

Poor most affected by corruption, says UNDP report

SOMSACK PONGKHAO

Corruption in the Asia-Pacific region has the greatest impact on poor people who rely on public services and the natural environment to survive, according to a new United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report released yesterday in Vientiane.

This year's Asia-Pacific Human Development Report, titled "tackling corruption, transforming lives", focuses on corruption from a human development perspective and the affect it has in limiting poor people's access to education



Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana (right) presents this year's Asia-Pacific Human Development Report to Mr Bounpone Sangsomsack yesterday.

and basic health services.

The report was launched by the UNDP in cooperation with the Lao government, who also held a joint workshop on the United Nations Convention against Corruption to further raise awareness of anti-corruption efforts in Laos.

A senior official from the State Inspection Authority, Mr Bounpone Sangsomsack, said

the event was in line with the government's policy to join the international community in combating corruption.

According to the report, corruption has many damaging effects including weakened national institutions, inequitable social services and unjust criminal systems.

Many developing nations in the Asia-Pacific region are rich in natural resources, but

due to corruption, much of this national wealth is being drained away, says the report.

Companies may bribe public officials to obtain permits to log endangered tree species or log in protected areas, the report says.

UN Resident Coordinator in Laos, Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana, said corruption had no national boundaries and affected all cultures and societies.

"We live in an age in which it is no longer acceptable for nations to ignore corruption," she said.

"Around the globe, corruption is recognised for what it is: a crime which deprives mostly poor people from accessing basic services and receiving equal treatment in accordance with the law."

Ms Yangchen Rana said corruption often led to funding shifting away from priority areas such as poverty reduction to projects where bribes and kickbacks were more readily available.

Ms Yangchen Rana said the report came at the halfway

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point on the timetable for achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and highlighted the need for closer attention to the connection between corruption and poverty.

"In 2004, the United Nations determined that, in spite of hundreds of billions of dollars in aid being spent, more than 50 countries are

actually poorer than they were 15 years ago," she said.

"There is broad agreement in Laos that good governance is essential to achieving sustainable development. One of the most critical elements in fighting corruption is to ensure strong, timely and transparent enforcement of the law."

Ms Yangchen Rana said

one tried and tested approach to fighting corruption was to reduce the opportunity for people to engage in corrupt practices by improving public access to information.

The report suggests governments across the Asia-Pacific region should be actively seeking ways to reduce all forms of corruption.

Countries could make

immediate progress by identifying and dealing with some of the worst areas, whether in health services, education or in public utilities, the report says.

Laos signed the UN convention against corruption in 2003 and since then has been investigating the possibility of early ratification of the convention.