

Training for Journalists on Forest, Climate Change and REDD+

In follow up to the Editor's Dialogue on Forest and Climate Change held on 6 March 2012, Towards Transparency (TT) and the Transparency International-Secretariat (TI-S) in collaboration with the Center for Environmental Training and Communication (CETAC), the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) and International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), organised a training workshop for journalists on forest, climate change and the REDD+ programme.

Beginning on 20 March 2012 in Hanoi, the training was attended by around 20 journalists from 16 major newspapers from Hanoi and Son La province. The training workshop sought to improve the background knowledge of journalists on the role of forests in responding to climate change and on REDD+ and initiatives to improve transparency in the development and implementation of REDD+ in Vietnam. As a relatively new and complex topic, the participating journalists had questions, particularly on the benefit sharing mechanism and how the money received from REDD+ will be distributed to beneficiaries. In addition, the training workshop sought to equip journalists with primary skills such as descriptive and feature writing to improve reporting on environmental issues.

Following the workshop the journalists took part in a two-day fieldtrip from 21-22 March to Son La province where Payment for Environmental Services (PES) – a similar mechanism to protect the environment – is currently being piloted. Under Government Decree 99 on PES, service users compensate suppliers for their use of forest environmental services such as soil protection, regulation and maintenance of water sources for production and living activities of the society,

reduction of emissions of green house gases through measures for preventing forest degradation and loss of forest area. Consequently, REDD+ and PES share the same incentive mechanism for preserving forests by compensating preservation efforts. The trip sought to enable journalists to understand how Vietnam's experiences in PES can help inform the development of REDD+. During the trip, the journalists had the opportunity to talk with representatives from the Son La Department of Forestry, Son La Water Supply Company, Son La PES Fund, Son La Forest Protection Department, Chieng Co and Nam Pham People's Committee to get an overview of the implementation of PES in the province. They also visited Chieng Co and Nam Pham communes in the province to see how the communities spend and use the money received through PES. Discussions with local authorities and residents helped the participating journalists to better understand the implementation PES in Son La province, particularly how PES money is being distributed to beneficiaries and how transparency, accountability and the involvement of relevant stakeholders can be ensured.

The fieldtrip was recognised as particularly useful to participating journalists, who noted that the hesitancy of authorities to share information on forest and climate change issues often poses a significant obstacle to their work. According to the journalists, the fieldtrip provided them an important opportunity to probe into and understand the situation and to gain valuable information to improve the reporting on forest, climate change and REDD+ issues.