

# THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RESIDENTS IN DISASTER PREVENTION ACTIVITY\*

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## 1. Introduction

Although training activity is by far the most important thing in strengthening the community in disaster prevention, the relationship and cooperation between local government and residents should not be overlooked. Lack of relationship between each party can lead to the unsuccessful preparation for disaster mitigation.

In the past, the relationship between some developed countries' local governments and their residents in disaster prevention had many problems. Due to the government's incapability in helping people during disaster, people collaborated with each other to protect lives and properties by themselves. However, now their governments have developed a natural defense system to be more effective resulting in the increase of public safety accordingly. This has created the relationship of trust in the prevention and mitigation system of local governments mentioned above. In contrast, the stronger the government becomes, the more neglect to learn to protect themselves people have. Nevertheless, there are only few researches concerning this field study<sup>1)</sup>.

On the other hand, the relationship between developing countries' government and citizens in the prevention and disaster relief today is like what was in the developed countries in the past. Currently, the developing one's governments do not have enough efficiency to cope with disaster problems yet. As can be seen from worldwide situation, many disasters occurred, for example, flooding in the Philippines, earthquake in Indonesia. Therefore, the solution for this problem should start from improving the performance of government in order to gain the sense of public confidence in the work of government agencies. Consequently, this research has focused on the relationship between local government and residents in developing country such as Thailand.

## 2. Study Area

### (1) Details

Bangkok, the biggest city in Thailand, has approximately 5,702,595<sup>2)</sup> people. There are 50 districts and 169 sub-districts in Bangkok area. The most population density is Bang Khae district located in the western of central Bangkok. Bang Khae district has 46.55 km<sup>2</sup> area and it has the highest population in Bangkok approximately 193,448 people (2010)<sup>3)</sup>. Population density is 4,156 people per km<sup>2</sup>. There is only Bang Khae Fire station in Bang Khae district from Figure 1. When the fire occurs, it will cause a destruction not only property but also life. Due to the reason mentioned above, fire fighter is the key person who takes responsibility of this event, meanwhile, the fire voluntary groups would take a function with fire fighters as well.

Recently, the government plans to make Master Plan for International Fire Safety Development in Thailand. The objectives of the plan are reducing the ratio of fires, developing a management system to be efficient for scalable, and developing the efficient network of information storage. The plan focuses on reducing the numbers of fires and reduces casualties. It also requires staff to reach the fire scene within eight minutes<sup>4)</sup>.

In the past, fire protection in Bangkok area was the duty of the Thai police, but on November 1, 2003, there was the transfer of fire protection in Bangkok area to be one of responsibilities of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA). During the past 5 years, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration recruited the fire fighters of which 70% are the new officers while some volunteers are more experienced in fighting fires. As a consequence, the joint operations were not successful as hoped. Moreover; the imbalance between government officials and volunteers occurred.

Currently, Bangkok fire officers are unable to develop such policies. Due to many problems, voluntary groups are taking a part to assist Bangkok fire fighters for helping people. Thus, this research has been focused on the relationship between Bangkok fire fighters and voluntary groups for causes and means to resolve misunderstandings and the imbalance between the Bangkok fire officers and voluntary groups at Bang Khae district in Bangkok area.

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(2) Questionnaire survey

The questionnaire surveys for this research were distributed in Bangkok area but majority was in Bang Khae district. The 289 samplings were collected with constricted to Bangkok fire fighters, voluntary groups, and people between February and March 2010. The Bangkok fire fighters and voluntary groups were interviewed by using face to face and focus group method. On the other hand, one to one method was used with people.

According to the questionnaires, we have found the duty conflicts between the Bangkok fire fighters and the fire voluntary groups at Bang Khae district. Some problems have not been unraveled even though both missions are aimed the same to help citizens.

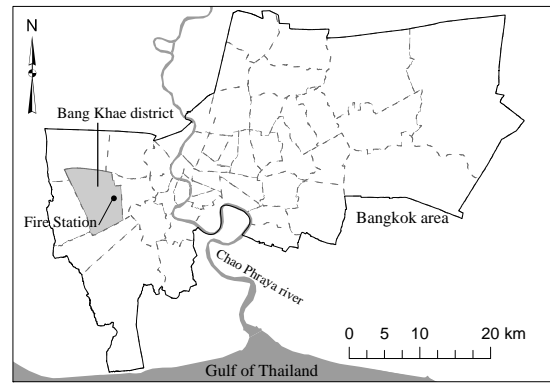


Figure 1: Location of the Bangkok

3. Result

According to the questionnaire survey and the analysis of the relationship between fire fighters and volunteers, the result can be divided into two groups as following:

(1) Individual

a) Sufficient ability

The Bangkok area covers 1,568.7 km<sup>2</sup>. There are 35 fire stations and about 1,500 fire officers in Bangkok Metropolitan area. Each fire station has about 40-50 fire fighters. As a result, compared with a ratio of fire stations, one Bangkok fire station is responsible for 45 km<sup>2</sup> while Tokyo metropolitan area is about 1,750 km<sup>2</sup> with 80 fire stations and 206 fire station branches to help supporting. Moreover, approximately 18,000 officers are working for Tokyo fire department<sup>5)</sup>. Therefore, a Tokyo fire station is in charge of only 6 km<sup>2</sup>. As mentioned above, Bangkok fire department does not have enough fire stations, fire fighters, and even equipments compared with Tokyo fire department despite the similarity of populations and area.

The traffic congestion is one of the major problems that make access to the fire place of fire engines with the standard eight minutes slower than prescribed. These problems can be analyzed between the figure 2 that most of the time Bangkok fire fighters could not reach the fire place before the voluntary groups did which sometimes can affect in significant damages.

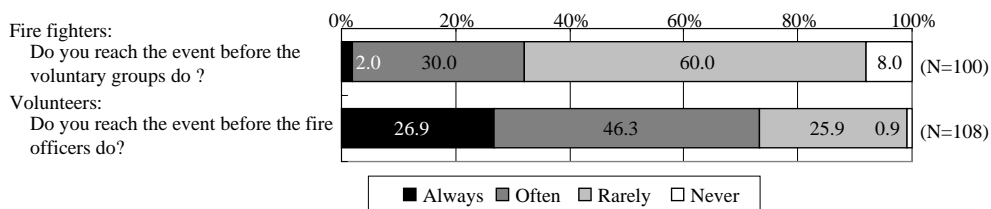


Figure 2: Answer of the question about Accessibility to the fire scene

In some cases, the groups of volunteer having no water supplies reached the fire target before the fire engines came. The voluntary groups' cars also block access to the fire point of the fire officers. This kind of situation caused wound between the two parties and aroused the major problems of working together.

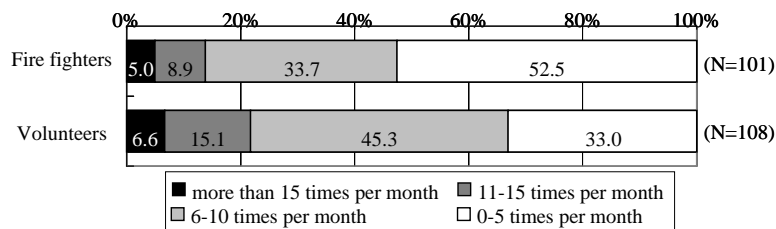
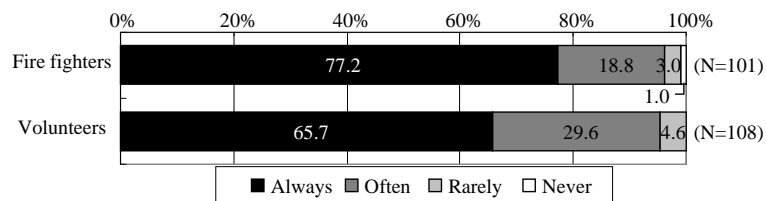


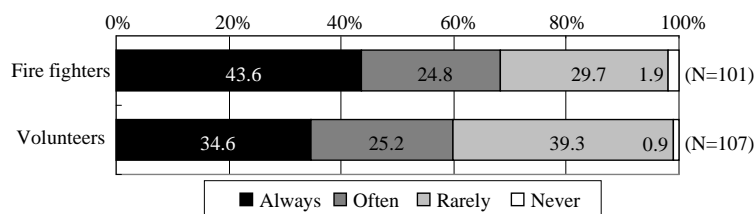
Figure 3: Answer of the question "How often have you been working in case of disaster?"

Figure 3 demonstrates that follows. Within a month, the percentages of volunteers who extinguish fire are more than the fire fighters. The reason may be due to the volunteers are a lot closer to the communities than the officers. And sometimes they stop the fire by themselves without notifying the situation to the Bangkok fire fighters. Especially when the big fire takes place, occasionally volunteers cannot control fire damage on their own.



**Figure 4:** Answer of the question “Do you want to help people when disaster occurs?”

However, Bangkok fire fighters and volunteers are both intended to help people based on the percentage of the graph from Figure 4, of the two parties, the percentage of fire fighters was only 77.2%, whilst in reality the result should be 100%. So it can be analyzed that nearly 23% of Bangkok firemen have problems in operation and also neglect to help people. The number of explanations can be proffered from this percentage. They may think that they do not have sufficient equipments to settle incident. From Figure 5, 43.6% referred that they have adequate equipments, while 56.4% mentioned differently which seems to be the cause of not being ready to help people when the incident happen. In contrast, Figure 4 shows that 65.7% of volunteers desire to help other people whereas 34.2% thought it is not possible. The reason may be due to the lack of fire fighting equipments or inadequate skills. This evidence is from Figure 5 which indicated that 34.6% have enough fire fighting equipments, but 65.4% have inadequate fire fighting equipments.

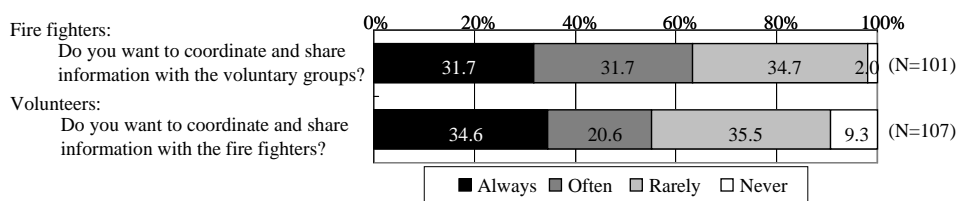


**Figure 5:** Answer of the question “Do you have enough tools when you go to the event?”

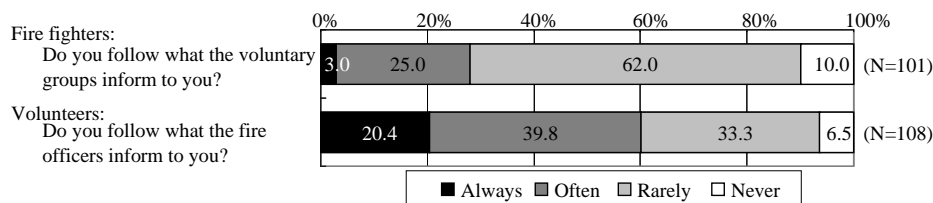
b) Intention

The problems raised between fire fighters and voluntary groups can be analyzed from Figure 6 that the exchange of information and collaboration of both are low in percentage. The average is only 30% while it can further be assumed that both groups work individually. If they cooperate, the percentage should be nearly 90-100%.

Even in Figure 7, percentage of volunteers who obey orders of the firemen is only 20.4% approximately. On the other hand, almost 62% of the fire fighters cannot agree on what the volunteers inform nor do they accept. Such the circumstances cause mistrust in collaboration of both parties.



**Figure 6:** Answer of the question about Harmonization.

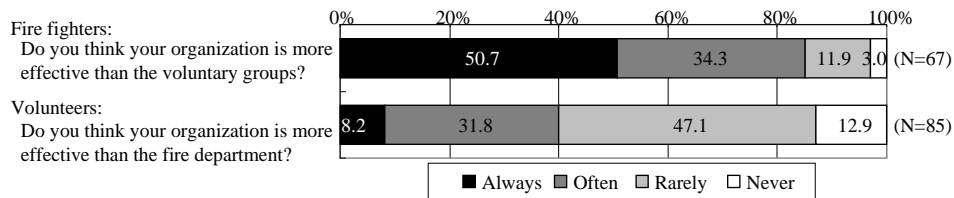


**Figure 7:** Answer of the question about Information exchange.

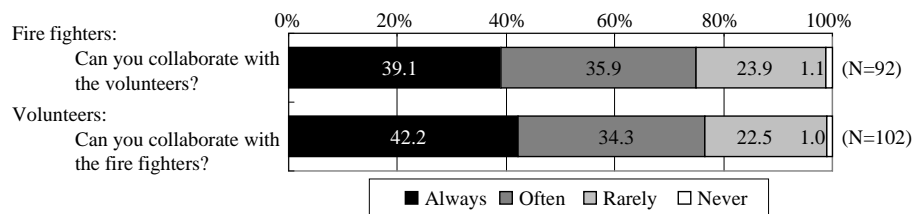
(2) Relationship

According to Figure 4 described above, the fire fighters and voluntary groups have the same purpose and intend to help people. Also from Figure 8, 47.1% of the volunteers thought that their organizations are not effective when compared with Bangkok fire officers and 50.7% of them believed the skill of firemen are better than those of volunteers.

The analysis is that both groups know their own potential. Through these questionnaires in Figure 9, only 1.1% of officers thought that the Bangkok fire fighters cannot work together with the voluntary groups. Likewise, only 1% of volunteers thought they cannot get along with the firemen. This can be further analyzed that problems between the firemen and volunteers have opportunities to be resolved in the future. In addition, the Salient Value Similarity Model theory of Earle & Cvetkovich<sup>6)</sup>, about believe can be applied on how to believe and trust between fire fighters and volunteers.



**Figure 8:** Answer of the question about Efficiency of organization.



**Figure 9:** Answer of the question about Collaboration between 2 parties.

#### 4. Consideration

The important thing to make a good relationship between Bangkok fire department and volunteers is that Bangkok Fire Department needs to build capacity in knowledge, ability of the body and mind using the advantage of sufficient budget opportunity. For example, the adequate equipments necessary for operation and the establishment of Fire Academy which can help the fire fighters enhance their efficiencies. Furthermore, the attitude of staff must be based on the love, willingness, and the readiness to serve and help people without thinking of any rewards. On the other hand, if any fire fighters with bad behavior such as ignoring the performance of duties or founding guilty must be penalties. Or in case that people who find the officer guilty can give notification to the Bangkok Fire Department directly. In the future, the fire fighters can be the role model for everybody in Thai society including volunteers and civilians. In other words, the voluntary groups will have faith and believe in collaboration with fire fighters leading to the benefit of public as well.

#### 5. Conclusion

Relationship between government and citizens in prevention from disaster is considered critical. If government cannot take care of residents, they have to help themselves to protect their lives and safety. However, if the government can develop the effective means to help people, confidence and trust will be built among residents. These relationships between two parties are linked by Trust Model Theory<sup>6)</sup>.

The results showed that there is no relationship between government and citizens. Government lacks of efficiency in the ability, power, and authorization which leads to no confidence in government's performance. Therefore, people must help themselves in disaster prevention among members in their community. Although there are conflicts between the parties, both sides have something in common which is the intention to help people. According to the problem mentioned, the Salient Value Similarity Model theory is used to support this research paper.

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