



GUIDANCE ON THE ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF SECTOR WORKING GROUPS

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1. Background

These Guidelines are a product of the Sector Working Group Review that was conducted during March-May 2007, following consultations with ministries and Development Partners. The review identified widespread dissatisfaction that Sector Working Groups were not meeting the needs of ministries and their partners for effective dialogue designed to support the achievement of the NSED and stronger development results.

The Review concluded that the Sector Working Group (SWG) mechanism has been perceived by ministries as a blueprint that gave them little scope to adapt the mechanism to meet their particular needs. The Review sets out core functions that each SWG is expected to perform, and lists optional functions that the SWG may also wish to include, or which may be included at a later date.

The SWGs are seen by government and Development Partners as a mechanism to support the achievement of the NSED, individual sector results, and assist in the implementation of the aid effectiveness agenda set out in the Vientiane Declaration Action Plan.

2. Composition of SWGs

SWG Chair ministries decide the membership of Sector Working Groups, but to ensure effective dialogue the following points should be taken into consideration:

- 2.1 Well-informed, technically and substantively competent representatives of Government who are mandated to represent the views of their institution, able to provide the necessary information and to facilitate follow-up within their own institution.
- 2.2 Development Partners represented at the appropriate and competent level.
- 2.3 The Government-appointed Chair of the SWG needs to be fully committed, with authority within the ministry to deal with matters arising during the meeting, to guide discussions smoothly, and have familiarity with some or all of the Development Partner funded programmes in that sector.
- 2.4 Development Partner Co-chairs must be senior within their organization, competent in the field and willing to share information with all other DPs. A Co-Chair is normally expected to support the SWG for two years. SWGs may decide to appoint Co-Chairs on a rotating basis. The SWG Chair ministry and members can choose to be supported by two Development Partner Co-Chairs rather than one if they prefer.
- 2.5 Similar guidelines on composition of groups and chairing apply to Sub-Groups if they are established, except that membership brings with it the expectation of contributing specific technical expertise, and that overall membership should be small to facilitate informal and efficient operation.
- 2.6 Technical Advisers working within the Government structure (embedded TAs) should participate in SWGs and should contribute technical expertise, but not represent Development Partners.

3. Roles and Functions of SWGs

3.1 Ministries retain full responsibility for assessing needs, designing policies to meet needs, managing their programmes to operationalise policies. SWGs are coordinating & supporting bodies that potentially unlock additional expertise and resources.

3.2 SWGs can play a critical role in supporting:

- implementation of the NSEDP
- implementation of Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan –progress requires many actions at sector level
- reporting progress on development results and aid effectiveness at the Round Table Meeting.

3.3 Sector Working Groups should develop a Terms of Reference setting out:

- Chair Ministry
- Other participating ministries
- Co-Chair(s)
- Other Development Partner members
- Whether Sub-Groups or ad hoc Task Forces are required and the chairing, membership and functions of Sub-Groups
- Functions and Roles of the SWG

3.4 SWGs are a critical instrument to promote progress towards NSEDP and sector goals, achieve greater aid effectiveness through the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration Action Plan and facilitate effective cross-sectoral dialogue and decisions at the Round Table level. Therefore, through the consultative review, a range of core functions that each SWG is expected to contribute towards were identified and are set out below. In addition, SWGs may choose to take responsibility for supporting ministries in additional areas, such as those listed in the optional column below.

Core Functions	Optional Functions
1. Ownership	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify NSEDP strategies, priorities & indicators falling within SWG/SGs. ▪ Identify whether additional analysis is required to support progress in the sector and carry it out. ▪ Ensure sufficient data/analysis exists for progress towards NSEDP can be monitored & reported rigorously. ▪ Build consensus around sector priorities, including prioritised & costed sector plans ▪ Prepare a Capacity Development Framework (at SWG or SG level) based on needs assessment and functional review – addressing capacity development at institutional, organisational & individual levels: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cost priority investments & identify funding sources & gaps ▪ Support development of costed, prioritised & sequenced medium-term expenditure framework and public investment programmes to achieve sector & NSEDP goals – integrating domestic & ODA resources ▪ Assess & reinforce linkages between plan, budget allocation, budget outturn and results
2. Alignment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Update the ODA Database with all on-going DP funded activities relevant to SWG (both those implemented by GoL and those implemented by others) ▪ Identify pipeline projects and potential DP funding that support sector strategy & NSEDP ▪ Promote alignment of donor activities with sector strategies & NSEDP and Capacity Development Frameworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use Database to track planned and actual outputs/results ▪ Promote maximum possible predictability of ODA ▪ Prepare a Project Implementation Arrangements Action Plan: identify PIUs, support development of transitional strategy where investments made in planning, finance & other departments to deliver sustainable capacity benefits (eg MoH example)
3. Harmonisation & Simplification	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Help GoL and DPs coordinate and cooperate in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote progress towards programme-based

their analytical work, missions and training	approaches: Identify obstacles (policy, implementation, monitoring, laws, regulations); recommend timebound actions to resolve.
4. Managing for Results and Mutual Accountability	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop joint monitoring indicators that enable SWGs to monitor their progress in meeting their core and additional mandates over time, including implementation of Vientiane Action Plan at sector level 	

3.5 The SWG Workplan should ensure that the SWG has a agreed substantive “product” to contribute to the Round Table process. Consider having chair or designated SWG spokesperson represent the group at the RTM. SWGs analyse the outcomes of the Round Table meetings and integrate follow-up at sector level in their work programme.

4. Support Required for SWGs to Function Effectively

4.1 The evolution from donor-led groups to government-led was not accompanied by systematic capacity development support. Therefore a shift is required from ad hoc support to predictable medium-term support. Significant investment is required if SWGs/SGs are to meet objectives and become “a process not an event”. As part of a Capacity Development Framework, ministries need to agree with partners on the best modalities to enable ministries to lead SWG process as part of the coordinated capacity development plan for the sector.

4.2 A SWG/SG “secretariat” may be required as an interim measure – but it is recommended that additional staff and skills training be provided to regular line ministry departments of planning & finance - so sustainable capacities are built to meet general responsibilities, of which SWGs are one (this approach is underway in some sectors such as health).

5. Conduct of Meetings

5.1 Advance Preparation: Chairs & Co-chairs have preparatory meetings. Consult within Government & with members to develop a workplan for the year, indications of topics for several meetings ahead.

5.2 Where possible, fix meeting dates three months ahead, and circulate agenda and relevant background papers in advance.

5.3 Prepare action-orientated minutes:

Issues	Agreed Actions	Progress	Responsible	Timeline
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5.4 Interpretation & Translation: feedback from GoL – “supporting documents... reports, minutes... should be produced both in English and Lao and if possible the SWG Meetings should have simultaneous translation into Lao language”

5.5 SWGs and Sub-Groups commit to post the schedule of meetings on a dedicated SWG web space (part of the Round Table website), along with agendas, minutes and background documentation and presentations.