

Press Release

Beijing, 18 February 2009

PlaNNet Finance China kicks off the Tongwei County Environmental Roadshow sponsored by the European Commission, Areva and GDF Suez.



On February 18th PlaNNet Finance's China office, with its local partners the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Tongwei Science and Technology Bureau, and the Tongwei Rural Development Association (the MFI at the centre of the Microfinance Biogas project), kicked off the Tongwei County Environmental Roadshow that will visit 32 villages and townships in the county over the next month to promote awareness of more ecologically sustainable practices, with the goal of touching a large proportion of Tongwei's 400,000-strong rural population.

Despite the cold and rain, about 400 townspeople eagerly crowded into the Tongwei County City center Wednesday morning to listen to the speeches from distinguished guests, including those from the European Commission and the Ministry of Science and Technology who had travelled down from Beijing, PlaNNet Finance China's Executive Director Gabrielle Harris, who personally heads the project, spoke of the Tongwei County government's dream of becoming a model of green development in a province that has been infamous for its polluted cities. A regional music group sang customized lyrics (relayed on LED displays) about the environment to traditional opera tunes, to keep the crowd's rapt attention in the soaked square.

Before it ends in November 2009, the project will have provided microcredit to fund 400 biogas digester systems for poor rural households. The Roadshow aims to combat the continuing environmental degradation in the county and region by raising awareness and improving agricultural and living practices.

"I'm not surprised by the increase in productivity Tongwei has seen after applying biogas residue. Now we just need to demonstrate it beyond doubt, so the spread of biogas technology will accelerate."

- Mr. Eckehard Schauz

In the afternoon, two international environmental experts from Germany gave a presentation to 400 local stakeholders, mostly village and township leaders. Mr. Eckehard Schauz spoke on soil science, fertility, composting, and yield improvement, while Ms Kosima Liu offered thoughts on the growing problem of waste management in the rural areas. Later, the experts met with the local Science and Technology Bureau to develop scientific experiments to measure and demonstrate the productivity improvements of crops using biogas residue as organic fertilizer. It was a dynamic exchange between parties, who got many insights from each other as they strove to reach the same goal.



About PlaNet Finance:

PlaNet Finance is an international non-profit organisation with the mission to alleviate poverty through the development of microfinance. Based in Paris, PlaNet Finance is active in more than 60 countries with an international network of 38 offices. Over the past 10 years, PlaNet Finance has supported 1,500 microfinance institutions that financed more than 9 million people.

www.planetfinancegroup.org

The PlaNet China office is based in Beijing and works with various local partners in the Chinese microfinance sector. Visit PlaNet Finance China's website at: <http://www.planetfinancechina.org>.

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