

Opening remarks
By Vice Minister of Planning and Investment
Meeting of Chairs and Co-Chairs of Sector Working Groups
28th September 2020
(Please check against delivery)

- Ms. Sara Sekkenes, UN Resident Coordinator
 - Ministers/Vice Ministers (if no attendance, please drop this line)
 - Director Generals/Deputy Director Generals
 - Representatives from line ministries
 - Ambassadors/Head of International Agencies
 - Distinguished Guests
 - Ladies and Gentlemen
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- On behalf of Ministry of Planning and Investment, it is my great pleasure to chair and convene this first meeting of 2020 for Chairs and Co-Chairs of Sector Working Groups and sub-Sector Working Groups.
 - I am glad that we could meet today to plan, discuss and consult about the preparation for the upcoming Round Table Meeting taking into various development agenda items for Lao PDR.
 - As you know, 2020 is the most difficult circumstance of our life time due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic which has already imposed a major shock on Lao PDR and our neighbors, with effects that are likely to be felt for years to come. The impact of this pandemic comes on the top of exiting challenges of our

country due to the two consecutive years (2018 and 2019) of major natural disasters.

- So far, the measures undertaken by Lao Government have proven successful in containing the spread of the virus with relatively small number of cases which have already been recovered. However, impact of this pandemic has brought shocks to a number of areas, in particular, among others:
 - Following years of GDP growth averaging in excess of 7 percent, growth in 2020 will be severely impacted. In this regard, the effects of COVID-19 require a structured process to consider necessary adjustments to plans whilst they are being developed, both to ensure that they focus on the right priorities, and that targets remain achievable.;
 - Labor-intensive sectors and those linked to global and regional value chains have been particularly affected. Tourism-related sectors, including transport, food and accommodation services and the retail trade have been hard hit due to fewer tourists from China and other neighboring countries. We expect this trend to continue for the remainder of 2020 due to mitigation measures adopted in response to COVID-19 in other countries as well as the continued closure of Lao borders.
 - Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly vulnerable in the current crisis. Supply chain disruptions have caused delays in delivering inputs to export-oriented manufacturing industries and the construction sector. Export-oriented industries have also been significantly hit by lower external demand;

- With regards to the labor market, a sharp drop in demand has led to job losses in tourism-related sectors, which account for 11 percent of total employment. In order to help those affected, the Government of Lao PDR is providing social insurance support to around 96,000 affected workers who are members of social insurance scheme.
- Taking these into great consideration, it is extremely crucial for the Government of the Lao PDR to carefully proceed with the drafting of the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan 2021-2025 which will serve as the main document for the upcoming Round Table Meeting.
- In particular, I would like to highlight that 9th NSEDP is being developed in highly unusual circumstances as our macro socio-economic challenges already existed before the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery may take years and we need to pay great attention to key measures such as:
 - The need to prioritise among priorities. It is important to make smart decisions to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak and foster economic resilience.
 - Consider - the changing core assumptions and sequencing of investment programmes in the short, medium and long term and selecting investments that yield the highest returns.
 - Importance of ensuring meaningful and realistic results, targets and indicators and an effective M&E framework to monitor and measure progress.

- Multi-dimensional impact, need multi-sectoral solutions, and we need alignment of strategies and cooperation from all stakeholders and partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Keeping these in mind, I would like to reiterate the importance of today meeting as it is a forum to brief each other on all the preparation done so far and what to do next to ensure that we share common understanding on the Round Table Meeting which will be organized sometimes early in 2021.
- Due to COVID challenges, I would like to propose that this upcoming Round Table Meeting is a special meeting not a high level as we intended to call it. It will be extremely difficult for high ranking HQ officials to travel during this time. Therefore, this will be a forum for our national government agencies and those resident development partners who will participate in the meeting.
- While this is the first meeting of this year, I am pleased that I have kept all partners informed about work through various communication letters sent out from MPI a few times so far.
- I am in particular delighted to share with you that our National Steering Committee met in July to review and give guidance on various activities leading up to the upcoming RTM taking COVID19 into great consideration.
- The National Steering Committee on the Round Table Process approved the RTIM concept and roadmap and stressed the importance of, among others:

- First, ownership and alignment of development assistance reflecting reality on the ground
 - Second, theme of the RTM which need to reflect
 - the preparation of the 9th NSEDP based key results from final assessment of the 8th NSEDP and recommendations from last year RTIM,
 - preparation of the next SDG report and LDC review, and
 - Third, Government priorities and supports by partners—reflection on past cooperation and way forward in light of recent national achievements
 - Fourth, Multi stakeholder partnership for development results including ensuring that national development agenda is effectively translated into concrete actions at local level.
 - Sixth, Background Document and other important reports which need to be prepared well in advance through greater participation of partners.
- The Committee has tasked DIC/MPI and Line Ministries to work closely with all national and international partners to ensure the success of RTM despite the COVID19 challenge.
 - We also need to pay great attention to important steps to create common and coordinated work at the sectoral and provincial levels which need to have a clear link with the Round Table Meeting.
 - I would like to encourage all of us who are here today, and those whom you will consult with after today's meeting, to provide comments, suggestions, and recommendations on how we could

further narrow down broad ranges of issues for various dialogues leading up to the Round Table Meeting.

- In particular, I have asked DIC/MPI to work closely with Sector Working Groups to have more strategic consultations leading to the RTM.
- I would like to stress that the 9th NSEDP will be endorsed by the new session of the National Assembly which will be later in 2021. Therefore, the outcomes of the Round Table Meeting strategically guide the finalization of the 9th NSEDP including its implementation and longer term development vision toward 2030 and beyond.
- Having said this, I would like to urge all partners to provide comments, suggestions, and recommendations based on the guidance that we have shared with you earlier and use the current draft version of the 9th NSEDP as a base for your comments and suggestions.
- I will stop here and before I end my remarks, I encourage all of us today to be frank, and provide constructive feedback in a coordinated, inclusive and forward looking manner.
- On behalf of Ministry of Planning and Investment, I would like to thank all of you here today and those who provide inputs in one way or another but could not make it today.
- My sincere thanks to you co-chair today, the UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Sara Sekkenes and her team and all chairs and co-chairs of Sector Working Groups, sub-Sector Working Groups and other partners for your participation and active engagement despite

all challenges that we have been all facing together during this COVID time.

- I officially open today meeting and hope that today meeting will be another platform to bring all of us closer and identify various key important elements for enhancing our partnership for the 9th NSEDP including the achievement of the SDGs and LDC graduation.
- Thank you very much for your attention.