



PRESS RELEASE

14 OCTOBER 2009

NSEDP National Workshop on Managing Climate, Environment and Natural Resources to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Exit Least-Developed Country (LDC) status

On October the 14th 2009, experts from around the region shared experiences and knowledge with the Government of the Lao PDR during a national workshop on *Managing Climate, Environment and Natural Resources to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Exit Least-Developed Country (LDC) status*, supported by the UNDP/UNEP Poverty Environment Initiative (PEI).

The challenges confronting Lao PDR related to the environment and climate change are diverse and will significantly impact the achievement of the Government goals to exit LDC status by 2020. For this reason, it is of critical importance that these issues be considered in more detail, ensuring that lessons and knowledge from around the region are shared with the Ministry of Planning and Investment and reflected upon in the 7th Plan.

Climate change, for example, will increase the intensity of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts, and will affect progress towards the achievement of all of the MDGs. We must ensure that investment projects are designed with increased resilience to withstand stronger floods; health programmes must be designed to cope with increasing incidence of water- and vector-borne diseases such as malaria; the agricultural sector needs to consider changes in water availability and the need for improved irrigation facilities as well as more drought resistant species; and other sectors must also respond accordingly. The estimated costs of climate change adaptation on a global level reach billions of dollars per year. Locally, the recent damage caused by tropical storm Ketsana highlights the urgent need for effectively addressing the current and projected impacts of climate change in Lao PDR. The storm hit the four southern provinces of Savannakhet, Saravan, Attapeu and Xekong, affecting 18 districts of 360 villages. The widespread flooding has left thousands of people homeless, with hundreds losing all of their belongings. By integrating climate change into national and sector planning now, and by anticipating the impacts of climate change (rather than reacting to the impacts), the costs incurred by the Lao people and country can be minimized.

This workshop comes at an important point in time, providing an opportunity for keynote experts from around the region to present critical poverty-environment linkages for their possible inclusion within the 7th NSEDP as it is being developed by the Ministry of Planning and Investment. Experts from around the region included representatives from the Mekong River Commission, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, RECOFTC –

The Center for People and Forests, and the World Wildlife Fund for Nature, as well as key Government speakers from the Water Resource and Environment Administration (WREA) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Given that, in Lao PDR we are highly dependent on our natural resource base for income, jobs, food, livelihoods and exports, amongst others, sound environmental management is of great importance. Over 80% of our people depend on our natural resource base for their daily livelihoods; the total value of the electricity and mining sectors increased by an average of 20% a year from 2005 – 2007; Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) are estimated to make up 40% of total rural income; and the nutrition of rural households in rural areas is closely linked to agrobiodiversity and wild foods.

In recent years, the Government of Lao PDR has prioritized the sound management of our rich natural resource base and has taken significant steps to ensure its sustainable use.

However, recent analysis indicates that the poor continue to suffer as the environment and natural resources upon which they depend are being degraded. Household nutrition is being affected by decreased availability of wild foods, health is being affected by poor water quality and over use of agricultural chemicals, climate change is generating more frequent and extreme weather events such as the devastating floods of 2008, and levels of vulnerability are increasing as the social safety nets of the poor are being eroded. Private investment in natural resources, e.g. agriculture, forestry and mining, is rapidly increasing with actual and potential positive and negative impacts on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. Increased attention to the quality of investment (rather than quantity) is urgently required to optimize the economic, social and environmental impacts of these investment projects in Lao PDR, thereby supporting the achievement of the Government's development targets including the MDGs and exiting the LDC status by 2020.

For more information please contact:

Janet Pontin, UNDP Public Information Unit Tel: (021) 267 777 ext: 715, Email: janet.pontin@undp.org

Vichit Sayavongkhamdy, UNDP Environment Unit. Tel: (021) 267719.

Email: vichit.sayavongkhamdy@undp.org

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