

The Sectoral Working Group Mechanism in Laos: How well is it working and how can it be strengthened?

Zero Draft: 4 April 2007

1. Executive Summary

This review reflects a common desire of the Government of Laos and its development partners to address shortcomings in how the Sector Working Group mechanism currently functions. This preliminary Zero Draft is shared at an early stage to ensure the maximum opportunity for ministries and development partners to shape the final recommendations for action, and thus be ready and willing to implement the final recommendations.

The many colleagues who agreed to be interviewed and generously shared their perspectives are gratefully acknowledged.

Findings and Recommendations

The current system is not meeting the needs of either government or partners, and this is reflected in the very small number of SWG meetings that have actually taken place over the past 12 months (average 1.3 across the 8 SWGs). This reflects: (i) line ministry dissatisfaction with a “blueprint” approach; (ii) a lack of understanding of the potential benefits of vigorous SWGs; (iii) lack of or ad hoc technical support to make it possible for Chair Ministries to organize SWGs effectively and follow-up.

Draft recommendations include the following:

- 1.1 **Reinforce Ownership of SWGs:** this review process itself provides a good opportunity for genuine consultation with ministries which could result in a far more flexible model that can be fine tuned to the particular requirements of SWGs which vary greatly in their scope.
- 1.2 **Increase the ratio of technical to political level meetings:** meetings chaired at very senior levels play (and have played) a critical role in mobilizing support within ministries and partners for sector reforms. However, ideally these need to be complemented by far more regular, smaller, technical level meetings which seek to solve particular problems. An example is the natural resources SWG. Political level meetings may only be required once or twice a year, whereas Sub Groups (either permanent ones based on sub-sectors or themes, or temporary problem-solving ad hoc sub groups) may meet every month.
- 1.3 **Integrate other ad hoc fora into a strengthened SWG mechanism:** Sub-Groups have been established for irrigation, agro-business and forestry and are, generally, performing strongly. However, cross-sectoral linkages are hard to assure unless the sub-group results are occasionally shared at the multi-sectoral SWG level. Some projects have effective meetings associated with them, such as PEMSP and PRSO. Their functioning should not be altered but periodically the work programme and results should be shared in the more inclusive Governance SWG forum.
- 1.4 **Do we have the right 8 groups?** Consider whether the current 8 are the right ones and whether others are required – eg a SWG for energy and mining.

- 1.5 **Clarify the roles and responsibilities of SWGs:** SWGs are intended as coordinating and supporting bodies and are not intended to substitute for or duplicate the functions of ministries or agencies. Used effectively, SWGs can unlock a wide array of knowledge and resources which can support ministries in delivering against their responsibilities and ensuring that development partners are harmonizing and aligning with the NSEDP and sectoral strategies. The review lists a wide range of roles that SWGs *could* play. It is hoped that comments received in the coming weeks will build a consensus on a core set of functions that all SWGs should play, leaving a broader menu from which ministries and their partners can choose from based on their requirements. The potential roles identified in this Zero Draft include:
- 1.5.1 **NSEP linkages:** identify NSEDP strategies, priorities and indicators that fall within the remit of the SWG.
 - 1.5.2 **Sectoral/thematic diagnostic work:** SWGs and Sub-Groups are more likely to function effectively if their work programme is guided by quality diagnostic work.
 - 1.5.3 **Strategy:** most sectors require the development or improvement of medium-term strategies that support the achievement of NSEDP goals and provide a common policy and programming framework for Government and partners. This is a pre-requisite for sectors, such as health, education and infrastructure, that seek to move towards some form of sector wide approach.
 - 1.5.4 **ODA Tracking:** most sectoral capital budgets are at least 50% ODA-financed, yet most ministries do not have accurate information on ODA project/programme planned results, actual results, commitments, disbursements and expenditures. Lack of access to reliable and standardized ODA data inhibits basic coordination and planning, as well as incremental progress towards a medium-term budgetary framework that integrates domestic and external financing. It is recommended that the existing ODA database be revamped to meet central policy and line ministry needs and those of partners.
 - 1.5.5 **Country Action Plan on Aid Effectiveness:** progress on implementing much of the Action Plan is contingent on progress on ownership, harmonization, alignment and measuring for results at the *sectoral* level. Implementation is likely to be greatly assisted if the SWG mechanism can be successfully reformed and revitalized.
 - 1.5.6 **Development of a Capacity Development Framework:** SWGs provide an ideal forum to support ministries in developing a Capacity Development Framework for the sector (or sub-sector), and which spurs movement towards a coordinated programme of capacity development support as well as progress in transitioning from PIU-type arrangements to investments in planning, finance and other departments that deliver sustainable capacity development benefits and support a more programmatic approach.
- 1.6 **Commitment to Capacity Development is critical to effective SWGs:** the shift from informal donor working groups to government led SWGs was not accompanied, on the whole, by sustained capacity development support for chairing ministries. For SWGs to function as a process and not an event, to have well prepared agendas, action oriented minutes and effective follow-up, ministries require secretariat support. Ideally, rather than have secretariat functions performed by partners or to have an secretariat “island” within a ministry, the regular planning and budgeting departments of the chair ministries require significant support. The capacity development requirements should be defined as part of a common Capacity Development Framework (as is occurring in the health sector) and partners need to commit significant resources to financing these

requirements. Investments in supporting better logistics could greatly enhance SWG effectiveness:

- 1.6.1 **Clearer chairing arrangements:** the term Chair should be reserved for the ministry chair of SWGs, with the term Co-Chair used for development partners. The roles of both should be clarified in improved ToRs for each SWG, which have true ownership by the relevant ministries.
 - 1.6.2 **Advance preparation,** workplans and agendas indicating topics for several meetings ahead
 - 1.6.3 **Action oriented minutes** with a clear format listing issues, agreed actions, progress, who is responsible and timeline.
 - 1.6.4 **Interpreting and translation:** all ministry colleagues interviewed noted that they had difficulties in having minutes prepared in both English and Laos and thus currently either ministry or DP colleagues are systematically excluded. Rarely are formal interpreting facilities available, yet without them a narrow segment of ministry staff can participate, or senior colleagues have to double as interpreters making it harder to contribute substantively. Addressing this in a serious fashion could have major benefits in terms of building better understanding within a broader group of ministry colleagues and thus greater momentum for change.
 - 1.6.5 **SWG Website:** few if any meeting dates, agendas and minutes are posted on websites. Having a SWG site giving easy access to such information and background documents is urgently required.
- 1.7 **Reinforcing Linkages between SWGs and the Round Table Process:** currently all parties agree that linkages between SWGs and Round Table meetings are weak. The quality of dialogue possible at Round Table meetings is heavily dependent on the extent to which each sector has translated NSEDP goals into a common sectoral policy and programming framework, aligned ODA-financed investments behind this sector strategy, and made progress in implementing the Action Plan on Aid Effectiveness. Inputs from the SWGs will be crucial to this process and to the quality of dialogue.

1. Introduction

This review was conducted at the request of the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reflecting the widespread recognition that urgent action is required if the Sector Working Group mechanism is to better respond to the needs of government and development partners.

Below is a zero draft of findings and recommendations based on preliminary information obtained during a four-day mission to Laos from 13-16 March 2007. It is shared in this preliminary form to provide the maximum opportunities to benefit from comments and corrections from colleagues within Government of Laos and the development community. The insights provided and time generously given already by many colleagues is acknowledged and greatly appreciated. Comments and corrections are welcomed. Reviews and guidance notes for Sector Groups produced for Afghanistan, Cambodia and Ghana were also drawn upon.

Many observations and recommendations will be familiar to colleagues, but it is hoped that the review and the debate on recommendations will contribute to building a strong consensus on actions that can be vigorously implemented, thereby increasing the relevance and benefits of SWGs to both government and development partners.

2. Scope of Review

The scope was defined as follows: conduct a participatory review of government and development partner experience of the Sectoral Working Groups (SWGs) and present findings and recommendations on how SWGs can better meet the needs of all stakeholders.

Meetings were held with the Government and development partner chairs for each of the eight working groups. In the interests of frankness, it was agreed that comments may be cited but would not be attributed to individuals. A list of persons met is included in Annex I.

3. Findings and Recommendations

The Sector Working Group mechanism is clearly currently not meeting the needs of all parties, and this is reflected starkly in the small number of times that most SWGs have met. Figure 1 sets out the current structure of the Sector Working Groups and other coordination fora and shows that most SWGs have met only once in the past 12 months.

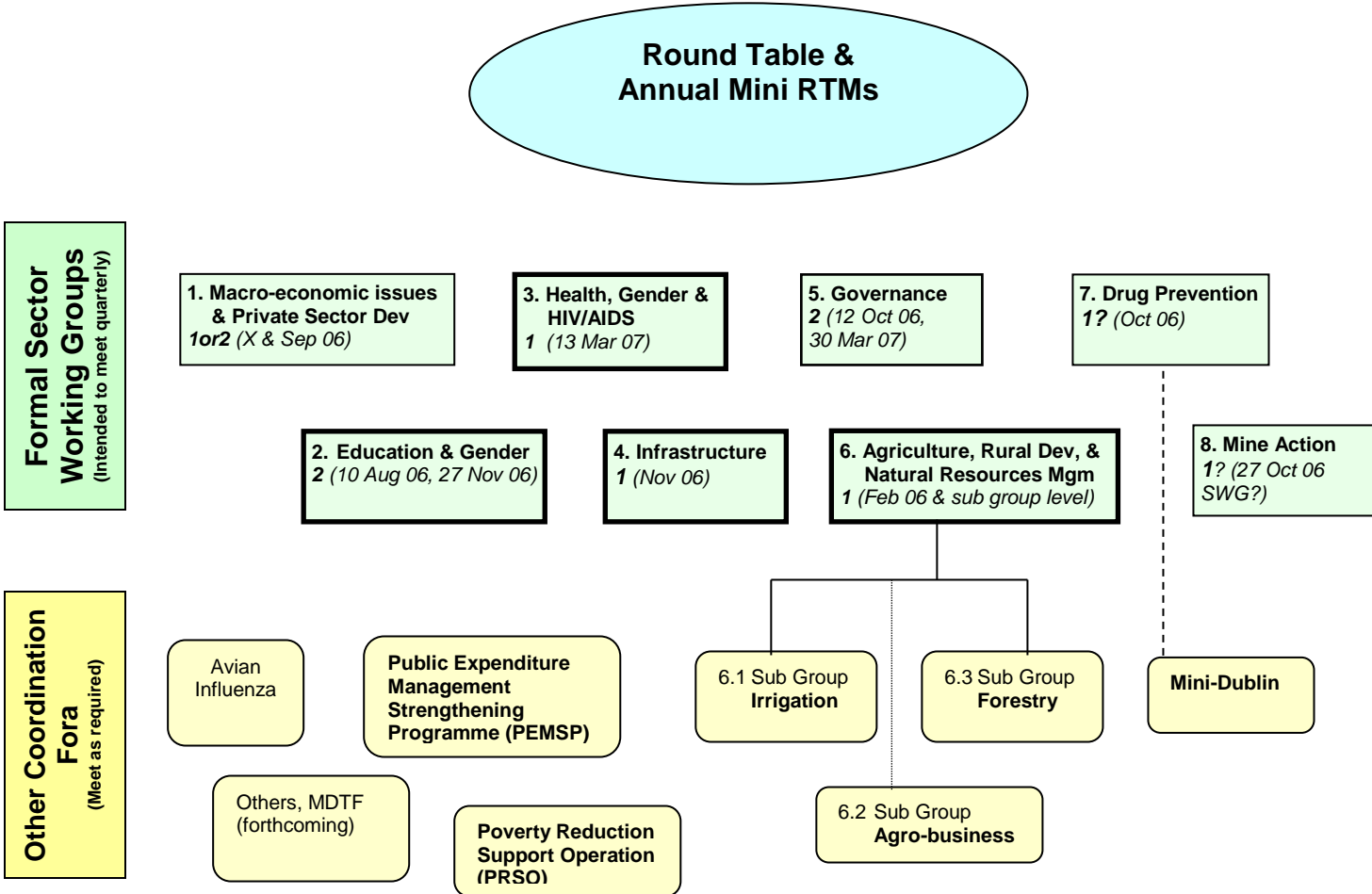
The current SWG model is described by some ministries as a “blueprint approach”. A general recommendation is that ministries and DPs be afforded considerable flexibility in how they organize their SWGs, chairing arrangements, possible Sub-Groups, and other aspects in order to better enable the mechanism to evolve to meet the rather varied requirements of diverse SWGs. Generally, Government officials and DPs recognized the problems as serious, most expressed a strong desire to contribute to improving the mechanism, and in some cases actions to improve individual SWGs are already underway.

Figure 1 seeks to summarise the current structure of SWGs and other fora. The green boxes show the SWGs that were formally created with draft TORs in 2006. The yellow boxes show other groups that were created by ministries or development partners that emerged to respond to a need or are related to specific projects/programmes.

There are, to date, little formal linkage between the SWGs as they currently operate and the Round Table meetings. There are few linkages between the “other coordination fora” (yellow) and the SWGs (green).

The numbers shown in bold italics refer to the number of times the SWG is believed to have met in the twelve month period from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007. Any corrections and updates are welcomed.

Figure 1: Current Structure of Sector Working Groups and Other Coordination Fora

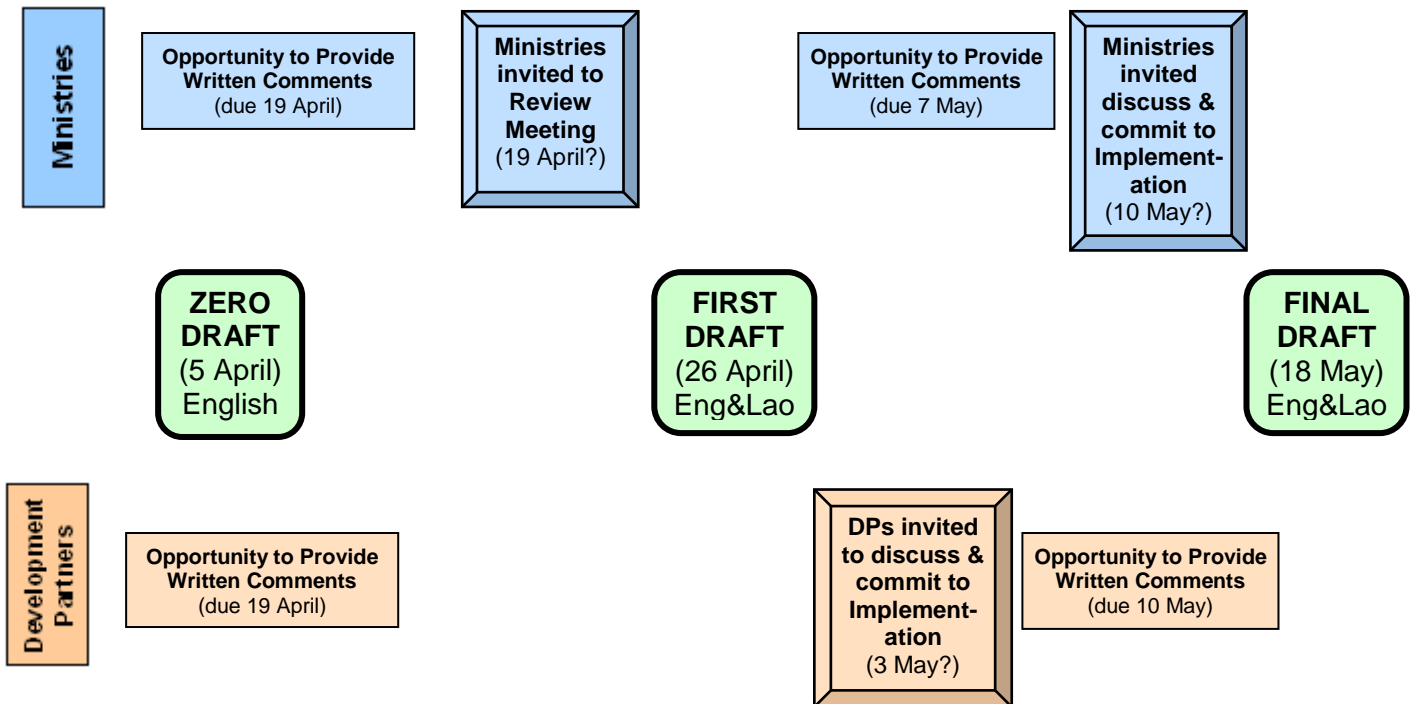


3.1 Reinforce Ownership of SWGs

Some central policy and line ministries feel limited ownership of the SWG mechanism, are unclear on its purpose, and therefore have limited commitment to allocate scarce staff resources and time needed to lead SWGs effectively. The SWG mechanism has been perceived by many as a “blueprint” that they must implement, with little scope to adapt the mechanism in line with their specific needs.

The process recommended below gives ministries and development partners the maximum opportunity to shape the final recommendations for strengthening the SWG mechanism (Figure 1). This investment of time and energy in reforming the SWG mechanism is thought worthwhile given the potential of SWGs to contribute to increasing aid effectiveness and achieving development results. Once both ministries and DPs have had the opportunity to review and comment on drafts, ministries and DPs will be invited to meetings to finalise the recommendations and to make commitments to implement those recommendations.

Figure 2: Timetable for Finalising Review of Sector Working Groups



- Line ministries currently participating in a SWG will be given the option to decide whether they wish to continue. Those not yet participating will be asked if they wish to establish a new Sector Working Group (eg covering the Energy and Mining sector, key to the Laos economy but not among the 8 SWGs).
- Line ministries decide who will chair their SWG (and an alternate) and how often it should meet (minimum of once a year).

3.2 SWG Chairs and Co-Chairs have greater flexibility to decide whether to determine how they wish to operate

Ministries and Development Partners have limited staff numbers and time and wish to avoid an excessive number of meetings. However, some SWGs have found it productive to meet at a sectoral or subsectoral level, in order to focus discussions on solving particularly challenges and to allow more informal and technical debate among a smaller number of government and DP partner practitioners. Examples include the Sub-Groups for Irrigation, Agro-business and Forestry, established under the Agriculture, Rural Development and Natural Resources Management Sector Working Group umbrella, the Governance SWG meetings focused on a single component of its agenda (Rule of Law), and the tightly focused fora outside the SWG mechanism such as

the Public Expenditure Management Strengthening Programme (PEMSP) and the Poverty Reduction Support Operation (PRSO).

- **Flexibility to Establish Sub-Groups:** The line ministry Chair of the SWG discusses internally and with other line ministries working in the sector and with DPs and decides whether to establish permanent Sub-Groups at sub-sectoral level or ad hoc Sub-Groups to solve particular problems (eg Developing a coordinated capacity development framework for the sector/sub-sector). Many government and DP colleagues noted that SWGs were often chaired and attended at a very senior level which could support decision-making, but which inhibited free-flowing informal discussions among subject specialists on how to address particular technical challenges. For this reason, there was strong support in many ministries and among some DPs for devolving technical issues to permanent Sub-Groups (in some cases, eg Primary education versus secondary versus tertiary and vocational), or to timebound ad hoc Sub-Groups to address particular issues (Development of a Capacity Development Framework; work on Medium Term Expenditure Framework, etc). These smaller Sub-Groups might choose to meet more regularly (eg every two or three months), whereas SWGs might only meet once or twice a year if they were supported by technical work at the Sub-Group level.
- **Rotating themes for SWGs:** an alternative to establishing Sub-Groups may be to rotate the focus of SWGs, taking different themes in term. Thus, the Macro-Economic and Private Sector Development SWG might choose to focus on fiscal policy, central bank and monetary policy, private sector development, etc, in turn.
- **Cross-cutting Issues addressed at SWG Level:** Where dynamic Sub-Groups have already emerged (such as in Irrigation, Agro-business and Forestry), the SWG Chair and Co-Chairs should consider periodically holding a full SWG meeting involving ministries and DPs from each Sub-Group to address cross-cutting dimensions that cannot be resolved within sub-sectoral or single ministry “silos” (at least once a year). The work programmes and achievements of the Sub-Groups should be documented and circulated in advance to avoid that SWG meeting time is spent on information sharing.
- **Linking other Coordination Fora to SWG Mechanism:** several aid instruments, projects and themes have generated their own regular meeting mechanisms, such as the Poverty Reduction Support Operation (PRSO), the Public Expenditure Management Strengthening Programme (PEMSP), and the Mini-Dublin meetings. The tight focus, clear work programme and results-oriented nature of these meetings has made them productive for government and DPs.
 - The substance addressed within the PRSO and PEMSP meetings appears to fall within the draft terms of reference for the Governance Sector Working Group. The relevant ministries and DPs could consider recognizing these two existing fora as Sub-Groups under the umbrella of the Governance SWG. This should not affect the functioning of the two fora themselves which need to remain small and tightly focused, but would create the expectation that at least once a year the work programme and results from these Sub-Groups would be shared and discussed at an inclusive SWG meeting.
 - Support the ongoing efforts of the National Commission for Drug Control and development partners such as Australia, Japan and UNODC to combine into a single government-donor working group the SWG for Drug Prevention (yet to meet) and the “Mini-Dublin” meetings.

- Ministries and DPs should consider agreeing to avoid establishing regular meeting fora outside of the SWG mechanism and its associated Sub-Groups.
- **Consider whether the current 8 SWGs are the “right” list:** one DP noted that there is no energy and mining SWG, despite the huge importance of this sector in Laos.
- **Figure 3** sets out one possible approach which integrates all the major coordination fora within a single framework, and under which sub-groups and other coordination fora are all linked to SWGs and the SWGs are clearly linked to the Round Table meetings. In this model, some SWGs would have sub-groups, others would not and instead would rotate topics from one meeting to the next. The SWG that have Sub-Groups that work at the technical level would meet only once or twice a year, whereas the Sub-Groups would meet more often.

3.3 Clarify Function of SWGs and Sub-Groups

Some line ministries express uncertainty as to the functions of the SWG mechanism. Draft Terms of Reference were provided to SWG chairs by DIC, however when line ministry officials (and development partners) were asked if formal TORs existed to guide their work, most indicated they did not have TORs or that they needed updating. Some officials had a clear grasp of the potential advantages offered by SWGs, while others felt they had little incentive to lead SWGs, reflected in DP comments that without repeated prompting by themselves, even fewer SWG meetings would have been held. Some describe SWG meetings as overly formal “show and tell” exercises.

Below are listed potential functions and responsibilities of SWGs based on existing draft TOR and comments received from Government and DPs. Discussion of the Zero Draft and First Draft of the Review should build consensus on what the minimum functions and responsibilities should be for each SWG, recognizing that some SWGs will wish to take on additional responsibilities, while in others roles will be delegated to the Sub-Group level.

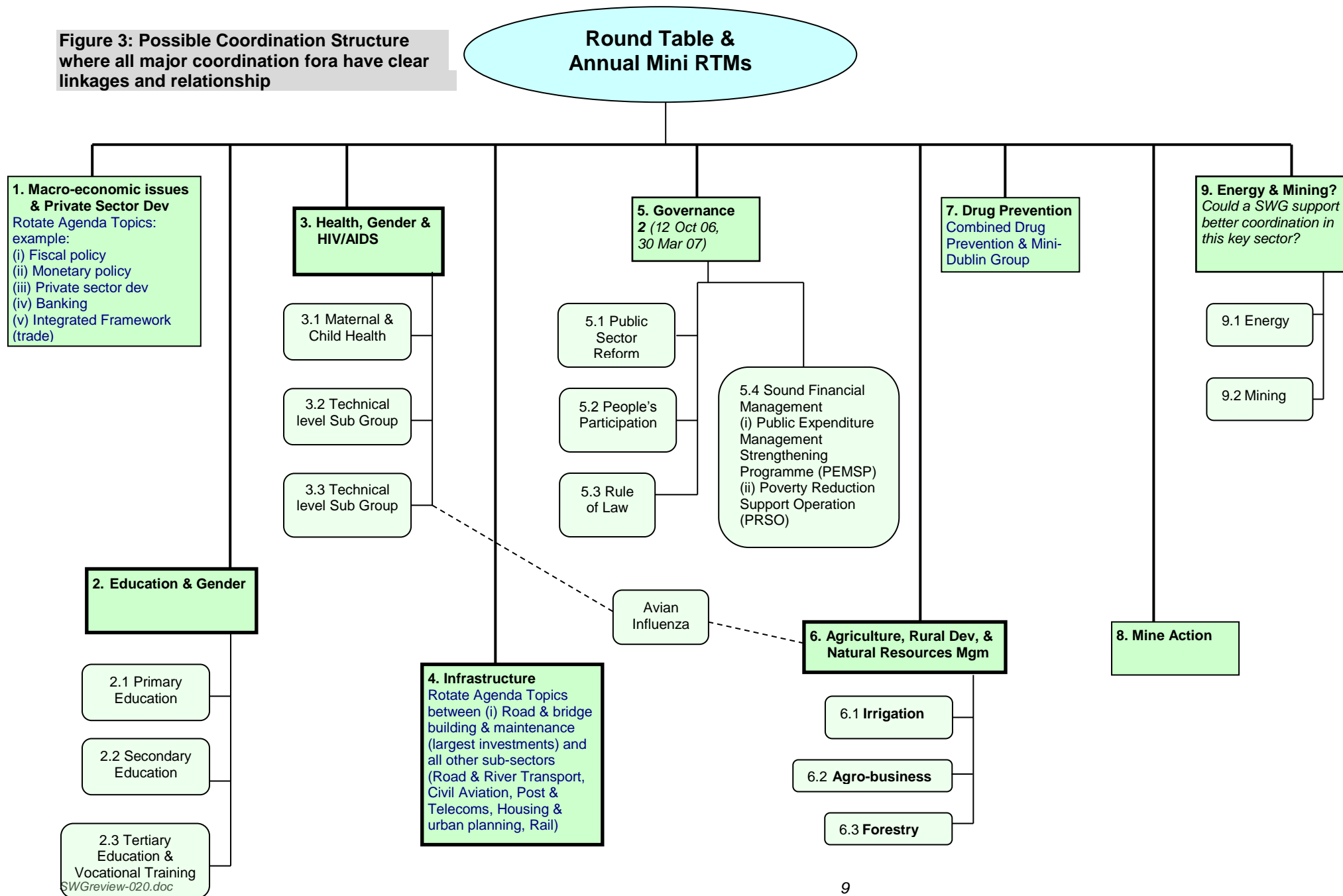
It should be recognized that line ministries retain full responsibility for:

- the assessment of national needs in their sector;
- the development of policies designed to meet those needs quickly, sustainably and cost effectively;
- the managing of ensuring programmes and projects that operationalise those policies.

The SWGs and Sub-Groups are intended as coordinating and supporting bodies and are not intended to substitute for or duplicate the functions of ministries and agencies. SWGs provide a mechanism and process that can assist ministries in bringing together their partners to reinforce and support these functions, and help elaborate options for consideration and implementation by government. Below are listed a large number of potential roles that SWGs could play, and it is for the Ministry and DP members, led by the Chair, to decide which of these roles are appropriate in their particular SWG. Depending on feedback received, one conclusion of the final draft of this review may be to identify a minimum core set of functions that SWGs must play, along with others that are optional.

- **NSEDP Linkages:** identify NSEDP strategies, priorities and indicators that fall within the remit of the SWG. Identify data sources that are relevant to monitoring progress in implementing the NSEDP.

Figure 3: Possible Coordination Structure where all major coordination fora have clear linkages and relationship



- **Sector/Thematic Diagnostic Work:** Government colleagues and DPs have emphasized the importance of a solid body of analysis to underpin and guide a work programme at SWG or Sub-Group level. The SWG or Sub-Group should therefore agree whether progress in the sector or sub-sector requires additional diagnostic work to be completed, or whether a sufficient body of analysis exists (and if so, to ensure analyses are shared within government and with DPs). If a development partner is willing to sponsor additional diagnostic work, they should be encouraged to share draft TOR and take comments (as occurred with the French-funded Irrigation study for example). New diagnostic work should draw on existing studies and avoid repeating them (one good practice example is ADB's agriculture survey).
- **Strategy:** Support the development of a medium term strategy to achieve the sector goals set out in the NSEDP which can provide a common policy and programming framework for Government and development partners.
 - In sectors or sub-sectors seeking progress towards sector wide approaches (such as Education, Health and Infrastructure), identify the obstacles to progress, including at the level of policies, implementation, monitoring, laws and regulations, and agree on timebound actions to overcome them.
 - Support the development of a costed, prioritized and sequenced medium-term expenditure framework and public investment programmes to achieve sector and NSEDP goals which integrates domestic and ODA resources. Assess and seek to reinforce the linkages between plan, budget allocation and budget outturn.
 - Assist the Government in identifying funding gaps and achieving effective resource mobilization to meet those gaps.
- **ODA Tracking:** line ministries highlight the large share of capital investments in their sector that are externally financed, yet underline that they do not have accurate and up-to-date data donor funded projects in their sector. Such information is essential if all resources (domestic and external) are to be aligned behind the achievement of agreed sector strategies and if a meaningful medium term expenditure framework is to be developed. A reinvigorated ODA Database is required, managed jointly by MoFA, CPI and MoF, and in collaboration with line ministries. SWG and Sub-Groups could circulate in advance of meetings tables from the ODA database summarizing existing funding commitments and, where possible, pipeline projects and programmes, and take responsibility for updating and correcting the database. Seek to minimize overlaps and gaps in externally financed projects and programmes.
- **Implementation of Country Action Plan on Aid Effectiveness:** given that progress on aligning development assistance with country priorities and systems takes place primarily at the sector level, SWGs and Sub-Groups can identify the implications of the Action Plan for that sector and assist the responsible line ministries in defining actions, responsibilities and timeframes in order to achieve the Action Plan targets. Monitor annually progress in implementing the Action Plan at sector level.
- **Develop Capacity Development Framework:** within the SWG or Sub-Groups, support ministries in developing a Capacity Development Framework that identifies and prioritises the capacity development measures required to active sector objectives, identifies ongoing capacity development programmes, agrees a coordinated programme for capacity development that is prioritized and sequenced.

This may include a detailed mapping of different departments' roles and responsibilities.

- **Develop a project implementation arrangements action plan:** one government official noted that many projects have a PIU because “we don't know how to do it otherwise”. SWGs and Sub-Groups should identify PIUs and support the ministries in developing a transitional strategy whereby investments are made in planning, finance and other departments, so as to deliver sustainable capacity benefits and support a more programmatic approach.
 - **MoH provides a good practice example,** having held a workshop in September 2006 to build consensus around an effective capacity development strategy and how to integrate project execution and management functions within existing structures rather than rely on PIUs.
- **Progress Monitoring:** assess available mechanisms for monitoring progress in implementing the sector strategy and monitoring the performance of the investment portfolio and taking account of this information through mid-term corrections. If necessary, recommend actions for improvement and support their implementation. Facilitate reporting to central coordinating agencies such as CPI, MoF and MoFA.
 - **Ensure Cooperation Across Sectors:** promote at SWG cross-sectoral linkages across Sub-Groups. Identify where linkages and collaboration or complementary services are required between ministries and across SWGs, taking account of government inputs and those of development partners.
 - **Support the effective mainstreaming of cross-cutting concerns:** identify the implications for policy, legislation, regulation and investments within the sector in order to achieve the gender, environment, human rights and other cross-cutting objectives set out in the NSEDP.
 - **Linkages with Round Table and Round Table Information Meetings:** SWGs have not specifically prepared materials ahead of annual or tri-annual Round Table Meetings. The workplan should ensure that the SWGs have an agreed substantive “product” to contribute to the Round Table process that will support substantive debate and progress.
 - **Information Sharing:** promote the effective sharing of information between and within government and between government and development partners and among development partners. Seek to achieve this through circulating written information in advance of SWG and Sub-Group meetings, through the website, through the ODA Tracking Database and to minimize “show and tell” verbal presentations.

3.4 Commitment to Capacity Development is key to successful SWGs

When asked how many SWGs have taken place, officials within line ministries and among DPs often quote different numbers. Some express concern that they are unaware when meetings are taking place. Others note that agendas are often received at the last minute and minutes are not circulated. Few SWGs provide minutes which set out clear action points and responsibilities for follow up. Ministry officials are disadvantaged by agendas, minutes and diagnostic materials being available only in English and a lack of interpretation capacities limits the scope of participation by line ministry colleagues. Sometimes minutes are in Lao only, affecting DPs engagement. In no case are SWG meeting dates, agendas, minutes and meeting documentation easily available to all on

the internet. SWGs were described by one DP as “an event and not a process” with correspondingly limited impact.

- **Clarify Chairing of SWGs and Sub-Groups:** DIC, line ministries and DPs sometimes have a different understanding of which ministry officials are responsible for chairing SWGs. Some SWGs have multiple DP chairs and co-chairs, with uncertain division of responsibility among them. The roles listed below should be clarified as part of a process of developing clear ToRs for each SWG (as is underway for Education).
 - The term **Chair** should be reserved for ministry chairs of SWGs and ministry chairs of Sub-Groups. Ministries clarify the Chair and an Alternate Chair (if the Chair is absent) who will lead the SWGs and shares this information with the Development Partners and with MoFA, MoF and CPI. Ministries may decide to have occasional high level (“political” level) SWGs as well as more regular technical level SWGs, or they may decide to have periodic SWG meetings supported by technical level work conducted in Sub Groups. In all cases, the Chair and if possible an Alternate, should be decided upon and notified to MoFA, MoF and CPI and DPs. These decisions should be taken in consultation with the Development Partners co-chairs.
 - The term **Co-Chair** should be reserved for Development Partners who provide political, technical or secretariat support. One or two Co-Chairs will be agreed at the SWG level and, if relevant, at the Sub-Group level. SWGs and Sub-Groups will decide whether one or more Co-Chair positions should rotate after an agreed time period. The Co-Chairs should be selected on the basis of their familiarity with the full spectrum of sector programmes, leadership capabilities, time availability, and interpersonal skills.
 - Consideration should be given to eliminating the terms vice-chair or deputy chair. Co-Chairs will be expected to provide strong support to the Chairs in preparing, Chairing and following up to SWG and Sub-Group meetings, and may take the lead in providing capacity development support the Chairs in managing the SWG mechanism effectively.
 - Membership of the SWGs and Sub-Groups will be determined by the Chair ministry in consultation with other involved ministries.
- **SWG Chairs provided with Capacity Development assistance for management of SWGs:** Some ministries chairing SWGs have been supported in their SWG responsibilities by: (i) technical assistance from DPs who have happened to have projects within the ministry; or (ii) a “hands-on” supportive role from DP co-chairs. However, technical assistance has been largely *ad hoc* and some ministries have received limited support. A successful evolution from the informal Donor Working Groups to the Government-led Sector Working Groups requires significant investments in Chair Ministries.
 - Ministries should agree with their development partners the best modalities for capacity development as part of the coordinated capacity development plan for the sector. While it may be necessary to establish a distinct SWG or Sub-Group “Secretariat” as an interim measure, it is recommended that additional staff and skills training be provided to departments of planning and finance within the line ministries, so that their capacities are built to meet their general responsibilities, of which managing the SWG process is only one.

- **Advance Preparation:** SWG/Sub Group Chairs and Co-Chairs should consult within Government and DPs to develop a workplan for the SWG and Sub-Groups and indications of topics for the agenda for several meetings ahead. Before each meeting Chairs and Co-Chairs should discuss what preparations are required, including who will present for each agenda item, circulation ahead of the meetings of presentations or background papers, review the status of actions agreed at the previous meeting, ensure that the agenda is sent out at least two weeks ahead of the meeting in English and in Lao and posted on the SWG website. Chairs and Co-Chairs may wish to invite other active members of the SWG or Sub-Groups to participate in these informal preparatory meetings.
- **Workplan:** Develop a workplan for the SWGs and Sub-Groups.
- **Action-oriented Minutes:** Chairs and Co-Chairs should consider adopting an action-oriented format for minutes of SWG and Sub-Group meetings.

Issues	Agreed Actions	Progress	Responsible	Timeline
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- **Interpreting and Translation:** in no case are minutes produced in both English and Lao. Minutes in English (usual case) only exclude many colleagues from within ministries from understanding the issues discussed, decisions taken and progress made. Minutes in Lao only (some cases) make DP ownership and active collaboration less likely. Ministry officials have highlighted the lack of good quality translation capacity within ministries, and the poor quality of translation training at university level in Laos. Building momentum for reforms and action demands the maximum possible access to information and participation within Government in particular, and among DPs. This suggests that a significant investment in better translation facilities and training courses within Laos is needed. In the interim, Co-Chairs and DPs are urged to further increase support to ministries in ensuring minutes, strategies and other key documents are available to government colleagues. An illustration of the challenge is that no official translation of the Vientiane Declaration yet exists.
 - Interpreting: serious engagement by a critical mass of ministry and DP colleagues in SWGs and Sub-Groups may well require provision of formal interpreting at meetings. This is rarely provided. Instead, officials already under pressure to contribute substantively to the debate may find themselves in an unofficial interpretation role.
- **SWG Website:** Consideration should be given to establishing simple webpages for each SWG, either on the Chair Ministry's home page or as part of the Round Table/Action Plan websites. Currently, there is no single site which alerts government and DP colleagues to when the next SWG or Sub-Group meeting is schedule, or easy access to agendas, minutes and relevant documentation. Stickiness in information flow and institutional memory are serious challenges within government and within DPs, given relatively rapid turnover of staff.

3.5 Reinforce linkages between SWGs and Round Table Process

During 2006 the process of transition from Donor Working Groups to Government-led SWGs as well as changes within the Government itself, resulted in rather weak linkages between the SWG process and the preparations and follow-up to the Ninth Round Table of November. A well-functioning and revived SWG mechanism will have significant

positive “spillovers” for well-prepared, substantive Round Table meetings and subsequent follow-up.

- SWGs and Sub-Groups should well in advance what issues, analyses, progress reports, combined statements or other materials they wish to prepare and contribute to the Round Table meetings.

Annex 1: Background on Formation of Sector Working Groups

Will be included in First Draft (due 26 April).

Annex 2: List of Persons Interviewed

The time and insights provided by many colleagues are gratefully acknowledged. Corrections to names and titles gratefully received.

Organisation	Name	Title
Government of Laos		
Committee for Planning and Investment (CPI)	Dr. Khamlien Pholsena	Director General, DGP
Lao National Commission for Drug Control and Supervision	Mr. Phoutsavath Sounthala	Deputy National Programme Director, Programme Facilitation Unit
Ministry of Communication Transport Post and Construction (MCTPC)	Mr. Onida Souksavath	Deputy Director General, DP
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	Dr. Phouang Parisack Pravongviengkham	Permanent Secretary
	Mr. Xaypladeth Chounlamany	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education (MoE)	Dr Sisamone Sithirajvongsa	DDG Planning & Cooperation
Ministry of Finance (MoF)	Ms. Thipphakone Chanthavongsa	Deputy Director General
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA)	Mr. Latsamy Keomany	Deputy Director, DIC
	Dr. Bountheuang Mounlasy	Director General, DIC
Ministry of Health	Dr. Nao Boutta	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Public Administration & Civil Service Authority (PACSA)	Mr. Nisith Keopanya	Deputy Director General, PMO
National Regulatory Authority on UXO Mine Action in the Lao PDR (NRA)	Mr. Thongphone Keosayadet	Deputy Director, Operations Chief
Development Partners		
ADB	Mr Jim Nugent	Country Director
AusAID	Mr Michael Hasset	First Secretary
Australian Embassy	Mr. Alistair Mclean	Ambassador
EC	Ms Josephine Kalinauckas	First Secretary
	Mr Fabio Artuso	Attaché (Cooperation)
	Mr Carl Bjorkman	Programme Officer

	Mr Thomas Kersher	Consultant, Facilitator
	Mr Vaclav Sveja	Programme Officer
Embassy of Japan	Ms. Miki Matsuura	Advisor - Economic Affairs and Multilateral Relations
French Development Agency (AFD)	Mr. Etienne Woitellier	Director (Chair of rural development sector working group)
	Zacharie Mechali	Chargé d'études
IMF	Mr Philippe Beaugrand	Resident Rrepresentative
Sweden/Sida	Mr. Jorgen Persson	Counsellor/Analyst
UN	Ms Sonam Yangchen Rana	Resident Coordinator
	Ms Louise Scott	Donor Coordination Associate, Office of the Resident Coordinator
UNDP	Mr Robert Glofcheski	Economist
	Mr Jamshed Kazi	Assistant Resident Representative
	Ms Phanchinda Lengsavad	Assistant Resident Representative a.i.
	Ms Sophie Mackinnon	Project Analyst, Poverty and Economic Unit
	Ms Elsa Morandat	Programme Analyst, Poverty and Economic Unit
	Mr Stephane Vigie	Deputy Resident Representative
USA Embassy	Mr Joshua Archibald	Economic Counselor
World Bank	Mr William Rex	Lead Country Officer