



CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS IN DEVELOPING LOCAL GOVERNANCE: THE CASE OF KHON KAEN PROVINCE, THAILAND

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Abstract:

This article explores the mechanisms of formulation and implementation of citizen engagement in Thailand. A province in the Northeast of Thailand was chosen as the case study. Three groups from each local administration organization were purposively selected to be critical informants, firstly, executive officers, both politicians and bureaucrats, secondly, leaders of council community organizations, thirdly, local leaders such as religious leaders, women's leaders, leaders of civil society community organizations and youth organizations. The results showed that citizen engagement could strengthen local governance accountability and responsiveness to citizen-led initiatives.

Keywords: Citizen Engagement, Local Governance, Civic Education, Area-based Administration

Título en Castellano: Participación Ciudadana y Desarrollo de la Gobernanza Local: El Caso de la provincia Khon Kaen en Tailandia

Resumen:

En este artículo se trata de explorar los mecanismos de formulación e implementación de la participación ciudadana en Tailandia. Se ha elegido como caso de estudio a la provincia localizada en el Noreste de Tailandia. Se han seleccionado como informadores claves a tres grupos, uno de cada organización administrativa local, primero, oficiales ejecutivos, tanto políticos como burócratas, segundo, líderes de organizaciones de consejos de comunidad, tercero, líderes locales como líderes religiosos, líderes de grupos de mujeres, líderes de organizaciones comunitarias de la sociedad civil y de organizaciones de jóvenes. Los resultados demuestran que la participación ciudadana puede fortalecer la rendición de cuentas en la gobernanza local y la capacidad de respuesta a las iniciativas ciudadanas.

Palabras Clave: Participación Ciudadana, Gobernanza Local, Educación Cívica, Administración Local

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1. Introduction

'Citizen engagement' can be defined as any individual or group activity addressing issues of public concern. Its primary purpose is the local and regional development involving government agencies and civil society organizations. The goal is to create an equitable allocation of resources, striking a balance between economic, social, and political development while respecting local wisdom, ways, and cultural traditions. It would create consciousness and raise awareness of community rights for the common good.³

Citizen engagement aims to create social change on a community through cooperation among people and the related agencies. All the dimensions of the practice are mainly related to the local development master plan, which will allow the local communities the opportunity to define their future jointly and to create both physical and conceptual changes within the local community⁴.

Citizen engagement focuses on a participatory process involving contributions from both inside and outside the community. The assembly members drive the progress in development and create self-governance with changes not only in activities but also in the design of the type of development inducing structural changes. These actions will modify the power relationship between the community and local agencies and even those at the national level⁵.

Citizen engagement can constructively create an information exchange among all the local stakeholders, which can help the public agencies to meet general needs and deliver services to the people who need them, quickly and effectively. It can encourage people to join government agencies while it is essential for public agencies to build links and connections with their citizens. All this will lead to the development of quality public services.⁶

This research focus on the mechanisms of formulation and implementation of citizen engagement in Thailand. It aims to explore the details and the success of this practice to provide knowledge that can 'fill the gap' in the development of citizen engagement in local government. The results can provide guidelines for promoting citizen engagement in the administration of local government and support the decentralization process in terms of the concept and practices of local governance.

At the end, the structural change will be able to create more efficiency and effectiveness in the local development. Finally, it will contribute to the economic and social achievements of the local community.

2. Theory and Methodology

The concept of citizen engagement is a tool to develop "citizenship" because it is a tool to generate lessons to be learned together for making local development plans at various levels from local to the provincial level. It will be an essential social capital helping people to engage

³ Gaventa, John and Barrett, Gregory, "Mapping the Outcomes of Citizen Engagement," *World Development*, Vol.40, nº 2 (December 2012), pp.2399–2410.

⁴ Gaventa, John, and Valderrama, Camilo, "Participation, Citizenship and Local Governance," *Strengthening Participation in Local Governance*, Institute of Development Studies, 1999, pp.1–16.

⁵ Bovaird, Tony, "Beyond Engagement and Participation: User and Community Coproduction of Public Services", *Public Administration Review*, Vol. 67, nº 5 (September 2007), pp.846–860.

⁶ Virtudes, Ana. "'Good' Governance Principals in Spatial Planning at Local Scale.", *Procedia Engineering*, Vol.161 (October 2016), pp.1710–1714.



with government agencies in the provinces and with local governments in the local administration.⁷

Its advocates claim some notable advantages over other kinds of political processes:

Firstly, by engaging people other than those who choose to put themselves forward for elections or those who want to attend public meetings, it extends participation in detailed policy discussions beyond tiny, unrepresentative groups.

Secondly, by focusing on people who are not tied to election manifestos or agreed with organizational positions, it allows the members to engage freely in discussion and deliberation, in which they can listen to and interrogate the arguments and make up their minds based on what they hear.

And thirdly, by providing opportunities for detailed learning and by structuring the discussions to be both deliberative and inclusive, it enhances the likelihood that conclusions are well informed and based on careful consideration of a range of arguments and evidence.⁸

The critical objective of citizen engagement is to encourage the community to be involved, from the beginning, in the local administration through a community-based convention so that the needs of the community and local offices can be met. The local government defines the pattern of the new relationships.⁹ Local governments, community organizations, and stakeholders will have a mutually supportive role. There are various structures of responsibility, from identifying the problem, problem-solving design, and evaluation of the impacts of public service provision. This one is to achieve efficiency and be most beneficial to the local community.¹⁰

Citizen engagement creates new relationships between ordinary people and local government, building relationships through new forms of participation, responsiveness, and responsibility. It may be described as a new form of citizen-to-state engagement and is associated with a new concept that represents the voice of the people in local politics. On the other hand, the meaning of citizen engagement is related to local governance¹¹.

Citizen engagement respects the human rights of all citizens by recognizing that citizens are dignitaries and have co-ownership of public resources. Together with other citizens in local communities and societies, they have the right to share ideas and to work with the local government to develop public policies that will use to create public benefits for their local communities. Social benefits are somewhat equally and responsibly distributed to all citizens in a society on the path of democracy¹².

⁷Nurmandi, Achmad and Purnomo, Eko P., Making the strategic plan work in local government: a case study of strategic plan implementation in Yogyakarta Special Province (YSP). *International Review of Public Administration*, Vol. 16, n°2 (March 2014), pp.143-164.

⁸ O'Byrne, Susan and Daymon, Christine, "Irresponsible Engagement and the Citizen Investor," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol.26, n° 5 (November 2014), pp.455-473.

⁹ Taylor, Moureen and Kent, Micheal, "Dialogic Engagement: Clarifying Foundational Concepts," *Journal of Public Relations Research*, Vol.26, n° 5 (November 2014), pp.384-398.

¹⁰ Lindquist, Evert A, et al. (2013): *Putting citizens first: engagement in policy and service delivery for the 21st century*, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Canberra, ANU E-Press.

¹¹ Kirlin, John J, and Kirlin, Mary K., "Strengthening Effective Government-Citizen Connections through Greater Civic Engagement" *Public Administration Review*, Vol.62, n° 4 (December 2002), pp.80-85.

¹² Druschke, Caroline G. and Seltze, Carrie E., "Failures of Engagement: Lessons Learned from a Citizen Science Pilot Study." *Applied Environmental Education and Communication*, Vol. 11, n° 3-4 (July 2012), pp.78-188.



This article tries to present how citizen engagement can impact on local governance development. A province in the Northeast of Thailand, the Khon Kaen province, one of the most prosperous areas, was selected for the implementation of citizen engagement in the local development plan in Thailand.

Three groups, from each local administration organization, were purposively chosen to be critical informants, firstly, executive officers, both politicians, and bureaucrats, secondly, leaders of council community organizations, thirdly, local leaders such as religious leader, women's leader, leader of civil society community organization and youth organization.

Two data collection types were semi-structured interviews and focus groups. There are three primary purposes.

Firstly, to identify how can construct citizen engagement.

Secondly, to explain how citizen engagement is operated.

And thirdly, to describe how citizen engagement can make an impact. Data analysis do through applying content and descriptive analysis.

In the case of the semi-structured interviews, this research would employ a blend of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions. The dialogue meander around the topics on the agenda and delve into totally unforeseen issues. About one hour is maximum length to minimize fatigue for both interviewer and respondent.

In the case of a focus group, this research would begin with identifying the main aim and defining the key research objectives of the study. Based upon the research objectives, a list of questions is prepared as guidance for each focus group discussion session. The researcher allows the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about this issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices.

About data analysis, this study begins with transcribing recorded statements so that a detailed, written document is available about who said what about a particular question. Then use coding. At this stage, the researcher lists emerging ideas, draws relationship diagrams and identifies keywords used by respondents frequently as indicators of important themes.

Reviewing memos would be produced by the researcher containing reflections on the process of data collection or insights into the research problem. Lastly, the researcher would analyze and interpreting qualitative data. These activities typically are done through a two-step. First, look at what people in the group literally said. The unit of analysis is the group, rather than the individual. Second, the researcher interprets what people said in an integrated, theoretical way.

3. Discussion and Results

3.1 Making Citizen Engagement

This study found that citizen engagement initiated a public forum at the community/village level. The members of the sub-district council of the community organizations strengthened their knowledge of the concepts, objectives, goals, and processes, and got that all of these issues, including implementation guidelines, were understood by all the villagers under the perspective of self-management provinces.

Once the people have enough knowledge and understanding, the forum is open to brainstorming on issues that will provide to their villages/communities a better live. The working group requires the villagers to certify the proposals of each village that will then be presented to the public proclamation process. The resolution to endorse recommendations must be approved by at least 60% of the households.

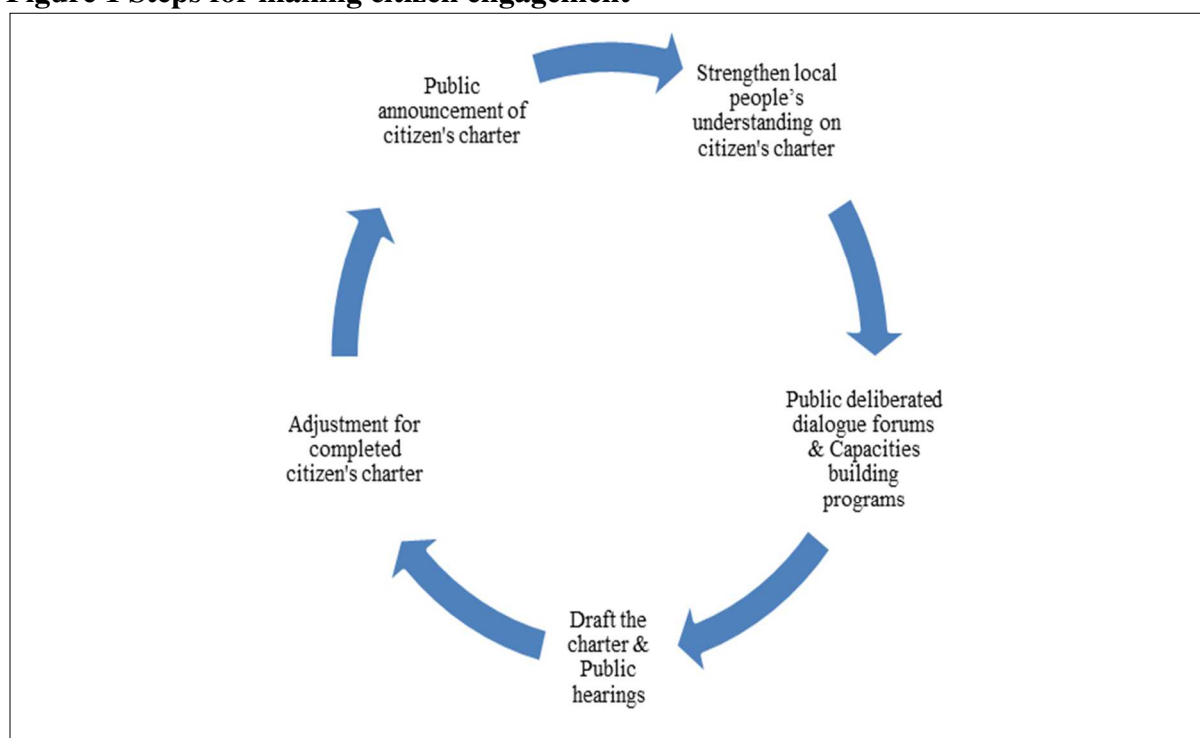
Each proposal will be compiled as a proposal of the village and will be brought by the working group to the sub-district level. Considerations will make for proposing that level.

Following the plan, a team of trainers would assign to support the implementation of the process at the village and sub-district level. This function would confirm that all stages follow in the determining process.

When the council of community organizations has prepared a forum for hearing from all the villagers, two villagers from each village, together with experts, the mayor, members of the local government council, formal local leaders, and people representing local wisdom, become board members. The board would make comments and put forward a final proposal. The proposal would be forwarded to the provincial executive team to compile, analyze, categorize, and prepare a "draft of the citizen charter." This draft would be sent to all sub-districts for a public hearing, with 200 participants invited, including representatives of all government agencies. They join the forum to offer feedback and suggestions before bringing the conclusions of the public hearing to improve and complete the citizen's charter.

Once the draft of the citizen charter is finished, the community organization makes a public announcement in front of the town hall. People in the province jointly announced their intention to implement the charter. Afterwords, the announcement is used in the development of the province by various government agencies, relevant to the regional and local government organizations. The charter becomes a framework for the development of policies, programs, projects, and budgetary regulations of these agencies to guarantee that the citizen's charter is implemented to achieve the desired goals.

Figure 1 Steps for making citizen engagement



Source: Author elaboration from Sataporn Roengtam and Anchana Saengkaew 2017

3.2 Citizen Engagement Becomes Operational

After the announcement of the citizen's charter, to guarantee that it would fully implement according to the goals, citizen engagement set the process of implementation. This one consists of 10 steps of practice displayed in table 1.



Table 1 The implementation of citizen's charter

Steps	Actions
1. Create a vision of the development plan.	Brainstorming to set the vision for the development
2. Organizing a forum to listen to people's opinions at the village level.	Allowing people to propose their problems and needs of their local communities
3. Data collection for drafting the district development plan.	Collecting data from the villages
4. Sub-district development planning	The proposal of all communities will present to the meeting for consideration, analysis, classification, and making to be the sub-district development plan.
5. The referendum for certification of the district development plan	The proposals of all villages will be presented to the meeting for consideration, analysis, classification, and development to be the sub-district development plan.
6. The development of community organizations network	The network will support participation in multiple issues.
7. Drafting of the people's provincial development plan	Draft the provincial development plan used for the community forum to hearing the people's opinions
8. The referendum on the provincial development plan	Holding a referendum at the sub-district level
9. Submission of the plan to government agencies in the province	To integrate the people's provincial development plan into government agencies' plans or 'One Province One Plan' (OPOP).
10. Submission of the plan to the local administration	All local provinces have to make plans in accord with the concept of the provincial development plan or 'One Local One Plan' (OLOP)

Source: Author elaboration from Sataporn Roengtam and Anchana Saengkaew 2017



3.3 Impacts of Citizen Engagement

According to different studies, all these activities can promote citizen engagement in the administration of local government. Details are as follows:

First, these activities of citizen engagement can create area-based management because they can open new, effective channels of co-working between the people and local organizations.

These activities encourage all council community organizations throughout the area by supplying budget support for use in the various projects of the organization. Local governments help the community organization to create innovation. The local government supports the budget as a subsidy to implement projects of community enterprises.

These activities encourage people to be able to handle their problems and their needs by themselves, as much as possible. In general, it can be said that in these activities government agencies no longer assume full responsibility, but reinforce people's initiative without waiting for government agencies in all processes. Therefore, they can promote the right of people to work with the local government in co-decision making, which is the primary goal of citizen engagement.

These activities create rules and agreements for every party that can share common values and develops a political system to support local governance, encouraging the community to be involved, from the beginning, with the local administration through a community-based convention. So, there are more actors than just the local government. Local public groups become organized into a dense network of local community relationships.

The critical activity is to encourage the community to be involved in the local administration through a community-based convention. The role of local government defines the pattern of these actions. Local governments, community organizations, and stakeholders will have a mutually supportive role. There are various structures of responsibility, from identifying the problem, problem-solving design, and evaluation of the impacts of public service provision.

Second, these activities can promote a participatory process involving contributions from both within and outside the community. These activities create the central council mechanism that various organizations can indeed cooperate in the development of planning.

Furthermore, these activities create a space for use as a common area for seeking solutions. These activities empower people's participation in the local development planning of local government by changing the implementation method of the development plan. They encourage community organizations to participate in the local development plan, together with the government agencies.

There are not just plans from various agencies, or those set up by the policy of central agencies, as in the past. Now the plans and projects must be developed by listening to the needs of the people in the area, and they must approve by the representatives of the people and community organization. It is an activity that gives parties a more significant opportunity to make decisions together.

There are various structures of responsibility, from identifying the problem, problem-solving design, and evaluation of the impacts of public service provision. Citizens can participate in local development plans and that they can have essential roles in mobilizing the administrations of the policy process, together with local government, playing some tasks, such as enforcement, to strengthen the government and civil society organization for developing strategies and jointly engage in monitoring public services. The local government empowers



societal groups by giving certain rights and privileges. Those groups have the right to take part in the development of local development plan either individually or as a member of a group or organization. This community-based organization places great emphasis on encouraging citizens to participate in local development plans. It is a useful tool for empowering citizens to participate in local development plans. These activities create a citizen network that has the responsibility to participate in public agency's actions for making public interest.

Third, these activities of citizen engagement constructively permit an information exchange among all the local stakeholders. It contains public sector practice guidelines, based on data, that efficiently reflect the causes of the actual problems in the local community. All these dimensions allow the local communities to define their future jointly and to create both physical and conceptual changes within the local community through joint consultative activities and by supporting the people to negotiate with and advise government agencies regarding their essential problems and needs. The process encourages people in the community to consider things collectively and to deal with various public issues.

These activities work through social networks allowing individuals to express their views on the problems affecting them. People have the right to share ideas and to work with the local government to develop the public sector. They increase the level of interdependence and interconnectedness among players through the creation of an information exchange network among local government, people, the private sector, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations. Local public groups become organized into a dense network of local community relationships and respect the human rights of all citizens by recognizing that citizens are dignitaries of these rights and have the co-ownership of public resources.

These activities attempt to increase the level of interdependence and interconnectedness among players through the creation of an information exchange network among local government, the people, the private sector, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations¹³. These works spread further away to other sectors in the locality that can be checked out, and play a vital role in the local government's management process and administration. That process now listens to public opinion more than ever before, with the voice of the people or public demand being a component of the development plan. Citizen engagement creates changes that allow the public, community organizations, and the people, to take an essential part in the decision-making process for the administration of the local government.

¹³ See D'Ambrosi, *op. cit.*, p.34-48.



Table 2. Impacts of the citizen engagement

Impacts	Indicators	Details
Created area-based management	Co-working among local government, community organizations, and people	Promote the right of people to work with the local government in co-decision making
Promote participatory process	Changing the implementation method	Gives parties a more excellent opportunity to make decisions together
Create an information exchange among all the local stakeholders	Allowing the local communities the chance to define their future jointly and to create both physical and conceptual changes	Joint consultative activities and supporting the people to negotiate with and advise government agencies

Source: Author elaboration from Sataporn Roengtam and Anchana Saengkaew 2017

Citizen engagement has induced important changes by promoting local governance in 5 aspects:

- Awakening to Join the Government in the Preparation and Management of the Development Plan

After the implementation of citizen engagement, it has shown that the number of people who increasingly active and interest in participating in the development planning process. There is also more diversity in groups, no more extended clusters of only a few individuals than in the past.

- Local Co-Ownership

After using citizen engagement, there has been a further enhancement of people being able to receive various new missions due to greater self-management in local government. As a result of the local government's acceptance of the citizen's charter for use in local development, it has made people feel that they are responsible for the consequences of their local community development. This last point is important because it also gives people a sense of belonging to their local community.

- Confidence Building in Working with Government Agencies

After the use of citizen engagement in the preparation and management of the sub-district and provincial development plan, the people have more faith in working with the government. In this way, the people can easily propose a development plan by themselves, in cooperation with the sub-district community organization council at the provincial level and the local government level.

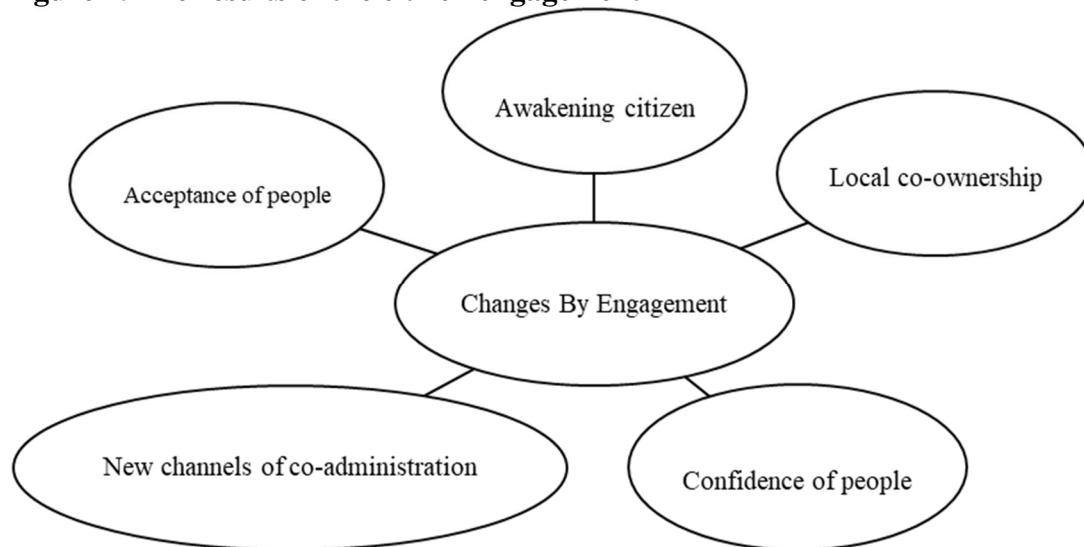
- Making the Channels for Working with Government Agencies

After the use of the citizen engagement to increase the channels for working with the local government and government agencies, it is now possible to create pathways for people to work with the local government and government agencies in the province, more than ever before. These practices reject the often-one-way channel of participation at the community stage due to an increase in channels to submit proposals to be integrated in the local governmental plans and the provincial development plans of the government agencies.

- The Acceptance by the People of Local Government and Government Agencies

After using the approach of citizen engagement, this study found that the charter can create more acceptance of these agencies. People can anticipate solutions submitting their proposals to the organizations at all levels. The citizen's charter can be used as a tool for facilitating by local governments and other government agencies the acceptance of the role of people in local administration.

Figure 2. The results of the citizen engagement



Source: own elaboration from Sataporn Roengtam and Anchana Saengkaew 2017

4. Conclusion

We can conclude that citizen engagement is a valuable tool to strengthen the political participation of local people because it has the potential for increasing co-governance. People in this area study enhanced their capabilities by promoting people's self-learning process by working with the local government through local development plans and policies. This practice is a comprehensive learning process. People who have joined this process can enhance their confidence, knowing that it is possible to work with local government organizations.

This implies a significant change for the people involved, never seen before. People generally do not believe that citizen engagement could empower them to work with the local government. They almost changed their traditional belief on local administration, traditionally considered as a tool and responsibility of the state agency alone where people should not interfere or be involved. Further, their rights were limited. They could participate only if they were invited by the local government to participate in certain activities, namely as a contributor to comment and vote in the community forum held by the local government.

In the case we studied, citizen engagement shows that it can provide to the people extensive opportunities to join with government agencies in designing the plans for the province and support local development in ways they find desirable. This process bestows people with a sense of civic consciousness to join the government in determining their future.

Regarding the theories of citizen engagement, they can develop a form of self-management in the future. The public will have the chance to play a role in shaping the goals of the provincial and local government plans for development.

The successful implementation of citizen engagement is an outcome of the co-governance of local people. It helps to increase a sense of 'ownership' in the local people towards the local community.



People's ability to work with the local government can build confidence and instil a sense of responsibility for their actions.

Co-ownership means that people are involved in discussions to make the 'right' decision and in thinking about alternatives. It becomes co-operative after consulting and deciding on the course of action. If there are problems on operation, both the public and private sectors need to work together to find solutions. People have the right and the opportunities to work continuously with others. These findings confirm that citizen engagement can establish co-ownership, which develops a 'cherished' feeling to keep the local development process together. Citizen engagement will not be a success unless there is ownership. These findings illustrate that ownership creates a shared understanding of community-based management. It can convince all sectors to come to an agreement and work together. As people become responsible in the implementation of development projects, they must take responsibility for their community as well. An increased sense of responsibility gives people a sense of community ownership as well. This is a significant result of the citizen's charter in local governance.

Significantly, the sense of belonging to the local community indicates that people are ready to join the local government in a governance partnership. We can conclude from the results of citizen engagement that people and community organizations working with governmental local organizations can be brought closer. It can create new channels for local development. These new channels define workflows and practices which can be essential tools for empowering people to achieve greater self-governance. Therefore, citizen engagement can be used to promote the co-governance of people in the area with two approaches: First, people can use it to strengthen its citizenship and change their minds, being partners and co-owners of local development along with the local government and other agencies. Second, it can open new channels for people to promote local and provincial self-governance.

Under the principles of the citizen's charter, collaborative dimensions will change the relationship between people and government agencies in a way that allows people to engage with government agencies to manage their areas of common interest, 'co-governance', as much as possible. This means that citizen engagement can promote a 'common agreement' between all the involved parties in the area.

This finding confirms that the impact of citizen engagement can ensure the effectiveness of local governance. Therefore, it can be stated that citizen engagement can promote the practices of 'local self-governance', which has never been previously prominent in the local administration of this country.



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