Accountability and Network Management in the Public Sector: Case Study on Bangkok's 2011 Flood

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Abstract

Performance management has become one of the core elements of managerial reform, and accountability in public sector has figured prominently in current and future governance. This study is designed to examine the accountability and network management at the local government level. Using accountability system and public network management frameworks, the paper examines the accountability system of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) as a case study, particularly on what determines the preference for a certain accountability approach amidst the institutional conditions during Bangkok's 2011 Flood. The objective is to provide an analyst of accountability system as means to evaluate the performance of Bangkok's administration, which is relatively limited in the field of public administration. In doing so, the study employs a qualitative research method and conduct a literature review in three main areas: (1) the administrative reform efforts in Thailand since the reform of Civil Service Act in 1991 (UNDESA, 1997), (2) the role and relationship of BMA and the central government, and (3) the causes, impacts, and the politics of 2011 Flood. The study also utilizes the theory on accountability system in public sector as the main theoretical framework. The finding reveals that BMA has been subjected to political accountability system due to its institutional structure; however, this status quo did not let the organization perform effectively on many problems in Bangkok and even worse in the case of disaster. The study further discusses there are some widely shared solution to disaster management. The study suggests that the collaborative network framework may be a feasible option on disaster management for somewhat unsolvable accountability system.

Keywords: Accountability system, Public network management, Disaster management, Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Bangkok's 2011 Flood

Introduction

In October 2011, Thailand experienced its worst flood with 12.8 million people affected and 728 casualties. 27 out of 77 provinces are affected, especially low-lying central provinces, including Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand (Poaponsakorn and Meethom, 2013). The economic cost resulted from destroyed agricultural and industrial sites are considered to be

more than 46.5 billion USD. Although floods are not uncommon in Thailand, 2011 flood was not purely nature-made disaster; rather the human-made calamities are widely claimed to have made the disaster worse. Although the government failed to provide a full answer to why the flood occurred at the time, the combination of causes has been later identified by varied stakeholders, including flood-related government agencies, think-tank experts, media, and public communities (ibid.,4-13; Koontanakulvong, 2012; World Bank, 2012). First are the natural causes that directly contributed to the flood. Second are the human and managerial errors that might have caused the government to ignore and overlook the technical problems (Mydan, 2011; Bangkok Pundit, 2011). Third are the inaccurate, contradicting, and inconsistent public messages provided by different public agencies (e.g. Ministry of Science and Technology, Flood Relief Center, and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration or BMA), resulting in a public confusion and poor disaster management and flood prevention and control. After the evaluation of the crisis situation has been conducted, the combination of nature, mismanagement, and poor communication have been substantially argued to have caused the worst water crisis in the country (World Bank, 2012).

Research Question and Objective

The objective of the study as follows;

1. To provide an analyst of accountability system as means to evaluate the performance of Bangkok's administration, which is relatively limited in the field of public administration;

2. To discuss public network management as a possible response to the conflicted accountability system, especially in the case of emergency situations or disaster.

With regard to the multiple systems to manage expectations, the research question is as follow: what determine the preference for a certain accountability approach amidst the institutional conditions during Bangkok's 2011 Flood. This study argues that BMA has always been subjected to political accountability system due to its institutional structure; however, this status quo did not let the organization perform effectively on many problems in Bangkok and even worse in the case of disaster.

Theoretical Framework

Accountability in public administration plays an important role in managing the expectations of a public agency (Romzek and Dubnick, 1987). Often referred to as answerability, accountability can be perceived as "a strategy for expectations" (ibid.,228) and is conceptualized by two factors: (1) the source of expectation (i.e. internal and external), and (2) the degree of control over its action. These two dimensions creates the typology of accountability system and implies that a public agency encompasses more than one, if not all, accountability types at the same time.

Table 1

Types of accountability systems

Degree of control over agency actions		Source of agency control	
		Internal	External
	High	1. Bureaucratic Supervision* (superior-subordinate)**	2. Legal Fiduciary (principal-agent)
	Low	3. Professional Deference to expertise (layperson-expert)	4. Political Responsiveness to constituents (constituent-representative)

Source: adapted from Romzek and Dubnick, 1987

* Key characteristics of each system; ** Key actors of each system

Bureaucratic accountability refers to a public agency's answerability according to the bureaucratic hierarchy. This organizational relationship between a supervisor and a subordinate creates orders as a form of answerability, as well as rules, regulations, and operating procedures, which holds a public official accountable to its actions. The tools for such system are the application of rewards and punishment within the agency, thus, possess a high control of its actions. Similar to bureaucratic accountability, legal accountability utilizes rules and regulations as a form of control. However, they differ with regard to the source of that control, where legal accountability involves a legal or contractual obligation, therefore, result in a high external control of an agency's action.

Rather than responding to supervision and fiduciary powers, professional accountability is based on the control of expertise within an agency. Instead of organizational hierarchy, decision-making power mostly belongs to the public officials who are experts or possess a technical expertise to solve complex problems. This type of accountability, thus, depends on the discretion and performance of in-house skilled employees. Lastly, political accountability refers to a responsiveness of a public agency to its constituents. This type of accountability is strongly tied in a democratic process where public officials is expected to "be responsive to their policy priorities and programmatic needs" (ibid.,229) of the wide-ranged constituents, from citizens or general public, interest groups, to elected officials in the executive office.

Given multiple expectations from internal and external contexts, a public agency often needs to determine the preference for one accountability system over others. According to Romzek and Dubnick, there are at least three factors: (1) the nature of the agency's tasks, (2) the management strategy of the agency, and (3) the institutional context of the agency. With the aim to find an appropriate accountability mechanism, they point out that most agencies will tend to adopt two or more types of accountability systems simultaneously according to these three factors. However, those accountability systems are subjected to change when there are changes in institutional conditions.

Key points from the accountability systems are twofold. Firstly, the framework points out how context matters to the performance of government organizations. Political influences are perhaps the inherent factor hindering public agencies' performance (Rainey, 2009). This factor is presented by Romzek and Dubnick through examining institutional pressures and its implication in the case of NASA's Challenger accident in 1986, which argues that the higher *bureaucratic and political pressures* on NASA had increased the chances of the accident. As NASA's institutional structure shifted from professional to a more bureaucratic and political accountability system, the organization had seen a reduced expertise and flexibility, increased "bureaupathological" behaviors and hierarchical structure. Although professional accountability based on deference to expertise was the appropriate form of NASA's organizational mission, the direction to reform the organization at the time was reversely so. In essence, the case raises a crucial question on whether professional accountability is the remedy to public organization's performance.

Secondly, the framework reveals how a public agency faces demands and expectations not only from the internal stakeholders, but also the external. According to Meier (2000), two core standards that are expected from bureaucracy are (1) responsiveness and (2) competence. Meier argues that certain values we expected from bureaucracy frequently are not mutually exclusive, thus, resulting in conflicts that significantly hinder its performance. In order to improve public sector's performance, it is important to realize that the subject is very much political and contingent (Boyne, 2003). In a case of a disaster, the paper argues that these political influences and conflicted expectations are even more accentuated.

Methodology

The paper employs a qualitative research method and conduct a literature review in three main areas: (1) the administrative reform efforts in Thailand since the reform of Civil Service Act in 1991 (UNDESA, 1997), (2) the role and relationship of BMA and the central government, and (3) the causes, impacts, and the politics of 2011 Flood. The study utilizes the presented type of accountability system as the main theoretical framework. By doing so, the paper analyzes past and current public service development in Thailand, as well as the bureaucratic structure and administration, in order to provide a better understanding of the institutional context. This institutional analysis will help the paper identifies the accountability system of BMA as a public agency and local government, and subsequently, evaluate the performance of BMA in the case of 2011 Flood.

Following the analysis of the accountability systems, the paper discusses further what could the solution for crisis management amidst the conflicted accountabilities BMA encompassed be. The framework of public network management (Milward and Provan, 2006) is suggested as an approach for BMA and relevant agencies to adopt and address the

accountability challenges they face when managing different, and sometimes conflicting, expectations. Although the known framework of public management network is not new in the field of disaster management, the collaborative network framework provides a useful analytical framework to study the new direction Thai government is taking and offer a feasible option on disaster management for somewhat unsolvable accountability system.

Literature Review

Thailand Administrative reforms: From bureaucratization to politicization

To have a better understanding of institutional context in Thailand, past and current bureaucratic system and its significant changes are illustrated in this section. The legal and bureaucratic framework of Thailand's public administrative system is based on two fundamental legislations: (1) The Government Organization Act 1991 (also known as State Administration Act), and (2) The Civil Service Act. The study discusses how the administration reforms has created a certain preference for accountability system among Thai public agencies, particularly how the shift from bureaucratic to political accountability system happened, and how the reforms become the base of BMA's role and its relationship with the central government.

The details of administrative functions and services are described in the 1991 Government Organization Act, which organizes the administrative structure in three interconnected regimes: central, provincial, and local administrations. The central administration consists of ministerial level agencies and those subjected to the Office of Prime Minister. The provincial administration oversees the de-concentrated functions by provincial governors appointed by the central administration. The local administration consists of self-governing decentralized organizations and can be divided of two types of agencies: Special Local Administrations (SLA), i.e. Bangkok and Pattaya, and the municipalities which include the districts and sub-districts in every other province.

Thailand's key administrative reforms lies in the 1991 Civil Service Act which defines the overall regulation of civil service and personnel management, including recruitment, appointment, performance appraisal, discipline, ethics, and retirement of public servants (OCSC, 1992). According to the reform report, the legislation has been constantly revised and amended "in response to rapidly changing national and global situations" (UNDESA, 1997, p.126). At the global level, Thai public administration is expected to provide efficient public services in response to growing economic growth in order to maintain and increase national competitiveness, while at the domestic level, the government has dealt with increasingly complex problems, where it has been criticized of its ineffective management in terms of redundant, overlapping, fragmented functions, and poor human resource management,

resulting in low performance in the public sector. These internal and external factors were described as the rationale for administrative reform in 1991.

With such rationale, Civil Service Council (CSC) proposed a revision of the Civil Service Act to revamp the bureaucratic system with the purpose to improve the efficiency in the public sector in two following aspects: (1) reform the public service system by streamlining the existing administrative structure, utilizing technology to simply tasks, and focusing on public services tasks in order to become more efficient and responsive, and (2) improve the public officials by reforming the human resource management in terms of recruitment, career advancement, ethical practices, and compensation. After revisions, four major reforms in the public sector were carried out. The following summarizes the reforms and measures undertaken during 1991-1998: (1) downsizing public administration in order to create "a smaller but more efficient" government through various measures; (2) upgrading public compensation in order to attract and retain public officials and facilitating human resource mobility between public and private sectors; (3) monitoring and measuring performance in public agencies through pilot projects[1]; and (4) reforming performance management by redesigning work process to improve service quality, organizational behaviors, and the use of technology.

These reforms hold two implications for the accountability system framework regarding how administrative operations are structured and how performance is measured (Romzeck, 2000, p.32). These tendencies to change structural features and standards for evaluation emphasizes on the discretion and responsiveness which tend to drive organizational shift from bureaucratic to professional or political accountability[2]. The shift from bureaucratic to political accountability applied in Thailand's administrative reform, although the professional accountability is not similarly adopted as in the US and UK. This change to political accountability without professional accountability is implicit; however, as the reform has been masked by a managerial problem rather than a political one. The reforms are criticized of its "questionable assumptions", where the efficiency aspect of new public management (NPM) is overemphasized at the expense of other administrative goals, and "uncertain outcomes" where long-term consequences are overlooked as part of the reform outputs (Bowornwathana, 2000). Focusing on the "how to" aspect of managerial reform is undeniably important to improve

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[1] The pilot project was carried out by Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC) supported by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and Urban Institute.

[2] For example, the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 restructured the federal civil service in the US which granted more discretion and managerial capabilities (professional accountability). In the UK, reforms under Thatcher demanded more responsiveness (political accountability) while reduced the professional accountability among expert civil servants (Romzeck 2000, p.31)

bureaucratic efficiency; however, the reform has enabled "government reformers to bypass the complex political and social economic realities of the country" (ibid.,402). In reality, it is argued that the true impact of the reform subtly has led to the concentration of power to pro-reform politicians rather than decentralization among public agencies.

The reform implication on accountability system is that the nature of a political system matters when implemented the administration reform ideas into Thailand's unstable regime as the reform may not share the same principles and become political-driven as a tool for political leaders to further their political goals (Bowornwathana, 2013). In fact, the reform direction is steered by the government and the dominant power of politicians in the central government, resulting in a new "stronger politicians, weak bureaucrats" paradigm (Bowornwathana, 2006; Bowornwathana and Poocharoen, 2010). Furthermore, from the case studies of five countries, the administrative reforms have led to decentralization for local autonomy in four case studies (i.e. South Korea, China, Japan, and the Philippines) except Thailand (UNDESA, 1997, p.11). The lack of decentralization points out to the political effects of the reform, which created the increasing political control of the bureaucracy, and decreasing those of many local agencies. Intentionally or not, the political aspect of the administrative reform has resulted in local public agencies and BMA's limited authority. In fact, the agency's shift to political without professional accountability has been neglected and limitedly discussed among the reform efforts.

BMA and the Central Government: Accountability Misalignment?

As a capital and a primate city, Bangkok has always been the central of governmental, commercial, and cultural power of the country. In 1973, Bangkok city was administered by an executive appointed by the national government. Nevertheless, it was shortly determined that the city office should be administered by a popularly elected civil servants, resulted in the amalgamation of the Bangkok Metropolis Administrative Organization Act BE 2518 (1975). The legislation enacted the establishment of Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) headed by an elected governor with a four-year term. Additionally, Bangkok city's council which comprises of representatives has also become popularly elected in 1988. Apart from political actors, BMA also comprises of the bureaucratic officials who do not come from the election and are tasked with the administration of 50 districts and 16 departments in BMA.

The administration of Bangkok city is usually criticized of its incompetency and ineffectiveness, reflected in the city's multiple problems such as severe environmental degradation, lack of public amenities, lack of communities and public spaces, and flooding (Douglass et al., 2007). The city's outdated organizational structure stemmed from BMA being a single legal authority which is ill-suited for the size of its administrative tasks and budget (TCIJ, 2018). According to national legislative council, BMA's budget grew to 75

million baht in 2017, which is comparable to a large ministry and even larger than the Prime Minister Office (32 million baht) and Ministry of Labor (47 million baht). Moreover, BMA has a wide span of control across the organization with a total of 70 departments. Despite its large resources and responsibilities, the organizational structure has inefficiently tied those departments under one roof.

Not only that this inflexible, incompetent organizational structure of BMA is dragging the city's development, the relationship between BMA and the central government has also clenched the hands of BMA and its governor. As opposed to Bangkok's political and socio-economic role as an outward-looking metropolis, the Thai government is very cautious when it comes to urbanization, where the government often takes conservative actions and constrains changes, rather than initiates pro-urbanization policies (Webster and Maneepong, 2009). Often, the central government often "prevents BMA from enacting strategies that BMA considers to be in the best interest of city's residents" (ibid.,84). For example, Bangkok's mass transport system has always been financially dominated by the national government and Ministry of Transport who makes the final policy decision (ibid.,85). This expansion of central agencies power is the government's tool to impose administrative control over the rest of the bureaucratic system. This has created a dilemma for politically-elected Bangkok governor to rely on the central government and implement its policy with limited discretion and power. Such tension between national and local governments are well-captured in many urban problems that require urgent response, such as the case of Bangkok's flood in 2011, where the disaster reveals that, despite its status as a Special Local Administrations, BMA is "a stranger in its own house" (ibid.,84). This limited power to administer its own jurisdiction has made BMA suffered when dealing with wicked policy problems in the city, and subsequently paralyzed in the case of disasters.

Findings

Accountability Challenge Under Disaster Context: The Case of 2011 Flood

The causes of 2011 flood in Thailand are three folds. First are the natural and technical issues that directly contributed to the flood. Second are the human and managerial errors that might have caused the government to ignore and overlook the technical problems (Mydan, 2011; Bangkok Pundit, 2011). Third are the incorrect, contradicting, and inconsistent public messages provided by different public agencies (e.g. Ministry of Science and Technology, Flood Relief Center, and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration or BMA) resulting in a public confusion and poor management of flood prevention and control.

The city's susceptibility to flooding is intensified by its growing population (ibid). According to 2010 census, Bangkok has a total population of 8.28 million, which accounted

for 13% of the country's total population (WPR, 2018). However, it is estimated that more than 10.6 million people actually live in the city considering also the number of unregistered residents. With rapid urbanization, the city's population rapidly grew from 1.71 in 1955 with an average growth rate of approximately 2-4% since 1950s-1990s (ibid). The city is regarded as a megacity with a population greater than 10 million in 2018. During the 2011 flood, Bangkok is estimated to accommodate about 8.26 million people. With the larger size of the population, however, Bangkok is not well-enhanced with its urban planning and infrastructure, resulting in the city's poor management of public amenities not only flooding but also reflected in the heavy congestion and urban sprawling. The city's existing land use comprises of 29.64% commercial and industrial, 23.58% agricultural, 23% residential, and 23.78% others (DPA, 2011). This has resulted in a troubling overuse of ground water in Bangkok and surrounding provinces (IDS, 2007). The change of land use and land subsidence are also identified as a major part of the city's weaknesses for flood.

The second cause of the flood refers to the human and managerial errors that may have caused the government to ignore and overlook the above natural and technical problems. Flood mismanagement (Poaponsakorn, 2013) is regarded to had largely worsened the crisis due to the sources of poor flood management as follow: (1) weakness of existing operations of major reservoirs, (2) ageing flood protection infrastructure and poor maintenance, especially along the Chao Phraya River, (3) lack of effective flood forecasting and early warning system, (4) political intervention in dam operation and irrigation management, and (5) poor crisis management (e.g. mismanagement of refugee). These managerial errors and administrative issues highlight the underlying political aspect of the flood sources. In this case, politics is perhaps the most complicated and controversial source of poor management resulting in the emergence of multiple incorrect, contradicting, and inconsistent public message provided by the different public agencies, including the Ministry of Science and Technology, Flood Relief Center, and BMA.

This lack of communication exchange did not only result in a large-scale public confusion and poor management of flood prevention and control, but it also reflected the underlying political conflict between the government and BMA which has also worsened the crisis. Particularly, the lack of coordination and management reveals the tense relationship between the national government and local government administration, especially BMA, "thanks to the fact that they belong to different political parties" (Poaponsakorn, 2013). Moreover, the report indicated several issues regarding the political inventions that posed as a threat and obstacle to water management, thus, worsened the flood outcome, for example, the case of blocked water at Makhamtao gate and at Raphibhat canal which are the flood ways to divert excess water from flowing into the city (ibid.,11-12). Moreover, a national news headline's "Govt wrestles with telling truth or lies about floods" discloses that the information

on flooding were blocked from the Ministry of Science and Technology by FROC and national politicians because "the truth will hurt the government's image" (Asian Correspondent, 2011). The concealment of this information has led to wide public confusion and delayed evacuation of residents in Bangkok and surrounding provinces, which were told that the provinces was still at risk two days after they were declared safe. By contrast, BMA refused to issue an announcement that the flood situation was under control (BMA, 2011).

The distrust in the government's information and government's failure to contain the flood echoes the mismanagement of disaster and information in 2011 Flood where BMA was challenged by its conflicted accountabilities. Thus, following orders from its political executives not only partly enhanced the politicization process at BMA, it also reduced its representativeness and responsiveness to other political constituents who are the public or residents of Bangkok. As this tensed institutional condition under crisis situation enhanced the tension between BMA and the central government, the result was not a shift in the types of accountability systems; but rather reveals the accountability dilemma for BMA, where neither responding to its bureaucratic responsibility nor political executives would give BMA or its governor an opportunity to manage the disaster appropriately.

Discussion

Management and Coordination: The Government's Response to the Crisis

Prior to the flood crisis 2011, previous water management have induced a number of studies that identify the management problem and recommended solutions. Four institutional traps are identified to reduce the vulnerability to flood and climate change in Thailand (Lebel, 2010), including capture of agendas by technical elites, the rigid and centralized concentration of capacity, organizational fragmentation among agencies responsible for environmental issues. Moreover, overemphasis on "reactive" crisis management is also pointed to be one of the challenges. Several recommendations are also given to resolve the institutional challenges, such as building adaptive capacities at multiple levels and connect relevant agencies. Encouraging more public participation in managing risks is also a recommended response to the management problem.

This significance of a more coordinated system to address the environmental issues in Bangkok is also recognized for the city to be responsive to climate change. Bangkok's capability to respond to climate change and relevant environmental issues with regard to the intensity types of measure encounters several constraints at the institutional level including limited decentralization and role of civil society (Webster and McElwee, 2009). Furthermore, a mismatch between limited authority and transboundary problems of water management is found (Limthongsakil et al., 2017). Policy suggestions are provided to combine both "hard" and "soft" measures, and integrate, systematize and distribute the knowledge to increase the

awareness and remove existing constraints at the institutional level in order to manage crisis situation appropriately and effectively.

In response to the 2011 flood, the government has established the government's center for assisting flood victims, or Flood Relief Operations Centre (FROC), which is ad-hoc agency created to tackle evacuation, emergency, and communication issues; however, its performance is hindered by overlapping tasks and lack of coordination with other agencies (Isra News, 2011). Flood Management Master Plan was also drafted with short-term and long-term plans to mitigate the damage and address the flood management system. In the aftermath of the disaster, the government response and the Master Plan are evaluated, where they are encouraged to make a stronger use of data for flood management, as well as communication and information exchange (Poaponsakorn, 2013). Furthermore, it is widely suggested that the administrative aspect of flood management system needs to be improved (Koontanakulvong, 2012; Poaponsakorn, 2013). For example, setting up a single command organization, along with better compensation regulations, data base, protection, and warning systems. Moreover, the management needs to consider the social aspects such as the understanding, acceptance, and participation from the public to the government measures.

To tackle flood and water management issues in a long run, the Thai government has established a new organization, Office of National Water Resources (ONWR) in 2017 by the proposal of National Water Resource Committee. The new public agency derived from "the government's plan to establish a single all-encompassing organization to combine the efforts of different agencies and oversee the country's water management policies" (Rujivanarom, 2017). In doing so, the government relocates the Water Resource Department from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to the Prime Minister Office under the new name. ONWR will focus on five main tasks regarding water management: water consumption, agriculture and industry, ecosystems, flood relief and drought relief. Being located directly under the Prime Minister, ONWR is given "a higher rank than department level agencies to take control on the policymaking and be a single command centre for water management" and can help unlocking "bureaucratic problems related to water management agencies and improve the efficiency of water management efforts" (ibid). Although this new policy has promised to improve coordination between multiple agencies relating to water management in order to be more productive and efficient; it does not guarantee successful implementation and will be subjected to high expectation from the public to solve this chronic problem. The assumption of this new collaborative policy, however, is questionable in terms of its centralized structure and whether it has neglected other significant aspects of a collaborative network.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND NETWORK MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC

Public network management: Challenges and opportunities

The previous studies provide an important implication and policy recommendations for crisis management. Many points out to certain aspects of networking, for example, interagency collaboration and the role of NGOs in addressing flood issues. These acknowledgements reflect that government programs alone are not always the solution to disaster management (O'Toole, 1997). Thus, a new policy with collaborative approach should perhaps encompass a set of public sector network that collaborates with NGOs and relevant organizations to deal with flood management effectively. In this regard, the public management network framework (Milward and Provan, 2006) can be utilized to assess the extent public network management has been established in ONWR (i.e. what type of public network management ONWR can be classified as) and which elements of the network the new policy has overlooked.

The network approach has its strengths in the independent nature of network, and the types of problem it can solve (ibid). Defined as "structures of interdependence involving multiple organizations or part thereof…[and] exhibit some structure stability" (O'Toole, 1997, p.45), network encompasses two crucial characteristics: interdependence and stable structure. Within a network, a wide range of agencies can work "independently to exchange information and/or jointly formulate and implement policies" (Agrenoff, 2004, p.63). In other words, the rationale behind public management network is institutional flexibility and collaboration, which is considered an appropriate tool to tackle policy problems that are usually inherent (e.g. poverty homelessness, or child welfare) or highly uncertain (e.g. natural disaster or terrorism) and requires the knowledge and expertise from different agencies.

Such key characteristics of collaborative network, thus, create several crucial implications for disaster management. For instance, the approach allows the network-participating agencies to keep their independent organizational status while working collaboratively. This is perhaps especially true for the information diffusion network type as the main task of the network is information dissemination in order to avoid or mitigate disasters by improving the service each agency is already providing (Milward and Provan, 2006, p.13). This type of network inserts flexibility in the structural-rigid institutions in Thailand, leaving some room for exclusive and hierarchal relationship. Nevertheless, such network was limitedly present, if not entirely absent, in the case of 2011 flood as previously illustrated by the distribution of conflicted information by BMA, MOST, and FROC as a fatal result of lack of communication.

Problem solving network is perhaps a more challenging collaboration for many public organizations in Thailand to implement. With its capability to "quickly solve the ensuring crisis" (ibid.,14), problem solving network is the successful version of the previous information diffusion network, as well as the recommended type of network to be used in the

case of disasters. Given the "known unknown" character of the disaster event, problem solving network can be designed in advance in order to determine command structure and manage supplies where flood is likely to occur. Despite the predictability and previous multiple occurrences of floods, the disaster in 2011 reveals that this type of collaboration is ironically *unknown* to the Thai bureaucratic system. Rather, the establishment of FROC can be considered as an *emergent* network. In the aftermath, the government has come to realize and respond to this known unknown disaster only recently. The establishment of ONWR can, thus, be classified as the *designed* problem-solving network. Nevertheless, the new policy and ONWR has arguably overlooked certain elements of the public network management.

Firstly, the new policy may underestimate information diffusion network as essence and base for problem solving network (Milward and Provan, 2006, p.14-16). Although ONWR's tasks are comprehensive water management which overlook the entire cycle to ensure water security, little has been done to utilize the information for managerial purposes, especially in disaster management scenarios. The use of performance information is, thus, significant to public agencies as they will have "an enormous amount of data at their fingertips" (Hatry, 2010, p.208) which is "able to be processed continuously and in real time" (ibid.,209). The two features will enable the use of performance information to make better decisions to manage disaster situations as more information made available for a more detailed and analytically-based geographic areas.

Secondly, the policy may underestimate the significance of the community capacity building network which can be supplementary to provision of information and problem-solving measures. Specifically, the community-based network (Milward and Provan, 2006, p.16-17) can be linked with local autonomous adaptation to flood risk, where "spontaneous acts driven by local experience to reduce risks from any specific environmental changes and enhance opportunities for wellbeing in the absence of official intervention and external support" (Limthongsakul et al., 2017, p.52). This integrative approach calls for the participation of stakeholders at different levels, including institutions, communities, and households, to mitigate flood. In addition to the hard measures such as planning and water resource management at the institutional level, soft measures such as flood-resilient housing and environment structure can be coped with at the community and household levels. These approach and measures share the similar goal to build social capital in community-based settings to deal with the problem at the local level.

Conclusion

The fundamental argument of this paper is that BMA has always been subjected to bureaucratic and political accountability systems due to its institutional structure; however, this status quo did not let the organization perform effectively in many policy problems in

Bangkok and even worse in the case of disaster. The analysis on accountability framework reveals the underlying institutional conditions that have been hindering the performance of many public agencies, especially BMA whose accountability has been subjected to national political entities in the central government, which left a few rooms for BMA to solve technical problems and be account for the people of Bangkok. Derailed from the NPM train towards decentralization to improve public performance, Thailand's lack of decentralization as part of the administrative reform has evidently worsened the local agencies performance due to limited autonomy and discretion of the agencies. Such institutional constraints make "doing good" and "doing well" very difficult for BMA, and even more challenging in the time of crisis.

To the extent that these accountability mechanisms were inappropriate for BMA's tasks, they became a major factor in the 2011 flood. BMA's inability to act on its own clearly indicated the inappropriate accountability mechanism and led to the contradicting information between BMA and the government during the flood which resulted in ineffective performance of the public sector at the local and national levels. Had BMA been given more bureaucratic and professional accountability in handling the situation, perhaps decision-making power would have been given to the governor and the local expertise on flood management.

Given this untouchable accountability mechanisms in Thailand, how will Thai public agencies perform better in an event of crisis? The paper provides an alternative to directly shifting or replacing this accountability system, but rather using the concept of public network management in handling a crisis situation. In addition to the misaligned accountability due to institutional constraints, the flood crisis also reveals the lack of coordination in information exchange and disaster management among relevant public agencies. The analysis on the network framework points out to this lack of coordination, despite the fact that an ad-hoc agency was established explicitly to handle the situation but failed to do so effectively. This lesson learnt has led to recent efforts by the government to enhance management cooperation, which is consistent with the previous literature that suggests a coordination model to address the problem.

Even though several flood prevention programs have been improved after the overwhelming floods in 1995 and 2011, Bangkok still faces increasing risk of flooding, and the current 907,000 people at risk is expected to rise to more than 5 million by 2070, while the economic losses related to infrastructure are expected to reach 1.12 USD trillion by 2070 (Dhakal and Shrestha, 2016). Ideally, BMA needs to find a more appropriate accountability system that give the discretion and autonomy to perform better, i.e. bureaucratic and professional accountabilities based on supervision and technical expertise. The reality of BMA context, however, make the achievement of this ideal highly improbable. Although the implementation is not without challenges and subjected to existing institutional constraints,

the improvement of coordination system among BMA and other public agencies may turn out to be a more feasible option for BMA to move towards the city's urban development and for the government to manage disaster better in the near future.

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