

THAILAND

**Improving Future National Reporting
to the Commission on Sustainable Development**

by Mrs. Wanee Samphantharak, Ph.D.
Deputy Secretary General
Office of Environmental Policy and Planning
Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment
Bangkok, Thailand

1. Role of National Focal Point in Thailand

Thailand's national focal point for reporting to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) is the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning (OEPP), Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment (MOSTE). This Office serves as the secretariat to the National Committee on Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development, which is a subcommittee of the National Environment Board, Chaired by the Prime Minister.

The National Committee is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment, and is comprised of 33 members, who represent stakeholders in the development process from all sectors of Thai society. Members of the National Committee include representatives from concerned public sector agencies; academics and researchers; non-governmental organizations; professional associations and leagues; the media; and, major groups who are both beneficiaries and important players in achieving sustainable development.

The National Committee provides a national-level forum for multi-stakeholder participation and consultations among the sectors of Thai society that are most affected by implementation of Agenda 21 and that are essential to ensuring the sustainability of economic and social development activities in Thailand.

The National Environment Board has designated the specific role of the National Committee as follows:

- i) Direct and make recommendations for the implementation of Agenda 21;
- ii) Propose policies, action plans, and measures for the implementation of Agenda 21 in Thailand;
- iii) Coordinate among national and international bodies on issues related to the implementation of Agenda 21;
- iv) Monitor, inspect, and evaluate action plans and measures to implement Agenda 21 in Thailand;
- v) Take responsibility for tasks related to sustainable development and the implementation of international agreements arising from meetings of United Nations' bodies related to environment and development; and,

- vi) Promote and publicize the objectives and recommendations encompassed in Agenda 21 for the purpose of promoting understanding and support among the Thai people, for the policies, plans, and measures aimed at implementing Agenda 21.

2. Inter-Ministerial Coordination in Preparing National Reports

In its role as the secretariat to the National Committee on Agenda 21 and Sustainable Development, the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning has responsibility for the processing of questionnaires sent by the CSD. Following their receipt, copies of the questionnaires are sent to all concerned government agencies and other key stakeholders in the sustainable development process in Thailand, to acquire primary data for further consideration. In light of the importance of the CSD reports, the OEPP may engage an external consultant to assist with screening the data for relevance, and for further processing of data provided by the various agencies and important stakeholders. OEPP coordinates data collection and processing, and takes responsibility for screening, assessment, and evaluation. Appropriate data is reorganized and arranged in a format acceptable for reporting to the CSD.

3. Reconciliation of Reporting Requirements from Different UN System Bodies (Including Mandatory Reporting for Conventions)

In the capacity of the secretariat to the National Environment Board (NEB), the OEPP serves as the focal point for coordinating all environmental information and reporting on behalf of the Thai Government. The reconciliation of reporting requirements to various United Nations system bodies, including mandatory reporting for conventions, therefore is not an overly complex task. Environmental and sustainable development reports are prepared by OEPP for selected international conventions and the CSD. The standard procedure is for OEPP to contact concerned agencies to obtain data related to the implementation and execution of programs, projects, policy, plans, financing, monitoring, and evaluation. Data essential to meeting reporting requirements then is extracted from documents and materials. Intra-agency communications at OEPP have been designed to ensure the sharing of data and information necessary to formulate reports mandated by conventions and UN bodies. OEPP synthesizes the required information and prepares inter-ministerial reports that are submitted to the

National Environment Board, through the appropriate inter-ministerial subcommittee, prior to being made public.

At this time, OEPP serves as Thailand's focal point for the following UN bodies and international conventions:

- Commission on Sustainable Development / Agenda 21
- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
- Ramsar Convention
- Convention on Biological Diversity
- World Heritage Convention

In addition, the OEPP represents the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Environment at meetings of other conventions including the Montreal Protocol and the Convention on Desertification and Drought.

4. Capacity and Resource Issues Related to Preparing National Report

Perhaps the most difficult issue related to preparing national reports is the difficulty in inducing agencies to take the time to identify, organize, and report data and information that is required by UN bodies and the secretariats of international conventions. National agencies that are not accustomed to reporting to national and international bodies on issues related to sustainability and quality of life, simply do not have the capacity to deal with questionnaires. Thus, data collection becomes an issue in national reporting.

A second issue relates to Thailand's internal capacity to prepare necessary reports in a timely manner. Due to the need to exercise financial restraint in recruiting new personnel and mobilizing consultants, OEPP is not always able to process data and complete the highest quality reports within timeframe required by the UN or international convention. A reasonable level of supplementary funding should be made available to national focal points to support report preparation. In addition, personnel who undertake tasks as national focal points for both the CSD and international conventions should receive training at the national and (preferably) regional levels, focused on the most important elements of sustainable development. This training should include discussions and information on formulating and applying sustainable development indicators, and methodologies for data collection, processing, and reporting.

5. Difficulties and Obstacles Encountered in National Reporting

Thailand has had difficulty in generating the data necessary to meet the reporting requirements established by the CSD. Obstacles have included:

- Personnel assigned to coordinate the reporting function do not always fully understand the implications of Agenda 21 and related sustainable development issues. This could be resolved through training and attendance at national and regional conferences where important sustainable development issues are highlighted.
- Due in part to the recent financial and economic crises, sufficient funding is not available to engage external consultants to prepare high quality reports on a timely basis. A reasonable level of funding should be made available to support the engagement of external expertise to assist with reporting requirements.
- The ready availability of standardized data, even among some UN agencies, continues to retard the ability to produce high quality reports on a timely basis. A case in point is (for example), the CSD requirement to report “GDP per capita,” while the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other agencies in the UN system now use “GNP per capita, calculated using the Atlas method.” With limited capacity, it is difficult to transcribe the calculations of one international body into the form required by another international body.

Recommendations

For the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Global Environment Facility (GEF) has provided the financial support to the preparation of Thailand’s National Communication. Similarly, the CSD should consider making available funding to national governments to support preparation of annual reports to the CSD. This would ensure that the quality of reports is sufficiently high and that relevant data is being reported in a usable format.