

PRESS RELEASE



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National Consultation Workshop highlights linkages between Poverty Reduction and Natural Resource Management

This week, senior decision makers tackle the twin challenges of poverty reduction and natural resource management in Lao PDR at the Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI) National Consultation Workshop, held in Vientiane on the 5th and 6th of March. The Vice Minister of Planning, HE Mr Bounthavy joins representatives from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, the Ministry of Energy and Mines, the Water Resources and Environment Administration (WREA), the National Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication and Provincial authorities, along with key donors and representatives from international non-governmental organizations and the private sector, to identify and discuss key poverty-environment linkages that are central to the achievement of poverty reduction in Lao PDR. This workshop, organized by MPI with support from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) marks the end of PEI's preparatory phase in Lao PDR, and paves the way for activities to be rolled out in Vientiane and in selected provinces from now until 2011.

PEI activities will focus on integrating poverty-environment concerns and opportunities within the 7th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED), raising the awareness of poverty-environment linkages amongst decision makers, and building national and provincial capacity to consider environment in investment, land use and development planning. The programme's design has been driven by national and provincial authorities from Oudomxay, Phongsaly, Saravane and Savannakhet through extensive consultations and two sub-national workshops.

As Vice Minister Bounthavy states "with more than 50% of the nation's GDP derived from agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries, sound environmental management is critical not only at the national level, but also at the local level where it is closely linked to household income, health, nutrition and clean water." The direct use of natural resources and biodiversity by poor households and enterprises is estimated to be worth some US\$650 million a year. Food security and household nutrition are dependent on the availability of and access to wild foods, which currently provide more than half of non rice food consumption.

"The changing global climate, together with the global financial crisis, will bring a whole additional set of challenges to the fight against poverty", says UNDP Resident Representative (a.i.), Stéphane Vigié. "Given the importance of natural resources to the rural poor, and in light of the combined threats posed by the global financial crisis and climate change to poverty reduction efforts, sound management of Lao PDR's rich natural heritage will only become more critical to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015".

Poverty reduction in Lao PDR depends on sustainable natural resource management and a healthy environment, and yet many of the key decisions that impact the environment are outside the direct control of environmental institutions. It is critical to include the environment in economic and social decision-making. Improved natural resource management was highlighted as a priority by the Round

Table Implementation Meeting in November 2008. In this context, the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) is working together with the joint UNDP –UNEP PEI to develop partnerships that improve the capacity of the government and other stakeholders to integrate the environmental concerns of poor and vulnerable groups into policy, planning and implementation processes for poverty reduction, pro-poor growth and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These partnerships will complement the efforts of the many other development agencies which support improved natural resource management in Lao PDR.

Through highlighting natural resource management for pro-poor growth in planning and investment, the PEI can assist Lao PDR to achieve its national objective of exiting LDC status by the year 2020.

Notes:

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