

Public services for Urban Environment

By...Thailand Environment Institute

Introduction

Along with globalization, increasing population growth, rapid economic expansion, and technological developments have been causing various environmental problems especially in urban areas. Such problems have been directly and seriously affecting human's life. The extensive and rapid urbanization, yet through imbalanced development, merely causes a number of environmental problems i.e. water, air, and noise pollution, solid waste and hazardous waste problem, traffic congestion and existence of slum in urban area, and not to be missed socio-cultural problems as well. These problems take place in almost every city around the world, especially in those of developing countries, where economic development is always first-prioritized.

The environmental problems in urban areas have become far too serious and far beyond the carrying capacity for government alone to timely cope with. It is imperative that government make people understand that the awareness and participation of every one in order to find measures to minimize urban environmental problems. Therefore, collaboration and experience sharing among units from different levels; international, regional, national, and local, are essential.

Municipalities are local administration directly responsible for public utilities and infrastructure and basic services to the urban population with good quality so they can live in appropriate environment and have eventually achieved sustainable development. Every municipality or local government is the key actor in coping with its environmental problems. Nonetheless, local government still has a number of constraints and obstacles to achieve the goals because of;

- Lack of flexibility and freedom to coordinate and implement development activities with other concerned agencies within its own boundaries and its surroundings
- Lack of sufficient financial resources to invest and maintain public utilities and infrastructure
- Local administrators, and planners, including some working units, lack the capacities and experience in managing the urban environment effectively and systematically
- There is not enough information and guidance from various concerned parties in dealing with environmental problems



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10 Points...

Guiding the municipality for urban environmental management

Urban environmental management is not about individual officers or municipalities going about their business in isolation. The approach that is requiring confronting deterioration urban environmental condition is multi-faceted. It is therefore essential, before undertaking work in individual subject areas, to be clear about the general strategy and approach that the municipality should adopt. There are at least ten points that must be borne in mind all the time.

1) Self-reliance

Since urban environmental management is predominantly a local responsibility, the municipality should not rely on the central government to take initiative or provide resources, but should think and act creatively to address local needs.

2) Interdependence

The central government should be seen as a resource of expertise and some finance, and not as provider of services on which the municipality must rely.

3) Training

In order to address increasingly serious environmental problems effectively, the municipality must have adequately trained personnel. It is therefore important to make maximum use of training opportunities for municipal staff.

4) Data collection

Organizing local service provision is not possible without good information on what already exists and what is needed. Collecting and using information on local condition and needs is an important task of the municipal staff.

5) Involvement of the community

The local community must be involved both in determining what is to be done and in actually doing it. Municipal responsibilities in environmental management are as much about mobilizing local resources as about carrying out the work itself.

6) Information dissemination

Educating the community about the environment is a vital part of effective environmental management. All media should be used, and



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local organizations mobilized, to raise awareness and disseminate key messages.

7) Empowerment of local communities

A really successful environmental initiative is where local communities solve their own problems, with the municipality as facilitator, providing information and basic resources to empower communities to act on their own behalf.

8) Coordination and integration

The key task of the municipality is coordination and integration of financial, physical, social and organizational resources. Most environmental services and infrastructure are interdependent: for instance, good sanitation and drainage rely on good solid waste management.

9) Monitoring and evaluation

The municipality needs to define clear environmental goals, and then to work conscientiously towards them. An annual, or more frequent, evaluation of achievements needs to be undertaken to see what has been achieved, and to determine how to overcome difficulties if these have arisen.

10) Legal framework and enforcement

The municipality must have solid legal support for its local environmental policies. It may pass local rules and regulations to enable the collection of service charges, and to fine or restrain violators of environmental regulations.

Management System of Urban Environment

The 10 environmental management strategies are guiding implementation principles which need to be supported and managed by a Good Management System. A good urban environmental management system should have the following characteristics:

The system is commonly understood and accepted

- The system responds well to the stated policies
- The system is focusing on preventive measures rather than curative
- The system is flexible to current situation

The 4 elements of Urban Environmental Management System:



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1) Urban environmental policy

Municipal leaders should develop their environmental policies with clear goals which are endorsed by the municipal council and fully understood and accepted by the municipal staff.

2) Administrative structure, personnel and budget

The municipality must organize itself as a centre to coordinate all activities aimed at creating a healthy and pleasant urban environment. In achieving this end, it is crucial to develop and utilize the municipality's own personnel, capital and finances.

3) Environmental action plan

The action plan is a concrete expression of stated policies, and aligned to administrative structure, budget and personnel resources available. The planning process must start from the needs of the communities, and involve the communities in the decision making. Local environmental action plan should be designed and aligned with provincial and national development plan.

4) Law

Laws, rules, regulations and bylaws are all important measures to enforce and implement stated policies and agreed action plans as well as to enable the collection of service charges, and to fine or restrain violators of environmental regulations.

Urban Environmental Action Planning Process

Urban environmental action plan is considered to one of the essential environmental management tools because The plan is one of the indicators of the "intention" of administration to bring policy to practice for the development and conservation of urban natural resources and environment. Moreover, the plan through which a process to create people's awareness and a capacity building for local organization's environmental management.

There are 4 steps to make action plan.

Step 1: In-house preparation and preliminary awareness raising: Municipal staff need to prepare the team and gather and analyze data; and to raise public awareness of existing environmental problems through various public forums from various interest groups.

Step 2: Formation and operation of Urban Environmental Management Committee; the committee becomes a key coordinating mechanism



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and body at local level. It should consist of representatives from municipality administration, technical staff, environmental experts, business sector, non-governmental organization, and the community. The main tasks of the committee at this stage are to identify and prioritize environmental issues, to form Strategic Working Groups in accordance to chosen issues; and to develop a coherent policy framework.

Step 3: Generation of Activities; the mechanism for generating action plans and activities is Strategic Working Groups. The main tasks are to analyze and prioritize the causes and impacts of the problems. Methods and strategies should be identified and work (action) plan should be formulated in dealing with each problem.

Step 4: Plan implementation. The Environmental Action comprising a group action plans which are produced by each Strategic Working Group, needs to be submitted to the Urban Environmental Management Committee for debates and approval. This process will ensure that all interested parties have an opportunity to participate, and also to raise awareness of and secure commitment. At the same time, public forums should be organized for various sectors, according to their interests, to voice their opinions and recommendations to the proposed plans. After the public consultation, the plans can be then formally assigned to the relevant organizations for their implementation. The municipal officers should put a lot of efforts to coordinate the activities in accordance to approved work plans. Variable indicators of the achievements of each project or activity defined according the objectives at the outset, will help to ensure satisfactory evaluation.

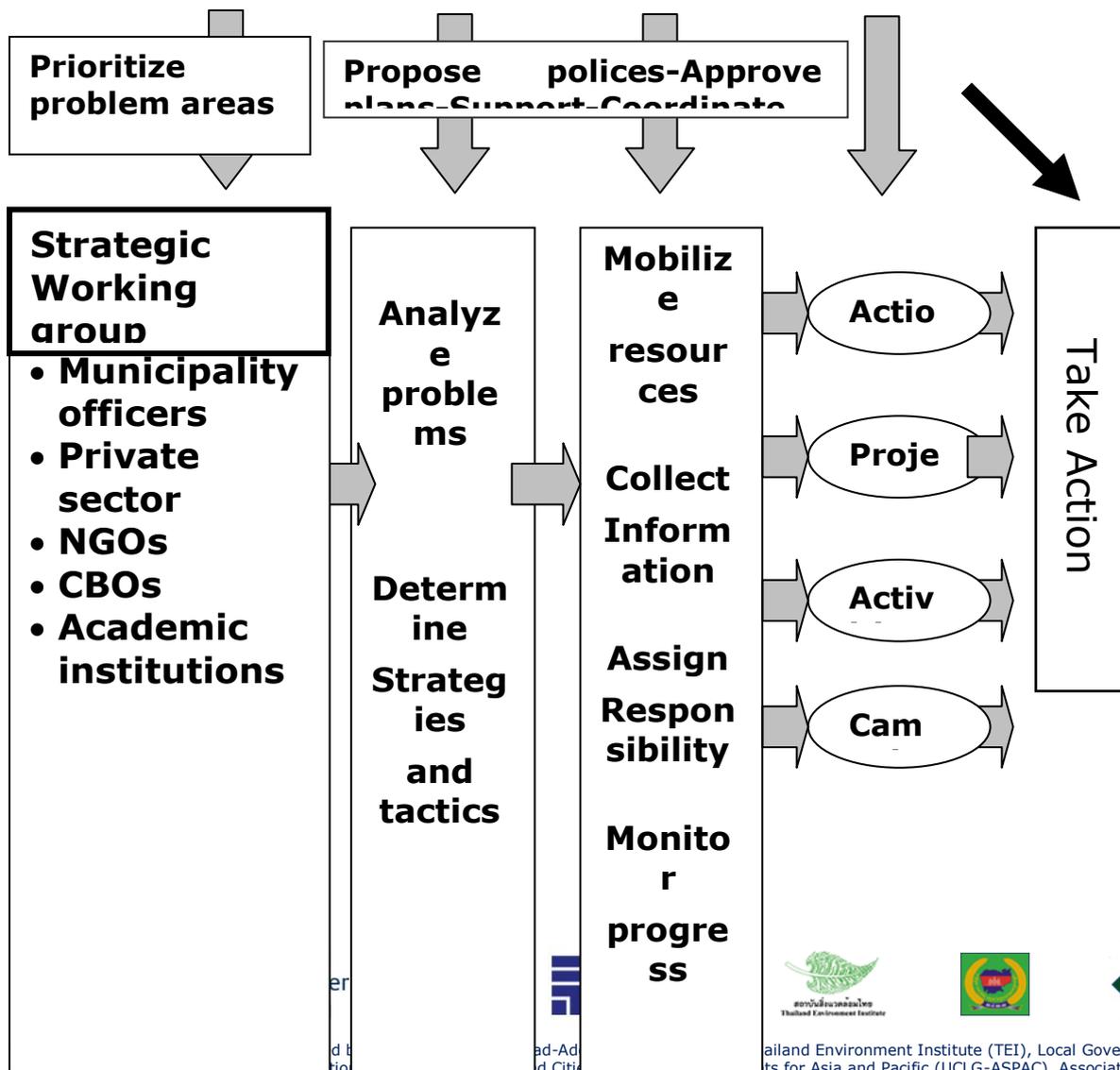


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Urban Environmental
Action Planning Committee

- Mayor
- City Clerk
- Unit Directors
- Other relevant Government agencies
- Private sector
- NGOs
- Academic institutions
- Individual advisors



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Indonesian Regency Governments (APKASI), Association of Cities of Vietnam (ACVN), and National League of Communes/Sangkats of the Kingdom of Cambodia (NLC/S).



Thailand Environment Institute (TEI), Local Government

Urban Environmental Issues: need to be aware of and to be managed



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Generally speaking, most of city administrators want to have their cities livable and sustainable. This is quite a challenging task which engages both a short and long term objectives. However, livable and sustainable city should comprise 3 following fundamental elements, namely, human well being, societal security, and environmental livability. And the three elements should also be built on the two pillars of knowledge and good governance.

Urban environmental issues can be divided into two main agenda, brown and agenda.

Brown agenda are:

1. Water pollution control
2. Drainage
3. Solid waste management
4. Hazardous waste management
5. Air pollution control
6. Environmental health

Brown agenda problems largely need to be solved immediately or in the short term by the application of known technologies and relatively simple management methods. However, these agenda remain crucial problems for most of the cities in developing countries.

Green agenda are:

1. Transport and traffic
2. City greening
3. The built environment
4. Slum improvement
5. Land use planning
6. Natural resource management
7. Energy and manmade environment management

Green agenda are more complex which require more commitment to long term thinking with a better understanding of the causes of the environmental problems of the 'brown agenda'. Alternatively, if the green agenda are efficiently planned and implemented, brown problems minimally occur.

All mentioned problems are closely interrelated and interdependent: therefore the municipality needs to approach the problem systematically and



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find the links from one problem to the others, in short and long-term. Both the brown and the green agenda should not be treated in isolation. There is much cross-referring between and among the issues. The categorization of the issues is served with the purpose practicality and specialty of management. It is necessary for municipalities and communities to think holistically and systematically with a broader view and with an integrated approach.



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