



Guidance Note

13th High Level Round Table Meeting (13th HL-RTM)

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I. About this document

This document is a guidance note for the preparation of the upcoming 13th High Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM), scheduled to take place towards the end of 2021 in Vientiane Capital, Lao PDR. The HL-RTM offers a platform to discuss development challenges and solutions between Government and development partners. It aims to outline expectations and objectives of the 13th HL-RTM to ensure the successful preparation for the event by the Roundtable Process (RTP) Secretariat and the Sector Working Groups (SWGs).

A final confirmation on date, time, and venue of the meeting will be announced at a later stage. The formal invitation of the 13th HL-RTM will be sent out in mid-October 2021.

This draft guidance note will be updated based on consultations with relevant partners during the RTP Retreat. The guidance note will then be finalised and approved by the National Steering Committee on the Round Table Process in Lao PDR (RTP NSC) chaired by the Prime Minister.

Please refer to Figure 1 for a summary of the preparation process for the 13th HL-RTM.

II. National Planning and Socioeconomic Context during the time of COVID-19

Several elements of context are presented to guide the successful preparation of the HL-RTM. They should be updated as the situation in country evolves, especially with regards to COVID-19.

A. National planning and socioeconomic context

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2020 and 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, human capital, infrastructure development and the transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve.

The world is currently facing serious outbreak of COVID-19, which is an immediate and long-term challenge for economic development for us to respond and recover. In Lao PDR, achievements and efforts to eradicate poverty and progress in the implementation of SDGs within the framework of the 8th and 9th NSEDP has been severely impacted. The country has only 9 years left for the fulfilment of SDGs by 2030, with the slogan “leaving no one behind”.

During the period covered by the 9th NSEDP, Lao PDR will also see windows of opportunity in terms of investments in human capital, regional integration, and fight against climate change and environmental degradation.

Simultaneously, access to the necessary development finance to accelerate progress is becoming increasingly challenging on the top of existing issues ranging from revenue shortfall to repeated shocks stretching coping capacity.

B. COVID-19 implications on the Round Table Process

With restrictions in place throughout 2021 so far, COVID-19 has been and will continue to be a challenge for RTM preparations.

The schedule of various Sector Working Group and sub-Sector Working Group meetings has been impacted. Planned retreats for the 2020 Round Table Process, had to be postponed. The decision was made in accordance with the announcement issued by the Government on mass gatherings, prevention, and mitigation efforts of COVID-19. Planned consultations in 2021 will continue to be dependent to the evolution of the pandemic and likely held online.

C. Coordination structures

Coordination of Government, development partners, civil society, private sector, and other stakeholders' contributions has traditionally taken place through the national Round Table process including the Sector Working Group mechanism. Mobilisation efforts will continue to be channelled through the SWGs to ensure ownership on both sides.

However, noting the structure of the 9th NSEDP, which has been developed with 6 cross-sectoral outcome areas where most SDGs have been integrated, ensuring the meaningful contribution of SWGs to the RTM will necessitate relevant matching of the SWGs against outcomes and outputs of the 9th NSEDP and SDGs.

D. Development assistance

A series of development partners, including the Luxembourg, the United States, Switzerland, the European Union, the UN, and other DPs are currently finalising new overarching and programmatic strategies in support of the 9th NSEDP policy priorities.

III. Objectives of the 13th High Level Round Table Meeting (13th HL-RTM)

The main focus of the 13th High Level Round Table Meeting (13th HL-RTM) is on finalisation of the 9th *National Socio-Economic Development Plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025) and means of the implementation*. More specifically, it aims to provide a forum of genuine dialogue and highlighting of:

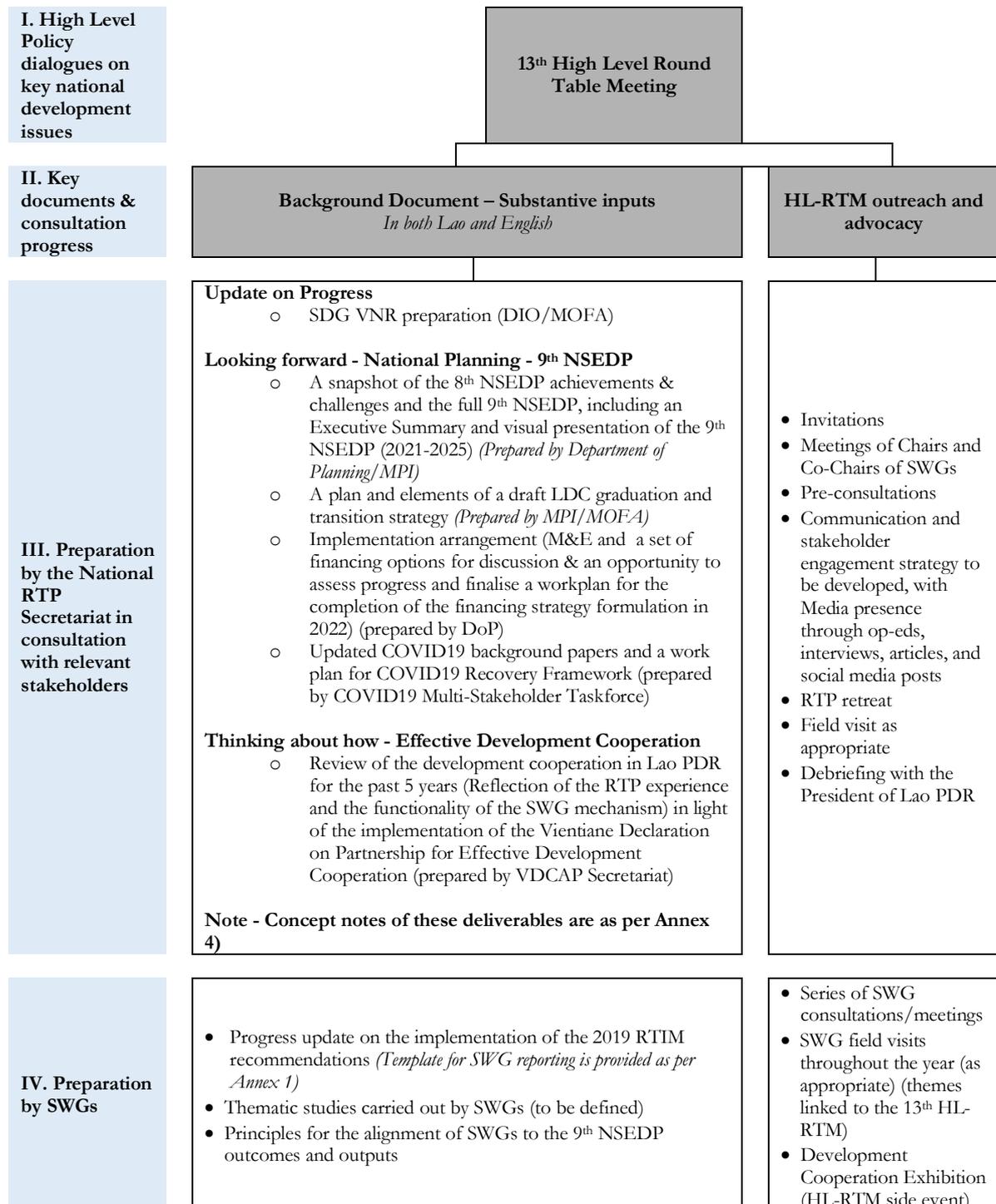
1. **A brief progress update (taking stock) exercise**, looking at the progress to date, lessons learnt, challenges and opportunities, through the Voluntary National Review (VNR) which subsequently inform fundamental and key priorities/goals of the 9th NSEDP;
 2. **Looking forward**, the national development priorities, expressed in the 9th NSEDP, and necessary policy adjustments and measures to take in the current context, as well as indicative resource requirements for the effective implementation of the 9th NSEDP. This includes necessary technical preparations for the LDC graduation Smooth Transition Strategy 2026 and a COVID-19 recovery plans in 2022; and
 3. **Thinking about how**, reflections on key achievements and lessons learnt during the past years of the country implementation of development cooperation and effectiveness principles and the ways forward, through the VDCAP review.
- Drafts of the following are expected to be available:
 - The main findings of the 2021 SDG Voluntary National Review.
 - The 9th NSEDP, in English and Lao;

- An update of progress towards the development of a financing Strategy providing policy options to meet the financing needs of the 9th NSEDP, feeding on series of structured dialogues with relevant stakeholders, and various assessments of the macroeconomic and financial challenges the country is facing;
- A comprehensive and implementable Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, to track progress against the 9th NSEDP policy priorities;
- Elements of a draft strategy to prepare for LDC graduation by 2026;
- Updated background documents along the following five thematic areas:
 - Financing for sustainable development and effective development cooperation;
 - Trade and private sector, value chains and tourism;
 - Green growth, resilience and risk management with respect to potential environmental, health, and economic shocks;
 - Manage changes and enhance policy preparedness for decent work;
 - Human capital including health and education.
- The VDCAP review.

The National RTP Secretariat, within the Department of International Cooperation of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, oversees the preparations of and chairs the HL-RTM. The UN Resident Coordinator co-chairs.

IV. Preparation by the National RTP Secretariat in consultation with relevant stakeholders

Figure 1. Summary of the preparation process for the 13th High Level Round Table Meeting (IV and V)



4.1. Background Document – Substantive inputs

To ensure constructive dialogues and informed discussions at the HL-RTM, series of background documents will be prepared in advance of the HL-RTM, with support from Line Ministries, Development Partners, civil society and private sector.

More details are provided below on each category of background documents, **which will be made available in Lao and in English.**

A. Update on progress

- **2nd SDG VNR main findings (DIO/MOFA):** progress against the 2030 Agenda will be presented at the RTM, using the main findings of the 2nd VNR, which was finalized in June 2021.

B. National planning:

- **A snapshot of the 8th NSEDP (2016-2020) achievements:** this will give the HL-RTM participants an overview of past achievements, challenges and measures and areas in need of special focus over the coming years (This will be an integral part of the 9th NSEDP).
- **The Full Report and Executive Summary of the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025):** currently being finalized, the 9th NSEDP will be available in both full and executive summary versions, incl. leaflets and visual presentations.
- **Concept Note for LDC Smooth Transition Strategy (Prepared by MPI/MOFA):** initial ideas for a smooth transition strategy beyond LDC graduation should be available.
- **9th NSEDP implementation arrangement**
 - *A financing strategy for the 9th NSEDP (prepared by DoP):* Access to the necessary development finance to accelerate progress is becoming increasingly challenging, due to various challenges ranging from, among others, revenue collection falling short of expectations, insufficient foreign direct investment and private sector contribution to development progress, unpredictable ODA trends, and repeated shocks stretching coping capacity and limiting the inflow of remittances. As a consequence, the Government of Lao PDR, through the Ministry of Planning and Investment and with the support of the United Nations Joint Programme on Financing Efficiency, has been working on developing the elements for a practical and realistic financing strategy with clear options to ensure access and availability of development finance in support of national development priorities. At the 13th HLRTM, three set of information will be available:
 1. Background documents on diagnostics and on financing options;
 2. A clear process and timeline to finalise the financing strategy;
 3. A variety of communication products (e.g. Op-ed, Q&As, etc.) to sensitise relevant stakeholders and communicate technical knowledge in simple terms to a broader audience.
 - *Me&E framework (prepared by DOP):* Information which will be available ahead of the 13th HL RTM include: a visualisation (either in terms of slides or leaflet) of the

M&E framework; and a short briefing note on main challenges and gaps and potential ways to solve these.

- **Updated COVID19 background papers and a work plan for COVID-19 Recovery Framework (prepared by the COVID19 Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce):** Two key elements will be available: updated background papers building on last year's Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce process; and a workplan as well as a clear mapping of stakeholders that can contribute to the drafting of a COVID-19 recovery strategy.

C. Development Cooperation

- **Review of the development cooperation in Lao PDR for the past 5 years:** VDCAP Mid-Term Review Report

4.2 Outreach and advocacy

- **Pre-consultations**

Pre-consultations, which will be organised in the lead up to the RTM, aim to ensure that all relevant background documents are prepared, and that the RTM objectives are fulfilled. This may include, but are not limited to:

1. Consultations on COVID-19 assessments;
2. Consultations on financing for development;
3. Consultations on LDC Graduation Strategy;
4. Reflections on the 2nd VNR main findings;
5. Pre-RTM VDCAP review meeting.

- **RTP Retreat**

A preparatory retreat, gathering government and development partners, will take place in advance of the RTM, to discuss technical preparations.

- **Meetings of Chairs and Co-Chairs of SWGs**

DIC expects to organize a meeting of Chairs and Co-Chairs of SWGs leading up to the 13th HL-RTM. The meeting will focus on the progress of the preparation for the 13th HL-RTM and discussions over key issues for clarification and common understanding.

- **Invitation and participation**

The 13th HL-RTM invitation package is expected to be sent out in mid-October (one month before the HL-RTM) to all stakeholders. A registration form will be provided and participants will be required to notify a confirmation at least two weeks before the meeting. The HL-RTM participation will be:

- High ranking government officials from central and line Ministries and Provinces;
- High ranking donor representatives [invitation will be sent out to Foreign Affairs Ministries of DPs and Heads of DPs (resident and non-resident in Lao PDR)];

- Private sector [Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry + two International Chamber of Commerce + five national companies (self-selection basis)]; and
 - 1+5 international NGOs (INGO Network + five) and five national NPAs, based on self-selection process.
- **Debriefing with the President of Lao PDR**

The debriefing with the President of Lao PDR will take place after the HL-RTM. It is anticipated that a small group of development partners as per past experience will be representing the donor community for the debriefing with the President. The RTP secretariat will define criteria and inform the delegation on preparation in due course.

- **Communication strategy and stakeholder engagement**

DIC/MPI as the National RTP secretariat will support the communication and stakeholder engagement objectives of the RTP, which are:

1. Ensuring that all participants are duly informed ahead of the HL-RTM;
2. Support necessary pre-consultations;
3. Consultation of all relevant stakeholders on all substantive background documents, and those elements being currently prepared are developed through an inclusive and participatory process;
4. Further the understanding of national development priorities, development context, and the 2030 Agenda.

Arrangements will also need to be in place for a 13th HL-RTM Meet the Press event prior to the meeting. The purpose is to inform the public on the preparation and expectation of the HL-RTM. The invitation will be sent to the media in due time.

V. Actions required by the SWGs

Progress report by SWGs on the implementation of the 2019 RTIM key recommendations (prepared jointly by the Government and development partners – template and guidance attached for your information) should be submitted to the RTP Secretariat (DIC/MPI) by latest **15th October 2021** (please refer to Annex 2 – template of the reporting).

Discussions/consultations at sectoral level and on COVID-19: All SWGs are required to reflect on follow up actions of 2019 RTIM key recommendations and the priorities set for the 13th HL-RTM. Individual SWG should also identify key messages at sectoral level which reflect on the implications of COVID-19 for their plans and priorities.

Discussions / consultations on the re-alignment of SWGs to the 9th NSEDP outcomes and outputs and SDG indicators: pre-consultations should be organised to facilitate the adaptation of development coordination mechanisms to the 9th NSEDP structure. Initial principles for a revision of coordination mechanisms aligned with the 9th NSEDP should be presented at the RTM and have been consulted in advance with the chairs and co-chairs.

Sector Working Groups Work Plan – Actions to be taken in 2021

In line with the Vientiane Declaration, for increased outcome and results orientation within the context of the Round Table Process capably led by the Ministry of Planning

and Investment and the opportunities presented by the SWGs that underpin this process, and to which development partners contribute, we would like to suggest the following actions in the lead up to the HL-RTM – this should at this point be accommodated into the development of SWG annual work plan (guiding template as per Annex 3):

- i. ***Every Sector Working Group*** to agree on at least three measures aimed at strengthening national statistic systems and establishing a robust monitoring system in the respective area, in line with the commitments made throughout 2019, focusing on the national SDG indicators with no baselines to allow better planning and tracking of resources and results of the 8th and 9th NSEDPs. Building more coherence and convergence between SWGs on cross-cutting priorities, such as building human capital, nutrition challenges and disaster risk reduction, and linking national sectoral plans with convergent planning at provincial level should be a priority of the 9th NSEDP.

In addition, SWGs are requested to reflect on the implications of COVID-19 for their plans and priorities.

In particular:

- ii. ***Every Sector Working Group***, in identifying SDG targets and in implementing measures to achieve them within the 9th NSEDP, to confirm its commitment to fiscal consolidation for fiscal stabilization, which is a prerequisite for sustainable socio-economic growth, and to ensure that planning integrates budgeting. This would send a positive signal that Lao PDR is heading in the right direction in its efforts for sustainable LDC graduation.
- iii. ***Every Sector Working Group*** to have more expanded participation of civil society and private sector representatives in the recurrent SWGs meetings to be held at least three times a year and in the overall ongoing Round Table Process, to fully reap the benefits of their contribution towards the sustainable LDC graduation and SDGs implementation.
- iv. ***Every Sector Working Group*** in collaboration with SDG focal point ministries, to map out the national SDGs indicators to which the sector contributes, to ensure that the priority issues laid out in the Groups' Annual Work Plans tackle as many SDG related bottlenecks as possible – including the cross-cutting SDG targets such as on UXO - informing among others, the High-level Round Table Meeting in 2020 and the 2nd Voluntary National Review on the 2030 Agenda implementation due in mid-2021.
- v. ***Health Sector Working Group*** in cooperation with others to systematically review coordination efforts at the local level to improve delivery of maternal and child health services holistically through people-centered approaches to ensure progress towards the national SDG targets. Health SWG is specially requested to highlight key measures and implication of COVID-19.
- vi. ***Education Sector Working Group*** to identify at least three gender-sensitive measures dedicated to acceleration of the SDG targets on quality of education and percentage of students at primary and lower secondary levels having achieved minimum proficiency standards in reading and mathematics.
- vii. ***Macroeconomics Working Group*** to implement at least three tangible measures accelerating achievement of the Ease of Doing Business/Business

environment/Secured environment related SDG targets and setting baseline data for the SDG indicators on tax revenue, labour productivity and disaggregated value of investments respectively.

- viii. **Trade and Private Sector Working Group** to implement at least three tangible measures accelerating achievement of the Ease of Doing Business/Business environment/Secured environment related SDG targets and setting baseline data for the SDG indicators on tax revenue, labour productivity and disaggregated value of investments respectively.
- ix. **Natural Resource and Environment Sector Working Group** to identify clear SDG targets (with baseline data) to be implemented through the National Disaster Recovery Framework and its Action Plan, National Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Green Growth Strategy and propose measures for mainstreaming disaster risk reduction across all sectors.
- x. **Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Working Group** to show tangible progress with regards to (a) setting clear targets within the Green Growth strategy for agriculture commercialization, diversified services and sustainable trade expansion in agriculture products in order to reduce rural poverty; (b) implementation of the current Agriculture Development Strategy 2025 and preparation of the next Strategy with a clear action and investment plan to support transformation of subsistence farmers to commercial farmers, with dedicated measures to enhance adaptation and mitigation to climate change especially among vulnerable farming communities.
- xi. **Sector Group on Illicit Drug Control** to identify at least three gender-sensitive measures targeting SDG indicators on the wellbeing of drug affected communities (SDG3.5) and the overall public security (SDG 5.7, 8.7, 10.7, and SDG16).
- xii. **Sector Group on Infrastructure** to review the Transport Infrastructure Masterplan for priority setting with proper expenditure planning balanced against the desired outcomes within the social sectors in view of the current budget constraints and to agree on creation of a quality control unit within the Government leadership to ensure oversight of all infrastructure development initiatives for a standardized approach for low-cost quality infrastructure across the country.
- xiii. **Governance Sector Working Group**, to contribute in defining governance's outcomes, outputs, targets, and indicators within the 9th NSEDP.
- xiv. **UXO Sector Working Group**, in collaboration with other SWG and SDG focal point ministries, to elaborate on the connections and linkages necessary for mainstreaming SDG 18 including the preparation of SOPs enabling the measurement of the UXO contribution to poverty reduction and sustainable development in Lao PDR.

5.1. Development exhibition

Development exhibition will be organized as side event during the 13th HL-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 actual HL-RTM to go through all necessary arrangements for this side event.

5.2. Field visits prior to the HL RTM

SWGs are encouraged to suggest, take the lead and design field visits which are in line with the concept of the 13th HL-RTM. Different types of projects/programmes (ODA projects, PIP, public-private partnerships, South-South Cooperation, Triangular Cooperation and others as appropriate) will form integral part of the visits. The field visits should be ideally organised at least a month before the HL-RTM. The RTP Secretariat will send out a letter to all SWGs to inform about a concept and rationale behind the organization of the field visits.

VI. Key milestones/consultations leading up to the HL RTM

Key milestones and consultations	Tentative Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
1. Dissemination of the MPI Minister's Instruction on implementation of the 2019 RTM policy recommendations	February/March 2021	DIC/MPI
2. High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and presentation of SDG VNR	July 2021	MOFA/MPI
3. Revision of the 13 th HL-RTM Guidance Note	July-August 2021	DIC/MPI
4. Presentation and finalization of the 9 th NSEDP during the National Assembly 2021	March/April 2021	DOP/MPI
5. Preparation of the 9 th NSEDP implementation arrangement 1. Financing Strategy (Costing and Development Finance Assessment (DFA)) 2. M&E	January – November 2021	DOP/MPI
6. - Report to the National Steering Committee on the Round Table Process to highlight the 13 th HL-RTM Roadmap and Concept - Meeting of the National Steering Committee on the Round Table Process chaired by the Prime Minister. Deputy Prime Minister/Minister of Planning and Investment	February 2021 End of October 2021	DIC/MPI
7. Dissemination of the 13 th HL-RTM Guidance Note to all SWGs and relevant stakeholders and invitation to the RTP retreat	Early October 2021	DIC/MPI
8. Dissemination of the final translated 9 th NSEDP	Early October 2021	
9. VDCAP Secretariat Meeting	16 th September 2021	VDCAP Secretariat
10. RTP Retreat	8 th October 2021	DIC/MPI
11. Meet the press	Early November 2021	DIC/MPI +
12. Meeting of Chairs and Co-Chairs of SWGs	End-October 2021	DIC/MPI
13. Series of SWG meetings	Throughout the years 2020 and 2021	SWG Secretariat

Key milestones and consultations	Tentative Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
14. SWG individual meeting with the RTP Secretariat	20-30 September 2021	DIC/MPI and SWG Secretariat
15. Submission of SWG progress report to DIC/MPI	15 th October 2021	SWG Secretariat
16. HL RTM invitation and agenda sent out	Mid-October 2021	DIC/MPI
<p>17. HL RTM Background Documents to be sent out to all participants</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 8th NSEDP conclusion 2. SDG VNR 3. Updates on 9th NSEDP implementation arrangement (Financing strategy (financial options for discussion) and (Final M&E framework) 4. LDC transition strategy work plan (draft) 5. Updated background papers on COVID19 and a plan for development of recovery framework (draft) 6. VDCAP mid-term review report (2016-2020) 7. ODA implementation review report for the last five years (2016-2020) and ODA direction for the next five years contributing to the implementation of the 9th NSEDP (2021-2025) (draft) 	Early November	DIC/MPI
<p>18. HL-RTM pre-consultation and side events (outcomes to be reported back to the HL RTM)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 8th NSEDP conclusion and 9th NSEDP implementation arrangement (Financing, costing and M&E) (Structure dialogue -one day) 2. SDG VNR Dissemination Workshop/RTM pre-consultation (Plenary discussion – Half a day) 	<p>1st structured dialogue (14-15 October)</p> <p>2nd structured dialogue (Early November)</p> <p>End of October</p>	<p>DOP/MPI</p> <p>DIO/MOFA</p>

Key milestones and consultations	Tentative Timeframe	Key agencies in charge
3. LDC transition strategy work plan (Plenary discussion – Half a day – side event)	Early November	DIO/MOFA
4. COVID 19 recovery plan (five thematic areas – updating background papers in 2020 by COVID19 multi-stakeholder taskforce)	Late October (Thematic Discussions) Early November (Plenary discussion – RTM Side Event)	MPI with line ministries concerned as per the Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce TOR
5. Dissemination of the VDCAP review report (Panel discussion - half a day)	Early November	VDCAP Secretariat
19. 13 th High Level Round Table Meeting (One day high level policy dialogue)	Week of 15 th November 2021	DIC/MPI
20. Debriefing with the President of Lao PDR	Few days after RTM	DIC/MPI

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.

VII. Focal points within DIC/MPI

For all matters relating to the overall preparation of the 13th HL RTM, please contact:

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Annex 1 – Summary of 2019 RTIM key recommendations

I. SDGs, LDC graduation and 9th NSEDP and their link to Round Table Process including Sector Working Groups

1. **The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals:** Various partners commend the Government for the continued commitment and strong ownership of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 17 and its suggested diverse partnerships need be emphasised considering the limited fiscal space for Agenda 2030 faced in many countries, including in Lao PDR, together with the limitations set by the conventional means and methods of official development assistance. Mobilising the globally needed trillions versus the billions of \$ provided in ODA, public and private domestic resource mobilization have become critical for successfully achieving the 2030 Agenda. RTIM participants congratulate the Government for its commitment and prioritization of investments, including through the focus on fiscal consolidation, into the social sectors for building the human capital, such as the ones made under the PM auspices at the Lao Generation 2030 Forum, targeting the most vulnerable groups, such as girls and women, that can help ensure equitable growth so that we leave no one behind.
 - a. In terms of **evidence-based monitoring and reporting of the progress towards the SDGs**, RTIM participants discussed challenges related to coordination and institutional arrangements, ranging from, for instance, the need for a stronger push on the systematic awareness raising at all levels, increased guidance on the inter-linkages of and potential trade-offs between SDGs and expectations from the SDG Focal Points and their more active engagement in the SWG to ensure reporting aligned to relevant SDG indicators (for instance to measure the national commitments made at last week's International Conference on Population and Development - Nairobi summit), including on harmonized reporting on the progress towards the national SDG targets that can help guide future policy making and budgeting processes.
2. **Least Developed Country (LDC) Graduation:** Showing early results, Lao PDR is a front runner for graduation from the “Least Developed Country” status in 2024. The development partners find this year's efforts of the Government in analysing the impact of the graduation remarkable and commendable. Partners stand ready to feed into the preparation of a smooth transition strategy that will help define the new generation of policies fostering productive capacities and structural economic transformation. The smooth transition strategy is also important to cushion against external shocks, for instance, in case of a risk of deceleration of Foreign Direct Investment flows from big investors due to an uncertain global environment, or, to build resilience among vulnerable communities under the global Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
3. **The 9th NSEDP preparation and contribution of the Round Table Process and better link with Sector Working Groups:** There is a need to have stronger linkages between planning, budgeting and actual spending, as well as alignment of various planning instruments and priority processes, such as the LDC transition strategy, the Human Resource Development Strategy 2025, Green Growth Strategy and National Disaster Recovery Framework, under the overall wireframe of SDGs to be captured in the 9th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) 2021-2025. It was also pointed out that in this process, it is extremely important to accelerate the fiscal stabilization and consolidation, by formulating a budget that balances income and expenditure among others, in order to ensure sustainable economic growth. Under your leadership, Prime

Minister, development partners stand ready to help put in place an Integrated National Financing Framework with an evidence-based monitoring framework that would enable keeping track of progress of the 9th National Plan and SDGs, including through the Sector Working Groups (SWG), chaired by line ministries and co-chaired by development partners, under the Ministry of Planning and Investment, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, Foreign Affairs and guidance of the National Assembly.

- a. Further efforts are needed, under close coordination of the Ministry of Planning and Investment, **to translate national commitments into local action by fostering multi-sectoral actions aligned with policy priorities at sub-national level** through support to design, implementation and monitoring of Provincial and District Socio-Economic Development Plans aligned to the 9th NSEDP, including gradual transition to domestic resources, increased accountability and monitoring of results at local level, and strengthening financial and human capacity of provincial and district authorities aligned do the Three Builds (SamSang) Strategy.
- b. With the impact of climate change, Lao PDR should be prepared for natural hazards and disasters, especially floods, which are taking place more frequently and more severely. Natural disasters affect human lives as well as local economies through damage to industrial and social infrastructure, and rural communities are particularly vulnerable. **Disaster Risk Reduction and resilience to climate change should be mainstreamed in across sectors in Lao PDR.** Development partners welcome such trend and continue to support the Government.
- c. **Early planning for the 2020 High Level Round Table Meeting synchronizing with the 9th NSEDP preparation.**
 - This requires *every Sector Working Group* to agree on at least three measures for 2020 aimed at strengthening national statistic systems and establishing a robust monitoring system in the respective area, in line with the commitments made throughout 2019, focusing on the national SDG indicators with no baselines to allow better planning and tracking of resources and results of the 8th and 9th NSEDPs. Building more coherence and convergence between SWGs on cross-cutting priorities, such as building human capital, nutrition challenges and disaster risk reduction, and linking national sectoral plans with convergent planning at provincial level should be a priority of the 9th NSEDP.
 - *Every Sector Working Group*, in identifying SDG targets and in implementing measures to achieve them within the 9th NSEDP, to confirm its commitment to fiscal consolidation for fiscal stabilization, which is a prerequisite for sustainable socio-economic growth, and to ensure that planning integrates budgeting. This would send a positive signal that Lao PDR is heading in the right direction in its efforts for sustainable LDC graduation.
 - *Every Sector Working Group* to expand participation of civil society and private sector representatives in the recurrent SWGs meetings to be held at least three times a year and in the overall ongoing Round Table Process, to fully reap the benefits of their contribution towards the sustainable LDC graduation and SDGs implementation.
 - *Every Sector Working Group* in collaboration with SDG focal point ministries, to map out the national SDGs indicators to which the sector contributes, to ensure that the priority issues laid out in the Groups' Annual Work Plans tackle as many SDG related

bottlenecks as possible – including the cross-cutting SDG targets such as on UXO - informing among others, the High-level Round Table Meeting in 2020 and the Voluntary National Review on the 2030 Agenda implementation due in 2021.

II. Macroeconomics, Trade & Private Sector Development

4. **Further improvement for the Public Financial Management Regulatory Framework:** The development partners commend the efforts made by the Government in Public Financial Management, including the approval of the Public Debt Management Law, Procurement Law, and several tax laws. The Public Debt Management Law provides a basis for the formulation of a Debt Management Strategy, which can guide borrowing decisions. Tax administration has been modernized through the introduction of the TaXRIS system - electronic tax/fee payments through banks, which is a promising step forward in the Government's ambitious plan for fiscal consolidation. In addition, the Public Investment Law and its secondary legislation are available for further improvement of the public investment management.
5. **Acceleration of the pace of fiscal consolidation and creating a greater link between planning and budgeting:** As mentioned above, it is important to accelerate the pace of the fiscal consolidation, as revenue performance remains a challenge and yet to yield substantial results. Continuing fiscal consolidation efforts while shifting from expenditure compression to revenue generation would be helpful to build the fiscal space needed for the needed strengthening of social sectors and development of infrastructure. To this end, strengthening a coordination framework between the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Planning and Investment for implementing the public finance management reform including the public investment management improvement is crucial in terms of enforcement of the related laws and regulations.
6. **Greater efforts for improvement of the business climate:** Progress has been achieved in improving the business environment in Lao PDR by further implementing Prime Minister's Order No. 2 on the Ease of Doing Business, for instance, business community now has an opportunity to give feedback on issues of concern to the sector. However, as the Prime Minister pointed out at the 12th Lao Business Forum, there is a need to *walk the talk*, where 'the government needs to act more, and the business needs to talk more'.
 - a. For example, currently starting a business takes roughly 173 days in Lao PDR compared to 25.6 days' average for East Asia and the Pacific. Partners look forward to the establishment of a special taskforce committee, as suggested by the Prime Minister, to address unresolved issues relating to the improvement of the business climate in Lao PDR to ensure the future competitiveness of the Lao private sector.
7. **Implementation of the Trade Facilitation Roadmap** is commendable, which enabled deepening Lao PDR's integration into the global trading system. It is particularly crucial in the context of LDC graduation, a loss of LDC-specific trade preferences will have modest welfare consequences for Lao PDR given the limited trade to date, but competitiveness will become a defining factor. Participation in bilateral and regional trade agreements will play an important role in cushioning the negative effects of the progressive withdrawal of trade preferences in the course of graduation.
8. **Linking trade and private sector to other related sectors, in particular, infrastructure:** Challenges for the trade and private sector remain on various fronts of issues related to policy certainty, transport and logistics, tax, customs, infrastructure developments, investment climate, business environment, and human capital.

- a. For instance, there needs to be more collaboration between the Trade and Private Sector Development Working group and the Infrastructure Sector Working group to address issues related to the China-Laos railway and other large infrastructure projects, and all the multipliers these developments will bring.
9. **Involvement of private sector in the Round Table Process including all SWGs:** As discussed at the Round Table, over time, with a decrease of ODA, sustainability can only be upheld when underpinned by three core sources of financing for development: domestic public financing (tax revenue including personal income and corporate taxation), domestic private investment (private sector and investments, remittances, etc) and, international private financing (foreign investments, IFIs, etc). This rebalancing requires a structural economic transformation and solid investment in the human assets needs, particularly that of girls and women, that can undertake this shift. It is therefore critical and a welcome development with the expanded engagement of the private sector in development dialogue, such as the Round Table Process and all the SWGs.
 10. **Resilience to natural hazards and disasters:** The increased frequency and fierce occurrence of natural hazards and disasters has put pressure on the growth prospect and fiscal burden. Reminded last week with the earthquake in the vicinity of the Xayaburi dam complex, in the nexus of LDC graduation and disaster risk reduction, for instance, the dam safety institutional framework requires strengthening, for example, starting with the establishment of a dedicated dam safety department within the Government and the development of a dam safety strategy and/or policy. Without this resilience to natural hazards and disasters then development gains will be continually lost and SDGs unlikely to be met by 2030.
 11. **Quality and resilience of investments in agriculture sector:** It is important to engage private sector in agricultural, manufacturing industry and SMEs development and resilience building, and to ensure the quality and resilience of investments such as the critical infrastructure investments to disasters and climate change, particularly those based on natural resources (water, land and forest) to avoid, minimize and mitigate any possible harmful effects on environment and livelihoods of local people. Ensuring a sustainable use of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides is also critical, and this could give Lao PDR a competitive advantage in the regional market for agricultural products. More and improved coordination among ministries is needed to tackle and legislate on the cross-cutting issues of the agricultural sector trade and private sector and their potentials for a healthy and stronger diversification of the Lao economy.
 12. **Gender-sensitive public spending in the health sector, and education sector and vocational training which will help translate the investment into a skilled and productive workforce:** Currently, low labour productivity hinders large scale investments. With the high levels of ODA dependency in health and education and while acknowledging current fiscal constraints, the continued prioritisation of gender-sensitive public spending in the health sector, and education sector and vocational training is recommended to ensure that Lao PDR can fully reap the benefit of its dynamic young population and is able to translate this investment into a skilled and productive workforce.
 13. **Implementation at provincial level:** Sustaining robust and inclusive economic growth will require consistent investment in human capital, greater participation of women in the formal economy, and increasing efforts to reduce corruption-related vulnerabilities. Provinces play an important role in Lao PDR' economic development and hence partners believe focused implementation at provincial level is key.

III. Governance

14. **Further improvement of the regulatory framework:** RTIM participants commend the Government's efforts in the path towards a 'Rule of Law State', including the new legislation put in place in 2019, for instance, the new Disaster Management Law, the revised Land Law, the Forestry Law and a Climate Change Decree as well as the renewed commitments in relation to the Lao Generation 2030, the preparation for implementing the Civil Code and the commencement of drafting a new National Strategy for DRR. It has also been encouraging to note the favourable vote to adopt the ILO Convention concerning the elimination of violence and harassment in the labour market.
15. **Bringing domestic laws into alignment with international norms and to systematically raise awareness of people's rights and obligations:** Continued measures are highly welcome bringing domestic laws into alignment with international norms and to systematically raise awareness of people's rights and obligations under the law and to strengthen institutional capacity for implementation and enforcement. To this end, partners welcome the integration in the 9th NSEDP of a specific outcome covering Governance topics, as the success of implementing the 2030 Agenda and achievement of the SDGs will depend on the strength of institutions and the respect of Rule of Law.
16. **Addressing transnational organized crime:** Lao PDR is located in a region with high levels of transnational organized crime, including human trafficking, wildlife- and timber crime, and drug crime. The geography coupled with the vast length of borders with countries that have larger populations, economic status, and commercial trade, make Lao PDR an attractive area for transnational criminal groups and the illicit smuggling and trafficking of drugs, weapons, money, wildlife, timber, and humans. These challenges can increase with on-going regional integration measures. Enhanced border security should therefore compliment integration measures, to ensure that Lao PDR can reap the benefits of increased legal trade without the negative impacts of caused by transnational organized crime. Similarly, proper regulations should be put in place to ensure that Special Economic Zones can function as tools to attract investment and stimulate growth, while avoiding the risks of being exploited by Transnational Organized Crime groups.
17. **Financial Action Task Force (FATF) anti-money laundering and counter financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) mutual evaluation:** With the upcoming Financial Action Task Force (FATF) anti-money laundering and counter financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) mutual evaluation in November 2020, Lao PDR will be measured in terms of compliance with the 40 FATF recommendations as they relate to the ability of both the public and private sectors to combat money laundering and terrorist financing. The United Nations recognizes that the current round of FATF mutual evaluations has a greater focus on actual AML/CFT effectiveness and therefore is much more challenging. A poor assessment can lead to public listing as a country with AML/CFT deficiencies which in worst case can lead to FATF 'black-listing', loss of access to international corresponding banking relationships, a reduction in overseas investment and overall reputational harm. It will therefore be important with continued efforts to ensure that the outcome of the 2020 assessment is a good one, particularly in view of the aspiration for sustainable LDC graduation.
18. **The monitoring & evaluation and reporting mechanisms for the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review:** With appreciation for the constructive engagement in missions of Special Rapporteurs and reporting to and follow up on Concluding Observations of the CRC and CEDAW Committees, development partners look forward to supporting the Government in implementation, as well as putting in place the monitoring & evaluation and

reporting mechanisms for the recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review taking place in early 2020. Partners have taken note of the legislative and policy efforts to improve the legal framework, stressing the importance of economic, social, cultural, as well as political and civil rights, particularly that of girls and women. Partners will remain supportive of all efforts to bridge the gap between the adoption of the laws and their enforcement.

19. **Enhancing transparency and accountability for more participatory planning and budgeting:** Development partners collectively call for enhancing transparency and accountability for more participatory planning and budgeting, including through decentralization and empowerment of local governments, for the socio-economic development in the country, particularly for the most critical needs/priorities in social sectors, for instance in education, health and other public services targeting women, children, including migrant children, elderly, persons with disabilities and displaced populations.
20. **An increased participation of civil society in SWG, including in the Round Table Process:** A worldwide lesson learned is that in order to achieve durable development outcomes that benefit everyone equally, public debate and decision-making have to be conducted in a transparent and informed manner. Civil society can play an active and positive role, not only for service delivery but also in helping shape effective policies. Partners therefore welcome and commend the increased participation of civil society in SWG, including in the Round Table Process.

IV. Agriculture and Rural Development

21. **Advancement of the integrated green and resilient growth model:** The government is progressing well in terms of the integrated green and resilient growth model into national, provincial and district development plans as well as sectoral development strategies. Province and district level agriculture and forestry offices have been using Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture guidance in planning, design and implementation of an increasing number of projects.
22. **Minimizing the impact of climate change and disasters on agriculture and rural development sector:** One of the key challenges for the Agriculture and Rural Development sector is the increased frequency of climate-related events. In 2019, this included the late arrival and uneven distribution of rainfall resulting in droughts and heavy rainfall with flooding in parts of the country, leading, among other things, to greater food insecurity. Improvement of early warning and dissemination of information and its implication, increased investment in climate change adaptation and in rural transformation is therefore important to ensure that all sectors, and especially farmers are able to prepare and be resilient to climate change and disasters.
23. **Promotion of agriculture commercialization, diversified services and sustainable trade expansion and increased investments in research on agricultural innovation:** Investment in research and extension to underpin agricultural innovation could also be increased. Promotion of agriculture commercialization, diversified services and sustainable trade expansion in agriculture products are key to reduce rural poverty, with linkages upstream to smallholder producers and downstream to domestic agribusiness. This is vital as the majority of the Lao labour force are engaged in and dependent of the agricultural sector. Cooperatives Decree can play an important role in increased incomes for small farmers and for producers to be more responsive to market demand therefore a comprehensive plan for full implementation needs to be prepared.
24. **Further efforts on necessary conditions for rural development and employment for rural population, particularly for younger generation:** Complementary to agriculture, availability

and access to quality basic services are necessary conditions for rural development. On top of agriculture, it is important to improve both service delivery and exploit other economic potentials that would provide employment for rural population, especially for younger generation.

25. **Investing in Lao PDR's agro-biodiversity and balancing commercial development and national food security:** It is important to encourage all partners to promote and invest in Lao PDR's agro-biodiversity using the National Agro-Biodiversity Program which has been formulated as a framework for conservation and sustainable use. Further to this, development partners recommend continuing efforts to balance production and nutrition - continue to focus on balancing commercial development and national food security with support for subsistence farmers and food production that meets local nutritional needs. Development partners believe that investing in high quality agricultural produce offers significant opportunities for Lao PDR in the regional market.

V. Education

26. **Quality of education:** RTIM participants commend the progress in education, for example, in improving enrolment in basic education, as evidenced by now close to universal primary enrolment. There has also been development of a new national primary curriculum along with new teaching and learning materials which present a major transition towards "active learning" and will have spin-off effects on the quality of education. Evidence show that inadequate learning outcomes at primary level, particularly in Lao language and mathematics are the key constraints and have continued effects at higher levels of education.
27. **Greater investment in training of the primary teacher workforce:** In order to take full advantage of new teaching materials and the improved pedagogy, a much greater investment in training of the primary teacher workforce is required. It is important that the national budget for education is protected, including that a national budget for school-feeding be provided to maintain the gains in enrolment and attendance in primary education.
28. **Enhancing early child development and school readiness, reducing drop-out rate, particularly among girls, and ensuring education quality and efficiency:** 2019 saw a remarkable renewed commitment of the Government targeting the Lao Generation 2030 through cross-cutting interventions aiming an investing along the life course in children and young people as declared on the occasion of the 30th Anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the event in Vientiane and also presented at the global gathering in New York on 20 November 2019, with youth ambassador Mlle Nickar and the Lao delegation led by Mr. Bounsavad Boupha, Vice Minister of Justice, addressing the UN General Assembly. Critical challenges persist however, in enhancing early child development and school readiness, reducing drop-out rate, particularly among girls, and ensuring education quality and efficiency, aiming to address learning outcomes and low skills-acquisition which have been documented, especially among the most vulnerable groups, thus slowing progress towards meeting targets under SDG4. Provision of school meals has been a crucial factor in achieving almost universal enrolment in primary education and partners are pleased with the earmarking of a government budget for one year for 827 schools to continue these efforts.
29. **Increase investment and cooperation with the private sector in TVET:** RTIM participants congratulate the Government on the amendment of the revised TVET Law in July 2019. To effectively enforce and implement this law, partners encourage the Government to increase investment and cooperation with the private sector in TVET aiming to address labour and skills shortage in the labour market.

30. **A holistic and strategic approach needed to the development of the education profession:** In general, there is much need for a holistic and strategic approach to the development of the education profession in Lao PDR. Such a strategic approach should span the whole professional lifecycle, including teacher attraction, initial education, retainment, career progression and continuous professional development, including collaborative peer support. Simultaneously, there could be innovative low-cost approaches introduced for sustainable teacher education system, such as a school cluster, to develop professional networks to work together strengthening collegiality to improve teaching and learning.

VI. Health

31. **The health sector is not well equipped with authority or resources to mobilize community action to increase access and utilization of services:** There has been commendable progress in the Health Sector Reform implementation toward Universal Health Coverage, for instance, quality standards for health care facilities have been defined with a nation-wide situation analysis initiated; and there has been enhanced implementation of the National Health Insurance under the Health Finance Strategy currently under development. For example, Lao PDR became the 3rd fastest country in the world in reduction of maternal mortality ratio over the last decade. However, despite the tremendous improvement, challenges remain, especially among certain population groups defined either by ethnicity, place of residence, or other social determinants. As mentioned at the Meeting, some essential service coverage such as immunization has stagnated, partially due to weak community mobilization, which has led to disease outbreaks and other health impacts. A contributing factor is that the health sector is not well equipped with authority or resources to mobilize community action to increase access and utilization of services. As healthcare in Lao PDR has suffered from budget cuts in recent years – partners hope that future budgets can protect this critical area of work.
32. **There is a need to address wide disparities within the region as the more remote communities continue to face high rates of malnutrition and food insecurity:** Even though food production has increased, and rates of food insecurity and malnutrition are reducing, there are wide disparities within the regions, wherein, the more remote communities continue to face high rates of malnutrition and food insecurity. For instance, in some provinces, as many as half of all children suffer from chronic malnutrition. Among causes of undernutrition of children under age 5, a contributing factor is the poor quality of complementary feeding of children 6 months and above and the limited awareness of caregivers around adequate feeding practices providing sufficient protein, energy and micronutrients to young children. Efforts are underway to counter these developments but need to be scaled up, institutionalised and placed on-budget. Social and Behaviour Change Communication could be a low-cost example of awareness raising tools.
33. **Strong commitment from various sectors beyond health:** The next phase of the Health Sector Reform will focus on strengthening Primary Health Care, which can be realized only with strong commitment from sectors beyond health. For instance, in terms of the health sector nexus with education, adolescent reproductive health education will help apply prevention-based approach to address the issue of high teenage pregnancy rates. Partners recommend establishment of a mechanism to enhance commitment and leadership of the local authorities in community mobilization and securing sustainable financial source.
34. **Greater efforts to address the nutritional challenges:** To help address the nutritional challenges, partners recommend increased attention be paid to the production of local complementary food together with awareness building of caregivers. More progress should be made with the fortification of food with micronutrients.

VII. Natural Resources and Environment

35. **Improved Regulatory framework:** The Government of Lao PDR is taking commendable actions to address climate change. Lao PDR became the first country in ASEAN to ratify the Paris Agreement on Climate Change by passing a national law on its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution. Furthermore, in 2019, Lao PDR adopted the National Green Growth Strategy and issued the Climate Change decree.
36. **Further clarifications on issues such as a claim on land compensation, rights to agricultural land and continuous use, and grievance mechanisms to address land conflicts beyond village level:** It is also remarkable that the new Land law provides recognition of villages inside designated forest categories. Development partners would encourage further clarifications on issues such as a claim on land compensation in line with international standards, rights to agricultural land and continuous use, and grievance mechanisms to address land conflicts beyond village level. Global evidence shows that in the course of development, such situations are unavoidable and best managed by clear legislative guidance and procedures.
37. **Prioritisation of disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction strategies, including climate change adaptation and resilience building:** RTIM participants encourage the Government to prioritise disaster preparedness and disaster risk reduction strategies, including climate change adaptation and resilience building, to reduce the cross-sectoral impact of future disaster events. Decreasing vulnerabilities to disasters caused by both natural and man-made hazards will also be a key influencing factor in the context of Lao PDR's graduation from the "Least Developed Country" status and the achievement of SDG targets.
38. **Alignment and implementation of the National Disaster Recovery Framework:** The Government's efforts in setting up the National Disaster Recovery Framework following approval by the National Assembly of the Disaster Management Law are extremely timely – for instance, in terms of percentage of GDP, the Lao PDR records the highest average annual loss of 8.7 per cent from disasters among South-East Asian countries, with the most serious damage being in the agricultural drought loss, which accounts for over 5 per cent of Lao PDR's average annual loss. It is recommended that the National Disaster Recovery Framework be aligned with the Global Sendai Framework with coherence to the SDGs. In order for the national framework to be effective, it is essential that DRR plans are also developed at local level where the impact is the greatest, and that they are inclusive of the whole community including private sector, women, children, elderly and peoples with a disability.
39. **Strengthening disaster damage and loss data collection and reporting:** In order to measure progress in implementing the Sendai Framework for DRR, new National Strategy for DRR and disaster-related SDGs, it is important that disaster damage and loss data collection and reporting be strengthened through the existing national damage and loss database.
40. **Integration of the prevention and preparedness measures and clear targets into the 9th NSEDP and monitoring and reporting mechanism:** The preparation of the 9th NSEDP presents an opportunity to direct investment in prevention and preparedness measures and set clear targets in key sectors under the wireframe of SDGs for the subsequent coordination and consolidation by the SWGs and reporting through the Round Table Process. Development partners stand ready to support the Government in the identification and implementation of these measures.

41. **Further efforts on community disaster prevention:** It is also important to work on community disaster prevention - for instance, through enhancing their understanding of disaster risk they are threatened by and ensuring risk information such as hazard mapping and risk communication to villages is available and effective. The investment of disaster prevention bases, i.e. pre-investment to prepare for disasters and Build Back Better (better recovery efforts that are more resilient) in affected areas is also essential.
42. **The importance of integration of climate change and disaster risk reduction into the national planning processes:** The Meeting also emphasized importance of integration of climate change and disaster risk reduction into the national planning processes, including every socio-economic development plan and strategy. There needs to be a strong linkage between the National Green Growth Strategy and the National Disaster Recovery Framework and DRR Strategy - at the stage of development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – particularly, in the area of reducing disaster risk, enhancing adaptation and mitigation to climate change. Moreover, the Disaster Recovery Framework and Green Growth Strategy priorities should be captured in the 9th NSEDP with clear linkage to the SDGs and targeted measures focusing on women, children, including migrant children, the elderly, persons with disabilities and displaced populations who may be disproportionately affected.
43. **Enhancing capacity to manage Green Climate fund:** It is important to build capacity and strengthen the Lao Environment Protection Fund as the first Lao institution to be accredited by the Green Climate Fund as Direct Access Entity to effectively and efficiently fulfil its tasks.
44. **Consideration defining trade-offs and opportunities across sectors that can drive economic growth or protect development achievements from economic growth:** Development partners also recommend for consideration defining trade-offs and opportunities across sectors that can drive economic growth or protect development achievements from economic growth. Examples of opportunities 1) improved protected area management and a better business operating environment can increase high-value nature-based tourism; 2) waste can be an input into new productive use through recycling schemes; 3) a framework on river basin management with environmental and social safeguards standards can protect from any negative impact of construction of hydropower plants and 4) a reduction in pollution will reduce health costs; the RTIM participants that pollution could have a significant negative impact on the GDP of Lao PDR if not tackled.

VIII. Infrastructure

45. **Mainstreaming disaster risk reduction and climate resilience to sector strategies and business processes for sustainable infrastructure development and road asset management:** On infrastructure development, and the aspirations of moving from land-locked to land-linked, it is encouraging to see Lao PDR's active engagement in regional initiatives and in the preparation of the sector strategy to meet its three main pillars: regional, domestic and last mile connectivity. In addition, the country has developed the logistic strategy in order to maximize the benefit from the regional connectivity development. Due to increased natural hazards and disasters caused by climate change, and the expansion of development, infrastructure sector such public works, roads, urban housing, power generation plants, drainage systems, and water supply have become more vulnerable to natural hazards and disasters which has direct implication on the achievement of SDGs 9, 11 and 13 among others. It is therefore recommended to mainstream disaster risk reduction and climate resilience to sector strategies and business processes for sustainable infrastructure development and road asset management.

46. **Introduction of clear and appropriate standards with adequate enforcement and quality control of construction:** In order to prolong lifecycle of the infrastructure and reduce disaster damage under limited fiscal resources, clear and appropriate standards should be introduced with adequate enforcement and quality control of construction. Furthermore, effective monitoring of the implementation both in physical and financial aspects along with disaster monitoring and early warning systems along with emergency response in the sector are also needed. In this respect, the issue of dam safety deserves specific attention considering the priority given to production of hydroelectric power. Development partners are keen to support the Government's efforts to follow up on the dam safety survey initiated after the accident in Attapeu in 2018.
47. **Sustainable urban transport solutions needed:** In response to growing urban transport needs, rapid motorization and rising congestion, sustainable urban transport solutions need to be provided.
48. **A need to balance the desired outcomes of the sector and limited fiscal space and priority setting for infrastructure projects as well as the accompanying systematic maintenance of existing and aging infrastructure:** While quality of (transport) infrastructure remains inadequate, limited fiscal space poses a challenge for the sector to achieve its target planned under the 8th NSEDP and also for its sustainability. Meanwhile, investment related to strengthening connectivity with the Mekong region is important. Hence, the earlier-mentioned fiscal consolidation and revenue generation efforts are key but needs to be balanced against the desired outcomes within the social sectors. Priority setting for infrastructure projects as well as the accompanying systematic maintenance of existing and aging infrastructure with proper expenditure planning and priority setting should be put in practice under the current budget constraints, including better use of private-public partnerships.
49. **Effective regulation of increased foreign direct investments to ensure quality infrastructure:** While tackling issues for ease of doing business can increase foreign direct investments into quality infrastructure, effective regulation of these investments is required, for instance, with a dam safety regulatory framework and standards for environmental impact assessments, in order to avoid, minimize and mitigate any possible harmful effects on environment and livelihoods of local people.

IX. Illicit drug control

50. **Continued efforts in the implementation of measures detailed in the National Drug Control Master Plan:** RTIM participants commend the Government for the Lao Commission for Drug Control and Supervision's continued efforts in the implementation of measures detailed in the National Drug Control Master Plan, such as Community Based Treatment and Alternative Development. With developments over time, there is a need for a National Drug Use Survey to improve knowledge on drug use patterns in order to better develop policies and enhance availability of evidence-based drug treatment, as well as to build capacities of law enforcement.
51. **Taking an active part in regional cooperation mechanisms aimed at strengthening border security and prevent the flow of illicit drugs:** In recent years, the Mekong region has seen a large increase in the production, trafficking and consumption of Amphetamine-Type-Stimulants (ATS). Located at the centre of the Mekong region, Lao PDR is vulnerable to increased flows of drugs and the precursor chemicals necessary for their production. RTIM participants would like to commend the Government of Lao PDR for taking an active part in regional cooperation mechanisms aimed at strengthening border security and prevent the flow

of illicit drugs. Continued and enhanced focus on strengthening border security is important. Without such efforts, Lao PDR risks becoming a major transit hub for illicit drugs and precursor chemicals in the Mekong region.

X. UXO

52. **Developing transparent criteria for the prioritization process feeding into the strategic prioritization plan preparation:** There has been good progress in enhancing the understanding of the UXO sector's needs in prioritization of the Confirmed Hazardous Areas to be cleared. With these developments, and in the context of the forthcoming elaboration of a new 3rd Safe Path forward strategy for the UXO sector, it is recommended to develop transparent criteria for the prioritization process feeding into the strategic prioritization plan preparation.
53. **Clear guidance on regulatory process and framework:** Moving forward, the recent developments on Article 9 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions are commendable. Further to this, while looking at the enduring challenge posed by explosive remnants of war (ERW), it will also be important, in line with the broader transitional strategies to elaborate how best to make use of international support in the coming Decade of Action accelerating towards the SDGs called for at the UNGA74, while realising that the true extent of the UXO contamination in Lao PDR is, due to its daunting geography, yet to be fully understood. It is recommended for NRA to provide clear guidance on the MoU process for donors and implementing partners, and that the NRA then helps in the quick formalization of such agreements, to enable all actors to conduct activities expeditiously and in line with established procedures to ensure that as much as possible is achieved in the decade to come in tandem with the expansion of a residual institutional capacity that can address the future threat.
54. **Mainstreaming UXO across all sectors in the next five-year National Plan:** Disasters caused by natural hazards such as flooding may dislocate UXO in flood-affected areas and add to the threats affecting rural communities. The effects of ERW are a cross-cutting issue that can delay the achievement of multiple SDGs in affected communities. Therefore, it is important to ensure that the nationally endorsed SDG18 - Lives Safe from UXO is mainstreamed across all sectors in the next five-year National Plan.

Annex 2 – Template for SWG reporting

<p>Name of Sector Working Group:</p> <p>SWG Chair and Co-Chair(s):</p> <p>SWG Secretariat Focal Point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government Officials: - Development Partners: <p>Technical Supporting Staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government Officials: - Development partners:

Overview of Sector Performance in 2020/2021

Sector outputs and activities	Update on the Progress/note on situation and relevant information to highlight sector performance	Challenges, opportunities and way forwards
A. Actions/activities relating to the RTIM key recommendations and those highlighted in SWG Call for Action 2019		
1.		
2.		
B. Communication and outreach activities with the sector and across Sector Working Groups		
C. Cross-sectoral thematic areas applied to all SWGs		
1. Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (in accordance to VDCAP 2015-2025) (Only narrative on each principle)		
2. Innovation and technology		
3. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and accelerating the adoption and implementation of the National Youth Policy		
4. Other emerging issues such as impact of COVID-19 and response		

Annex 3 – Guidelines for development/update of SWG annual work plan

<p>Name of SWG: SWG Chair and Co-Chair(s): - Sub-SWG - SWG Secretariat and Focal Points</p>
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<p><u>Stakeholders</u> Government lead agencies: Government counterparts: Development partners: Private sector partners: Civil society partners: Other partners:</p>	<p>Total estimated budget (USD):... Out of which 1. Secured (USD):... 2. To be mobilised (USD):.....</p> <p><u>Note</u> - Secured resources are subject to the finalization and approval of the SWG AWP - Operational costs to be included</p>
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OUTCOME (copy from 8th NSEDOP outcome) and those which are sector specific: XXX Relevant SDG targets and indicators with corresponding national SDG targets and indicators: - SDG XXX		
Outputs (please copy from NSEDOP) and those which are sector specific	Output Indicators, baselines, targets, MoVs	SWG Monitoring Focal Point(s) (a Dept...)
Output 1.1	Indicator 1.1.a. : Baselines: Targets: MoVs: Indicator 1.1.b: Baselines: Targets: MoVs:	

OUTCOME (copy from 8th NSEDP outcome) and those which are sector specific: XXX Relevant SDG targets and indicators with corresponding national SDG targets and indicators: - SDG XXX		
Outputs (please copy from NSEDP) and those which are sector specific	Output Indicators, baselines, targets, MoVs	SWG Monitoring Focal Point(s) (a Dept...)
Output 1.2.	Indicator 1.2.a: Baselines: Targets: MoVs: Indicator 1.2.b: Baselines: Targets: MoVs:	

8th NSEDP

Outputs (from NSEDP) and those which are sector specific	2020 Expected Results (specific annual results the SWG wants to achieve referring to sector strategy and/or plan)	Actions	Stakeholders (Govt, CSOs, DPs, etc.)	Implementation Mechanism (joint or agency specific)	2020 Budget Remarks
Output 1.1.	Expected Result 1:	<i>Action 1.</i>			
	Expected Result 2:	<i>Action 1.</i>			
		<i>Action 2.</i>			
Output 1.2.	Expected Result 1:	<i>Action 1</i>			
	Expected Result 2:	<i>Action 1.</i>			

Outputs (from NSED) and those which are sector specific	2020 Expected Results (specific annual results the SWG wants to achieve referring to sector strategy and/or plan)	Actions	Stakeholders (Govt, CSOs, DPs, etc.)	Implementation Mechanism (joint or agency specific)	2020 Budget Remarks
	Expected Result 3:	<i>Action 1.</i>			

2019 RTIM Key Recommendations and others

2019 Round Table Key Recommendation	Planned activities	Stakeholders (Govt, CSOs, DPs, etc.)	Implementation Mechanism (joint or agency specific)	2020 Budget Remarks
1				
2				
3				

Annex 4 – Concept Notes of HL RTM Key Agenda Items

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE MEETING
WORKSTREAM 1 – REVIEWING PROGRESS

1.1 - 2021 Voluntary National Review

Led by the National SDG Secretariat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Background

- ***National context***

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, financing constraints, human capital, infrastructure development, and the planning for transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve in 2026.

- **2021 High-Level Roundtable Meeting**

The High-Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM) should provide an important platform to (1) discuss development progress (2) reinforce the coherence and cohesiveness of national policymaking, (3) present the 9th NSEDP and discuss national strategies on LDC graduation and COVID-19 response and recovery, (4) introduce the means of implementation of the national plan, and (5) discuss efficiency and quality of ODA and coordination mechanisms. The HL-RTM should consist of a series of technical level dialogues, whose results and recommendations will feed into a one-day high-level event. The exact format, structure and scale of the HL-RTM will ultimately depend on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR. Three workstreams are on the agenda:

- (1) *Taking stock*, a review of development progress, to better understand achievements and challenges to inform national priorities;
- (2) *Looking forward*, a deep-dive into national planning, anchored around the 9th NSEDP, its implementation arrangements, and topics of national relevance, such as COVID-19 and LDC Graduation against the backdrop of committed measures to address the triple planetary crisis: climate change, nature and pollution;
- (3) *Thinking about how*, a review of ways of working and potential improvements of development coordination and cooperation.

- ***2021 Lao PDR Voluntary National Review (VNR)***

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages member States to “conduct regular and inclusive review of progress at the national and sub-national levels, which are country-led and country-driven”. The assessment serves as a basis for the regular reviews of progress against the SDGs by the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), meeting under the auspices of the ECOSOC. The VNR process provides a platform for countries to share their individual experience, including success, challenges and lesson learnt from their SDG integration and localisation efforts to the national development priorities as outlined and expressed in consecutive NSEDPs since 2015. The VNR process is also meant to strengthen and promote national ownership, transparency, inclusiveness, and multi-stakeholder approaches to development, and provide a critical look into data availability and access to measure progress, and ultimately inform national development priorities.

Lao PDR conducted its 1st VNR in 2018 summarizing the progress and challenges in SDG implementation under the Outcomes of the 8th NSEDP. Building on the key recommendations

from the 1st VNR, the 2nd VNR takes a critical look at progress and challenges in selected areas, considers ways to strengthen policies and institutional arrangements, and mobilise multi-stakeholder support and partnerships to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs. The Government of the Lao PDR submitted and presented the 2nd VNR at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 15th July 2021.

Objectives

The 2nd VNR agenda item at the 13th HL-RTM fits under the first workstream on reviewing development progress (see above). It aims to:

- Present and visualise progress on SDG localisation and implementation in Lao PDR;
- Present key recommendations from the 2nd VNR on how to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda including against commitments made under the auspices of the UNFCCC, the Sendai Framework and relevant human rights instruments; and
- Discuss best practices, challenges, and data gaps and limitations.

Deliverables

Expected deliverables include:

- One factsheet (available in Lao and English) highlighting the progress and challenges for the 18 SDGs in Lao PDR based on findings of the VNR reports;
- A set of flashcards in Lao and English analysing the nine selected SDGs of the 2nd VNR report. The first half of the card could be dedicated to the progress update of the SDG while the second half could illustrate required actions needed to achieve the respective SDG;
- A comprehensive presentation elaborating on the key findings of the VNR, the process, lessons learnt, data gaps, and formulating recommendations for future reviews and foster progress towards the 2030 Agenda.

Leadership

The VNR agenda item is led by the SDG Secretariat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), in close coordination with the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), which acts as the secretariat of the HL-RTM. UNDP supports the VNR through its MPI-MoFA project, in close coordination with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), which coordinates UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes and supports the coordination of development partners as required.

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE MEETING
WORKSTREAM 2 - NATIONAL PLANNING
2.1 – 8th NSEDP conclusion and 9th NSEDP

Led by Department of Planning, Ministry of Planning and Investment

Background

- ***National context***

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, financing constraints, human capital, infrastructure development, and the planning for transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve in 2026.

- **2021 High-Level Roundtable Meeting**

The High-Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM) should provide an important platform to (1) discuss development progress (2) reinforce the coherence and cohesiveness of national policymaking, (3) present the 9th NSEDP and discuss national strategies on LDC graduation and COVID-19 response and recovery, (4) introduce the means of implementation of the national plan, and (5) discuss efficiency and quality of ODA and coordination mechanisms. The HL-RTM should consist of a series of technical level dialogues, whose results and recommendations will feed into a one-day high-level event. The exact format, structure and scale of the HL-RTM will ultimately depend on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR. Three workstreams are on the agenda:

- (1) *Taking stock*, a review of development progress, to better understand achievements and challenges to inform national priorities;
- (2) *Looking forward*, a deep-dive into national planning, anchored around the 9th NSEDP, its implementation arrangements, and topics of national relevance, such as COVID-19 and LDC Graduation against the backdrop of committed measures to address the triple planetary crisis: climate change, nature and pollution;
- (3) *Thinking about how*, a review of ways of working and potential improvements of development coordination and cooperation.

- **8th NSEDP**

The 8th NSEDP, prepared by the Department of Planning (DoP) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), with support from line ministries and development partners, was the central document for national development from 2016 and 2020. Its implementation coincided with the fulfilment of all three LDC graduation criteria, the formulation of a green growth strategy, and the attraction of FDI to support needed infrastructure development, but also the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which threatens to halt and potential reverse Lao PDR's development progress. Challenges remained, among others, in terms of the inclusivity of growth, the role of the private sector, both domestically and internationally, in supporting national development priorities, environmental degradation and climate change, and regional inequalities. Key priorities that remain include the diversification of the drivers of growth, including decreased reliance on natural resources extraction and improved integration into global value chains, macroeconomic stabilization, supporting investments in human capital to improve the wellbeing of all, and improving the legal and regulatory environments and governance across all sectors ensuring the actual implementation of development policies.

- **9th NSEDP**

The drafting process of the 9th NSEDP started in 2019 and was subsequently substantially adapted to the changing context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A multi-stakeholder taskforce was formed in response to the pandemic, whose recommendations were incorporated into the 9th NSEDP by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), with the support of the United Nations. Under the lead coordination of MPI, line ministries provided inputs to defined policy priorities to the NSEDP drafting team. A revised draft was presented to development partners in December 2020 for final feedback. A final draft was presented to and endorsed by the National Assembly in March 2020.

The 9th NSEDP has four overarching directions for development: quality, focus, green and sustainable. The document should be the central framework for development work and bring the country closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the edge of LDC Graduation, while ensuring successful recovery from the pandemic. There are 25 outputs grouped under six outcomes, which are as follows:

- (1) Continuous quality, stable and sustainable economic growth achieved;
- (2) Improved quality of human resources to meet development, research capacity, science and technology needs and create value-added production and services;
- (3) Enhanced wellbeing of the people;
- (4) Environmental protection enhanced and disaster risks reduced;
- (5) Engagement in regional and international cooperation and integration;
- (6) Public governance and administration improved, and society more equal, fair, and protected by the rule of law.

Objectives

The 9th NSEDP agenda item at the HL-RTM fits under the second workstream on national planning. It aims to:

- Present the 9th NSEDP as the central planning document for development in Lao PDR building on the conclusion of the 8th NSEDP;
- Present the formulation process of the document;
- Reflect on best practices and provide recommendations on the elaboration of the next NSEDP.

Deliverables

Expected deliverables include:

- Final version of the 8th NSEDP review, in Lao and in English;
- The 9th NSEDP, in Lao and English;
- A comprehensive presentation elaborating on the 9th NSEDP directions and policy priorities and the formulation process, including key challenges and opportunities to address in the next cycle, starting from the annual review;
- A visual presentation and communication products (e.g. leaflet) presenting outcomes and outputs of the plan, and its alignment with the 2030 Agenda;
- A visual mapping of outcomes and outputs, and how they feed into one another.

Leadership

The 9th NSEDP agenda item is led by the Department of Planning (DoP) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), in close coordination with the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of MPI, which acts as the secretariat of the HL-RTM. UNDP supports the 8th NSEDP review through its MPI-MoFA project, in close coordination with the United Nations

Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), which coordinates UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes and supports the coordination of development partners as required.

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE MEETING
WORKSTREAM 2 – NATIONAL PLANNING
**2.2 - 9th NSEDP implementation arrangement (Monitoring & Evaluation Framework
and Financing Strategy)**
Led by Department of Planning, Ministry of Planning and Investment

Background

- *National context*

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, financing constraints, human capital, infrastructure development, and the planning for transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve in 2026.

- **2021 High-Level Roundtable Meeting**

The High-Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM) should provide an important platform to (1) discuss development progress (2) reinforce the coherence and cohesiveness of national policymaking, (3) present the 9th NSEDP and discuss national strategies on LDC graduation and COVID-19 response and recovery, (4) introduce the means of implementation of the national plan, and (5) discuss efficiency and quality of ODA and coordination mechanisms. The HL-RTM should be preceded by a series of technical level dialogues, whose results and recommendations will feed into a one-day high-level event. The exact format, structure and scale of the HL-RTM will ultimately depend on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR.

- *9th NSEDP*

The drafting process of the 9th NSEDP started in 2019 and was subsequently substantially adapted to the changing context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A multi-stakeholder taskforce was formed in response to the pandemic, whose recommendations were incorporated into the 9th NSEDP by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), with the support of the United Nations. Under the lead coordination of MPI, line ministries provided inputs to defined policy priorities to the NSEDP drafting team. A revised draft was presented to development partners in December 2020 for final feedback. A final draft was presented to and endorsed by the National Assembly in March 2020.

The 9th NSEDP has four overarching directions for development: quality, focus, green and sustainable, critical elements that were recently reinforced by Prime minister Phamkham at his address to the UNGA High Level session in New York. The document should be the central framework for development work and bring the country closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the edge of LDC Graduation, while ensuring successful recovery from the pandemic, within planetary boundaries and other political and legal commitments made by Lao PDR. There are 25 outputs grouped under six outcomes, which are as follows:

- (1) Continuous quality, stable and sustainable economic growth achieved;
- (2) Improved quality of human resources to meet development, research capacity, science and technology needs and create value-added production and services;
- (3) Enhanced wellbeing of the people;
- (4) Environmental protection enhanced and disaster risks reduced;
- (5) Engagement in regional and international cooperation and integration;

- (6) Public governance and administration improved, and society more equal, fair, and protected by the rule of law.

In follow up to the commitments made by stakeholders during the High-level consultation with development partners in December 2020, to support in the development of implementation arrangements under the 9th NSEDP, consensus was reached on the need to develop 1) a preliminary costing of the NSEDP 2) a financing strategy and 3) a monitoring and evaluation framework.

- ***M&E framework***

In line with this, the 9th NSEDP was complemented by the development of a comprehensive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework to ensure that progress can be measured effectively, challenges and opportunities can be identified, and would feed into future national planning formulation.

The process to develop the M&E framework was led by the Department of Planning (DoP) of MPI and technically supported by UNICEF, which first organised a workshop on M&E and Results-Based Management Theory in December 2020. The process then continued with a request for relevant indicators to all line ministries. From an initial list of more than 800 indicators, the DoP, in consultation with relevant ministries, narrowed down the selection, focusing on availability of data and relevance to the 9th NSEDP policy priorities. MPI eventually led a workshop to validate the M&E framework in March 2021. It was then submitted to the National Assembly for feedback in April 2021 and is currently being finalised.

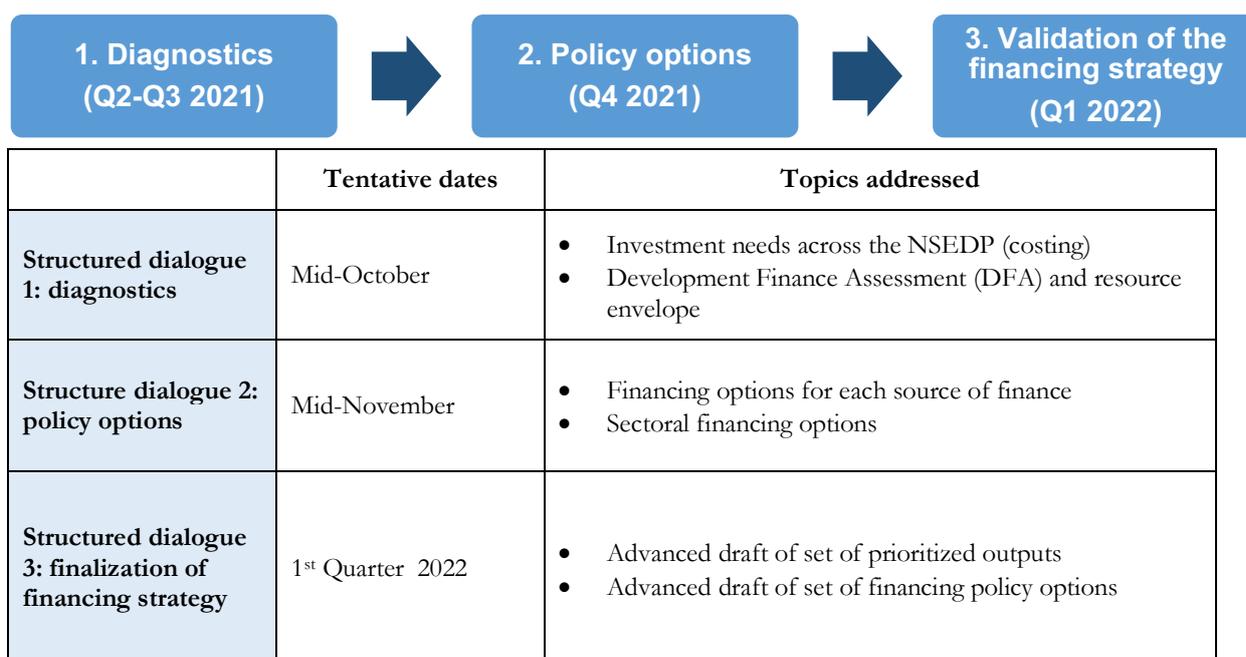
The current M&E framework contains around 170 indicators, with a combination of outcome-level indicators and output-level indicators. The initial objectives of the M&E framework were to provide a practical tool to measure progress against national development priorities, clarify processes in terms of data collection, production, and dissemination, and ensure close alignment with the SDG indicators, LDC framework, and other international standards such as the Sendai Framework. Reviewing progress towards those objectives will be crucial to ensure the continuous progress of Lao PDR in monitoring and evaluation of development objectives.

- ***A financing strategy for the 9th NSEDP***

Access to the necessary development finance to accelerate progress is becoming increasingly challenging, with various challenges ranking from revenue collection falling short of expectations, insufficient foreign direct investment and private sector contribution to development progress, unpredictable ODA trends, and repeated shocks stretching coping capacity and limiting the inflow of remittances. As a consequence, the Government of Lao PDR, through the Ministry of Planning and Investment and with the support of the United Nations Joint Programme on Financing Efficiency, has been working on developing the elements for a practical and realistic financing strategy with clear options to ensure access and availability of development finance in support of national development priorities.

Considering the strategic importance of this financing strategy, and acknowledging the work done by the Government and development partners in addressing financing constraints, the formulation of the financing strategy is based on:

- A clear process: three structured dialogues (see table) should be organised, along the three stages in the diagram below. MPI and UNDP hope to develop a draft set of financing options for discussion at the second structured dialogue by the Round Table Meeting, planned in November 2021.



- **Inclusivity:** A Technical Working Group to mobilise inputs from and build consensus between relevant stakeholders was agreed by the Deputy Prime Minister upon request of the Deputy Minister of MPI early in the year. The group was initially mobilised in a workshop on April 5-6 to discuss the objectives of the project, methodologies, and data sets necessary to develop these diagnostics. Bilateral discussions with the Ministry of Finance, the Bank of Lao PDR, relevant line ministries, and development partners are expected to be held in between structured dialogues.

Since July 2020, the *United Nations Joint Programme on Efficiency and optimization of Lao PDR's public budget to finance the SDGs through the National Plan* works to strengthen the national architecture for managing and allocating development finance to support more efficient and effective use of available resources, and mobilisation of other sources of finance in support of national priorities and the 2030 Agenda. It supports the formulation of the financing strategy. Coordinated by the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Department for International Cooperation (DIC), and the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), it involves the Ministries of Finance, Planning and Investment, and Health, as well as UNFPA, UNCDF, and UNDP, with the latter acting as the technical lead.

Objectives

The M&E framework agenda item aims to:

- Present on the substance of the M&E framework and indicators selected to monitor progress against the national plan priorities;
- Assess gaps and challenges in terms of data collection, production, and dissemination, alignment with international frameworks and standards, and best practices and processes to ensure that the monitoring and evaluation phase of national planning is an essential part of the planning cycle (and feeds into assessments and policy formulation) and informs future planning.

The financing agenda item at the HL-RTM should provide:

- A set of financing options for discussion;
- An opportunity to assess progress and finalise a workplan for the completion of the financing strategy formulation in 2022.

Deliverables

Expected deliverables on financing include:

- Background documents on diagnostics and on financing options;
- A clear process and timeline to finalise the financing strategy;
- A variety of communication products (e.g. Op-ed, Q&As, etc.) to sensitise relevant stakeholders and communicate technical knowledge in simple terms to a broader audience.

Expected deliverables on M&E include:

- A visualisation (either in terms of slides or leaflet) of the M&E framework;
- A short briefing note on main challenges and gaps and potential ways to solve these.

Leadership

The 9th NSEDP financing strategy agenda item is led by Center for Development Policy Research (CDR) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment in close coordination with the Department of Planning (DoP) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of MPI, which acts as the secretariat of the HL-RTM. The Joint Programme on Financing Efficiency (see above) supports the formulation of the financing strategy, in close coordination with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), which coordinates UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes, International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and other development partners as required.

The 9th NSEDP M&E framework agenda item is led by the Department of Planning (DoP) of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), in close coordination with the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of MPI. UNICEF supports the M&E framework, in close coordination with the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), which coordinates UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes and supports the coordination of development partners as required.

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE MEETING
WORKSTREAM 2 – NATIONAL PLANNING

2.3 - COVID-19 recovery

Led by the Centre for Department Policy Research (CDR), Ministry of Planning and Investment

Background

- ***National context***

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, financing constraints, human capital, infrastructure development, and the planning for transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve in 2026.

- **2021 High-Level Roundtable Meeting**

The High-Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM) should provide an important platform to (1) discuss development progress (2) reinforce the coherence and cohesiveness of national policymaking, (3) present the 9th NSEDP and discuss national strategies on LDC graduation and COVID-19 response and recovery, (4) introduce the means of implementation of the national plan, and (5) discuss efficiency and quality of ODA and coordination mechanisms. The HL-RTM should consist of a series of technical level dialogues, whose results and recommendations will feed into a one-day high-level event. The exact format, structure and scale of the HL-RTM will ultimately depend on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR.

- ***9th NSEDP***

The drafting process of the 9th NSEDP started in 2019 and was subsequently substantially adapted to the changing context of the COVID-19 pandemic. A multi-stakeholder taskforce was formed in response to the pandemic, whose recommendations were incorporated into the 9th NSEDP by the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), with the support of the United Nations. Under the lead coordination of MPI, line ministries provided inputs to defined policy priorities to the NSEDP drafting team. A revised draft was presented to development partners in December 2020 for final feedback. A final draft was presented to and endorsed by the National Assembly in March 2020.

The 9th NSEDP has four overarching directions for development: quality, focus, green and sustainable, critical elements that were recently reinforced by Prime minister Phamkham at his address to the UNGA High Level session in New York. The document should be the central framework for development work and bring the country closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to the edge of LDC Graduation, while ensuring successful recovery from the pandemic, within planetary boundaries and other political and legal commitments made by Lao PDR. There are 25 outputs grouped under six outcomes, which are as follows:

- (1) Continuous quality, stable and sustainable economic growth achieved;
- (2) Improved quality of human resources to meet development, research capacity, science and technology needs and create value-added production and services;
- (3) Enhanced wellbeing of the people;
- (4) Environmental protection enhanced and disaster risks reduced;
- (5) Engagement in regional and international cooperation and integration;

- (6) Public governance and administration improved, and society more equal, fair, and protected by the rule of law.

- ***Multi-stakeholder taskforce on COVID-19***

In 2020, MPI with the support of the UN convened a Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce to Support a Determination of the 9th NSEDP and SDG Localization due to the Impact of COVID-19. This brought together key national policymakers and development partners to review the impact of COVID-19 on national priorities, and make recommendations for how policies and the then near final draft 9th NSDEP could be re-calibrated in light of the changing context. Work was structured across five themes:

1. Financing for sustainable development and effective development cooperation (led by MoF, WB and NIER);
2. Trade and private sector, value chains and tourism (led MOIC and ITC);
3. Green growth, resilience and risk management with respect to potential environmental, health, and economic shocks (led by MoNRE, NIER, CDR, ADB, GGGI, UNDRR, UNEP and WB);
4. Manage changes and enhance policy preparedness for decent work (led by MoLSW, ILO and IOM); and
5. Human capital including health and education (led by MoES, MPI (CDR), UNFPA, UNICEF and WHO).

For each theme, the Multi-stakeholder Taskforce developed a background paper and -following a thematic policy dialogue- a set of key recommendations for consideration. These recommendations were submitted to the meeting of the Sector Working Group Chairs and Co-Chairs for consideration in the finalization of the 9th NSEDP and subsequently saw the incorporation of many of the recommendations into the final draft. Building on this, the Government has requested a review and revision of these – as a means to provide an up-to-date situational report on the reverberating effects of the pandemic and priority areas that will require attention to ensure a successful recovery.

Objectives

The COVID-19 agenda item fits under the second workstream on national planning. It aims to:

- Sensitize decision makers and development partners to COVID-19 health and socioeconomic impacts;
- Agree on the development of the formulation of a nationwide COVID-19 recovery strategy in 2022.

Deliverables

Expected deliverables include:

- Updated background papers building on last year's Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce process;
- A workplan as well as a clear mapping of stakeholders that can contribute to the drafting of the COVID-19 recovery strategy.

Leadership

The COVID-19 agenda item is led by the Centre for the Development Policy Research (CDR) Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), in close coordination with the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of MPI, which acts as the secretariat of the HL-RTM. The agenda item is supported by the Multi-Stakeholder Taskforce, within which the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), will coordinate partner stakeholders as required.

**HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE MEETING
WORKSTREAM 2 – NATIONAL PLANNING**

2.4 - LDC Graduation Smooth Transition Strategy

Led by Department of International Organisations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Background

- ***National context***

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, financing constraints, human capital, infrastructure development, and the planning for transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve in 2026.

- **2021 High-Level Roundtable Meeting**

The High-Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM) should provide an important platform to (1) discuss development progress (2) reinforce the coherence and cohesiveness of national policymaking, (3) present the 9th NSEDP and discuss national strategies on LDC graduation and COVID-19 response and recovery, (4) introduce the means of implementation of the national plan, and (5) discuss efficiency and quality of ODA and coordination mechanisms. The HL-RTM should be preceded by a series of technical level dialogues, whose results and recommendations will feed into a one-day high-level event. The exact format, structure and scale of the HL-RTM will ultimately depend on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR.

- ***LDC Graduation Smooth Transition Strategy (STS)***

Sustainable graduation from LDC status has been a long-term objective of the Government of Lao PDR since 2000. Lao PDR met the graduation criteria for the first time at the 2018 Triennial Review through its performance on the GNI per capita and the Human Assets Index (HAI). In the 2021 Triennial Review, Lao PDR successfully meet the graduation criteria in all three quantitative criteria: GNI per capita, HAI and the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index- thereby qualifying for consideration of graduation. On 26th February 2021, the United Nations [Committee for Development Policy](#) (CDP) recommended Lao PDR for graduation with an extended 5-year preparatory period¹ reflecting the severe and ongoing impact of COVID-19. Graduation is therefore expected to take place in 2026, with CDP continuing to monitor progress closely throughout the preparatory period.

Graduation from LDC status will be an important national development milestone, reflecting the hard-earned achievements by Lao PDR despite the many development challenges faced. Graduation, however, would require careful management to ensure development momentum is maintained through the COVID-19 response and recovery phase, any impact sustained by the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and pollution, as well as any specific impacts resulting from loss of international support measures for LDCs in trade and other areas.

To prepare for and manage the shift from LDC-status and the associated international support measures, graduating LDCs are encouraged by the General Assembly to develop a national Smooth Transition Strategy (STS) in close cooperation with development and trading partners, with support from the UN to ensure the transition from LDC-specific support does not disrupt the country's development, and that use of these support measures is optimised whilst available. A well-prepared STS can help guide a sustainable graduation process, enhanced and more coordinated support by development partners (including the UN), as well as identifying capacity

¹ Endorsed by ECOSOC in resolution 2021/11, GA resolution pending

building priorities. To this end, the 9th NSEDP clearly sets out the expectation that the Government will develop an STS in consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

The main purposes of the Lao PDR's STS are to:

- Summarize existing information on the impacts of losing LDC-specific international support measures and identify and address any remaining information gaps;
- Identify mitigation measures for each specific impact of graduation; and
- Determine the most prioritised smooth transition measures and their implementation modalities.

Guided by the forthcoming Doha Plan of Action², the STS will set out to operationalise the PoA with plans to reach agreements with the main bilateral and multilateral development and trading partners on smooth transition measures and an implementation plan for the STS recommended actions with agreed responsible parties and timelines clearly articulated. The Lao PDR STS will be made up of a comprehensive and coherent set of specific and prioritised measures in alignment with national development priorities taking into account its own specific context. The key principle of the STS process is to be country-led, country-owned and using existing country systems to the extent possible.

The development of the strategy will be informed by a consultative mechanism in cooperation with development and trade partners to identify and agree on the associated actions, negotiate their duration and phase-out period of the support measures that are appropriate to the country's situation.

Objectives

The LDC Graduation agenda item at the HL-RTM fits under the second workstream on national planning. It aims to:

- Sensitize national decision makers and development partners to the opportunities gained from graduation, anticipated changes, and potential measures needed to address any foreseen challenges that could come from LDC graduation; and
- Facilitate the discussion and collect feedback from the broad range of RTM participants on the draft elements of Lao PDR's STS and the proposed process for its development.

Deliverables

Expected deliverables include:

- An updated review/summary of relevant literature, which could be translated into communication products to inform relevant stakeholders about LDC graduation and possible graduation support measures;
- Draft elements and process, including a workplan, to ensure the timely completion of a STS in 2022, and clearly mapping roles and responsibilities of relevant Government and development partners;
- Identification of priorities for monitoring/data/statistics during the preparatory period and after graduation.

Approach

In line with the anticipated overall approach to the RTM, made up of more detailed events to address specific issues, followed by shorter formal sessions as part of the High-Level RTM itself, preparations for the LDC STS agenda item will lead to two complementary outputs:

- LDC Graduation Side Event
 - Presentation of anticipated implications of Lao PDR's graduation from LDC status.

² Following the LDC Istanbul Plan of Action agreed among Member States at LDC4 the LDC Doha Plan of Action is the expected outcome document that will be agreed in January 2022 at LDC5 in Doha, Qatar.

- Presentation of MoFA's approach and plans to develop the STS, including anticipated consultations, workstreams, and support from development partners (including the UN).
- High-Level RTM Agenda Item
 - Summarising the conclusions of presentations and discussions during the technical event to high-level participants.
 - Aiming to build high-level support towards engaging with and supporting the development and implementation of Lao PDR's STS.

Leadership

The LDC Graduation agenda item is led by the Department of International Organisations (DIO) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) supported by its Permanent Representatives to the UN in New York and in Geneva, and focal points from all line ministries in close coordination with the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of MPI, which acts as the secretariat of the HL-RTM. The UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes with relevant expertise coalesced in the LSC Graduation support output group of the new Lao PDR-UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF), technically led by DESA under the overall coordination of the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO), technically supports MoFA.

HIGH-LEVEL ROUNDTABLE MEETING
WORKSTREAM 3 – DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

3.1 Review of the Development Cooperation

Led by the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and the Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan (VDCAP) Secretariat

Background

- ***National context***

Lao PDR is at an important stage of the national development planning process. 2021 marks the conclusion of the implementation of the 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (8th NSEDP 2016-2020) and the commencement of the next five-year plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025). This transition has been dominated by the challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, sustainability and climate change, quality and inclusive growth, financing constraints, human capital, infrastructure development, and the planning for transition from Least Developed Country status, which Lao PDR hopes to achieve in 2026.

- **2021 High-Level Roundtable Meeting**

The High-Level Round Table Meeting (HL-RTM) should provide an important platform to (1) discuss development progress (2) reinforce the coherence and cohesiveness of national policymaking, (3) present the 9th NSEDP and discuss national strategies on LDC graduation and COVID-19 response and recovery, (4) introduce the means of implementation of the national plan, and (5) discuss efficiency and quality of ODA and coordination mechanisms. The HL-RTM should consist of a series of technical level dialogues, whose results and recommendations will feed into a one-day high-level event. The exact format, structure and scale of the HL-RTM will ultimately depend on the COVID-19 situation in Lao PDR. Three workstreams are on the agenda:

- (1) *Taking stock*, a review of development progress, to better understand achievements and challenges to inform national priorities;
- (2) *Looking forward*, a deep-dive into national planning, anchored around the 9th NSEDP, its implementation arrangements, and topics of national relevance, such as COVID-19 and LDC Graduation against the backdrop of committed measures to address the triple planetary crisis: climate change, nature and pollution;
- (3) *Thinking about how*, a review of ways of working and potential improvements of development coordination and cooperation.

- ***Vientiane Declaration Country Action Plan***

Lao PDR transitioned its aid effectiveness agenda covering five principles (ownership, harmonization, alignment, managing for results and mutual accountability) (Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 2006) to a new partnership for effective development cooperation in 2015 by a formal adoption of the Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (the Vientiane Declaration II or the Vientiane Partnership Declaration 2015-2025).

The Declaration, signed by the Government and more than 30 development partners after the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation's first high-level meeting in 2015. The Declaration as well as the design and implementation of subsequent national development plans and processes, such as 8th National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSEDP) 2016-2020 and 9th NSEDP 2021-2025, 10-year Socio-Economic Development Strategy (2016-2025) and the National Vision 2030, form a broad development framework to guide an inclusive dialogue mechanism, the Round Table Process. This structured partnership mechanism between the

Government and development partners, coupled with Laos' 10 Sector Working Groups, has streamlined development effectiveness.

In 2016, the VD Country Action Plan (CAP) was developed to guide the implementation of the Vientiane Declaration. The VDCAP identifies 14 concrete time-bound actions that will be reviewed and reported in line with that of the global monitoring survey on global partnership for effective development (monitoring against 10 global indicators) which is carried out every two years.

Objectives

The review of development cooperation under the VDCAP framework and principles is one of the agenda items at the HL-RTM. It fits under the third workstream on development cooperation and coordination. It aims to:

- Taking stock, summarise the achievements and the lessons learnt against the 14 key actions since the introduction of the VD and the VDCAP;
- Provide policy recommendations to further enhance effective development cooperation in the country in light of the new national socio-economic development plan (9th NSEDP 2021-2025) structuration.

Deliverables

Expected deliverables include:

- VDCAP review report; and
- A short brief highlighting main policy recommendations based on the analytical review of development cooperation and coordination.

Approach

- The VDCAP review will be a desk review. The key findings for the review are based on various monitoring and survey reports produced during the course of implementation, including the 2018 global survey on effective development cooperation, 2019 mutual accountability survey, and other relevant reports such as the Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey 2008, Paris Declaration Monitoring Survey 2011, a snapshot of the Implementation of the VDCAP (2012-2015) and series of annual Foreign Aid Reports prepared by DIC/MPI. Consultation with key stakeholders particularly Sector Working Groups will further inform the key findings of the VDCAP report.

In line with the anticipated overall approach to the RTM, made up of more detailed events to address specific issues, followed by shorter formal sessions as part of the High-Level RTM itself, preparations for the financing strategy agenda item will lead to two complementary outputs:

- A panel discussion as a side event to the RTM will be organised a few weeks before the RTM, to review the main findings of the desk review. Additional consultations with the SWGs will be organised as required;
- At a high-level, a brief presentation on the main findings of the report and main policy recommendations, and opportunities for high-level statements.

Leadership

The review of development cooperation agenda item is led by the Department of International Cooperation (DIC) of MPI, which acts as the secretariat of the HL-RTM, and the VDCAP Secretariat consisting of focal points from line ministries. UN RCO, UNDP, ADB, WB, Japan and Korea will provide technical support for the VDCAP review.