



Lao People's Democratic Republic
Peace, Independence, Democracy, Unity, Prosperity

**Summary Report of
The Annual Retreat on the Round
Table Process**

14th February 2018,
Ministry of Planning and Investment

Prepared by
Department of International Cooperation
Ministry of Planning and Investment

Table of Contents

I. Introduction and proceedings	2
II. Presentation by Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment	3
2.1 Key lessons learnt from the preparation and organisation of the recent Round Table Meeting/Round Table Implementation Meeting	3
2.2 Round Table follow-up and the Instruction of the Prime Minister's Office for the implementation of the 2017 RTIM discussion points	3
2.3 Initial proposed priorities and focus of 2018 (Special Session) RTM	6
III. Outcomes of Plenary and Group Discussions	8
3.1	8
General comments made during the plenary discussions	8
3.2 Results of group discussions and relevant comments	10
Group 1 – Follow up actions of the 2017 RTIM discussion points and linking to SWGs.....	10
Group 2 – Roadmap & Guidance Note for the 2018 (Special Session) Round Table Meeting	12
IV. Closing and follow up actions.....	14
Annex 1 - Agenda of the 2018 Round Table Process Retreat	15
Annex 2 - 2017 RTIM Key Discussion Points.....	16
Annex 3 - List of Participants	19

I. Introduction and proceedings

The Retreat on the Round Table Process (RTP) took place on 14th February 2018 at Ministry of Planning and Investment in Vientiane. Participants included representatives from Line Ministries, Development Partners (DPs) including South-South Partners and other stakeholders representing all 10 Sector Working Groups (SWGs), colleagues from Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Bank of Lao PDR, Lao Women's Union and Lao National Committee for Advancement of Women (Lao NCAW), INGOs and Non-Profit Associations (NPAs), and Private Sector.

The Retreat was organised as a follow up from the 2017 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM) on 22-23 November 2017 in Champasak Province. It focused on

- (1) Follow up actions of the 2017 RTIM key discussion points and linkages to SWGs; and
- (2) Recommendations and suggestions to frame the agenda of the 2018 Round Table Meeting. In particular, the retreat was designed in a way to allow the Government of Lao PDR and Development Partners and other stakeholders to discuss cross sectoral coordination and a better link between the RTM and SWGs.

Please refer to Annex 1 for the Agenda and Annex 3 for the list of participants.

The RTP retreat was chaired by His Excellency Dr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment and co-chaired by Ms. Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative.

To officially open the Retreat, the chair highlighted the success of the Round Table Process over the past few years, pointing out that the process has been strengthened through a number of complementary aspects, among others, for instance:

- The increase of trust and cooperation between the Government and development partners, including private sector, civil society and other stakeholders, and the better alignment of their support behind the national priorities;
- The revitalization of the structure and format of the Round Table Meeting and the Round Table Implementation Meeting, to create the space for dynamic, open and frank discussions; and
- The introduction of Round Table pre-consultations, which provide the opportunity for in-depth policy dialogue and generate important recommendations to the main meeting.

In particular, the Deputy Minister pointed out that the 2017 RTIM in Champasak was broadly perceived as a success by Government and its partners due to the frank, open and inclusive dialogue, the comprehensive preparation and the concrete outcomes. To ensure continuity, key recommendations from the 2017 RTIM have been translated into an instruction by the Prime Minister and forwarded to line ministries, provinces and agencies concerned. Partners across the development cooperation spectrum will now be expected to implement these recommendations during the remaining period of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan.

In addition, H.E. Mr. Chanthaboury also highlighted the importance of 2018 which is not only the 'Visit Laos Year' but also a year with a number of important milestones such as the mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP, the LDC review by the UN Committee for Development Policy, and the submission of Lao PDR's first Voluntary National Review on Sustainable Development Goals. With these in mind, the Deputy Minister urged both Government agencies and development partners to think strategically in preparing for this year's Round Table Meeting.

UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative Ms. Kaarina Immonen also thanked all partners for improving the Round Table Process over recent years. As co-chair, Ms. Immonen stated that the dialogue has benefitted from enhanced participation of private sector, civil society and regional partners. Partners have appreciated great efforts made by the Government to ensure greater partnership and deliver real development impacts. Ms. Immonen reiterated that consultation outcomes help inform policy design and priorities. From the international community’s perspective, partners can clearly see that the process has traction and effect.

II. Presentation by Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment

After the opening session of the Retreat, a presentation was made by Mr. Sysomphorn Phetdaoheuang, Deputy Director General of DIC/MPI on lessons learnt and preparation for 2018 Round Table Meeting. Key points from the presentation are highlighted as follow:

2.1 Key lessons learnt from the preparation and organisation of the recent Round Table Meeting

- Making the Round Table Process more inclusive increases its relevance
- Reaching consensus on the agenda for the RTM at least six months prior to the meeting provides clearer direction.
- Selection of a few priority topics ensures focused discussions
- Panel discussions and pre-consultations strengthen substance; interactive dialog with stakeholders contribute to a better understanding on priority issues
- Sector Working Group TORs, work plans and reports: the more results-oriented, the better.
- Essential for Sector Working Groups to follow up on RTM recommendations. Strong secretariats required to ensure substantive/high-quality policy dialogue.

2.2 Round Table follow-up and the Instruction of the Prime Minister’s Office for the implementation of the 2017 RTIM discussion points

- Key discussion points from the 2017 RTIM were reported to the Prime Minister
- The Prime Minister’s Office issued an instruction (No.160/PM) for the implementation of the RTIM key discussion points on 30 January 2018.
- The main purpose is to ensure clearer responsibilities of Ministries concerned to monitor and report on implementation of key discussion points.
- Key information of the instruction is summarised as follows:

Government Agencies	Key action areas
1. Ministry of Planning and Investment in collaboration with line ministries, provinces and other related agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure successful mid-term review of 8th NSEDP and effective implementation of annual NSEDP 2018 • Support reduction of economic vulnerability and diversification of country economy • Ensure greater participation of stakeholders and ensure successful organization of 2018 Round Table Meeting with participation of wider stakeholders, in line with key national

	<p>development milestones such as the mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP, the LDC review, SDG voluntary national review, and the visit Lao year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support quality private investment and a better linkage between Lao Business Forum and RTP • Ensure proper guidelines for assessment and balance of potential private investment at national and local level and enhance enabling environment for private sector investment through transparent, efficient, clear and auditable one-door service. • Ensure effective implementation of the national statistics strategies - carrying out various national surveys for monitoring 8th NSEDP including SDGs and ensuring national indicators are well understood and are well calculated and disseminated • Take lead in promoting and formulating projects and programmes on south-south and triangular cooperation: creating opportunities, mutual benefits from exchanges of lessons learnt, quality technology, utilization of local experts and development cooperation financing at all levels. Further enhance experience-sharing, learning exchanges, peer learning and networking among those countries with similar developing status and progresses for mutual benefits and coalition programme solving.
<p>2. Ministry of Foreign Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for the LDC review in March 2018 • Ensure SDG integration at line ministries and provinces • Strategize and prepare the 2018 SDG Voluntary National Review in a participatory manner, to be presented at the High Level Political Forum on SDGs in July 2018 • Ensure effective oversight and provide enabling conditions to facilitate civil society work as partner in development in accordance with laws and regulations of the Lao PDR; ensuring effectiveness, monitoring and reporting of programme and project implementation of civil society.
<p>3. Ministry of Finance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue working on tax reform and modernization and effectiveness of revenue collection to facilitate quality private sector investment • Ensure macro-economic stability, and effective debt sustainability strategy in order to increase confidence of potential private sector investment • Create a better linkage between budgetary and planning process through Medium Term Expenditure Frameworks • Formulate integrated financing strategy for SDGs.

4. Ministry of Education and Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the rate of enrolment in secondary schools, as the critical path to skilled labour, increase adult literacy and improve quality of teacher • Work with MOLSW on labour information system and labour demand and supply in order to increase capacity level, enhanced labour force, and integration into ASEAN. • Ensure that education and training policies and programs, including higher education, overseas scholarships, TVET, other post-secondary schooling and industry-based training are directed towards national human resource development priorities and the demands of the labour market in Lao PDR.
5. Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with MOES to strengthen the development of a national Labour Market Information System based on the needs of the public and private sectors. • Promote economy diversification, production chain to commercial production and quality services for employment purposes. • Work with MOIC, MPI, LNCCI on promoting decent jobs generated by private sector
6. Ministry of Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay greater attention to address food and nutrition security, reduce under 5 mortality and maternal mortality to achieve the national goals and objectives • Ensure quality health personnel and service delivery at local level
7. Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with MONRE to address illegal logging and wildlife trafficking • Work with MPI and MONRE on environmental aspects of the 8th NSEDP including SDGs and LDC graduation criteria • Work with MPI, MOIC, and MONRE to ensure private sector contribution to cooperate social responsibility and environmental assessment of private sector investment
8. Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue working on the National Land Use Planning for endorsement by the National Assembly, formulate land use planning at provincial level and continue revision of Land Law to be reported to the NA by end of 2018 including creation of land valuation mapping national wide • Enhance Communal Land Registration and Titling national wide • Work with MPI and MAF on environmental aspects of the 8th NSEDP including SDGs and LDC graduation criteria • Work with MPI, MOIC, LNCCI to ensure private sector contribution to cooperate social responsibility and environmental assessment of private sector investment

9. Ministry of Industry and Commerce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with LNCCI, and MONRE and other ministries to ensure quality, environmentally friendly, private investment • Ensure better linkage between Lao Business Forum & Round Table Process; ensure proper guideline for assessment of potential private investment • Work with LNCCI and MOLSW to ensure private sector generates decent jobs
10. Ministry of Home Affairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure effective oversight of NPAs and facilitate their contribution • Ensure effective implementation of good governance programmes for service delivery at local level
11. Bank of Lao PDR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with MPI, MOF and line ministries on macroeconomic stability, financial management, debt sustainability strategy, fiscal management to increase confidence of potential private sector investment
12. State Audit Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out regular audit and disclose information on corruption and other irregular activities

2.3 Initial proposed priorities and focus of 2018 (Special Session) RTM

Overall Objective of the 2018 RTM

To promote coherence and multi-stakeholder partnerships for implementation of the 8th NSEDP: monitoring progress achieved in 2017 and setting priorities for 2018.

- To report on key progress made in terms of:
 - Mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP,
 - Integration and localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) based on the first national SDG voluntary review presented at the HL PLF at UN HQ in July 2018,
 - Results of the LDC review in March 2018
 - Implementation of Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation and its Country Action Plan (VDCAP)
- To identify concrete actions, particular on financing for development perspective and capacity development to address key challenges for the remained period of the 8th NSEDP and potential key topics/areas for the formulation of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025).

Proposed over-arching theme

“Accelerating national efforts for achievement of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan and Sustainable Development Goals, including preparation for the graduation from the Least Developed Country (LDC) status.”

Possible options for agenda items

- 8th NSEDP Mid-Term Review (MTR):
- SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR) and LDC Review:
- Financing for Development and Public Financial Management:
- Economic Diversification

Key preparatory activities and consultations leading up to the 2018 RTM

Key activities	2018 Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
1. Preparation of the 2018 RTM Roadmap and Guidance Note.	January	DIC/MPI
2. Dissemination of the Prime Minister's Instruction on implementation of the 2017 RTM policy recommendations.	February – March	
3. Preparation for the mid-term review of the 8 th NSEDP which is coinciding with the Visit Laos Year campaign	January – September	DOP/MPI
4. Preparation for the LDC review	Jan – March 2018	DOP/MPI, LSB/MPI, DIC/MPI and DIO/MOFA
5. Meet the press	Quarterly	
6. Preparation of the Lao SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR) report <i>(more detailed information, please refer to the Lao SDG VNR work-plan)</i>	Jan – July	DIO/MOFA
7. Series of SWG meetings	Throughout the year	
8. SWG outcome based Annual Work Plan (AWP), calendar of events and updated Terms of Reference	Early February	SWG Secretariats
9. Round Table Process Retreat	Early February	DIC/MPI
10. Meeting of the National Steering Committee on Round Table Process	Mid-March	DIC/MPI
11. Finalization of the 2018 RTM Roadmap and Guidance Note <i>(This includes decision made on a province to host the 2018 RTM, format, key agenda items and other key important aspects)</i>	End of March	DIC/MPI
12. Dissemination of the 2018 RTM guidance note/roadmap to all SWGs and relevant stakeholders	End of March, or Mid-April	DIC/MPI
13. Roll out of the 2018 monitoring round of the global partnership for effective development cooperation <i>(Note: this will be done in line with the roll out of the first monitoring of the VDCAP)</i>	May	DIC/MPI
14. Background briefing on the 2018 LDC review	June – August	DIO/MOFA, DOP/MPI and LSB/MPI

Key activities	2018 Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
15. High Level Political Forum on SDGS	July	DIO/MOFA
16. Meeting of Chairs and Co-Chairs of Sector Working Groups (Policy level)	Quarterly (as often as needed)	DIC/MPI
17. Meetings of SWG Secretariats and RTP Secretariat (Technical level)	Every two months	DIC/MPI and SWG Secretariats
18. Preparation of Foreign Aid Report	Jan-Oct	DIC/MPI
19. 2018 RTM invitation set out	At least two months before the actual RTM	
20. SWG report submitted to RTP Secretariat	End of September or Early October	SWG Secretariats
21. 2018 RTM Background Document finalised	At least two weeks before the actual RTM	DIC/MPI
22. RTM Pre-consultations	At least a month before the actual RTM	
23. 2017 RTM and Debriefing with the Prime Minister	Mid to End of November	

Please refer to the 2018 RTM Roadmap and Concept for more detailed information

III. Outcomes of Plenary and Group Discussions

3.1 General comments made during the plenary discussions

- The relevance of the Round Table Process:** The RTP has been seen as useful in bringing together Government, DPs and other stakeholder on a regular basis, promoting connections, exchanging information, providing a platform for discussion, and enabling networking. In terms of substance, the focused discussion is important and there is a need to make it more interactive and focused with great outcomes. In term of field visits, it is useful as it provides information for the RTM participants on issues facing local communities and what is going on the ground. There is a recommendation to explore different approach and format of the RTM field visits to make it more manageable and in smaller group instead of larger group in a formal setting.
- Inclusiveness and participation of partners apart from OECD donors and other stakeholders such as civil society and private sector:** Inclusiveness is important and it also covers not only traditional donors but also other emerging donors, including CSOs and private sectors. While great progress has been made in this area, there is room for improvement to ensure greater participation of relevant partners. The principle of participation of INGOs, NPAs and private sector in the RTM/RTIM is based on standard self-selected five representatives. However, during various meetings of SWGs and pre-consultations, it is important that partners engage and participate in such events rather than waiting to attend the actual RTM itself.

- **Revision of decrees relating to INGOs and NPAs:** There is a recommendation to ensure effective consultations of revision of relevant decrees. There is also a need to create better and common understanding of implications and implementation of the revised decrees. Appreciation has also been expressed by various partners as there have been regular meetings between the Government counterparts and INGOs and NPAs.
- **Linkage between RTM/RTIM and SWGs:** Process and substance prepared for the RTM are important and SWGs play an important role in setting up agenda, identifying and preparing the substance and following up and implementing the RTM key discussion points/recommendations. In particular, the Prime Minister's Instruction serves as primary important reference as it identifies relevant line ministries chairing SWGs. Therefore, SWGs have direct inputs for effective implementation, monitoring and reporting on follow up actions and progress made on RTIM/RTM recommendations.
- **Linking Lao Business Forum (LBF) to Round Table Process (RTP):** There is a need to think about how to better promote Lao PDR as destination for foreign direct investment (FDI). To do so, open and transparency are important. Therefore, private sector involvement needs to be strengthened to ensure closer link to the roundtable process. Prime Minister's Instruction calls for an improved enabling environment and ease of doing businesses in Lao PDR – particularly streamlining processes and procedures. In this regard, it is important to look at 10 indicators of ease of doing business index in order to work out what needed to help reduce the ranking from three digits to two digits.
- **The rule of law state:** The Government is making important administrative and legislative progress towards Lao PDR becoming a rule of law state by 2020, as a fundamental prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable development. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) plays an important role in this regard, particularly within the Governance SWG framework. The current Prime Minister's Instruction for the follow up of the 2017 RTIM key recommendation highlights role of Ministry of Home Affairs on matters relating to good governance. Therefore, MOHA and MOJ will work together closely to realize the ultimate goal of becoming a rule of law state in the near future.
- **Coordination among development partners:** To maximize aid and development cooperation effectiveness, coordination among development partners is important. While good progress has been made in recent years, more efforts are still needed as it is a means to an end, intensely process-oriented, focusing on relationships and linkages (vertical and horizontal).
- Related to **illicit activities**, the Government was commended for its efforts to reduce corruption, illegal wild life trade and illegal logging. Indications of progress on preventing contraband goods were also welcomed. It was noted that this remains a challenge in the rural areas in particular. The RTIM received a request to have the issue of wildlife trafficking brought within the scope of the Round Table mechanism. Eradicating wildlife trafficking would be of enormous benefit for the global image of Lao PDR and will also directly contribute to the achievement of the relevant SDGs. The Government has been working with all partners to accelerate efforts to reduce illicit activities ranging from illegal wildlife, to illegal logging, human trafficking, to corruption and other irregular activities. The decree no. 15/PM on wildlife trafficking has been issued by the Government. Now, efforts on follow-up and monitoring of its implementation are

required to ensure effective management of illegal activities. The issue is closely linked to money laundering, international crime and fight against corruption related issues. Addressing international crime requires a collective approach and there is a need for the Government to work together with all relevant stakeholders at different levels. On money laundering, the Bank of Lao PDR (BOL) plays an important role and needs to closely work with partners to address the issue. EU and other partners stand ready to support. Regarding illegal logging, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) has been assigned in collaboration with other concerned stakeholders to ensure effective implementation of the Prime Minister's Order, and strengthen the capacity of the Secretariat to have better working and monitoring activities in addressing these issues.

- **Compliance and reporting on implementation of international obligation and conventions:** The Government has been working closely with partners to ensure effective implementation and reporting on international obligations and conventions that Lao PDR is party to. Specifically, on international or transnational crime, it is interlinked with other illicit activities that need to be strategically addressed in collaboration with various stakeholders.

3.2 Results of group discussions and relevant comments

Group 1 – Follow up actions of the 2017 RTIM discussion points and linking to SWGs

2017 RTIM key discussion points	Key follow up actions to be carried out	Relevant to SWGs (using the PM's Instruction as a guide)
1. Rule of Law		All SWGs and SSWGs
2. Review of the 8 th NSEDP and priorities for 2018	Mid-Term Review of the 8 th NSEDP All follow up actions related to Statistics relevant Give special attention to adolescent girls and other vulnerable groups	All SWGs and SSWGs
3. LDC graduation and SDC graduation	First Voluntary National Review All follow up actions related to Statistics relevant Give special attention to adolescent girls and other vulnerable groups	Health SWG: Maternal and Infant mortality; nutrition recommendations Education SWG: rate of enrollment in secondary schools UXO SWG on SDG 18 All other SWGs and SSWGs
4. Private sector and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider better inclusion of youth in the Round Table Process, as future leaders • How to link Round Table Process and Lao Business Forum (expected in March), 	Trade and Private Sector SWG (next meeting expected in March) Natural Resources and Environment SWG (PM Decree 160)

	<p>establishing a task force to discuss this</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote SMEs, digital economy across sectors • Ensuring a level playing field for private sector across provinces and districts 	
5. Human skills and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider better inclusion of youth in the Round Table Process, as future leaders • Implementation of the Human Resource Development strategy, involving all concerned sectors 	Education SWG UXO SWG
6. South-south and triangular cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider better inclusion of youth in the Round Table Process, as future leaders • Strengthen institutional arrangements for SSC and TC (led by MoFA, with implementation under MPI); establish roadmap • Identify role of private sector in SSC (in particular in regional context) • UXO 	Should be discussed across SWGs
7. Macroeconomic and fiscal management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at experience of other countries regarding tax reform; how this can support SMEs 	Macroeconomic SWG Trade and Private Sector SWG Governance SWG
8. The development partnership	Continue inclusive process	Across SWGs and all development partners
9. Land management	Follow up on PM Instruction 160 – land use planning etc.	UXO SWG
10. Illicit activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PM Instruction on Illegal Logging; Wildlife Trade • Continue and conclude international negotiations on Transnational Organized Crime and related issues 	SWG on Agriculture and Rural Development SWG on Environment and natural Resources SWG on Illicit drug Control SWG on Governance
11. Statistical data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance disaggregation of data (gender in particular) 	Across SWG

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective implementation of the national statistics survey • Effective implementation of statistics survey • Collection, dissemination and use of timely, quality data • LSB coordinate closely on mid-term review and VNR • Assessment on data collection, including data gaps • Continue to align statistics with international standards • Analyze results of LSIS and Labour Force Survey (results expected to be presented in March) • LECS and agricultural census conducted in 2018; • Results of national survey on UXO expected in 2019 (rolled out across the country) • Consider the use of big data from non-traditional sources • Develop Labour Market Information system and information for employment service 	
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Some of key comments from the floor in additional to the presentation of the group discussion are:

- Rule of Law should be considered by all SWGs as cross-cutting issue: legislation and enforcement
- Each SWG should consider developing an overview on the decrees and legislation applicable to them
- There might be a need to involve youth in the Round Table Process to enable them to gain more understanding on national development agenda.
- Matters relating to adolescent girls are cross sectoral and they will need to be addressed in a multi-sectoral manner. This also applies to other vulnerable groups.

Group 2 – Roadmap & Guidance Note for the 2018 (Special Session) Round Table Meeting

Description	Comments (in addition to what highlighted in the draft 2018 RTIM Roadmap and Guidance Note) and linking to SWGs when applicable
1. Overall aim	Midterm review of NSEDP integrating LDC and SDG

	reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep discussions open, interactive, and leading to concrete concrete outcomes and results
2. Proposed overarching theme	Midterm review, LDC graduation, should be the focus for pre-consultations to guide high level RTIM discussions
3. Key focused areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic • Human/Social • Environment • Cross cutting theme of governance and Rule of Law • Financing for Development (DP and government public program budgets) avoiding pledging
4. Format	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Propose a full day for technical discussions, with panel discussions in the morning and free time in the afternoon (to consolidate findings/recommendations) During this time people can visit development exhibitions • Shift from presentation to moderation of discussions (possibly in smaller groups then bring back to plenary) • Have more structure – do avoid duplicative pre-consultation discussions and have some concrete steps to make it more meaningful. • Time management is important to ensure all sessions have equal opportunity for discussion • Development exhibitions are useful – have small presentations at site of exhibitions in parallel with what is happening inside
5. Location	Back in Vientiane capital
6. Field visits	Find a different format – possibly smaller groups or organize visits before/after the regular RTIM schedule Maybe have them throughout the year – can be sector specific
7. Development cooperation and other related matters	Include a session during special high level meeting on CSOs and the new decree: what it means for development planning

Some general comments in additional to the presentation by the group are:

- There is a need to look at roles of SWGs carefully and forward to the RTP secretariat
- Migration is a cross cutting issue that needs to be considered by all SWGs' work plan. IOM is committed to work with various partners. In this regard, the Government also views that youth employment and migration are important issues and Government and DPs need to work together during the remaining period of the 8th NSEDP.

IV. Closing and follow up actions

Key points and follow up actions as highlighted by the Chair and Co-Chair of the 2018 RTP Retreat are:

1. Stakeholders are committed to ensure better linkage between the Round Table Process and the Sector Work Group mechanism. To have substantive dialogue for better results and outcomes, it is important to hear from various partners as it will provide us different perspectives on development issues. Therefore, consultations through various platforms particularly meetings of chairs and co-chairs of SWG, meetings of SWG secretariat and the RTP secretariat, pre-consultations and other events play an important role and will contribute to the success of the RTM.
2. Given the success of the last RTIMs, we will need to work harder to take the RTP to the next level and make it more meaningful to meet the dynamic development challenges. Government and partners will need to continue to enhance the impact of development cooperation on the lives of people on the ground.
3. The RTP Secretariat will report all comments, recommendations and suggestions made during the RTP retreat to the National Steering Committee on the Round Table Process for further guidance. Themes and key topics, format, structure and similar issues will be decided by the National Steering Committee and communicated to all partners.
4. This year's RTM is an important one as it is organised in the mid-point of the implementation of the 8th NSEDP. In addition, various important milestones are to be made in 2018. Therefore, the Government, development partners and other stakeholders will work closely together to ensure the RTM maximizes support for the remaining implementation period of the 8th NSEDP and provides suggestions for the formulation of the 9th NSEDP which is a transition period for the LDC graduation.
5. SWGs play a key role not only in preparing the RTM but also implementing and monitoring the recommendations as per the PM's instruction. Therefore, it is important that the 2018 roadmap/guidance note and other related information is shared with SWG secretariats through effective and meaningful communication channels. Vice versa, information on SWGs and their key substantive matters will need to be shared with the RTP secretariat to facilitate effective cross-sectoral coordination.

Annex 1 - Agenda of the 2018 Round Table Process Retreat

2018 Retreat on the Round Table Process MPI Conference Room (Level 6), 14th February 2018

AGENDA

08:30 – 09:00	Registration
09:00 – 09:10	Opening remarks <i>H.E. Dr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment</i>
09:10 – 09:20	Remarks <i>Ms. Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative</i>
09:20 – 09:35	Presentation on follow up actions of 2017 Round Table Implementation Meeting's Key Discussion Points, and Roadmap & Guidance Note for the 2018 Round Table Meeting <i>By Mr. Sysomphorn Phetdaoheung, Deputy Director General of International Cooperation Department/Ministry of Planning and Investment</i>
09:35 – 10:05	Plenary discussion
10:05 – 10:20	Coffee/Tea Break
10:20 – 11:50	Parallel group discussions (2 groups) (1) – Follow up actions of 2017 RTIM's key discussion points and linking with Sector Working Groups (2) - Roadmap/concept for the 2018 RTM
11:50 – 12:00	Presentations from the two group discussions (5 minutes each)
12:00 – 12:20	Plenary discussion
12:20 – 12:25	Remarks <i>Ms. Kaarina Immonen, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative</i>
12:25 – 12:30	Summing Up and Closing Remarks <i>H.E. Dr. Kikeo Chanthaboury, Deputy Minister of Planning and Investment</i>

Annex 2 - 2017 RTIM Key Discussion Points

1. Review of the 8th NSEDP and Priorities for 2018

- Participants presented and discussed progress on the implementation of the 8th NSEDP, including for Champasak province, and identified priorities for the year ahead. In overall terms, there is a strong sense that good progress has been made since the 2015 High-Level Round Table Meeting, and that Lao PDR is on the right path of development, as it moves forward with the implementation of the 8th NSEDP.

2. LDC Graduation and SDG Integration

- Regarding LDC graduation and SDG integration, one of the four priority topics selected for this year, discussions proved timely.
- There was optimism that Lao PDR would succeed in its goal of graduation and that a smooth transition would be supported by development partners. It was particularly interesting to note the progress towards the SDGs and LDC graduation - not only at the national level but also at the provincial level, as presented by Champasak province, and as witnessed during the field visit organized to three different sites in the province.
- Participants noted that even with LDC graduation, vulnerabilities will remain. Indeed, the impressive and sustained growth should continue and translate even more rapidly into human assets and social welfare gains for Lao citizens. Hence, it will be important to retain a focus on human assets through increased levels of investment in nutrition, in health and in education.
- Additionally, participants highlighted that a continued stronger focus on the poor, vulnerable and more remote rural communities will support inclusive development, reflecting the full diversity of the Lao population. Related to this, the problem with UXO contamination was raised, highlighting the joint efforts by the Government and the development partners towards the achievement of the national SDG 18.
- The RTIM benefited from the attendance of a senior UNCTAD expert, who underlined that Lao PDR has made the right policy choices and is therefore progressing well towards LDC graduation. In this context, participants look forward to the Review by the Committee for Development Policy in 2018.

3. Private Sector and Growth

- Regarding private sector and growth, the second priority topic at the round table, it was agreed that the role of the private sector is central to our development partnership dialogue. The private sector creates jobs, reduces poverty and contributes to domestic resource mobilization through taxation. The private sector's role in making growth inclusive, sustainable and poverty reducing in its impact, is our ultimate shared objective.
- Participants noted that an economic diversification strategy would be essential, supported by a national human resources and skills development strategy, aligned to the drivers and goals of diversification.
- Development partners were encouraged by the steps taken on rule of law, transparency and predictability in order to provide a level playing field between all investors. A holistic Government approach was suggested to strengthen the enabling environment for the private sector. The continued resolve of the Government to engage in reforms on these areas will be crucial, based on international good practice and based on consultations with all stakeholders.
- Delegates noted that sustained attention to the implementation and enforcement of legal and regulatory - including tax and environmental - frameworks, remains

critical to attract high quality investors, to improve Lao PDR's ranking on 'ease of doing business' as directed by you.

- Participants recommended that the process for assessing potential investments should be made more rigorous, to ensure their social, economic and fiscal returns are maximized for the benefit of people and any environmental impact minimized in support of the SDG agenda. The overall quality of investment was stressed as being critical to assess.

4. Human Skills and Training

- Regarding human skills and training, the third priority area, it was emphasized that investment in this area is fundamental to help drive development and long-term growth, as so many examples in the region highlight. Development partners will be happy to collaborate with the Government in planning for national skills development, being more responsive to private sector demands and using ongoing consultation mechanisms with the private sector in this context.
- Further coordination and capacity development for key training institutions was encouraged, as well as improved labour market data and analysis to provide the basis for evidence-based decision making.
- Training programmes that reach the most disadvantaged groups and are flexible enough to provide skills relevant to them would contribute to ensuring no one is left behind.
- While progress was acknowledged on human resources in the health and education sectors, it was agreed that enhancing the quality of teachers and health professionals will get priority attention.
- Furthermore, the transition from primary to secondary education would benefit from greater consideration. Indeed, special focus will be put on the education survival rates of adolescent girls, thereby enabling them to make informed choices. Such continued efforts will result in a positive impact on poverty reduction and social conditions, whereby girls are also less likely to enter into early marriage and child birth.

5. South-South and Triangular Cooperation

- With regard to the fourth priority topic of the round table, development partners expressed significant interest in exploring opportunities for South-South and Triangular Co-operation in line with the Vientiane Declaration of 2015. Good practices and development solutions are in abundance and transferrable within the ASEAN region.
- It was highlighted that South-South and Triangular cooperation is a 'two-way street' in that Lao PDR can benefit greatly from the experiences of other countries, and that there are areas where Lao PDR's experience will be valuable for other countries. It will be important to strengthen and enhance the existing institutional arrangements to identify and make best use of such opportunities. This would help to ensure that South-South and Triangular Cooperation is demand-based, nationally owned and led and above all mutually beneficial.

6. Macro-economic and Fiscal Management

- Participants acknowledged that macro-economic stability and the prudent management of public sector finances set the context for private sector investment, which underpins SDG and LDC graduation progress.
- The Government's determination for careful oversight over public spending and debt, alongside implementation of domestic revenue reforms and transparency over the budget, and maintaining a competitive exchange rate and a stable financial sector, was acknowledged and underscored for future development cooperation, as

it positively contributes to the investment environment. This is particularly the case since foreign investment banks place a premium on these factors when deciding to provide loans and blended financing. Opportunities in South-South Cooperation could also be aligned with private sector investments.

7. The development partnership

- Participants recognized that civil society has an important role to play in livelihoods, access to services and finance for the most vulnerable communities. Yet it is felt that the procedures established for governing their operations are at risk of limiting civil society's contribution as a partner in development. In addition, partnerships between INGOs and NPAs should be encouraged.
- On the draft ODA Decree, participants welcomed the opportunity for further consultations, to reflect on how to enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation and optimize the flow of ODA, which is a shared concern of the Government and Development Partners. A regular exchange of information on ODA will facilitate the collaboration.

8. Land Management

- Related to land management, the Government was commended for the progress in the Land Law Revision which heralds an enhancement for land management, tenure, security and compensation. This helps underline the centrality of land as an asset, in particular for the poor.

9. Illicit Activities

- Related to illicit activities, the Government was commended for its efforts to reduce corruption, illegal wild life trade and illegal logging. Indications of progress on preventing contraband goods were also welcomed. It was noted that this remains a challenge in the rural areas in particular.
- The RTIM received a request to have the issue of wildlife trafficking brought within the scope of the Round Table mechanism. Eradicating wildlife trafficking would be of enormous benefit for the global image of Lao PDR and will also directly contribute to the achievement of the relevant SDGs.

10. Statistical Data

- On statistics, participants highlighted that improved disaggregated data, especially by gender, and overall statistics of high quality would strengthen evidence-based policymaking and provide the foundation for SDG monitoring, reporting and dissemination.

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