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IMPLEMENTING HOME POLICE VOLUNTEERS STRATEGY IN THAILAND

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Abstract

In 1974, the Royal Thai Police began to realize that police could not distance themselves from the public, and they began to acknowledge the importance of public cooperation in improving crime prevention efficiency and effectiveness. Since then, various policies and programs have been implemented to promote police – community relations. The “Home Police Volunteer” program was officially founded in 1990 by the Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau and could be considered one of the most widespread programs among police across the country. The program founders expected that the volunteers would be a great help to the police by assisting the police in their efforts to protect, serve and help monitor the safety of their own communities as well as carry out some tasks assigned by the police. Even though the program objectives were similar nationwide, the procedures to carry out the program such as program names, volunteer roles, training focuses, uniform designs and procedures differed from station to station. Consequently, in order to standardize the programs, the Royal Thai Police set up the regulation for Home Police Volunteers in 2008. The regulation detailed implementation stages of the program including recruitment and selection procedures, training processes, role definition, responsibilities and evaluation. The purposes of this paper are to describe and provide details in each stage of implementing the Home Police Volunteers program following the 2008 Royal Thai Police regulation. In addition, the paper will explore public reaction to the program and discuss strengths and weaknesses of the program by comparing and contrasting with the community policing and problem-oriented policing strategies.

Introduction

In 1974, the Royal Thai Police began to seek cooperation from the public to increase its capacity in crime prevention and suppression after recognized that police alone could not increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the crime prevention and suppression. It was necessary to engage public in their activities (Paowasan, 1996). Following that, different units within the Royal Thai Police had launched various measures, strategies and projects to seek cooperation from the public. Each model and method was different depending on the needs in each area and also depending upon individual commanders at different levels; police station, provincial police and provincial police region. An outstanding project model was an initiation of the Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau, where a public relations centre was set up in 1974 responsible for organizing entertainments such as music shows and concerts for communities and education institutions. In the same year, they have initiated “Volunteers against crimes” project where civilian volunteers providing information to communities as well as assisting police in crime prevention and suppression. Later, the title of the project changed to “Members reporting crimes” project. In 1976, another project was initiated titled “Youth Connection” where trainings were provided to youths in order for them to be involved in the crime prevention and suppression (Sompob, 1990).

In 1990, the Bangkok Metropolitan Bureau set up “Home Police Volunteer” project where trainings were provided to volunteers from all professionals backgrounds who were interested in crime prevention and suppression. The volunteers were to watch out for any suspicious behaviors within their communities and reported to police. They were also reporting crimes, assisting police during arrests and public disasters. Two days trainings for nine classes of volunteers took place, financially supported by both government and private sectors. In 1994,

volunteers from 65 police stations in Bangkok metropolitan areas were trained resulted in another 65 classes of volunteers at a total of 7,110 people (Paowasan, 1996).

This concept of home police volunteers had been widely adopted by police in many areas, however, the training format and curriculum as well as the role and responsibility were varies in each area. Moreover, the volunteer's uniform in were also different in each area, and as a result, collaboration between police stations were difficult to manage. In 2008, The Royal Thai Police had launched a set of regulations on "Promoting involvement of civil society, community and local authorities in police activities 2008" which clearly indicated the role, responsibility and management approaches for home police volunteers which to be applied throughout the country.

The aim of this article is to present a concept and implementation strategy of home police volunteers in Thailand in accordance to the regulation of the Royal Thai Police to Thailand. This article will cover the role, responsibility and the processes; from selection, training, management, monitoring and evaluation, as well as provide examples of the advantages and to discuss the context and responsibility of home police volunteers in crime prevention and suppression.

Home Police Volunteers: Concept and Implementation

In order to modify the concept of home police volunteers that were conducted in different formats in different locations throughout the country, the Royal Thai Police had launched a regulation to promote involvement of civil society, community and local authorities in 2008, according to the Royal gazette book 125, special section 45 dated 3 March 2008. The document stated that 'Home Police Volunteers' means "civilians who openly involved in police

activities, provided with uniforms, identification cards and registration numbers,” the aim is to keep community in order and to provide support in crime prevention and suppression.

This is to seek cooperation from the public to work with police in crime, narcotics and disasters prevention and suppression as well as assist with patrol police. The responsibilities are as follows:

- 1) to assist police in peace keeping, provide support in traffic control
- 2) to report to police in the case of emergency, crimes, criminals and drugs trafficking
- 3) to assist police in setting up check points in the areas and
- 4) to liaise between police and community and to act as a network for police in the area

According to the regulation, the target volunteers were locals who determined to support their communities and able to dedicate their times as well as able to assist with police duty. They could be members of general public, community leaders or personals in any organization. The basic requirements are; being Thai citizens, living in the areas where they want to volunteer, at least 20 years old with behavior guarantee from two credible sources or three polices, foreigners who married to Thai citizens living in the areas are also eligible to apply for home police volunteers. According to the Royal Thai Police, the selection committees consist of police officers authorized by police station chief, representative of municipality administrative office, district chief, village chief and community leader. They were to select 5-10 volunteers from each village.¹ It is to note that there was no set of rule for the committee selection criteria such as the number of the committee members and their occupations. The regulation was set

¹ The size of police station determines number of sub-districts it responsible for. Some police stations responsible for one sub-district while some police stations responsible for 4-5 sub-districts. A sub-district consists of a number of villages, the number of villages can also be varies.

loosely having police station as a key player and the police could choose to collaborate with any sector of the community as mentioned earlier. When the home police volunteers were selected, each police station was responsible for providing training, both practical and theory.

As mentioned in the regulation, the curriculum and the duration of the training were to be adapted to suit each police station. The Royal Thai Police, however, provided training topics guidelines, for example, the prevention and problem solving in the case of terrorist attacks and unrest situations, providing assistance to disaster victims, basic knowledge on the laws and enforcement, disasters relief, primary rescue procedures, knowledge on drugs and influential characters within the communities, observing techniques, reporting procedures etc. For the practical part of the trainings, it includes police artifice training, brevity test (parachuting off a tall tower) and self defense techniques.

Upon completion of the training, volunteers would receive certificates and identification cards from the police station chiefs and would be appointed police assistances. There would be training for home police volunteers once a year to revise and practice the lessons. Home police volunteers would be on duty for two years, with renewable appointment. Their uniforms and badges attached to uniform were unified all over the country. The budget for the operation of the project derived from the police stations yearly budget along with funding from private sectors and the local administrative organizations such as a sub-district administration office or provincial administrative office.

The regulation states that the management and commanding of the home police volunteers is under the responsibility of police station chiefs, with an advisory board which consist of head of local administrative organization or the monitoring committees of the police stations. The home police volunteers will select a chairman and a secretary from within the

group. Once the selection process is completed, they will formulate rules, duty, order of command, and organize a meeting every month to provide information to all members. Performance evaluation of the volunteers will be conducted by police stations and to be reported to the Royal Thai Police every six months. It is to note that the Royal Thai Police regulation 2008, was announced in March 2008 and it has not meet the six months terms as yet therefore the evaluation report by the Royal Thai Police has not been produced.

Practice and Response from Society

The Home Police Volunteer project began its operation before it was included in the Royal Thai Police 2008 regulations. Police officers have been working in collaboration with Home Police Volunteers in many aspects of crime suppression; for example, provide assistance to police and administrative officers in drug suppression in the northern region², manage the traffic during festival period in the northeast region³, setting up safety zones in Bangkok⁴, monitor vacant houses in the neighborhood⁵, monitor and provide information on crimes to police officers in central region⁶. The public has a positive response to the implementation of the Home Police Volunteer in Thailand which can be seen even before an issue of Royal Thai Police regulations in 2008. The support also derives from the heads of Provincial Administrative Organizations all around Thailand who provided financial support for the training of Home Police Volunteers with confidence that they would assist the police in their efforts to protect, serve and help monitor the safety of their own communities as well as carry out some tasks to be assigned

² Siamrath Newspaper, 06 November 2004

³ Matichon Newspaper, 27 December 2004

⁴ Siamrath Newspaper, 01 November 2004

⁵ Dailynews Newspaper, 21 December 2006

⁶ Dailynews Newspaper, 15 December 2006

by the police⁷. There were also supports from with communities who trusted that the volunteers can provide safety to they lives and assets.⁸

Crime Prevention and Suppression in Thailand; current situation

Crime prevention and suppression by Thai police are based on professional law enforcement or traditional policing which uses strategies and policies that had been passed on from generations to generations. Such practices have dominated and provided directions to the work of Thai police for a long period of time and remain until today. Such practice disconnects police from community and politics. As stated in Greene (1998), this can be called a reactive approach that focuses on the assigned duty, inward looking and concentrates on the crime with minimal interaction with communities. Crime prevention and suppression by Thai police are similar to Moore's (1992) professional law enforcement approach, which focuses mainly on patrol and rapid response to calls for service and retrospective investigation. Such practice reflects the theory that only police can combat crimes (Blundell, 2007). It can also be seen from the police station setting all around Thailand that based on essential uniformity, consist of 60-70 percent patrol police and 10-15 percent investigative police. It demonstrates that the priority was given to patrolling and retrospective investigation. The management structure of the Thai police stations has a formal hierarchy and conducts in quasi-military style according to seniority and position. The policy and order derive from the most senior ranking and move downwards.

The professional law enforcement approaches greatly dominates the working practice of Thai police. It can also be seen from the forward note by the Royal Thai Police Commander, who chaired the working group to improve the quality of the patrol police practice in the year

⁷ The Nation Newspaper, 04 August 2004.

⁸ Dailynews Newspaper, 10 April 2007

2000 that “Police stations has a standardized patrol police system all over Thailand” (Royal Thai Police, 2000). The order for action came through the management line which structure in the same manner in all stations. The emphasis on system and standard determines the performance evaluation result of the police work in protecting and providing safety within the community, according to the Police Station Improvement Project in 2007 (Royal Thai Police, 2007). Even though the professional law enforcement approach has an official and quasi-military like management style, the patrol police take a different approach. The patrol police conduct the work on their own without any supervisor. The incidents each patrol police encounter may be similar but the circumstances were different. It is essential that police use their own instinct and make decision according to the situations they are facing. It can be said that the duty of patrol police is similar to that of doctors and nurses in emergency units rather than the military operation (Moore, 1992).

The main concern of the professional law enforcement was the level of satisfaction from community and the harmonization within the society. The aim of professional law enforcement or traditional policing is on crime control, arrest of criminals and crime rates. The satisfactory level was set and the work is considered accomplish when the goal is met, Manning (1979) called those goals ‘reflexivity’. In each of the patrolling assignment, all the details had been set in the Police Patrol manual 2000, e.g. the duration of the patrol, the number of check points for each motorcycle patrol and car patrol. Furthermore, the Royal Thai Police uses statistics as indicators for their successes, for example, year to year comparison on the arrest rate and number of cases. The practice reflects a success in the process and the means rather than the end results, such as the harmony and goals that the community is looking for (Goldstein, 1990). The goal that set out prior to community consultation clearly divides police from the community. The goal of police and the community might be different thus police might not be serving the community and meet their real needs. It creates a gap between the expectation public has

towards police and what police is actually doing. The professional law enforcement approach ignores the community inputs, for example, the public might prioritize issues such as quality of life, excessive noise level, teenagers hang out areas or the dangers from entertainment businesses, while police might view that the level of petty crimes is the most important issue (Sparrow, Moore & Kennedy, 1990). Many studies in western countries show that the mainstream approach to crime suppression is not always in support of the current police practice, for example, the appearance of patrol police has an impact on the level of crimes and that the rapid response at the crime scene helps accelerate the arrest result (Kelling, Pate, Dieckman, & Brown, 1974 ; Kelling & Coles, 1997; Scott, 1981; Spelman & Brown, 1984).

Community Policing and Problem-Oriented Policing

Crime suppression and prevention have to meet the community needs and reflect the problems within the community (Moore, 1992). Blundell (2007) suggested that police has to be part of the society and given an example of one of the best practices, in Lowell, Massachusetts, USA where crimes had decreased by 70 percent when the problem-oriented policing approach had been adopted. They allowed a setting up of sub-police stations around the community instead of having one main station. Those sub-stations were given authorities and police were trained on skills to identify the problems in addition to their existing analytical skills, in order for them to apply that to crime prevention measures that reflect the reality of the situation. Problem-oriented policing strategy aims for better understanding of the problems, be equipped with analytical skills, ability to identify the problems and get to the root of the problems, as well as ability to produce the most suitable strategy and prevent the problem from reoccurring (Eck & Spelman, 1987 ; Moore, 1992 ; Oliver, 2008; Peak & Glensor, 2008). The specific issues in each area will determine the police practice and strategy (Eck, 1993). Problem-oriented policing focuses on the end result which is to solve problems existing within the community.

The concept of community policing based on the principle that when community and police are effectively working in partnership, it will reduce the number of crimes and develop safety in the community (Sparrow et al., 1990). The responsibility in solving crimes belongs to everyone in the community (Moore, 1992) and should not be left in the hands of police alone. Police and community can together create the environment that meets the need of community members. Community has a significant role in determining the goal, practice and evaluating police performance. Overall, community is the target as well as part of the solution. The target is no longer the statistics, the rates and number of cases (Oliver, 2008; Peak & Glensor, 2008). Moreover, police had a duty to find a balance between the need of the community and the lawful practice. Sometimes, the demand of the community may perhaps violate the law and basic human rights of others (Moore, 1992).

The community policing approach is not contradicting the crime prevention and suppression that focus on problem solving but in stead they can work in complementing one another (Moore, 1992). A successful problem solving has to be supported by the community. The community itself is a success factor. However, these two practices are different in some aspects, particularly the main goal of each practice. Community police focuses on building partnership between police and community, develop the relationship and seek ways to create harmony within the community as well as increase quality of life in all aspects and aims for community satisfaction. In this case, the collaboration between police and community is one of the tools that lead to the goal but it is not the main goal. The problem-oriented policing focuses on the problem solving and looking for ways to prevent problems from reoccurring. Its tool is partnership with the community. They may be fundamentally different in theory; but in practice, they could complement one another. The problem-oriented policing can be used as one of the

tools for putting the theory of community policing into practice (Oliver, 2008; Peak & Glensor, 2008).

Home Police Volunteers Strategy: Does it really work?

The Home Volunteer Police project aims to seek cooperation from the public and it was a significant change for Thailand, but there had been many challenges evolved around the project. They can be divided into two categories; first, the implementation of the project and secondly, the theory and concept of the project.

Project Implementation

There had been some problems during the implementation process. For a better understanding of the problems, the researcher had collected information using a qualitative method by conducting Focus Group Discussion (FDG). There were two FDG consisted of 16-18 people, conducted for one day each. The information was collected during 23-24 August 2008. The participants were key stakeholders consisting of 1) non-commissioned police officers who implemented the project, 2) government officials, employees and managers from the sub-district administration organizations who were involved with the project, and 3) general public. The participants who provided information were from various sub-districts in Sri Saket Province, which is a medium sized province in the Northeast of Thailand. In order to reduce the research bias, the researcher chose to conduct the FDG in an academic institution, Sri Saket Rajabhat University rather than a government office or police office. The result of the research shows that there were many problems in the implementation period as follows;

Source of policy and resource allocation: it was found that the policy was initiated solely and directly from the Royal Thai Police. Other agencies were not involved from the beginning,

thus there was a lack of coordination at the initial stage. The key implementer was at the police station level and they would require cooperation from local organizations such as sub-district administration organization, to select volunteers and financially support the project. When there was no coordination among the key partners, the organization who was suppose to provide financial support therefore did not pay much attention to the project and did not set aside the budget for it and was unable to allocate the budget as requested. The budget from police stations alone was not sufficient to successfully operate the project. It is therefore necessary to contact key partners from the beginning stage and provide a better understanding of the project.

Support for policy: it was discover that the volunteers were not from public who were willing to take part in the project. In fact, general public did not want to volunteer themselves as they did not want to be suspicious by their neighbors who might think that they provides confidential information to police and disturb the community. For example, there might be an operation of small scale gambling, which is against the law, and the volunteers will be blamed in the case of arrest. They would be punished by the society such as their families being ignored by the community. It was also found that those who were interested in being volunteers were those who had connections with local politicians as it could help them gaining votes in their constituencies. To be selected as home police volunteers is considered prestige among the locals in Thailand suburban areas. For the above factors, the project did not get the general public who were interested in joining, in stead; it was used as a political tool.

Incentive for implementers; it was found that the Royal Thai Police regulations did not provide financial incentive for police officers or volunteers who implemented and took part in the project. In comparison, there were financial incentives such daily or monthly allowances, for public to join other projects conducted by Thai government. This is one of the factors that the

public did not want to participate in this project and the project was left with those who had political connections and could gain benefits from it.

It is important that the Royal Thai Police improve the concept of the project, create an understanding and seek cooperation from local administrative offices and relevant organizations from an early stage of the project. This would result in a better collaboration in both human resource management and financial support. There is a need to put out a measure to attract and involved general public to become volunteers. Information on home volunteers police need to be generated among publics for a better understanding of their roles and activities. An appropriate financial incentive should be allocated, in a form of allowance or employee fund, in order to prevent those who volunteer only for financial benefits.

Theory and Concept

It is clear that the Royal Thai Police regulations adopted home police volunteers as one of the mechanisms in crime suppression and prevention. It is the mechanism used in the professional law enforcement that emphasize on a reactive approach and focus on patrolling. The main duty of the home police volunteer, according the Royal Thai Police regulations 2008, is to provide assistance to police and becoming part of a network. The aim of the home police volunteers is the same as that of the police which focus on crime controls, patrolling, and setting up check points and bring criminals into justice process. The reducing of crime rate and the arrest result will provide reflexivity to the process and the means. It does not a result orientated and aims to provide harmony or meets the goal set by community. The needs or the goals set by the community may be different and the gap between police and community still remains.

The implementation of the home police volunteers by the Royal Thai Police is a positive step towards involving community in crime prevention and suppression. The project started in

March 2008 and the first evaluation period is due in September in the same year, therefore the evaluation result will be revealed shortly. The home police volunteer approach is working in the professional law enforcement framework. It is not working in a partnership framework according to the community policing approach, nor a problem-oriented policing framework. The community is not involved in identifying problems, factors that cause the problems, setting up community's goal, or evaluate police performance. Their duty is to provide assistance to police and work in accordance to police guidelines. The goal set by community and police may differ and the police action may not reflect the needs of the community. It is necessary for the Royal Thai Police to expand the role and responsibility of home police volunteers from being one of the mechanisms to become an equal partnership. They should be involved in all the processes, from identify the problems, identify the factors that caused the problems, setting up working goals together as well as becoming part of evaluation process. These will create an enabling environment for police and community which will lead to harmonization within the community that they are working in.

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