

PRESS RELEASE



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Taking the Initiative on the Environment in Oudomxay and Phongsaly

Sub-National Workshop for the Poverty - Environment Initiative held in Oudomxay

Over three quarters of the country's population rely on natural resources for their livelihoods. In Oudomxay and Phongsaly provinces, non timber forest products are vital for food security and rural household income. Forests also provide critical watersheds for the rivers, fisheries and hydropower plants downstream. With high levels of rural poverty and ethnic diversity, limited road infrastructure and a rapid influx of investment, Phongsaly and Oudomxay face unique opportunities and challenges to reduce poverty and improve environmental management.

The Poverty - Environment Initiative (PEI) 1st Sub-National Workshop for Oudomxay and Phongsaly provincial officers was held on 17 - 19 December to discuss these issues and to develop the PEI programme. The workshop was organized by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Oudomxay and Phongsaly's Governors Offices, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Forty five people from across the two provinces participated, representing a wide range of sectors, including central authorities – Ministry of Planning and Investment, National Leading Committee for Rural Development and Poverty Eradication, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Water Resources and Environment Administration, Ministry of Energy and Mines - and development partners IUCN, UNDP and UNEP.

Across the Asia Pacific region, the PEI is being developed in ten countries including Cambodia and Vietnam. The PEI will work to influence institutions, policies and investments to implement improved environmental management which can reduce poverty. In order to achieve this, PEI will build national capacity to further integrate the environment into national development and local planning processes, budgets and sector strategies, and boost the profile of the environment in the work of central and provincial authorities.

Key issues identified in Oudomxay and Phongsaly relate to the Northern Industrial Economic Development and Cooperation Plan, participatory and land use planning, resettlement, plantation development, foreign direct investment, shifting cultivation and hazardous agricultural chemicals.

A second workshop, for Savannakhet and Saravane provincial authorities, will be held in mid-January 2009, and a national workshop in February, both contributing to the PEI programme for discussions and agreement with Government and other development partners, to be implemented in 2009.

Notes for editors:

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