

A systematic approach to urban environmental planning and management: project report from Thailand

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SUMMARY: *This paper describes an initiative to introduce an urban environmental planning and management system into Thailand as part of a broader "decentralization" agenda. Its main emphasis was on enhancing cooperation between local community organizations and municipal authorities in identifying problems and developing plans to address them. But it also encouraged provincial and national authorities to facilitate self-organized action at municipal and community level and to move away from traditional modes of centralized planning and control.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

A RECENT ARTICLE in *Environment and Urbanization* took a fairly comprehensive look at "bottom-up", participatory approaches to solving problems of urban planning and management.⁽¹⁾ One of its conclusions is that participatory development activities at the local level, promoted in isolation, can actually have the effect of reinforcing inequitable power relations. The article posed the question: "How can local planning within the community be linked to higher-level planning structures and policy-making? As community capacity to plan local settlements and projects increases, there is a need to ensure that municipal and city officials openly support and actively encourage such developments."

The article notes that participatory planning in Third World cities originated in the Rapid Rural Appraisal methods of rural development assistance. However, in urban areas, the application of such methods is substantially more problematic both because of the intensity of environmental and social interaction - in a situation where social cohesion is generally rather weak - and because of the intrusiveness of government in all the details of how the city works in relation to the wider world of resources and politics. The article goes on to assert that if such

1. Mitlin, D. and Thompson, J. (1995), "Participatory approaches in urban areas: strengthening civil society or reinforcing the status quo?", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.7, No.1, April 1995.

participatory methods of urban development were to work, fundamental changes would be required to the internal procedures and management strategies of government agencies, involving new working rules, financial management practices, reporting systems and supervisory methods.

This article aims to describe a project in Thailand, financed by German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), which ran from early 1991 to the end of 1994 and which attempted to address the full spectrum of issues that arise out of the foregoing problematic. Focusing on the relationship between local community problems, aspirations and capacities, and the roles, functions and capacities of local government, the project developed a set of general urban environmental planning and management procedures that would both enable local participation and self-activity and provide a basis for government at various levels to respond in enabling ways. Box 1 outlines some of the organizations discussed in this paper.

Box 1: An Introduction to the Institutions Involved

UEMP Urban Environmental Management Project: a collaborative project based in the OUD, with financial and technical support from the GTZ.

The Thai Ministry of Interior is responsible for all aspects of urban and regional development including planning and the organization and financing of local government. Departments and offices of this Ministry mentioned in the text include:

OUD Office of Urban Development: responsible for capacity-building of local authority staff and the development of programmes to increase autonomy in municipal management.

DPW Department of Public Works: hitherto responsible for all significant infrastructure design and construction in Thai municipalities.

DTCP Department of Town and Country Planning: responsible for land use planning on behalf of all Thai municipalities.

International Agencies and Programmes referred to in the text are:

GTZ Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit: German Technical Cooperation Agency.

CIDA Canadian International Development Authority.

UNDP United Nations Development Programme.

II. THE URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PROJECT

THE URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL Management Project (UEMP) originated from the problems that had arisen within a number of GTZ funded urban projects around the world. On the one hand, solutions to urban problems were being addressed in a fragmentary way both because of the uneven availability of information and the sectoral and technocratic approach to management. Not only residents of poor communities, but also local politicians, generally possess only a very partial knowledge of the structure of environmental problems and the range of options available for solving these. "Solutions" all too often come in indigestible project reports and over-sophisticated methods and technologies.

On the other hand - and not unrelated to the foregoing issue - the decision-making process regarding urban management is also fragmented between various departments, levels of government, "inside" interests such as business organizations, and other interests including the organizations of poor communities. However well a poor community gets together to manage local environmental problems, without active cooperation from other urban groups and, in particular, the local authority, net benefits may be questionable⁽²⁾ and disillusionment is likely to ensue.

Although the UEMP was created to pioneer new methodologies in general, it was clear from the outset that it could only do that through specific examples in terms of countries and localities; work started in Nepal and Thailand, with the project eventually continuing only in the latter. Furthermore, it was clear that it would be necessary to work simultaneously at the national, city and community levels, which would mean running a series of articulated sub-projects, some of which would be structural whilst others would demonstrate in detail how the system would work, particularly at the all-important community level.

The project was initiated by a three-day workshop involving representatives from key national agencies, a selection of local authority representatives, NGOs working in the urban field and academics working on urban environmental management issues.⁽³⁾ The workshop discussed possible structures for the project and then focused on the key environmental problems in Thai cities. This laid the foundation for a support network and also yielded an institutional base in the Office of Urban Development (OUD)⁽⁴⁾ of the Department of Local Administration at the Ministry of the Interior.

For the first few months, the project, comprising initially just one full-time project coordinator (eventually there was a total of four local staff) together with part-time input from OUD staff and from abroad, commissioned local academics and consultants to produce a series of pamphlets on the environmental issues identified in the initial workshop. These included "brown agenda" issues of water pollution, solid and hazardous waste, air pollution and environmental health as well as more complex

2. The famous Orangi project in Karachi is an excellent case in point, where hostility and hence the lack of cooperation from the local authority meant that the self-built sewer system actually exacerbated water pollution in other parts of the city.

3. It was important to the orientation of the UEMP that the Project Coordinator had an academic background in planning and local authority organization but also ten years of NGO experience with urban slum communities concerning housing rights and cooperative organization.

4. The OUD was established in the context of a UNDP project in answer to the decentralization objectives of the 5th National Economic and Social Development Plan. The agency has since taken responsibility for capacity-building in planning and managing the growth of cities.

5. It became clear in the course of the project that special attention would need to be focused on providing specific technical and organizational information to non-government and community groups and a second set of guidelines was produced to satisfy this need.

6. Rather than dictate to the municipalities what non-government interests they should include, this was left up to them, with the project providing only advice. This lack of procedures or even guidelines is now becoming a potentially serious problem and, with the formal adoption of the *Nam Rong* process as national policy, there is a real possibility of some very unrepresentative committees emerging.

issues of transportation, the built environment, land management, organization amongst poor communities and even regional resources management.

The pamphlets were not aimed at technicians but were meant to provide technical information to key local decision-makers including mayors and councillors, city clerks and key non-municipal actors interested in becoming involved in local development and management decisions.⁽⁵⁾ The approach - the style - of the pamphlets was therefore to ask simple questions and to provide easily understood, and liberally illustrated, answers and options. Case examples were provided to illustrate what had already been done and each pamphlet contained a directory of sources for help. The emphasis amongst the options where help is needed was on networking between communities and local authorities, rather than calling upon "higher authority".

The key point was simply that the decision-making process *can* be opened up by proposing technical solutions to local environmental problems which are transparent and which come together with a participatory approach to management. An interesting point concerning the exercise was that, already at the level of the consultants hired to produce the material, there were problems with thinking in terms of lay understanding and simple practical solutions. Professionals are used to reinforcing the elite decision-making process through esoteric ("scientific") approaches to urban management and infrastructure provision. It took considerable work to convert what the professionals provided in terms of materials into guidelines genuinely accessible to non-professionals.

Whilst these Urban Environmental Management Guidelines were being produced, work proceeded on identifying cities where the new urban environmental planning and management process might be pioneered. Eventually, seven municipalities, ranging from Chiang Mai with a population of over 200,000 people to Paak Phanang with less than 8,000, participated, chosen because of their variety of key problems (coastal, inland, tourist, industrial, etc.) and regional scatter but primarily as a consequence of an assessment of the probability of making good progress with strong commitment from the politicians and/or key officers, and a preference for municipalities where there was already some NGO and/or CBO activity that could be built into the project.

A set of procedures for the institution of local environmental action planning was drafted. These, together with the draft guidelines, were the subject of a lengthy critique by all the participants including actors in the municipalities where the procedures were to be tested. The time then came to run the exercise and, over a six-month period in late 1992 and early 1993, the seven municipalities underwent a pilot (in Thai: *Nam Rong*) process of generating environmental action plans. This involved the following:

- Each municipality organized an environment committee comprising municipal politicians and officers, representatives from other local interests⁽⁶⁾ and representatives from the provinces

(which, in Thailand, possess powers and budgets to carry out urban works); each municipality also appointed a liaison officer who was responsible for monitoring progress and generally liaising with the project.

- Following the prioritization of issues, working committees (it was intended that these, too, should involve non-government participants) were established to consider, via the options and procedures suggested in the guidelines, what approach should be taken to solving the prioritized problems.
- While these activities were underway, certain generic issues were identified and workshops held, involving participants from all the *Nam Rong* municipalities, in order to work through the problem and, in principle, to initiate demonstration projects that would produce generic solutions that could be emulated elsewhere. Issues included solid waste landfill site construction and management and methods of municipal-CBO cooperation.
- Furthermore, a general process of "awareness-raising" was encouraged, financed by the project, both to instill a greater concern for environmental problems and to make the connection in the minds of the public between these problems and the concurrent action planning process. Events ranged from local conferences to a whole week of events (in Chiang Mai). Elsewhere, more culturally specific responses were made, such as a well-known Buddhist monk delivering a sermon to several thousand and a shadow puppet play being written and staged.

The procedures were designed loosely to make use of existing skills in the local authority for assembling municipal budgets and could even be interpreted as a "popularization" of the conventional budgetary process. On the other hand, the formal plans called for the identification of non-government actors and resources to participate in developing and implementing detailed solutions. Whilst this fell far short of a fully rounded environmental planning exercise, it did have the effect of providing a foundation upon which further rounds of training and planning could be built and it had the advantage of starting from familiar ground.

As might be expected, the level of activity was very different from one municipality to another, with some showing little by way of results but, on the whole, with a wealth of useful experience being accumulated. The *Nam Rong* exercise was formally concluded in April 1993 and, in a workshop which brought together key central government officers, representatives from donor organizations and local authorities and NGOs involved in the *Nam Rong*, a debriefing took place to identify what work needed to be done to improve on the procedures and to disseminate the experience.

In the first instance, further work was done on refining the guidelines, which were eventually published and distributed.⁽⁷⁾

7. The *Urban Environmental Management Guidelines, Thailand* have also been published in English and can be obtained from Section 425, GTZ, Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-2, Postfach 5180, D-65726 Eschborn, Germany.

8. Rüländ, J. (1992), *Urban Development in Southeast Asia: Regional Cities and Local Government*, Westview Press, Boulder.

9. Hardoy, J.E. and Satterthwaite, D. (1989), *Squatter Citizen: Life in the Urban Third World*, Earthscan, London.

10. Rondinelli, D.A., Nellis, J.R. and Cheema, G.S. (1984), *Decentralization in Developing Countries: A Review of Recent Experience*, World Bank Staff Working Paper No. 581, World Bank, Washington; and Simon, D. (editor) (1990), *Third World Regional Development: A Reappraisal*, Paul Chapman Publishing, London.

Although the UEMP did not have the resources to follow up on all the plans produced by the municipalities, some demonstration projects were undertaken. Before discussing these in more detail, it is necessary to stand back a little from the mechanics of the project and discuss certain important background conditions.

III. SOME BACKGROUND CONSIDERATIONS

THAILAND, LIKE ALL Third World countries - being until very recently an extreme even by Asian standards⁽⁸⁾ - suffers from an excessive centralization of government powers and resources. In discussing the urgent need for more effective urban environmental management, particularly in poor communities of Third World cities, Hardoy and Satterthwaite⁽⁹⁾ stressed the point that weak, ineffective and unrepresentative local government lay at the heart of the problem of worsening urban environmental conditions.

The fact is that the international agencies have supported programmes in many countries to encourage Third World governments to decentralize resources and build up the capacity of local government to improve urban management. In spite of decentralization ostensibly being a political priority in many Third World countries, for a host of reasons these efforts have, certainly until very recently, largely failed.⁽¹⁰⁾ It is fairly clear that the predominant reason for failure has been that, until the 1990s, decentralization programmes were virtually always managed from the top down in a situation where the top manifestly does not have its heart in the process: who, in the central government, will willingly divest themselves of powers? Decentralization will become a reality only if it is orchestrated from the bottom up as political pressure - not simply in the form of an empty demand for power but as a reasoned argument for resources with which to undertake specific local projects and programmes.

The UEMP never made any secret of the fact that the core of the project's agenda lay in the aspiration to build up pressure from below for more autonomy in managing the local environment. Although local government is weak, the central government, in the form of the Department of Public Works (DPW), does, in fact, spend considerable resources in providing infrastructure directly - urban roads, river protection, water treatment facilities, etc. The problem is that this does not necessarily represent what the local authority, and in particular local communities, consider to be priorities or an appropriate use of resources. In the end, there is no feeling of "local ownership" of the end product which is consequently badly managed and perfunctorily maintained.

In this context, the *Nam Rong* process was designed to initiate a new kind of local politics of urban management that would have local government and communities making common cause concerning what they see as priorities and estimating the resources (including personnel capabilities) necessary to carry out

effective local environmental management. Some of the groups and processes are described in Box 2. But, given the inadequacy of local finances to cover larger cost items, how could demands for the necessary resources be articulated effectively at the national level?

Box 2: "Communities"

There are many non-government "stakeholders" even in a small town, some of whom are organized and others not, who might play an active role in obtaining resources and services to serve their needs. In comparison with many other countries (Indonesia and the Philippines, for instance⁽¹¹⁾), communities have been poorly organized in Thailand but this is changing rapidly in the context of recent economic and political changes.

Business organizations have been helped by the government to organize themselves and have been asked to be involved in development decision-making at national and provincial level. There has been a spontaneous rapid growth in "civic associations" in many cities that are challenging government development decisions. An NGO movement started in the 1970s to intervene in the rural development process has more recently become involved in urban areas and is supporting the development of community based organizations both in organizing self-help initiatives and in asserting their rights as citizens in the local political process.⁽¹²⁾

The UEMP hired a member of staff specifically to work with NGOs and CBOs in the Nam Rong municipalities with a strong emphasis on poor communities and aiming both to improve their organizational capacity and thence to bring them into the municipal environmental planning and management process as full partners. This was a very hit-and-miss activity, dependent on local personalities, capabilities and traditions and, whilst there were some clear isolated successes, given the meagre resources of the project, this had to be more a seed-sowing exercise rather than a programme.

11. Webster, D. and Saeed, K. (1992), *Generating Political Support for Improvements to Urban Environments in Asia*, International Workshop on Planning for Sustainable Development, Cardiff.

12. Atkinson, A. (editor) (1996), *Key Issue Analysis #3: Public Participation*, Thailand Environment Institute, Bangkok.

The first hurdle was to greatly improve the inclination and capacity of local authorities and communities to work together to create a "united front". Legally, and according to tradition, local government in Thailand (indeed in most countries), although wishing to appear as a local, even "popular" institution is, in fact, little more than an arm of central government and therefore basically uninterested in gaining greater local autonomy. Local NGOs and CBOs know this and this creates a hostility which both confirms local government in its detachment from local commitment and reduces the possibilities for real community benefits arising from local government programmes. The UEMP thus worked very hard to overcome these hostilities and enhance whatever possibilities there might be of forging a working relationship between community organizations and local government as a key to "capturing" local government as an ally in the struggle to gain more powers and resources from the centre.

13. Riggs, FW. (1966), *Thailand: The Modernisation of a Bureaucratic Polity*, East-West Centre Press, Honolulu. This is an oft-cited history of modern Thailand analyzed in terms of struggles between bureaucratic institutions.

With respect to the means of wresting powers and resources from central government, two approaches presented themselves. On the one hand, national government bureaucracy is never monolithic. On the contrary, it is always the scene of struggles for control over resources.⁽¹³⁾ Within this milieu, there are usually opportunities for new actors to "play the system": whilst decentralization may seem not to be in the interests of any central government agency, de facto decentralization may be achieved through the partial measures that happen to suit particular agencies in the thick of the bureaucratic struggle. This process is currently helped in Thailand by the way in which decentralization is seen in general political terms as a good thing, particularly within the ideological context of environmental management.

Two examples from the Thai case are as follows. Firstly, the passing of the Environmental Quality Promotion Act in 1992 established a substantial Environment Fund, controlled jointly by the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, and the Environment and Resources Office of the Ministry of the Interior. Hitherto, the Department of Public Works had been responsible for delivering environmental infrastructure as finished objects: urban roads, sewerage treatment plants, solid waste landfill sites and so on. Under the new Act, local authorities may now formulate their own solutions to water pollution and solid waste management problems and bid for money from the Environment Fund to implement their own solutions including not only hardware but also institution-building and public involvement.

As there had been serious problems in implementing this mechanism - not least of all the lack of local capacity to formulate proposals and generally plan and manage the **process** - the UEMP intervened both at the local level, by way of demonstration projects, and at the national level, with a view to tying the procedures for application for money from the Environment Fund into the urban environmental action planning procedures which it was developing. The intention is to ensure that local authorities and communities "capture" this opportunity to gain increased discretion in the use of centrally provided resources.

The second case involves a demonstration project which the UEMP organized in the town of Nong Khai, a municipality of 23,000 people in a district of around 150,000, and an active participant in the *Nam Rong* process. A bridge has recently been completed, connecting Nong Khai with Vientiane, the capital of the People's Republic of Laos, on the other side of the Mekong river. Frenetic development pressures, in the context of very weak land use controls, are having a variety of negative impacts on the existing urban structure. The UEMP undertook to facilitate a land use planning demonstration project in the town.

Nong Khai is not typical of Thai cities in possessing relatively strong community organizations: the municipality is divided into 18 such communities, mainly based on local Buddhist temples (*Wats*). In other cities, where there are no such neighbourhood organizations, poor communities organize on their own

behalf with various levels of coherence and competence; in Nong Khai the *Wat* organizations took over this function. Again, untypically, there is active cooperation between these community organizations and the municipality so that they take on certain welfare and other social functions in addition to, instead of, or in collaboration with, the municipality. Early in the UEMP, the town cooperated in running a workshop involving representatives from the other *Nam Rong* cities to demonstrate methods of community organization and cooperation between communities and municipalities.

One of the outcomes of the *Nam Rong* environmental action planning exercise in Nong Khai was a recognition of the need for effective land use planning and it was around this that the UEMP organized a demonstration project. Following informal discussions in the town, two of the communities were selected to participate in the exercise. A young German land use planner was appointed for four months to live in the town and to work closely with the two communities and the local authority staff with some advice and assistance from a university lecturer from Bangkok.

Together, the advisers, the municipal staff and representatives from the communities devised a series of procedures for "bottom-up" land use planning. This resulted, via an iterative process of discussion, the production of drawings, further discussion and an eventual choice among options, in one large urban block which had been partially developed, gaining a land use sub-division plan agreed to by the local authority, the community and the landowners. Project staff from the OUD then trained the local authority staff in how to programme the infrastructure component of the plan into the regular municipal budget.

The novelty in this process is as follows. Land use planning in Thailand is carried out entirely by the central government Department of Town and Country Planning (DTCP). Although the legislation allows for the production of "specific plans" (local plans), big real-estate interests have effectively blocked the production of these through their political influence on the central government. Meanwhile, the "comprehensive plans", which the DTCP has produced for all towns including Nong Khai, are too general to be of any practical use in defining the finer grain layout of towns or for controlling the kinds of development that take place. Rather than promoting land use planning in Thai cities, the DTCP thus effectively blocks any significant structured control over land use. The Nong Khai land use planning demonstration project was designed to remove the blockage by community and municipality both agreeing to take on the activity of local land use planning and using the rivalry between central government agencies to remove hitherto existing central government sanctions.

Initially, the DTCP agreed to participate in the Nong Khai project but, as things progressed, they failed to make their input and it became clear that senior officials in the agency were altogether unhappy about the project. However, the OUD had long cherished an ambition to appropriate the DTCP's role in local land use plan-making. As the demonstration project drew

14. A whole constellation of chances came together in Phuket which meant that it has become an experimentation ground for both "hardware" and "software" aspects of environmental management with the UEMP by no means the only actor.

towards its conclusion, it became evident to the DTCP that the OUD was making the running in an area for which they should have been responsible. A strong DTCP presence suddenly materialized in the final training workshop. At this point, the community that had produced its plan led a training session during which the leaders of other local communities were trained in how to produce their own plan with assistance from the municipal engineer and architect and, in the context of their rivalry, with assistance from the central government agencies.

The second approach to making headway on bottom-up pressures for decentralization was made via the Municipal League. The Municipal League is the association through which municipalities look after their collective interests in the political arena. Thailand does have elected mayors and councils but, given the weakness of municipalities as institutions, there has been a strong tendency towards clientalism where mayors use their position to look after their own affairs. The League had until recently been little more than an arm of the Ministry of Interior. From the start of the project, the UEMP targeted the annual meeting of the League as a venue to disseminate both the environmental management and decentralist agendas.

This paid very big dividends. From the outset, the Mayor of Phuket, one of the *Nam Rong* municipalities, grasped both agendas and embraced the project wholeheartedly. This meant that the municipality itself became a model for the development of the action planning process with a very interesting development of cooperation between the municipality and NGOs in place of what had been a deep-seated suspicion, if not outright hostility.⁽¹⁴⁾

It also meant that when the Mayor became the Chair of the Municipal League for 1994-95, he used this opportunity to develop the elements of a national "Local Agenda 21" with advice from the UEMP. This has involved networking with other mayors who have assimilated the messages of this call for a radically new approach to urban management, with its demands for a thorough redistribution of resources from the central to the local level. Within this framework, the Municipal League established a Health and Environment Committee, chaired by the environmentally very engaged Mayor of the town of Paak Phraek, which has undertaken the task of developing the League's Local Agenda 21 programme. The League spent its own funds to republish the UEMP guidelines and to develop and circulate further materials. At the time of writing, a series of regional workshops are being organized by the committee to raise awareness and disseminate information and methods for urban environmental action planning.

IV. SHORTCOMINGS OF THE PROJECT

OF COURSE, AN experiment such as this must be expected to have shortcomings - indeed some of the most constructive lessons grow out of failure. It is therefore useful to look at some of the shortcomings of the UEMP.

15. Rüländ, J. and Ladavalaya, M.L.B. (1993), *Local Associations and Municipal Government in Thailand*, Arnold Bergstreasser Institut, Freiburg i.Br.

16. Buying-off poor communities with wedding presents and other "signs of attention" - including indeed a measure of community development in squatter areas - is, of course, a cheap price to pay for electoral victory that brings with it many prospects for making considerable amounts of money from kick-backs on big development projects.

a. Chiang Mai

Not all the *Nam Rong* municipalities were successful. The town of Trat dropped out at an early stage when it became evident that the UEMP was not going to increase their budget for hardware items. But the failure of Chiang Mai, Thailand's second city, was more dramatic. Chosen because the City Clerk was both respected and keenly interested in participating (he was involved in the initial project workshop), and because of the presence in the city of very strong local NGOs⁽¹⁵⁾, the attempts to put into operation the environmental action planning process were nevertheless effectively blocked by the Mayor.

What was particularly disheartening was the way in which the Mayor and his associates had created a political momentum amongst the poorer communities designed to assure his continued re-election whilst running an openly corrupt system of urban management.⁽¹⁶⁾ Rampant construction of (largely vacant) high-rise buildings has been encouraged within a completely inadequate planning framework. Meanwhile, in spite of the attempts by the UEMP (and various other donor agency projects) to assist in the introduction of an effective waste disposal system, solid waste has been dumped across the surrounding landscape in a completely unregulated manner, arousing local demonstrations and emerging as a national scandal but continuing to go unsolved. In the autumn of 1995, however, the Mayor was voted out and although this was after the project had been wound up, it seems that it might now be possible for progress to be made by local NGOs who have been trained in the principles and the procedures developed by the UEMP.

b. Paak Phanang

The small municipality of Paak Phanang undertook to implement a demonstration project designed to create an appropriate and effective waste disposal system including recycling and a properly constructed and managed sanitary landfill site. The UEMP supplied the municipality with expert advice on how to put together an appropriate project and also helped in a successful bid for funding from the Environment Fund to pay for engineering and other assistance to develop the project.

Notwithstanding the inordinate amount of time which the process took, inadequate help on the part of the UEMP at each stage ended with the municipality obtaining the same kind of disempowering and indigestible expert report as characterized by "technical assistance" before the advent of the UEMP. The "awareness-raising" and "community participation" that were supposed to characterize the exercise (and which had been written into the terms of reference for the consultants) failed to materialize.

c. Nong Khai

The local land use planning exercise in Nong Khai was a complete success in the sense that the communities and municipal-

ity are now capable of applying basic land use planning techniques. However, drawing up a plan is the least of the problems: what matters is that everyone agrees to carry it out. In a recent visit to the municipality, one of the authors discovered that both sides were hesitating to act: the local community, including the landowners, were loath to honour the plan - which would effectively require giving up land for ample infrastructure rather than selling off as much as possible to house builders - unless the local authority demonstrated its willingness to pay for the infrastructure. On their part, the municipality asserted that they had not been able to convince the Department of Public Works to put this infrastructure into their investment plans.

There is an interesting subtext here. By chance, the Bangkok based planning adviser to the Nong Khai project (who, incidentally, is a relatively well-known public figure) had talked with the relevant staff at the Department of Public Works and discovered that they were apparently very open to suggestions from the municipality about where to build infrastructure; furthermore, special funds have been allocated to border towns, including Nong Khai, specifically to respond to increasing development pressures.

At the local level, however, the perspective looks somewhat different. Local authority supplicants to the Department of Public Works do not get the attention accorded to the Bangkok elite. They are also more timid in making their applications for project support and may decide simply to avoid making difficult requests. Furthermore, in a situation of traditionally restricted budgets, local elected officials have to make very fine balances by way of "paying off" each community in order to assure their political survival and as such are not necessarily happy suddenly to favour one community just because it has a plan to demonstrate its need for additional infrastructure funding.

Although all these shortcomings do not denote failure of the demonstration projects, they certainly indicate that such projects require longer-term nurturing and intervention at many levels to ensure that they progress to a successful conclusion. In essence, the problem involves one of developing trust between local authority and community that has to be justified in practice and of overcoming the "culture of subservience" that pervades local-central government relations.

V. THE STATE OF PLAY

AS NOTED AT the outset of this article, the UEMP, as a collaborative project between the Office of Urban Development and the GTZ and involving the *Nam Rong* municipalities, came to an end at the end of 1994. In fact, this was not anticipated but was the result of a funding crisis. Part of the problem lay in a decision taken by the German Ministry of Economic Cooperation to divert some of the UEMP funds into supporting the UNDP Local Initiative Facility for the Urban Environment (LIFE) Programme in Thailand. This programme was announced at the "Earth

Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and aims to finance small projects that bring together municipal and NGO/CBO actors to undertake joint environmental initiatives.

Whilst this reduction in funds for the UEMP was initially seen as an unmitigated disaster, in the end the project had a good deal of influence over the UNDP Local Initiative Facility for the Urban Environment (LIFE) Thailand Programme. The Coordinator was an ex-colleague of the UEMP Coordinator and the rules were written in such a way as to support small projects emanating from the action planning process in the *Nam Rong* municipalities. These projects are currently being implemented, some of which (including Paak Phanang and Nong Khai) are pushing forward unfinished business of the UEMP whilst others are taking up new issues and problems with a strong emphasis on support for poor communities.

In terms of "project sustainability", there are other interesting developments. Reference has already been made to the on-going activities of the Municipal League. Some municipalities, particularly with mayors who have taken a keen interest in the project, are taking up environmental management in earnest and making use of the training materials produced by the UEMP. The project has also trained a group of trainers, including OUD staff, senior municipal staff, academics and NGO personnel, who are available to carry out local training activities where there is a demand.

It should be noted at this point that the OUD staff did become genuinely committed to the UEMP in the final stage; in the early stages, changes in staff and unfamiliarity with the objectives of the project meant that collaboration was somewhat perfunctory. From early 1993, the OUD staff movement stabilized, allowing time to "internalize" the project aims and, at the same time, discover the advantages to the OUD of providing positive support. In late 1995, they incorporated the essential elements of the *Nam Rong* process into a proposal to disseminate environmental planning and management methods throughout the municipalities; this was adopted as official policy by the Ministry of the Interior.

Indeed, the reputation of the project had reached a point where its experiences and procedures are now being built into the 8th National Social and Economic Development Plan. This National Plan is intended to be a major departure from earlier plans which were essentially concerned - and with notable success - with achieving economic growth at whatever cost. Growing criticism of the inadequate concern for the social and environmental costs of this strategy have precipitated a proposed major change in direction for the new Plan to pursue a path of "human sustainable development" that puts social and environmental goals to the fore. Unlike previous plans, production of this Plan has also involved an extensive consultative exercise with widespread debate especially on the role of non-government and community based organizations in the urban decision-making process. The results are awaited with considerable interest.

Meanwhile, the development of provincial environmental planning mechanisms, following the enactment of the Environmen-

17. Many areas of Thailand are subjected to as many as five different types of plan including regional development plans, rural resource plans, urban land use plans (which overflow into surrounding regions), local development plans and now environmental action plans. These are by no means properly coordinated and, indeed, some government agencies such as the PWD and the Electricity Generating Authority are likely to disregard all the plans.

tal Quality Promotion Law and which the project attempted to influence, is now being undertaken systematically through a project funded by the Canadian International Development Authority (CIDA). The consultants are keen to integrate the legacy of the UEMP into the system which they are developing, with an ex-member of staff from the UEMP joining the CIDA project. The main problem facing the CIDA project is the continuing practice of government agencies to attempt to implement their plans⁽¹⁷⁾ in competition with the others, in the process rendering planning in general a rather impotent exercise.

Finally, the German government has decided to continue financing cooperation with Thai institutions in the general area of urban planning and development. In fact, besides support for the UEMP, the GTZ has in the past also supported the work of the DTCP with a view to encouraging decentralization of land use planning. In the Spring of 1996, a new project aimed at supporting the decentralization of land use planning, connected firmly into local development planning, is to be initiated. This will have "project cells" located in the DTCP and the OUD with a "headquarters" located in the upper echelons of the Ministry of the Interior, to which both Departments - and incidentally the provincial environmental planning system - are answerable. A specific tranche of funding will be made available to follow up on the work of the UEMP.

It is hoped that the new project will adopt the municipal and community focus of the UEMP, with the *Nong Khai* demonstration project as a basic model. However, there will be no escape from bureaucratic politics and efforts will necessarily continue to advance decentralization and, with it, to amplify community voices not just in isolated local projects but in the urban development process as a whole.