

**DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AND
TOURISM
DIRECTORATE: STATE OF THE ENVIRONMENT**



**REPORT ON PROCEEDINGS OF THE STATE OF THE
ENVIRONMENT REPORTING SEMINAR, 2003**

Compiled by:

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Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organization
DBSA	Development Bank of Southern Africa
DEAT	Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
DPSIR	Driving forces, Pressures on the Ecosystems, State of Environment, Impacts of Environmental Change and Responses to Environmental change
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
LA21	Local Agenda 21
NBI	National Botanical Institute
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
PSR	Pressure-State-Response
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SALGA	South African Local Government Association
SOER	State of the Environment Report
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg 2002)

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1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The rationale for State of the Environment Reporting is widely documented and legislated, both in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. Globally, Chapter 40 (Information for Decision Making) of Agenda 21 provides the basis for state of the environment reporting, and set out two programme areas to ensure speeding up reporting processes, namely:

- ? Bridging the data gap; and
- ? Improving information availability.

Following on the developments since the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters was concluded in June 1998. Aarhus Convention calls for necessary legislative, regulatory and other measures to ensure that the general public and decision makers are afforded access to environmental information. In terms of the Convention, such information should be housed within relevant public authorities.

Translating the global environmental commitments into the South African context is section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa that provides citizens with the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well being, and to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations. For this right to be actualised, citizens should have the right to information held by the state. The National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) section 31 (a) states that every person is entitled to have access to information held by the state. NEMA section 31 (b) provides organs of state with the right to information on the state of the environment. The new NEMA amendments mandates category A (Metropolitan municipalities) and C (District municipalities) to report on the state of the environment.

All these mandates call for collaboration, information sharing and transfer of best practices. As the custodian of the South African environmental resources, DEAT acknowledges the importance of collaboration and integration to achieve shared goals in the state of the environment reporting to meet its mandates as reflected above. This acknowledgement has in part resulted in the hosting of the State of the Environment Reporting Seminar held on the 6th October 2003.

This report outlines proceedings, discussions and issues raised during the national State of the Environment Reporting Seminar held in Pretoria on the 6th of October 2003.

2 OBJECTIVES OF THE SEMINAR

The objectives of the seminar were to:

- ? Strengthen networking and partnerships among key role players in environmental reporting;
- ? Identify further needs to advance the SoER initiative in South Africa;
- ? Share challenges, solutions and lessons learnt; and
- ? Obtain a better understanding of the specific challenges faced by provinces and local authorities in compiling state of the environment reports, and the role DEAT has to play.

In order to achieve these objectives, the seminar was structured into four (4) sessions. Session 1 covered challenges and opportunities by officials who have already completed their SoERs. Session 2 dealt with challenges from the perspectives of consultants who are or have been involved in assisting government institutions in compiling SoERs. Session 3

dealt with challenges and opportunities for those provinces and municipalities that are currently working on their SoERs. Session 4 covered introductory comments on the PubliKit Training.

3 ISSUES RAISED DURING THE SEMINAR

The following issues regarding state of the environment reporting in South Africa were raised and addressed during the seminar, namely:

- ? How are SoER end users defined?
- ? What processes were followed for achieving political buy-in or support?
- ? Appropriate or ideal lengths of SoERs, and packaging for different end users?
- ? The percentage of information available inhouse vis-à-vis outsourced?
- ? The impact of State of the Environment Reports on users and citizens (behaviour change)?
- ? What is the ideal time frame for compiling SoER?
- ? The need for a small set of indicators that can be aggregated at any reporting level. This should ideally lead to indices.
- ? The need to incorporate state of the environment reporting into academic institutions programmes.

4 CHALLENGES IN COMPILING SOER IN SOUTH AFRICA

Several challenges from national, provincial and local government were presented and discussed. These include, but are not limited to:

- ? The process is extremely demanding and requires dedicated professional officials and support staff to ensure smooth execution;
- ? Achieving political buy-in is very critical, and not often automatic;
- ? Striking the balance between capacity building and high staff turnover;
- ? Budget (especially for SoER derived products);
- ? Data (lack of, quality, accessibility, time series, consistency);
- ? Too many indicators (harmonization, performance indicators linked to policies and programmes);
- ? Competing and aligning with other reports (EIP/EMP);
- ? Unpackaging technical information for public consumption;
- ? Establishing and measuring the impact or effect of SoER;
- ? Lack of consistency;
- ? Incorporating cross-sectoral issues;

5 POSSIBLE MECHANISMS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES

Based on discussions from seminar participants, the following mechanisms are suggested for considerations in dealing with SoER compilation challenges, namely:

- ? Raise awareness of the importance of SoER and what the process for achieving the product entails (target audience: political leaders, senior managers and decision makers);

- ? Work with and/or through schools to ensure lasting awareness of environmental issues and change in behavioural patterns to reflect such awareness;
- ? Start with the end in mind (be clear of the deliverables to achieve, and the indicators to measure such deliverables);
- ? Leverage on other reporting mechanisms and build synergies (let them do their work and help you achieve your goals, or do it with them!);
- ? Establish mechanisms for measuring the impact of SoER (this will require defining target audience);
- ? Establish and work with cross-sectoral teams;
- ? Consider issue-based reporting framework or establish a generic set of indicators that are customisable to different needs;
- ? Establish some kind of a legal framework or policy for SoER (this could be translated into environmental policies at provincial and local government levels);
- ? Establish a nationally-based information management system;
- ? Ensure high level of internal participation (this could help in greater awareness, control and ownership of the process and product emanating thereof);

6 KEY ISSUES FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The following key issues are necessary to ensure smooth reporting on the state of the environment in South Africa, namely:

- ? Regulatory Framework;
- ? Funding or Financial Mechanisms;
- ? Core set of (environmental) Indicators, and the shift to Sustainability (social, economic, and environmental) indicators;
- ? Reporting Framework;
- ? Cross-sectoral reporting;
- ? Linking state of the environment reporting to other reports;
- ? Partnerships; and
- ? Assistance required from DEAT.

These are discussed in details in the sub-sections below.

6.1 Regulatory Framework

The need for regulatory framework was discussed, and through formal voting, over 75% of the delegates felt that the presence of legislation could help them in their SoER initiatives. The Aarhus Convention also calls for regulating state of the environment reporting. This is mainly due to the fact that state of the environment reporting is not a core function in provincial and local governments. This makes it an add-on, and often an un-financed exercise resulting in many parties not doing it at all.

A European benchmark was highlighted, and led to the conclusion that a legal framework would give birth to institutional support for SoER in South Africa.

6.2 Funding or Financial Mechanisms

State of the Environment Reporting in South Africa has been successful due to funding from Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) and the Norwegian government. The

Norwegian government funding has been extended to provincial and local governments, and this has been highly appreciated by those who benefited.

Institutional financing will be necessary in order to sustain the reporting, and this may have to form part of provincial and local authorities' budgets. This issue relates to the need for legal framework, as budgeting and focussing on issues that do not have legal mandates may prove difficult for many SoER drivers.

6.3 Core Set of Indicators

The seminar participants indicated a dire need to have a core set of indicators that can be easily aggregated for reporting at any level. This should be supported by a national guideline document. The current set of indicators are said to pose challenges, as they are very broad and often not easily adaptable to a level of use.

6.4 Reporting Framework

There are two main reporting frameworks that are in use, namely PSR and DPSIR. There have also been issues based reporting. On the basis of a core set of indicators, and the sentiments raised by seminar participants, there is a need to consider the use of specific reporting framework (this could help in establishing a legal framework). Indications are, the issue based reporting is most preferred, compared to the PSR and DPSIR. This conclusion may however be premature based on the number of presentations made, which may not necessarily be reflective of all relevant municipalities and provincial government departments.

6.5 Cross-Sectoral Reporting

Cross-sectoral reporting links to sustainability reporting. A core set of aggregated indicators could help in ensuring that any chosen reporting framework covers all cross-sectoral issues. This will ensure buy-in, but may require some awareness raising.

6.6 Linking SoER to other reports

As part of leveraging resources, it was indicated that there is a need to link SoER reporting to other reporting initiatives. In the absence of legal framework, and within stringent budgets that many departments operate under, establishing synergies could prove worthwhile. This will ensure that information provided for one report requirement is used on other reporting initiatives, or done concurrently, in which case it will save a lot of time.

6.7 Partnerships

6.7.1 The need for Partnerships

The WSSD Plan of Implementation calls for partnerships towards the attainment of sustainability. This call was presented as follows:

“We recognise that the implementation of the outcomes of the Summit should benefit all, particularly women, youth, children and vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the implementation should involve all relevant actors through partnerships, especially between Governments of the North and South, on the one hand, and between Governments and major groups, on the other, to achieve widely shared goals of sustainable development. As reflected in the Monterrey Consensus, such partnerships are key to pursuing sustainable development in a globalizing world” (WSSD Plan of Implementation, 2002:1).

The above citation indicates to the importance of stakeholders and creation of partnerships. The seminar also echoed, in many ways, the need to establish and work in partnerships.

These partnerships are at different levels, depending on the purpose of a partnership. Possible partnerships are provided below.

6.7.2 International Partnerships

International partners are indispensable in the journey to sustainability, and to ensuring relevant reporting. This has been reflected in several sections of the WSSD Plan of Implementation. The Norwegian government could be seen as such partner in assisting South Africa to establish efficient state of the environment reporting mechanisms. Other partnerships could be sought through the United Nations' platform, including United Nations Environment Program (UNEP).

6.7.3 Interdepartmental Partnerships

At the national government level, all government departments should form partnership to move towards sustainability in a concerted effort. On poverty eradication, the WSSD Plan of Implementation outlines, amongst others, the following actions:

- (a) Halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the world's people whose income is less than \$1 a day and the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and, by the same date, to halve the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water;*
- (b) ... encouraging the role of the private sector and individual citizens relative to Governments in funding the endeavours;*
- (c) Developing national programmes for sustainable development and local and community development ... These programmes should reflect their priorities and enable them to increase access to productive resources, public services and institutions, in particular land, water, employment opportunities, credit, education and health;*

Poverty features a lot on the DPSIR reporting framework as a driving force for several aspects of environmental degradation. Addressing poverty requires consolidated efforts from almost all government departments, and partnerships could be rewarding.

6.7.4 Provincial Partnerships

The provincial government is among the major stakeholders in state of the environment reporting as they work closely with the local government in the implementation of programmes and plans geared towards sustainable livelihoods and general service delivery. They also play a major role in feeding information for the national SoER.

Provinces differ from one another, and provincial knowledge base is critical for sustained state of the environment reporting efforts.

6.7.5 Local Government Partnerships

Within the WSSD framework, the partnership with the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) has played and continues to play a major role in translating national environmental policies and strategies into implementation. Salga plays a critical role in assisting municipalities of all categories in moving towards sustainability. They, together with DPLG assisted municipalities in establishing IDP framework and guidelines, this could be leveraged to ensure incorporation of environmental reporting.

6.7.6 Parastatals and Statutory Bodies

Parastatals have always been seen as extension of government's arm for specialised functions that were not core to government. They have played a major role in capacity

building across all economic sectors. The following parastatals and statutory bodies should be incorporated as partners in the quest for state of the environment reporting, namely:

- ? The Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA);
- ? The Agricultural Research Council (ARC);
- ? The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR);
- ? The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC);
- ? National Botanical Institute (NBI);
- ? South African National Parks (SANParks);
- ? The National Research Foundation (NRF); et cetera.

Parastatals have evolved through time, with others changing their status in the process. However, they still possess specialty expertise and resources necessary to achieve the objectives of Agenda 21, and the general mandates of the DEAT.

6.7.7 Non Governmental Organisations

Non-governmental organisations (NGO's) play crucial role in environmental management. They help steer the private sector into the right directions through lobbying and other activities. Many NGO's have international allies, which have access to state of the art technology and research tools that are critical in monitoring environmental parameters.

NGO's also work a lot with communities and they help in raising awareness of environmental issues in those communities. Many NGO's understand community dynamics and ways of life and they are critical partners in ensuring environmentally conscious public.

Through the provincial and local government offices, NGO's need to be identified and engaged in state of the environment reporting initiatives.

6.8 The role of DEAT in State of the Environment Reporting

The delegates appreciated the role DEAT has been playing to ensure state of the environment reporting in South Africa. Over and above what DEAT has done thus far, the following assistance is sought:

- ? Development of national guideline document on SoER indicators;
- ? Financial assistance;
- ? Capacity building and awareness on state of the environment reporting;
- ? Assist with data collection or linkages (for data not in public domain);
- ? Assistance with setting up and maintaining meta-database for SoER users;
- ? Research;
- ? Assistance in setting-up a national Information Management System (including national spatial information system with data sets);
- ? Assistance with regular information dissemination, which could be in the form of:
 - o Newsletters;
 - o List Server; and
 - o Online information source.
- ? Assist in establishing a protocol on mode of operation or working relationship;

- ? Assist in harmonization of indicators;
- ? Assistance with state of the environment reporting Planning and Programming;
- ? Assist in the creation and management of an information sharing platform in the form of conferences, seminars, workshops, etc;

It was indicated that DEAT needs to write a letter to the provinces and local authorities requesting them to outline areas in which they require assistance with regard to state of the environment reporting.

7 CONCLUSION

The proceedings went very well, and there are good basis for success. The challenge is maintaining the momentum. Challenges and opportunities in the state of the environment reporting initiatives were discussed, and participants seem to have gained insight into common issues and different approaches that are used in the compilation of the state of the environment reports.

The role that DEAT plays in relation to what the provincial and local government officials perceive is very important. Over and above what DEAT currently does, it appears that ensuring some kind of capacity building and information provisioning and sharing platforms could add value.

8 ANNEXURES

Annexure 1: Seminar Agenda

Annexure 2: List of Participants