municipalities still face because the decentralization process is still underway, the results of Nan's experience with citizen roundtables may not be as obvious as is the case in other instances of novel citizen participation experiences. There are no millions of baht that we can point to as having been saved, for example. Likewise, we cannot say that the central government's instructions to the Nan municipal government on how to spend grants and other funds have been greatly altered by greater citizen participation of Nan residents.

However, there is little doubt that Nan's citizen roundtables have widened the range of stakeholders who debate, analyze, prioritize, and monitor decisions about pressing community concerns—concerns that are often beyond the human and financial capabilities of the municipal government. Stakeholders include the members of the public, poor and vulnerable groups including women, organized civil society, members of the private sector, and the clergy.

6. Institutional and Financial Barriers Nan Municipality Faces in Managing Its Affairs According to Local Citizen Wishes

Innovative citizen participation initiatives such as Nan's roundtables should be examined against the backdrop of the environment within which their local government functions, if only so that we not be too carried away by the experiences of one town. That is particularly so because whereas Nan municipality residents have come up with an inventive way of influencing their local government, the fact remains that that same local government is far less autonomous about how it manages its resources than would first appear. The implication is obvious: Because local government in Thailand is still largely controlled by the central government, Nan municipal residents—even despite their roundtables and expert panels—do not yet have as much “voice” as may have been envisioned by the framers of the reformist 1997 constitution.

As mentioned earlier, one of the key aims of Thailand's 1997 constitution was to foster greater citizen participation and political decentralization by matching authority and accountability through a clear demarcation of who is responsible for what. Accordingly, those who are accountable must also have the *authority* (financial or otherwise) to deliver results.

Like almost all other municipalities in Thailand, the Nan municipal administration still faces major restraints on the control of much of its decision-making, particularly in the human and financial resource management areas.²²

There are clear disadvantages resulting from the heavy involvement of the central government in the staffing decisions of the Nan municipal government. The fact for example, that staffing is essentially controlled from Bangkok rather than by from Nan means that there is little prospect for the development of a dynamic municipal leadership and administration working to promote the municipality. Likewise, the numerous hiring restrictions, particularly of non-civil service

staff, as well as the periodic rotation of staff, are other disadvantages. Not only does such periodic rotation limit staff loyalty and commitment to the municipality and its residents, but it also limits their local experience, particularly with regards to the contacts and knowledge that the staff builds up in dealing with the various community committees. In turn, the mayor and other local managers are discouraged from prioritizing staff training and development.²³

For purposes of our discussion, it is perhaps the constraints that the Nan municipal leadership faces in the area of fiscal administration that are of particular interest. After all, most of the concerns passed on to the municipal leadership through the various roundtables and expert committees essentially require a reallocation of local budget priorities. First, the municipal government is currently still restricted in the way it can raise additional funds to that which is allocated centrally from Bangkok. In fact, the municipality cannot generate sufficient revenues to carry out all of its functions in an efficient manner. As explained earlier, a disproportionate share of the Nan municipal government's revenues comes from the central government both as a share of specific tax collections, as earmarked tax grants (such as those for education), and as general-purpose grants. In general, the Nan municipal government (as is the case for other municipal governments in Thailand), has traditionally only been permitted to collect two types of property taxes, a signboard tax, a slaughter tax and various other insignificant fees. However, the levels of these are fixed so that the municipality is incapable of augmenting its revenue by increasing the rate of tax payable.²⁴ Municipalities such as Nan thus cannot ensure that they are achieving full assessment and collection efficiency. They can also generate additional income from municipal enterprise activities such as markets and pawnshops, but these yield only limited amounts.

Whereas the Nan municipal government can generate some income for its capital needs from whatever is left over and above its operating expenditures, it is still heavily dependent on the central government for revenues for most of its capital expenditures. And while the central government, through the Interior Ministry's Department of Public Works' budget allocation, does construct some municipal works and facilities, the government usually finances all municipalities' capital expenditures through grants and, on a case-by-case basis, soft loans from the Municipal Development Fund. The Nan municipality is also permitted to borrow from commercial banks to finance revenue-generating enterprises. With permission from both the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Finance, the municipality can also borrow from commercial banks to finance infrastructure needs.²⁵ Yet, the supply of the essentially cost-free funds from the central government falls short of all the municipality's needs. Besides, the central government's allocation mechanism for these grants is neither based on any standard cost-benefit approaches, nor follows any explicit criteria. One of the consequences of that is that the Nan municipality has to compete with other municipalities by lobbying the Department of Local Administration hard for the particular projects it wishes to be funded.

Thus, far from being the fully autonomous self-government that it should be, the Nan municipal government is very much still under the control of the central government, at least to the extent that the central government largely still controls both its personnel and fiscal administration. Through both its appointment of municipal executive committees and the supervision of this committee and other municipal officials, provincial governors represent added control by the central government. The municipality thus has only limited scope and little incentive or wherewithal to carry out its own initiatives and promotional activities, let alone those that come from citizen roundtables and expert panels via their community committees.

7. Concluding Remarks and Lessons Learned

Nan's participatory roundtables and expert panels are without doubt an innovative way for increasing both citizen influence in local policymaking and civic activity in general. They allow many more citizens in the municipality to get indirectly (sometimes, directly) involved in informing local government policy decisions. Community committee meetings as well as various issue panels are held throughout the year thereby giving citizens more opportunities for civic involvement in community problem identification, prioritization, and resolution.

In essence, Nan's roundtable approach to citizen participation at the local level challenges Thailand's legacies of clientelism, corruption, and social class cleavages and exclusion by allowing citizens to feel more ownership of solutions to at least some of the intricate public problems. By moving the locus of community problem identification from the private offices of Nan Municipal Hall and the central government (and local) bureaucrats to citizen roundtables, panels and expert forums, these public forums foster transparency and accountability. Nan's roundtables and expert panels act as a civic duty training ground as engagement empowers local residents to better understand their rights and duties as citizens as well as the responsibilities of their local government. Despite the various institutional constraints outlined in the previous section, which essentially tie up municipal administrators' use of the scarce resources they have, Nan citizens still do offer helpful and creative solutions to the myriad social and economic problems that their local government has to deal with all the time. Citizens learn to negotiate among themselves and vis-à-vis the municipal government over what issues are most important to them and how scarce municipal resources (financial or otherwise) can be allocated in such a way as to turn these issues into local public policy priorities.

Whereas Nan's experience with citizen participation in local public affairs is original, it is important to remind ourselves that it is not the only model, not even in Thailand. To be sure, the citizen roundtables of Nan are a response to the particular political, social, and economic environment of that municipality and its surroundings. Thus there are no presumptions in this paper that institutional mechanisms for participation developed in Nan are necessarily, in small or large part, applicable elsewhere. Different municipalities as

well as other forms of sub-national governments in Thailand are adapting various interpretations of citizen participation as laid out in the reformist 1997 constitution. However, it is the expectation of the author that municipalities and other local governments elsewhere in Thailand, perhaps even in other parts of the world, can draw upon this experience to develop tools that link citizen concerns, community problem identification, policy-making, and citizen participation. Likewise, one also hopes that civil society as well as local political activists can learn from Nan municipality's roundtables and expert panels to promote greater citizen participation in local affairs in an age of decentralization.

ENDNOTES

1. Thailand's provinces (*changwat*, singular and plural) are, in alphabetical order: Amnat Charoen, Ang Thong, Buriram, Chachoengsao, Chai Nat, Chaiyaphum, Chanthaburi, Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Chon Buri, Chumphon, Kalasin, Kamphaeng Phet, Kanchanaburi, Khon Kaen, Krabi, Krung Thep Mahanakhon (Bangkok), Lampang, Lamphun, Loei, Lop Buri, Mae Hong Son, Maha Sarakham, Mukdahan, Nakhon Nayok, Nakhon Pathom, Nakhon Phanom, Nakhon Ratchasima, Nakhon Sawan, Nakhon Si Thammarat, Nan, Narathiwat, Nong Bua Lamphu, Nong Khai, Nonthaburi, Pathum Thani, Pattani, Phangnga, Phatthalung, Phayao, Phetchabun, Phetchaburi, Phichit, Phitsanulok, Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya, Phrae, Phuket, Prachin Buri, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Ranong, Ratchaburi, Rayong, Roi Et, Sa Kaeo, Sakon Nakhon, Samut Prakan, Samut Sakhon, Samut Songkhram, Sara Buri, Satun, Sing Buri, Sisaket, Songkhla, Sukhothai, Suphan Buri, Surat Thani, Surin, Tak, Trang, Trat, Ubon Ratchathani, Udon Thani, Uthai Thani, Uttaradit, Yala, Yasothorn.
2. To be sure, there are a myriad other ways one could classify Thailand's socio-cultural subsystems. This schematization is borrowed from Thorelli and Sentell's in *Consumer Emancipation and Economic Development*, pp. 33-38.
3. See, Dhiravegin (1985: 113).
4. See, Girling (1981: 34-35, 165-175).
5. For a fuller discussion, see Girling (1981: 165-175).
6. To be sure, the issue of transferring functions and duties to local government in Thailand can be said to go back even further than the Municipal Act of 1953. The original Municipal Act was passed in 1933. Indeed, virtually all of Thailand's constitutions since 1932 have contained some provisions for local self-government. It has also been suggested that one of the purposes of their introduction after the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1932 was not only to serve local needs, but also to familiarize the citizenry with new parliamentary system. (See, in this regard, Kokpol, 1996)
7. For example, the Phalang Dharma Party and the Solidarity Party both unreservedly endorsed introducing local elections of provincial governors. The Democratic Party and the New Aspiration Party also pledged themselves to decentralization programs although not as ambitious as the former two.
8. Until their conversion into municipalities, sanitary districts were a form of local government that was normally located in peri-urban areas, usually around municipalities.
9. The last law, mandated by Section 284 of the constitution, is the most important because it provides the basis for the concrete process of decentralization in Thailand. This article determines, first, that there must be "provisions of the law" that stipulate the division of powers and duties of public service provision between state and local governments as well as among local governments themselves by "having particular regard to the promotion of decentralization." Second, the same article makes it mandatory to draw up a law containing a plan and a step-by-step procedure for decentralization that must have at least three important elements: (1) it must stipulate

- the division of powers and duties of public service provision between state and local governments as well as among local governments; (2) proportions of taxes allotted to the state and to local governments must take into account their respective duties; (3) there must be a committee, comprising equal numbers of representatives from state units and local governments as well as experts, that concretizes the first two elements. This law had to be drawn up within two years after the constitution became effective (provisional clause, Section 334 [1]). For more on this, see Nelson, M. H. (2001).
10. It should be noted however that in comparison to many other Asian countries, property taxes represent only a minuscule portion of the country's GDP. In 1996, the percentage was estimated to be only about 0.18% of GDP as compared with 0.40% in Indonesia, Korea and the Philippines, and about 2.0% in Australia and New Zealand. Part of the reason for this is attributed to the exemption of taxing owner-occupied housing.
 11. Central government subsidies are mainly of two types: general subsidies and specific subsidies. General subsidies, as the name suggests, are provided without conditions in terms of project selection. Specific grants on the other hand, are allocated annually based on projects proposed by local authorities such as improvement and construction of local roads, drainage, bridges, and so on.
 12. As mentioned earlier, Thailand has six types of local self-government, namely, Changwat (provincial) Administrative Organizations (CAOs), municipalities, sanitary districts, Tambon (sub district) Administrative Organizations (TAOs), Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) and Pattaya City. The latter two are peculiar to the cities after which they were named.
 13. City municipalities must have at least 50,000 inhabitants and an average population density of 3,000 per square kilometers, plus adequate revenues to support limited governmental activities. Tambon municipalities may be established if the Ministry of Interior deems it fit that an area's local problems and future development can best be met by the application of a municipal form of government. Consequently, a local authority declared a tambon municipality need not have adequate local financial resources to support its mandated functions in part because it would be supported by the central government's grants-in-aid. It should be noted that given the wide discrepancy between the official designation of municipalities and their actual sizes, the national Municipal Personnel Commission has adopted another classification system for the design of their organizational and staffing levels. The commission classifies municipalities into five classes based on measures designed to identify their growth and development potential as well as to assess their performance. Class I municipalities, which are headed by city clerks, are at the very top. Such city clerks are C9-level government bureaucrats (equivalent to the deputy director-general of a Thai central government department). At the bottom level are Class V municipalities headed by C7-level bureaucrats and C6-level divisional directors, and without Social Welfare Divisions, Technical Services and Planning Divisions, or district offices.
 14. City (Nakorn) municipal councils have 24 members, while tambon municipal councils have 12.
 15. In contrast, city-type-municipalities (Nakorns) can have up to four deputy mayors, given their larger sizes.
 16. Each level of municipality has delineated compulsory and discretionary functions (summarized in the table below). Tambons, Muangs, and Nakorns are respectively required to provide 6, 12, and 14 basic services and functions. The Tambon municipality list of 6 functions points to their junior status.
 17. To be sure, the various communities do not actually sit around actual "round" tables (although some do). However, that particular name was chosen to emphasize the fact that the communities did not wish to institute a hierarchical structure of the participating members.
 18. Interview with Ms. Sirinthorn Ramsutr, Mayor of Nan Municipality, October 4, 2002.
 19. Interview with Ms. Amonrat Yakaew, Town Clerk (Palad) Mayor of Nan Municipality, October 5, 2002.
 20. Interview with Mr. Tonmun Buransri, Head of Baan pra Kued Community, Nan Municipality, October 5, 2002.
 21. Interview with Mr. Jakrapan Thepsukon, Head of Hua Wieng Tai Community, Nan Municipality, October 5, 2002.
 22. First, concerning its geographic areas, the Nan municipality is under-bounded in the sense that the full urban and urbanizing areas extend beyond its boundaries. One of the implications of this phenomenon is that much like many other municipalities in Thailand, the Nan municipal government is unable of managing the complete confines of the urban region surrounding it as one functional entity. Thus, it is also neither able to plan and manage its expansion, grow and develop the town itself, nor achieve potential economies of scale in its administration and service delivery. Second, the Nan municipality has few incentives to work to attract investment, and employment to the urban region. For example, it can hardly vary tax rates from those set centrally in Bangkok, thus barring municipal authorities from fiscal innovation. Likewise, the municipality does not have any incentives to attract additional population into its core area given in part that most new (manufacturing) industry locates outside municipal boundaries. The key reason for such location (outside municipal boundaries) is that rules and regulations in the peri-urban areas especially those regarding taxation, tended to be either much looser, or less strictly enforced than inside municipal boundaries. Third, the substantial involvement of the central government through its various departments and state enterprises in providing urban infrastructure, facilities and services puts many limitations on the municipal government. Fourth, Nan municipal managers, as is still the case elsewhere in Thailand, are proscribed from performing services not specified by law, regardless of the fact that they might be necessary to local needs and preferences. Fifth, the municipal government has very little control over its organization and staffing structures as these are primarily determined by the Ministry of Interior's Municipal Personnel Commission (MPC). The MPC is a national committee nominally headed by the Minister of Interior. Other members of the commission include other high-ranking officials in the Interior Ministry, especially those from the departments of Local Administration and Public Works, as well as representatives from other state organizations. The Commission is authorized by the "Royal Decree, of B.E. 2519 (1976)." The Commission not only defines the division, subdivision and section structure of all units of each category of municipality, but also determines the nature of their staffing needs, recruitment, transfers, promotion, training, disciplinary action, and retirement. Indeed, almost all Thai municipal personnel are members of the national municipal service and are thus subject to the same rules as those exercised by the Civil Service Commission. (see, Likhit, *Thai Politics*, p.445). The Department of Local Administration (DOLA) administers the municipal personnel service of administrative and professional staff ranging from the C1 to the C9 level. The various staff are normally transferred between municipalities within four years, so that a normal posting in Nan lasts anywhere from only two to four years. To be sure, the Nan municipal government does have some choice as it can recruit staff from the within the service, although there is no formal advertising of vacancies. The municipal managers can also recruit staff from outside the service for their public works and health divisions due to the shortage of engineers, medical personnel, and so on. Likewise, the municipality is permitted to recruit junior staff (up to C3 level) locally. The municipal authorities are also permitted to directly hire their often-large contingent of "temporary" workforce, mostly in roadwork, public cleaning and solid waste collection and disposal. Should they wish to keep some essential senior personnel, the Nan mayor and city clerk can also negotiate with DOLA for the extension of the terms of the individual or individuals in question. Other difficulties for the Nan municipal government concern its functional responsibilities in relation to other levels of government. First, in some instances the law requires the municipality to carry out certain functions for which it lacks both the capacity and resources. For

example, the municipality lacks both the capability and the authority for law enforcement even though existing laws require it to carry out policing functions. Municipal regulations and ordinances are in reality enforced by the provincial authorities which are, in turn, under the control of the provincial governor and police authorities in Bangkok. Another example is in the area of development planning. All Thai municipalities are required by law to prepare long-range plans (10–15 years), mid-range (5-year plan), as well as annual plans. All these plans are required to cover a wide range of areas including not only land use, but also economic, social, political, and administrative development. In reality, most of this responsibility is ceded to the central government, not least because of the lack of capacity at the local level, particularly with regards to land-use planning. (See, in this regard, Likhit, "Thailand" pp. 154–155). Second, municipalities usually perform only insignificant roles in those functions they share with central government. For example, in the area of traffic management, the Nan municipality only provides a budget for supplies, whereas representatives of the central government do everything else. Likewise, whereas the Nan municipality provides some basic health services as well as primary education, these roles are minor compared to what the various branches of the central ministries of public health and education do.

23. Interview with Ms. Sirinthorn Ramsutr, Mayor of Nan Municipality, October 4, 2002.
24. One of the most pressing constraints is that all owner-occupied houses and apartment units are exempted from property taxes.
25. In practice however, municipal authorities rarely do any commercial borrowing, in part because of officials' unfamiliarity with the mechanics involved in borrowing, having to navigate the Thai bureaucratic labyrinth, and because of the high interest costs usually associated with commercial loans.

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Appendix 1: Thailand Data Profile

People	1997	2000	2001
Population, total (in millions)	59.4	60.7	61.2
Population growth (annual %)	0.7	0.8	0.8
National poverty rate (% of population)	..	..	..
Life expectancy at birth (years)	68.2	68.8	..
Fertility rate, total (births per woman)	1.9	1.9	..
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	29	27.9	..
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births)	34	33.2	..
Births attended by skilled health staff (% of total)	..	..	..
Malnutrition prevalence (% of children under 5)	..	..	..
Urban population (% of total)	19.5	19.8	20
Prevalence of HIV (female, % ages 15-24)	..	..	..
Illiteracy rate, adult male (% of males 15+)	3.3	2.9	2.7
Illiteracy rate, adult female (% of females 15+)	7.3	6.1	5.9
Net primary enrollment (% of relevant age group)	..	..	..
Girls in primary school (% of total enrollment)	..	..	..
Net secondary enrollment (% of relevant age group)	..	..	..
Girls in secondary school (% of total enrollment)	..	..	..
Improved water source (% of total population with access)	..	80	..
Improved sanitation facilities, urban (% of urban population with access)	..	97	..
Energy use per capita (kg of oil equivalent)	1,199.70	..	..
Electricity use per capita (kwh)	1,388.40	..	..
Economy			
GNI, Atlas method (current US\$ billion)	165.14	121.9	120.9
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US\$)	2,780.00	2,010.00	1,970.00
GDP (current \$ billion)	151.1	122.3	114.8
GDP growth (annual %)	-1.4	4.7	1.8
Inflation, GDP deflator (annual %)	4	1.2	2.1
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)	11.2	10.5	10.2
Industry, value added (% of GDP)	38.6	40	40
Services, etc., value added (% of GDP)	50.2	49.5	49.8
Exports of goods and services (% of GDP)	47.8	67	68.9
Imports of goods and services (% of GDP)	46.4	58.9	63.6
Gross capital formation (% of GDP)	33.3	22.6	23.9
Current revenue, excluding grants (% of GDP)	18.4	15.9	..
Overall budget balance, including grants (% of GDP)	-2.1	-3.1	..

Source: World Development Indicators database, April 2002

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