



Roadmap & Guidance Note

2018 Round Table Meeting (2018 RTM)

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Ministry of Planning and Investment
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I. Introduction – From 2017 RTIM

The Round Table Process including Sector Work Groups (SWGs) continues to stimulate substantive policy dialogue on the country's development agenda, while seeking to strengthen development effectiveness and aid coordination in the country. In particular, it has been providing key recommendations for strengthening national policies and actions by the Government of Lao PDR (GOL) and its Development Partners (DPs) toward enhancement of the human impact of development cooperation.

Over the past few years, the Round Table Process has been strengthened through a number of complementary aspects. Among others, for instance,

- There has been a strong trust and relationship established between the Government and Development Partners including other partners such as private sector, international Non-Government Organizations (INGOs), Non-Profit Associations (NPAs), and other stakeholders.
- Structure and format of the Round Table Meeting (RTM)/Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM) have also been revitalised to meet increasingly dynamic nature of development cooperation in the country.
- We have witnessed improved space for 'dialogue' within the design and structure of the RTM/RTIM agenda. This takes place formally in the main meeting, supported by technical and focussed dialogue in the pre-consultation, as well as the opportunity for informal networking and dialogue afforded on the field trips and development exhibition. In addition, there have been great efforts to pursue an open dialogue.
- There has also been a commitment to the RTM/RTIM pre-consultation process. The past two years' pre-consultations have 'extended the brand' of the RTP by providing avenues of in-depth policy dialogue which has generated important recommendations to the main meeting.
- Holding the RTIMs in the provinces brings a refreshing dimension to the process and enables delegates to visit project sites relevant to the topics under discussion.
- A great effort has also been made for reaching agreement on the agenda for the RTM at least six months prior to it through consultation between the Government of Lao PDR (GOL) and Development Partners (DPs) – including preparations and updates through the Chairs & Co-chairs mechanism.

The latest Round Table Implementation Meeting on 22 and 23 November 2017 in Champasak Province (2017 RTIM) was broadly perceived as a success by Government and its partners, inter alia due to the frank and open discussions, the continuity from last year's RTIM, the inclusive nature, the comprehensive preparations and the concrete outcomes. Key recommendations from the 2017 RTIM (as per Annex 1) have been translated into an instruction of the Prime Minister to line ministries, provinces and agencies concerned. To implement these recommendations, it needs greater partnership across development cooperation spectrums for the remaining period of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020).

With the recent success, 2018 is an important year for Lao PDR as it is not only a year promoted as a 'Visit Laos' Year but also it is a year for various important milestones such as:

- Mid-term review of the 8th NSEDP,
- The LDC review in March 2018,
- Preparation of the SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR) to be presented at the High Level Political Forum on SDGs in July 2018,

- A review of the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VDCAP) in light of the third global survey on partnership for effective development cooperation,
- Preparation for the next National Human Development Report, and
- Finalisation of various national surveys such as labour survey, LSIS and others to support monitoring and reporting on progress made on implementation of national development agenda.

For the 2018 Round Table Meeting, it is also a mid-point toward the High-Level Round Table Meeting to be organised in 2020. Keeping these significant milestones in mind, it might be strategic outcome to organise the 2018 Round Table Implementation Meeting as a Special Ad-hoc High-Level Round Table Meeting.

II. 2018RTM – Aim and Over-arching Theme

2.1 Overall aim:

The overall aim of the 2018 Round Table Meeting (RTM) is:

1. 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) (<https://rtm.org.la/about/the-vientiane-declaration/>).
2. 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).

2.2 Proposed over-arching theme of the 2018 RTM:

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 Development Countries (LDC) status.

2.3 Initial ideas for 2018 RTM – format, agenda and location

Building on the constructive momentum of the past few years, it will be important to plan early for the theme for the 2018 RTM. Major activities already taking place in 2018 include: Voluntary National Review on the SDGs, the LDC review, 8th NSEDP Mid-Term Review (MTR), ‘Visit Laos’ 2018 and VDCAP implementation survey and the global survey on partnership for effective development cooperation. Hence, the following may be considered to build on this momentum, these themes and add further coherence to the approach being taken:

- **8th NSEDP Mid-Term Review (MTR):** A dedicated session on the MTR – Lessons Learned & Recommendations.

- **SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR) and LDC Review:** A further dedicated Review on SDG progress and the LDC review findings (this is the de-facto ‘standing item’ on the agenda)
- **Financing for Development and Public Financial Management:** A financial overview at the MTR of the 8th NSEDP which would include both public (national and international), and private investment (Lao and foreign). This could include a stock take to date as well as projections and aspirations for the second half of the plan. From the public finance perspective, it would include issues such as the macro-economic framework, national budget, tax reforms and revenue generation. It could highlight Gov’t progress on transparency and corruption. From the private sector, it could include volumes of investment and projections.
- **Economic Diversification** – Presentation and discussion on this item, as one of the key criterion for LDC graduation would be timely. What are the key areas for economic diversification in Lao PDR? It is known that tourism and hydro-power are two sectors, with agro-food processing (including coffee) as possible third. What are the key enablers needed to support the rapid emergence of these sectors and how can development partners assist? In the year of ‘visit Lao 2018’ it would be excellent to feature these selected economic drivers of the Lao economy and discuss the next steps that would enable these sectors to succeed in an increasingly competitive ASEAN community. The four or five areas could be ideal for pre-consultation topics.

In terms of **2018 RTM location**, if budget is available, it will be strategic to give consideration to giving an additional stimulus to the 2018 RTM by hosting it in a province which could accommodate participants nation-wide and those outside the country. Particularly, a consideration could be where Laos could also gain further awareness for its tourism work and where it has the infrastructure in place to hold a higher-level meeting, given the important mid-point juncture of the 8th NSEDP. If budget is more limited, consideration could be organizing the 2018 RTM in Vientiane and field visits could be arranged in provinces in partnerships with different partners who are already active in certain provinces.

III. Discussions, Consultations and Coordination at Sector Working Group Level

3.1 Outcome based work plan

All SWGs have been requested to create outcome based work plans. This requires –
- identifying actions/activities/initiatives contributing towards the achievement of sector outcomes and outputs (some of those highlighted in i) the 8th NSEDP M&E framework, ii) SDG indicators, and iii) RTIM key policy recommendations.

3.2 Updated Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the working groups need to be more focused on outcomes to be achieved. It also needs to be made explicit, which national level outcome(s) a working group would contribute to. The outcomes of a working group could include issues papers on certain topics, (sub)sector or thematic strategies, joint understanding on how to address specific issues, or an options paper to be considered at higher levels. The

outcome(s) expected of each working group is guided by the RTM/RTIM follow up matrix. The focus of SWG reporting will be on the specific outcomes achieved.

3.3 Outcome based sectoral progress report

With what highlighted above, SWGs are requested to report and update on status of each action within their portfolios. To help and guide SWGs in preparing the progress report (See Annex 2 for reporting template). **Please share sectoral progress report with the National Secretariat of the Round Table Process by end of 29th September 2018.**

3.4 Calendar of events

Time tables with meeting dates for the RTM/RTIM and SWG meetings should be communicated to all at the beginning of the year. This will create predictability and make communications and focus on outcomes easier. To help facilitate this, a 2018 RTIM roadmap/timeframe is documented under section IV of this note. Therefore, SWGs are required to submit their calendar of events to DIC/MPI on a quarterly basis, to be reflected on the RTP website <https://rtm.org.la/>.

3.5 Organisation of SWG meetings at different levels and key messages for 2018 RTM

All SWGs are required to convene and actively organize their sector consultations and carrying out substantive activities. While it is important that thematic sector issues are discussed during SWGs meetings, the RTP Secretariat would like to recommend that individual SWG identify key messages at sectoral level which could be used to stimulate discussions during 2018 RTM.

3.6 RTP Secretariat to meet with an individual SWG Secretariat

There is still a need to strengthen the 'policy dialogue' efforts within the SWG meetings, as many are reported to be rather stifled by process, speeches and protocol. Further efforts are needed in this regard, perhaps through the leadership of SWG secretariat. To help facilitate coordination across sectors and create common understanding on RTM preparation, DIC/the RTP Secretariat intends to visit individual SWG Secretariat (both chairs and co-chairs focal points). A request for meeting will be sent out well in advance to improve its coordination.

3.7 Meeting of chairs and co-chairs of SWGs and other related partners

DIC expects to organize at regular meetings of Chairs and Co-Chairs of SWGs leading up to the 2018 RTM. These meetings will focus on the progress of the preparation for the 2018 RTM and discussions over key issues for clarification and common understanding.

3.8 Development exhibition

Development exhibition will be organized as side event during the 2018 RTM. All SWGs are invited to display their activities contributing to sustainable development and inclusive growth. The National Secretariat of the Round Table Process will organize a briefing session with all SWGs and relevant stakeholders at least a month before the 2018 RTM to go through all necessary arrangements for this side event.

IV. Key preparatory activities and consultations leading up to the 2018 RTM

4.1 Roadmap and Timeframe

Key activities	2018 Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
1. Preparation of national responses for the mutual accountability survey	January	DIC/MPI
2. Preparation of the 2018 RTM Road Map and Guidance Note	January	DIC/MPI
3. Dissemination of the Prime Minister Instruction on implementation of the 2017 RTM policy recommendations	February – March	
4. Preparation for the mid-term review of the 8 th NSEDP which is coinciding with the Visit Laos Year campaign	January – September	DOP/MPI
5. Preparation for the LDC review	Jan – March 2018	DOP/MPI, LSB/MPI, DIC/MPI and DIO/MOFA
6. Meet the press	Quarterly	
7. Preparation of the Lao SDG Voluntary National Review (VNR) report (more detailed information, please refer to the Lao SDG VNR work-plan)	Jan-July	DIO/MOFA
8. Series of SWG meetings	Throughout the year	
9. SWG outcome based Annual Work Plan (AWP), calendar of events and updated Terms of Reference	Early February	SWG Secretariats
10. Round Table Process Retreat	Early February	DIC/MPI
11. Meeting of the National Steering Committee on Round Table Process	Mid-March	DIC/MPI
12. Finalization of the 2018 RTM Roadmap and Guidance Note (This includes decision made on a province to host the 2018 RTM, format, key agenda items and other key important aspects)	End of March	DIC/MPI
13. Dissemination of the 2018 RTM guidance note/roadmap to all SWGs and relevant stakeholders	End of March	DIC/MPI
14. RTM preparatory meetings and discussions with the province to host	As often as needed	DIC/MPI and representatives from a

Key activities	2018 Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
the 2018 RTM		province to host the 2018 RTIM
15. Roll out of the 2018 monitoring round of the global partnership for effective development cooperation (Note: this will be done in line with the roll out of the first monitoring of the VDCAP)	May	DIC/MPI
16. Background briefing on the 2018 LDC review	June – August	DIO/MOFA, DOP/MPI and LSB/MPI
17. High Level Political Forum on SDGS	July	DIO/MOFA
18. Meeting of Chairs and Co-Chairs of Sector Working Groups (Policy level)	Quarterly (as often as needed)	DIC/MPI
19. Meetings of SWG Secretariats and RTP Secretariat (Technical level)	Every two months	DIC/MPI and SWG Secretariats
20. Preparation of Foreign Aid Report	Jan-Oct	DIC/MPI
21. 2018 RTM invitation set out	At least two months before the actual RTM	
22. SWG report	October	SWG Secretariats
23. 2018RTM Background Document	At least two weeks before the actual RTM	DIC/MPI
24. RTM Pre-consultations	At least a month before the actual RTM	
25. 2017 RTM and Debriefing with the Prime Minister	Mid to End of November	

Please note that updated information on activities, consultations and other related matters about the Round Table Process including Sector Working Groups will be published through the recent revamped RTP website (<http://rtm.org.la>) on a regular basis.

4.2 Focal points within DIC/MPI

For all matters relating to the overall preparation of the 2017 RTIM, please contact:

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DIC focal points for SWG related work

DIC focal points have been tasked to facilitate the effective linkage between work of SWGs and the Round Table Process in terms of both substantive and process matters. If any queries and questions about the contribution of SWGs to the Round Table Process, please kindly refer to DIC officials as listed below:

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Annex 1 – Key recommendation from 2017 RTIM

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. Mid Term Review of the 8th NSEDP will highlight achievements made so far and priorities for the remaining period, particularly key areas for the formulation of the 9th 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 a role to play in the implementation of NSEDP. Therefore, the Government is providing all enabling conditions to facilitate their work as partner in development in accordance with laws and regulations of the Lao PDR. It is important to ensure effectiveness, monitoring and reporting of programme and project implementation of civil society, in accordance to the National Socio-Economic Development Plan.
- 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.

Annex 2 – Template for SWG reporting

Overview of Performance of Sector Working Groups and Sub-Working Groups in 2018

Name of Sector Working Groups:

SWG Chair and Co-Chairs:

SWG Secretariat Focal Points:

- **Government Officials:**
- **Development Partners:**

Technical Supporting Staffs:

- **Government Officials:**
- **Development partners:**

(Please also provide all information in the same format for sub-working groups)

Part 1 – Contribution of Sector Working Groups and sub-working groups for achievement sector outcomes/outputs (Maximum 4 pages)

Discussions should cover (but not limited to)

1. Actions/activities/initiatives – carried out or in the process of formulation
2. What are actions/activities/initiatives are trying to achieve
3. Mechanisms in place or planned to take place to implement those actions/activities/initiatives
4. Challenges and opportunities

Part 2 - Coordination, communication and outreach activities within the sector and across Sector Working Groups (Maximum 2 pages)

Part 3 – Supports (tangible and intangible) received in 2018 for the operationalization of Sector Working Group (Maximum 2 pages)