

Launch Event

National Adaptation Programme of Action to Climate Change and National Capacity Needs Self Assessment for Global Environment Management

**Remarks by: Ms. Sonam Yangchen Rana
UNDP Resident Representative/UN Resident Coordinator**

Vientiane, Lao PDR
21 May, 2009

Mme. Khempheng Pholsena, Minister to the Prime Minister's Office, Head of WREA

Excellencies Ministers,

Distinguished Ambassadors,

Distinguished guests and participants,

Ladies and gentlemen

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today at the launch of the National Adaptation Programme of Action to Climate Change and the National Capacity Needs Self Assessment for Global Environment Management.

We have come together today to present the results of an intensive 4-year process of analysis and consultation led by the Government of Lao PDR, which has resulted in a National Adaptation Programme of Action to Climate Change and the identification of key capacity needs for effective biodiversity conservation, combating desertification and adapting to climate change.

Climate change is the defining human development issue of our generation. The importance of acting decisively is highlighted in the recent UNDP Human Development Report "Fighting Climate Change: Human solidarity in a divided world". This Report shows that the way the world deals with climate change today will have a direct bearing on the life prospects of billions of people.

Failure to respond rapidly and effectively to the challenges posed by climate change will consign the poorest 40% of the world's population – some 2.6 billion people – to a future of reduced opportunities. Climate change will exacerbate existing economic, political and humanitarian stresses. It will have the most immediate effects on many of the poorest people in the world,

including those least able to recover from climate stresses and shocks that include drought, floods, and changing conditions for crops and livestock. That is why measures both to mitigate and adapt to climate change are urgently required in order to meet global and national development goals.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here in the Lao PDR, it is predicted that climate change will increase the extremity and frequency of floods and droughts. There will be more hot days, fewer cool days, changes in the onset of the monsoon season, changes in the distribution of vector borne diseases, and many other life changing effects.

Given the high dependence of the economy on natural resources Lao PDR is particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. As we know, agriculture currently contributes approximately 47% of GDP and the Lao people are highly vulnerable to shocks and stresses, and we saw that in last years flood and also in the more recent rodent infestation.

In the agricultural sector, for example, the World Food Programme estimates that 46 percent of the rural population, mostly in the lowlands, are vulnerable to drought. This is in addition to the 2 percent of people who are already chronically food insecure. Any increased intensity and extremity of droughts and floods can decrease productivity and increase levels of poverty.

In the water sector, climate change will affect river flows, ground water tables, and irrigation systems. It is estimated that by the end of this century the maximum monthly flow of the Mekong in the basin area will increase by up to 35%. Given the growing importance of hydropower to the Lao economy, the impacts of climate change on this economic activity require further analysis.

In the health sector, the distribution and incidence of vector borne diseases such as malaria and dengue will change, and flooding and drought will affect the availability of clean water that we today take for granted.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have mentioned a variety of impacts in the three key sectors of agriculture, water and health. There are, however, many more. These impacts are large, affecting Government targets to exit LDC status

by 2020 and achieve the MDGs by 2015. We have to adjust development practices to take into account the climate change challenge.

With financial assistance from the Global Environment Facility and the Least Developed Country Fund, UNDP has been working with the Government of Lao PDR since 2004 to develop the National Adaptation Programme of Action to Climate Change – NAPA – and the National Capacity Needs Self Assessment for Global Environment Management - NCSA.

Under the strong leadership of His Excellency Bountiem Phissamy and Her Excellency Mme Khempheng Pholsena, the development of the NAPA and NCSA has involved a process of intensive research, analysis and discussion that has involved key stakeholders from multiple sectors at including those at the District, Provincial and National levels. Together, they have discussed key adaptation priorities in the agriculture, forestry, water and health sectors. This has resulted in the identification of forty-five priority activities, of which twelve are considered to be critical. They include support to the National Disaster Management Committees, mapping flood prone areas, community reforestation, sustainable forest management, and establishing early warning systems.

The total estimated cost of the forty-five priority projects detailed in the NAPA is USD86 million. At an international level, it is estimated that the annual costs of adaptation for developing countries lies somewhere between 20 to 80 billion USD per annum, or more depending on the estimate used. Although the costs of adaptation actions may seem high, they are significantly lower than the costs of inaction. Natural disasters related to climate change cost billions of dollars on an annual basis. They also disproportionately affect the poor, significantly increasing levels of poverty in both rural and urban areas.

The NCSA has involved the identification of key, cross-cutting capacity needs for the national implementation of obligations under the United Nations Conventions on Biodiversity, Desertification and Climate Change, enabling development partners to strategically target their future capacity-strengthening support to this vital area.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us not under-estimate the impacts of climate change in the Lao PDR. As we have said earlier, they will affect progress towards existing LDC status by 2020 as well as the achievement of the MDGs by 2015. There is no time for complacency. We must scale up our support the Government

and the people of Lao PDR to effectively strengthen the capacity of all sectors to effectively respond to the challenges of climate change.

I would like to recognize the important support that is currently being provided by a number of development partners and international NGOs, including the Asian Development Bank, World Bank, Mekong River Commission, the IUCN / World Conservation Union, the Netherlands Development Agency (SNV), amongst others. Working together in strong partnership we can effectively mainstream climate change considerations, strengthen national systems that manage climate change variability, secure financing for environmentally-friendly investments and support the implementation of national adaptation priorities. Climate change is a central development challenge of this century. We have no choice but to address it with the urgency that it deserves.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Government of the Lao PDR – in particular WREA and the other sectors involved – for the successful development of the National Adaptation Programme of Action to Climate Change and the National Capacity Needs Self-Assessment for Global Environment Management. I am confident that these reports will be helpful to all stakeholders who are currently working in the areas of climate change, biodiversity and natural resource management, poverty reduction and sustainable human and economic development in Lao PDR.

Notes:

For more information please contact
Janet Pontin, UNDP Public Information Office, Vientiane, Lao PDR
Tel: 267777 ext: 715, Email: janet.pontin@undp.org

Or

Linda Norgrove, Head of the Environment Unit, UNEP/UNDP, Vientiane, Lao PDR
Tel: 267777 ext: 710, Email: linda.norgrove@undp.org

UNDP is the UN's global development network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life. We are on the ground in 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges. As they develop local capacity, they draw on the people of UNDP and our wide range of partners.