

Press Release  
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## UN system calls for transformational thinking among leaders in the fight against HIV/AIDS

The Government of Lao PDR, in close collaboration with UNDP and other UN agencies, has begun to shine the spotlight on the role of leaders and decision makers in leading the fight against the spread of HIV/AIDS.

A joint programme that focuses on developing multisectoral responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which was signed by the Government and UNDP in October 2005, seeks to rollout the implementation of 'transformational methodologies', which are introduced through a series of intensive workshops held over a period of 9-12 months. These methodologies call for an extraordinary response to the pandemic, and are guided by a shift in the "being and doing" of leadership in tackling this overwhelming challenge.



A key aspect of such a transformational shift in the response to HIV/AIDS rests in the identification of leaders from across a wide array of stakeholders to achieve significant breakthroughs in this ongoing battle, states Jon Love, the facilitator of the Leadership for Results: HIV/AIDS Workshop, which was held in Vientiane during January 24-27, 2006.

Through a process of dialogue and discussions, UNDP hopes to create innovative responses or breakthroughs and it explores the importance of instilling hope amidst mounting challenges. Positive outlooks and supportive actions that reduce existing biases and which lead to the reduction of discriminatory practices are paramount. The programme also seeks to reduce and progressively eliminate the shame, fear and silence that have come to dominate the lives of those living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

As a part of this attempt to develop and enhance the leadership skills of policy makers and local leaders within communities, UNDP, along with the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS invited around 120 government officials, mass organisation representatives, village



development officials and members of the Buddhist clergy to take part in an extensive 3-day workshop entitled, “Leadership for Results on HIV/AIDS”. Active participation from various line Ministries at the central and provincial levels along with the members of selected Provincial Committees for the Control of AIDS resulted in a vibrant exchange of ideas and creative dialogue.

The fundamental principle of the workshop lies in underlining the value of transformation – of mindsets and actions, with an overall goal of facilitating leaders to broaden their perspectives on HIV/AIDS related issues, according to the UN Resident Coordinator a.i. Dr. Leena Kirjavainen who opened the workshop along with the Minister of Health, His Excellency, Dr. Phonmek Dalaroy. Dr. Daraloy also presided over the closing session of the workshop, where he encouraged the participants to explore their leadership skills and stressed the need to explore innovative responses to counter the challenges that an HIV/AIDS pandemic brings.

Following close on the heels of similar leadership development workshops that have been piloted and successfully implemented in various parts of the world, the workshop examined the possibilities of going beyond set norms, in order to inspire change. It is envisaged that leaders from across all levels of society will be able to shift public perceptions within their own constituencies and spheres of influence, through encouraging a process of transformation both at the individual and institutional levels, and will hence be able to create new solutions that can ultimately help reverse the epidemic.

One of the participants at the workshop commented, “It was really important for me to go through this training as it shows you what it takes to be a leader.” The participants also resolved to work together over the scope of the coming months to take the images of leadership in general and women’s leadership in particular, beyond the scope of the workshop and into the realm of their work and everyday lives.

UNDP officials stated that the Vientiane workshop replicated similar work that has been implemented by UNDP in this region in China, Cambodia, Nepal and India, where the participants were able to successfully create new icons and metaphors in their creating their responses to the changing paradigm of the epidemic.

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**Notes for editors:**

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