THE HIGHLIGHTS

SAO Thailand and Our Audit Impact
State Audit Office of the Kingdom of Thailand

The Highlights: SAO Thailand and Our Audit Impact

VOLUME 1

Enhancing Resilience: SAO Thailand's Audit Reveals Key Steps for Strengthening Disaster Preparedness and Response

The State Audit Office of the Kingdom of Thailand (SAO) recognizes the importance of the continuous and intensifying issue of natural disasters across all regions. Recently, an inspection on the public warning system management revealed several issues related to the operation and performance of the majority of disaster surveillance systems, which are discontinuous and incomplete. Additionally, the decision support system for forecasting disasters lacks accuracy, along with problems regarding disaster alerts and preparedness, potentially leading to damage to the lives and property of the public.

Deputy Auditor-General Monthien Charoenpol, acting for the Auditor-General, disclosed that due to global climate variability, natural disasters such as floods, droughts, earthquakes, etc., are increasingly frequent and severe everywhere. Between the fiscal years of 2020 - 2022, the government allocated a budget of 1,074.95 million baht for managing the public warning system.

The Performance Auditing on the system's effectiveness and performance involved document reviews, executive and staff interviews from relevant agencies, both central and regional, and equipment readiness tests in 7 provinces: Chanthaburi, Chiang Rai, Nakhon Ratchasima, Phang Nga, Krabi, Surat Thani, and Sukhothai.

Significant findings include:

1. The disaster surveillance system (Telemeter) failed to achieve its objectives. Out of 555 telemeters checked, 318 (57.30%) could not continuously monitor weather and air quality for more than 2 days, and 539 (97.12%) had incomplete data for at least 1 day, such as rainfall, temperature, PM2.5, etc. Moreover, most people in risk areas couldn't access this weather and quality air data, including warnings via websites and the DPM Alert app, and there was a lack of usage of application data for disaster preparedness.

2. The Decision Support System (DSS) for forecasting disasters 1 day in advance lacked accuracy. Out of 170 real disaster incidents checked in 7 provinces, the DSS inaccurately predicted 113 times (66.47%) and only accurately predicted 57 times (33.53%).

3. The dissemination of warnings and information did not meet the set goals and objectives. Out of 3,387 actual disaster incidents, including floods, landslides/mudslides, and storms, local operational units failed to issue warnings to local units (districts or local government organizations) 1,334 times (39.39%), or the warnings issued were too late, not within the 24-hour period before the disaster occurred.

4. The preparedness and evacuation plans were not in accordance with the guidelines and objectives. It was found that area-level disaster prevention and mitigation plans were incomplete, and response plans did not cover all potential local disasters. Additionally, Tsunami preparedness for residents in 6 Andaman coast provinces did not meet the set goals, with issues such as unclear or discontinuous escape routes and dilapidated shelters.

The SAO report states that these issues affect the achievement of results and efficiency in managing the public warning system, preventing agencies from effectively using real environmental data for disaster analysis and warnings. It also leaves the population unprepared for disasters, potentially leading to significant loss of life and property, and results in substantial state budget expenses for disaster mitigation and recovery, impacting the overall economy. Additionally, this results in inefficient use of approximately 514 million baht spent on surveillance and warning projects.

The SAO suggests that relevant agencies consider actions for improvement, such as assigning responsible officers to maintain and inspect the telemonitoring equipment during and after the warranty period, developing a maintenance plan, improving the DSS for accuracy, integrating data from internal and external agencies for effective disaster surveillance and warning operations, promoting a network of volunteers for disaster warnings, addressing issues in the use and maintenance of warning equipment nationwide, and ensuring the preparation of local disaster prevention and mitigation plans, including readiness for Tsunami evacuation, with clear and continuous escape route signs and the use of shelters according to their intended purpose.

Acknowledgement

Special recognition is extended to Ms. Chanticha Suwanwej, the Director of Performance Audit Office No. 4, who led the comprehensive audit process. Her leadership and dedication to conducting this critical audit were instrumental in unveiling the areas requiring urgent improvements within Thailand's disaster preparedness and response systems. Ms. Chanticha's commitment to excellence and her main role in guiding her team through the intricacies of the performance and SDGs audit processes have significantly contributed to the actionable insights and recommendations presented. Her efforts underscore the vital importance of effective, accountable governance in enhancing the resilience and safety of communities against the backdrop of increasing natural disasters.

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