

Successful Implementation for Thailand as an emerging donor for infrastructure development in GMS

ความสำเร็จของประเทศไทยในฐานะประเทศผู้ให้ความช่วยเหลือด้านการพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานในอนุภูมิภาคแม่น้ำโขง

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Abstract

The objectives of this study were to: (1) study the factors affecting the success of financial aid under infrastructure development projects in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), and (2) propose a model for project implementation success. This study is the qualitative research by using three research methods in gathering data, consisted of document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and non-participant observation. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 34 key informants comprised of 9 key informants from Thai government agencies, 6 key informants from local administrations, 15 key informants representing the local people, and 4 key informants from Laos People's Democratic Republic, Kingdom of Cambodia, and Republic of the Union of Myanmar. All key informants have involved directly in road construction projects.

The study findings from content analysis revealed that government agents defined success at the outcome level, which consisted of improving quality of life, Sub-region economic development, and fostering partnerships with neighboring countries. On the other hand, the local administrations and local people considered success at the output level, which consisted of

reducing travel time and facilitating cross-border trade. The factors affecting the success of financial aid under infrastructure development projects in GMS consisted of 5 factors: (1) standards and objectives of policy requirements, (2) involvement and participation among stakeholders, (3) organization configuration management, (4) the social and political atmosphere, and (5) harmonization and coordination among stakeholders. The project implementation success model is presented consistent with evidence found in stakeholders considered success at the different level which effecting to various success factors. For the policy recommendations, the government sector should promote constructive relationships with neighboring countries and be aware of the best interests of neighboring countries. Moreover, the government sector should develop the foundation of legal, regulations as well as standards agreements under GMS along with hard infrastructure development.

Keywords: Infrastructure Development, Financial Aid, Project Success, the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ (1) ศึกษาปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความสำเร็จในโครงการให้ความช่วยเหลือทางการเงินเพื่อการพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานในอนุภูมิภาคแม่น้ำโขง และ (2) เสนอรูปแบบปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสำเร็จของโครงการ งานวิจัยนี้เป็นงานวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพ ใช้เทคนิควิธีการเก็บรวบรวมข้อมูล 3 วิธี ประกอบด้วย การวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา การสังเกตแบบไม่มีส่วนร่วม และการสัมภาษณ์แบบกึ่งโครงสร้างจากผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญจำนวน 34 คน ได้แก่ เจ้าหน้าที่รัฐบาล จำนวน 9 คน เจ้าหน้าที่ส่วนปกครองท้องถิ่นจำนวน 6 คน ผู้แทนท้องถิ่นจำนวน 15 คน และผู้แทนจาก สาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาว ราชอาณาจักรกัมพูชา และสาธารณรัฐแห่งสหภาพเมียนมา จำนวน 4 คน โดยผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญทั้งหมดเป็นผู้ที่มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้องโดยตรงกับโครงการก่อสร้างถนนใน สาธารณรัฐประชาธิปไตยประชาชนลาว ราชอาณาจักรกัมพูชา และสาธารณรัฐแห่งสหภาพเมียนมา

ผลการวิจัยจากการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา พบว่าเจ้าหน้าที่รัฐบาล นิยามความสำเร็จของโครงการในระดับผลลัพธ์ ประกอบด้วย การยกระดับคุณภาพชีวิต การพัฒนาเศรษฐกิจในอนุภูมิภาค และการสานต่อความร่วมมือกับประเทศเพื่อนบ้าน ในขณะที่เจ้าหน้าที่ส่วนปกครองท้องถิ่นและผู้แทนท้องถิ่น นิยามความสำเร็จของโครงการในระดับผลผลิต ประกอบด้วย การลดระยะเวลาในการเดินทาง การอำนวยความสะดวกการค้าชายแดน ในส่วนของปัจจัยที่ส่งผลต่อความสำเร็จของโครงการ ประกอบด้วย 5 ปัจจัย ได้แก่ (1) มาตรฐานและวัตถุประสงค์ของนโยบาย (2) การประสานงานและการมีส่วนร่วมของผู้มีส่วนเกี่ยวข้อง (3) สมรรถนะขององค์กร (4) สภาพทางสังคมและการเมือง และ (5) การร่วมมือและบูรณาการกับหุ้นส่วนเพื่อการพัฒนาด้านอื่นๆ ในการวิจัยครั้งนี้ นำเสนอรูปแบบปัจจัยที่มีอิทธิพลต่อความสำเร็จของโครงการ พบว่าผู้มีส่วนได้ส่วนเสียนิยามความสำเร็จของโครงการในระดับที่ต่างกันส่งผลให้เกิดตัวแปรต่อความสำเร็จที่หลากหลาย สำหรับข้อเสนอแนะเชิงนโยบาย ภาครัฐควรส่งเสริมความสัมพันธ์กับประเทศเพื่อนบ้านโดยต้องคำนึงผลประโยชน์ที่ประเทศเพื่อนบ้านพึงได้รับ และควรพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านกฎหมาย กฎระเบียบ มาตรฐานต่าง ๆ ควบคู่ไปกับการพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐานด้านกายภาพ

คำสำคัญ: การพัฒนาโครงสร้างพื้นฐาน ความช่วยเหลือทางการเงิน ความสำเร็จของโครงการ อนุภูมิภาคแม่น้ำโขง

Introduction

Infrastructure development allows less opportunities people to be able to achieve basic facilities and explore opportunity for higher income. Physical connectivity along border through infrastructure development is importance for gathering regional cooperation and economic development (Kuroda, 2007). Therefore, substantial infrastructure assistance in both physical forms and monetary has been launched to the world's low-income countries since World War II continually (Choi & Choi, 2007). Currently, major donors such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank (WB), the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the People's Republic of China have introduced their own corporate policies to complete assistance programs in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). Those Majors donors have been extending different approach of assistance to the Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam. For Thailand, the Neighboring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (Public Organization) or NEDA is the first Thai government agencies that which has main duty on providing financial assistance and technical assistance for infrastructure development in the GMS. In align with Thailand's 8th - 11th National Economic and Social Development plan, the Thai government has priority to increase economic and social development between Thailand and the Subregion by using strategic partnerships to position Thailand as a commercial hub in the Subregion. In according to one of the tool for Thai government is providing assistance to neighboring countries which is normally called aid agenda. This is a result of the emergence of the aid agenda in the 1990s and early 2000s, whose widely effect around the world. Foreign assistance is counted as a controversial policy whereas policymakers are often lack in agreement concerning its effectiveness, and taxpayers may question the amounts involved. Even aid can support low income countries by providing programs for hard and soft infrastructure development, others question focusing if this represents the optimal means of reaching the goals (United Nations, 2004). As there is not yet fully understood on the outcomes of foreign assistance in terms of a comprehensive framework that could provide detail on different type of approaches and mechanisms which are applied by recognition of the resulting outcomes.

Scope and limitations

Specific area

The paper focuses on financial assistance (grants/loans) to road construction projects in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar which were: 1) National Road Number 67 Construction Project (R67) Anlong Veng-SiemReap; 2) Road construction project from Chiang Rai Province-Kunming through Lao PDR (R3); and 3) MaeSod/Myawaddy-Thingannyinaung/Dawna Range Road Connection Project.

Specific organization

The organization under study is Neighboring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (Public Organization) or NEDA, attempting to identify the factors affecting project success.

Expected benefits of the study

This paper serves as a guideline to make recommendations for management development that will contribute to strengthening the donor role, focusing on subregion infrastructure development. The findings of this paper can serve as basic information for government policy implementation, and can be made use of in terms of the refinement of existing policies to enhance the performance of government agents as deemed appropriate.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows; 1) To understand the need for Thailand to provide infrastructure assistance to neighboring countries; 2) To explore the various definitions of NEDA's projects' success from the point of view of different stakeholders comprised of the government, local administrations, and local people; 3) To explore a consensus definition of NEDA's projects' success; 4) To explore the factors that affect NEDA projects' success; and 5) To propose a model for NEDA's projects' implementation success.

Literature Review

Infrastructure Development

The crucial for promoting cooperation and economic integration among the region is physical connectivity through Cross-Border Infrastructure (CBI) development. (Kuroda, 2007). To define the meaning of Cross-border infrastructure (CBI) or regional infrastructure, CBI is one of infrastructure development (either connects two or more countries or any national infrastructure connectivity) that has a significant cross-border impact. In terms of national infrastructure connectivity, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) have defined the term infrastructure as an important tool for development. For the World Bank (2016), infrastructure has helped to conclude the success in manufacturing and agricultural accomplishments. To reduce poverty, the investments in other sectors such as energy, housing, water, sanitation and transport also counts as importance factors leading to improving in quality of life. In addition, new information and communication technologies have been used for promoting growth, improving the access for health and other services, increasing educational opportunity, and promoting social and cultural advances. In alignment with Bhattacharyay (2009), infrastructure development has been seen to be the very importance issue to the realization of ASEAN's goal of further economic integration, while it will also be vital if ASEAN is to thrive in the long term, especially in the wake of the continuing global economic problems. To ensure greater connectivity across the region, the need for better infrastructure cannot be overlooked.

Global perspective on principle of aid

There were debates about the aids strengths and weaknesses, as the results some donors started to put in to three stand out as follows;

1. Recipient Participation and Country Ownership; It has been widely suggested that the role of donors in setting the conditions, objectives, and priorities for aid programs, as well as controlling their implementation and design, can be considered a weakness overall. It is argued that recipient countries should take a more dominant role, through the participation of the government, the private sector, charities and NGOs. However, broad participation and country ownership differ in their conceptual meanings. The latter demands that recipient nations design their own programs and determine their priorities, while the former suggests that the public should be involved in the process rather than simply the government and various government agencies. (Hayman, 2006)

2. Harmonization and Coordination; It can be a complicated process to manage aid when the sources are numerous and diverse, especially when many donors insist upon particular implementation practices and the right to monitor projects as they see fit. Demands for environmental audits, project audits, financial reports, procurement statements and frequent status updates for project management can be a huge challenge for recipient countries. The World Bank notes that the average developing nation may have to manage a working relationship with at least thirty different donors simultaneously, affecting many different parts of the economy and thus many government departments. Developing states may also host around five overseas visits from aid agencies annually for project monitoring processes. This places onerous demands upon the time of government ministers responsible for these projects as they must be accessible, but this detracts from their other duties. One possible solution would be to achieve better coordination among aid agencies to avoid duplication in their projects and to harmonize their operations to become more efficient and less time-consuming (Kanbur, Sandler & Morrison, 1999).

3. Results based management; Specific targets should be formulated for aid projects, and these should be achieved prior to renewal of the projects, or should support the re-assessment of progress and guide any future decisions taken on allocating aid. Three specific aims must be considered: 1) identifying successful projects which are worthy of further donor support; 2) identifying problems in order to make improvements to projects to increase their probability of success; and 3) guiding the design of better projects in the future. The relationships between agent and principal can be developed through improved monitoring and assessment procedures, providing information which will help aid agencies to better target their responses, while donor state taxpayers will be able to see the benefits of their support. (Hayman, 2006)

Project success

There are many ways to define success, and success can be achieved on different levels. Turner (2009) observed that it is rare for success to be measured by taking into account the views of all the stakeholders in a project (Turner & Zolin, 2012). The argument of these authors held that the stakeholders must be consulted because it might otherwise be possible to misinterpret the criteria used to assess the success of a project, resulting in poor decisions being made and leading to dissatisfied staff and a lack of productivity within the organization. The advice to be found within the literature offers that people involved with a project must be asked in confidence about the success of projects within their organizations (Chen, Chang & Huang, 2010). To this end, Turner (2009) argued that it is possible for all of the stakeholders to play a part in evaluating the results. It is possible for each stakeholder to be categorized in one of the following groups: investors; owners; consumers; operators; users; sponsors; project executives; suppliers; project managers; project team, or the public. Evidence for the importance of obtaining the views of the different groups of stakeholders can be found in the studies of Xue (2009, cited in Turner, 2009) who demonstrates the need to take into account diverse views across the duration of the project by considering the impact, the output and the outcomes involved. Turner and Zolin (2012) extended this idea beyond the duration of the project itself, and examined the criteria for success in the months and years which followed the completion of the project. This gives a useful insight into the nature of success once a project has run its course.

Policy implementation

There is two main approaches of policy implementation study which are top-down and bottom-up. This study focused on top-down strategy, when implementation is achieved through a top-down strategy, the activities of the officials at the top are the subject of interest, along with the factors which influence the behaviors of those officials, and the question of whether or not experience can help to achieve policy objectives. This approach has been mainly discussed by four key scholars namely Pressman & Wildavsky (1973), Van Meter & Van Horn (1975), Bardach (1977) and Mazmanian & Sabatier (1989). They used a model connecting six variables to outcome performance in implementation studies. These six variables comprises of policy standards and objectives, resources and incentives, inter-organizational relationships, implementing agencies, the economic social and political environment and 6) the disposition and response of implementers. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) recommended that there were a number of factors which had resulted in the failure of the policies. One important limitation where successful implementation is concerned is the fact that joint action can be very complex and so policies which require the cooperation of numerous agencies can encounter problems in align with coordination, problem solving delays, complicated decision making, and sometimes conflict about the objectives. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) advocated the applicable of a model which connects six variables to the performance results in the study of implementation. The six variables they specify are listed

as policy standards and objectives, resources and incentives, inter-organizational relationships, implementing agencies, the social, economic, and political circumstances and the disposition and response of implementers. Bardach (1977), meanwhile, takes a different view to the majority of researchers who have chosen to examine top-down approaches. In this case, the process of policy implementation can be imagined as a game, where participants must interact in an attempt to win. However, the game itself can cause problems in terms of policy implementation and the efficient allocation of resources. In addition, other challenges include the deflection of policy goals and a general reluctance to submit to administrative control. Furthermore, effort is expended upon the game rather than on useful activity. A basic model for successfully implementing policy is offered by Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989). There are three conditions which must be satisfied if success is to be achieved: 1) the problems must be tractable; 2) the statute must be able to structure the implementation; and 3) non-statutory variables must influence the implementation.

Research Methodology

This study used qualitative approach as the researcher needs to have closer understanding of stakeholders' beliefs, attitudes, and values. The importance is to know how the stakeholders perceived project success in meaningful ways. The qualitative method can generate rich information for a deeper understanding of people experience (Lieber, 2009). This study collected both primary data (semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation) and secondary data (recent reports and official policy papers on aid strategies). The secondary data were used for creating the interview guideline and for affirming the findings. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirty-four key informants comprised of nine key informants from the government, six key informants from local administrations, fifteen key informants representing the local people, and four key informants from neighboring countries. The specific key informants under study consisted of three groups whose jobs were directly related to the provision of financial assistance in infrastructure development (road construction projects) in neighboring countries. These groups were: 1) government agencies; 2) local administrations; and 3) local people. Representatives from neighboring countries were included in this research. All of the key informants had been working/living in specific areas for at least 5 years and were directly related to the R3, R67, and MaeSod/Myawaddy road construction projects. The selected projects for this study were selected under the condition that they were of the same project type (road construction) and received the same type of assistance (financial assistance projects).(Table 1).

Table 1 Characteristics of the selected projects

Characteristics	R3 Project	R67 Project	Myawaddy-Tanowsri Project
Neighboring Country	Lao PDR	Cambodia	Myanmar
Province in Thailand	Chiang Rai	Si Saket	Tak
Type of project	Road construction	Road construction	Road construction
Financial Assistance	1,385 Million Baht	1,300 Million Baht	122 Million Baht
Distance	84.77 km	131 km	17.35 km
Project Completion	February 2008	March 2009	May 2006

The inductive approach and content analysis has been used for analysis of the interview transcripts and field notes providing the data categories, patterns formation and themes. The qualitative data analysis based on three steps in data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification (Roberts, 2001). For improving the credibility and confirm ability of this paper, triangulation methods were used (Rothbauer, 2008) The triangulation method in this study used data triangulation comprised of 1) space triangulation (Project in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar); 2) method triangulation (semi-structured interviews, non-participant observation and documentation review); and 3) informant triangulation (government, local administration, and local people).

Conclusion

The study revealed that the Thai government uses financial assistance as one of government equipment for fostering relationships and economic development in the Subregion. In terms of the definition of NEDA's project success, it can be categorized into two levels, output and outcome. At the output level, agreed by local administrations and local people, success means that the financial assistance projects of NEDA can reduce travel time and save vehicle operating costs. Whereas the government as a state policymaker defined success in terms of ultimate outcomes and enhancing the connectivity with neighboring countries based on mutual benefits in improving quality of life.

The key four scholars that have discussed policy implementation success factors namely Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), Bardach (1977) Mazmanian and Sabatier (1989). The six variables leading to outcome performance in implementation studies comprised of policy standards and objectives, resources and incentives, inter-organizational relationships, implementing agencies, the economic, social, and political environment and the disposition and response of implementers. In order to ascertain the influential factors from the four key scholars, semi-structured interviews in connection with three projects were added. The interviews

affirmed that the success of policy implementation was affected by five independent factors comprised of policy standards and objectives, participation, organization configuration, social and political environment and harmonization and coordination between donor. (Table 2; Figure 1).

Table 2 Summary of the findings

Success Factors	Govt	Local Admin.	Local People	Neighboring Countries
1. Policy standards & objective				
1.1 Clear goals & objectives	x	x	-	x
1.2 International standards work system	x	x	-	x
2. Participation				
2.1 Inter-organizational relationships	x	x	-	x
2.2 Closer collaboration among international & domestic development partner	x	-	-	x
2.3 Recipient country's participation	x	-	-	x
3. Organization configuration				
3.1 Leadership	x	x	-	x
3.2 Resource and Budget	x	x	-	x
3.3 Qualified officers	x	-	-	x
3.4 Projects Monitoring and Evaluation	x	x	-	x
4. Social and Political Environment				
4.1 Soft infrastructure enhancement	x	x	x	x
4.2 Cross-border trade agreement	x	x	x	x
4.3 Transportation regulations	x	x	x	x
5. Harmonization and coordination between donor	x	-	-	x



Figure 1 Model for NEDA's projects' implementation success

Recommendation

According to the semi-structured interviews, the assistance through the NEDA projects focused on the promotion of trade for Thailand, and it was in fact driven by Thais' ideological. Therefore, The Thai government should be aware of the best interests of neighboring countries and avoid misunderstandings regarding the use of financial assistance projects as a tool for the support of politicians. Aside from promote constructive relationships with neighboring countries, it was evident that there was a lack of cross-border transport agreement. The government should

- 1) facilitate cross-border transportation, international shipping, and passenger transport;
- 2) establish regulations and cross-country processes related to the carriage of goods and passengers and make it simplified and harmonized; and
- 3) promote multimodal transport.

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