

# **The Government Initiative and Social Entrepreneurship in Thailand: Exploring the Role of Pracharath Rak Samakee**

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Similar to many countries in the Southeast Asian region, social entrepreneurship has a long history in Thailand. Co-operative, one of the oldest forms of social entrepreneurship activities in Thailand, has been around for over a century. Social entrepreneurship started to receive attention in the 1970's, as some projects on ethnic minorities in remote mountainous area initiated by the royal family transformed into business initiatives (British Council, 2020). Despite the early start, social entrepreneurship has only started to gain ground in the 2010's when the Thai government started to establish a government body to support the promotion of social enterprise in Thailand - the Thai Social Enterprise Office (TSEO). The office later bifurcated into three new organisations, the Social Enterprise Promotion Committee (SEPC), the Office of Social Enterprise Promotion (OSEP), and the Social Enterprise Promotion Fund (SEPF), under the Social Enterprises Promotion Act 2019 – the government's effort in promoting social entrepreneurship activities in Thailand. With the sprung of social enterprises in Thailand mostly in the form of private entities, the Thai government pushed social entrepreneurship activities further by initiating the Pracharath Rak Samakee - PRS. This government initiative is to have the National PRS as a central body to support the Provincial PRSs in each province in engaging major conglomerates, civil society organisations, local community, and academia for the national social and economic development. There are at least one Provincial PRS in each province. Therefore, there are 76 Provincial PRS across Thailand. However, since social entrepreneurship is indeed an entrepreneurial activity, it has been traditionally less government-driven but more market-driven. Thus, the question of how Provincial PRSs as social enterprises manage to perform as a hybrid entrepreneurial entity when they are government sponsored. What are the roles of the government in ensuring Provincial PRSs performing as expected, and to what extent the Provincial PRSs have autonomy in their decision-making processes? Using publicness theory perspectives (Perry and Rainey, 1998; Bozeman, 1988), this chapter aims to examine the performance of Provincial PRSs as government sponsored social entrepreneurial entities from three publicness perspectives: the extent to which PRS has public/private ownership, public/private funding, and public/private control. Publicness theories argue that all organisations are public (Bozeman, 1988) and therefore the need to appropriately manage their stakeholder relations, especially public stakeholders. In managing these relations, publicness theories highlight the public and private continuum along the ownership, funding, and control dimensions (Perry and Rainey, 1988). The public and private configurations of these

dimensions will ultimately affect the performance of the organisations (Walker and Bozeman, 2011). By comparing Provincial PRSs with other organisations with relatively high level of publicness, e.g. the BBC in the United Kingdom (Margiono, Zolin, and Chang, 2018), and with other public and private partnership projects, this book chapter will assess the publicness of Provincial PRSs, its implications on its decision-making processes, as well as the role of government in helping Provincial PRSs to perform. In addition, this book chapter will further discuss the implications of the PRS and the social entrepreneurship sector in Thailand in the future. This book chapter will end with policy suggestions to further leverage the social entrepreneurship sector in Thailand and highlight the importance of cross sector social partnership (Selsky and Parker, 2005), e.g. between the government, the private sector, and the civil society, in moving the Thailand social entrepreneurship ecosystem forward to further develop the nation.

***Keywords:*** *Government, Social Entrepreneurship, Thailand*