

Governance Sector Working Group Report 2021

Name of the Sector Working Group: **Governance Sector Working Group**

GSWG Chair and Co-Chair:

- Minister of Ministry of Home Affairs (MoHA)
- Minister of Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
- Resident Representative of UNDP
- Ambassador of Switzerland (based in Bangkok)

SWG Secretariat Focal Point:

- Ms. Vilaythone Sounthone Xaymongkhonh, Chief of Cabinet Office, Ministry of Home Affairs
- Ms. Saykit Visisombat, Deputy Director General of International Cooperation Department, Minister of Justice

Government Officials:

- Mr. Phetsomphone Souvanvixay, Director of International Cooperation Division, Cabinet Office, Ministry of Home affairs
- Mr. Bounthom Phenglattanavong, Director of International Organization Cooperation Division, Department of International Cooperation Minister of Justice

Development Partners:

- Ms. Francesca Arato, Attaché, Governance and Rule of Law, Delegation of the European Union to the Lao PDR
- Seán O'Connell, Head of Governance, UNDP
- Ms. Aurélie Righetti, Head of Governance Programme, SDC

Technical Support Staff :

- Mr. Thounvilai Oudomsine, Technical staff, Cabinet office, MOHA
- Ms. Viengvilay, Technical staff, International Cooperation Department, MOJ

Overview of the Sector Performance in 2021

Sector outputs and key activities	Update on the Progress/note on situation and relevant information to highlight sector performance	Challenges, opportunities and way forwards
<p>A. Actions/activities relating to the RTIM key recommendations and those highlighted in GSWG Call for Action 2020</p> <p>1. Enhance Effectiveness of the Public Governance and Administration.</p>	<p>1. Overall Progress: The GSWG led discussions on adapting governance and public administration to the COVID-19 response and recovery context, including a workshop in February 2021 on ‘Lessons learnt workshop on Strengthening Local Governance in Prevention, Control and Response to COVID -19’, led by MOHA and MOH. As part of this effort, workshops and trainings were held to increase efficiency in local service delivery through One Door Service Centres, acceleration of E-Governance, strengthening the role of CSOs in local development, and</p>	<p>(Note: activities under the LIOSSWG for 2021 had not taken place at time of drafting but an event related to achieving ROL related targets under the 9th NSEDP is being reviewed by MOJ and is planned for December)</p> <p>Adapting to COVID-19 lockdown: 2021 saw significant challenges in implementing governance reforms with an unexpected and lengthy lockdown due to COVID-19. Given Lao PDR’s effective response in 2020, levels of preparedness for continued governance</p>

	<p>capturing feedback from citizens to improve public service delivery. Key features of this work included using more online and digital tools including the engagements of the government at sub national levels, promoting more citizen centric approach to service delivery, increased coordination between ministries for service delivery and ensuring wider participation of stakeholders in service delivery. Progress on these key features is evidenced throughout 2021 in different ways.</p> <p>Digitalization & E-Governance: 2021 saw a marked increase in the adoption of digital tools in governance, in particular for coordinating between the national and sub national level. In March 2021 MOHA hosted a online training workshop on the roll out of One Door Service Centres for 44 districts from across the country. At the workshop on E-Governance in June 2021, details of the digital maturity assessment for line ministries were shared and further feedbacks were collected on the development of the digital master plan and the implementation of e-governance by line key agencies.</p> <p>Citizen Centric Service Delivery: Evidence of increased citizen centric service delivery can be seen from the use of preliminary results from the Service Users Feedback Survey, with over 1200 citizens were surveyed on their experiences</p>	<p>programming and activities in 2021 was lower and took some months to begin better co-existing with COVID-19.</p> <p>Two of the main challenges were adapting to hosting workshops online, and collecting information from sub national levels without the ability of interprovincial travel and missions. The ability of GSWG members to adapt to online events creates a significant opportunity to continue this model in the COVID-19 recovery phase, allowing greater number of participants to join, at least for hybrid online/offline events, as well as keeping costs down due to travel of participants to such events. The experience in delivering key governance workshops and trainings in 2021 will prove invaluable to driving governance sector reforms in the 2030 Agenda and the NSEDP, including through trainings and more easy consultations with actors and sub national and even international levels. The move to hybrid events will also support Lao PDR's efforts in advancing environmental protection and combatting climate change by reducing overall travel.</p> <p>The National Assembly similarly adopted online/hybrid meetings due to their international and regional obligations in different parliamentary formats such as IPU or AIPA. Also, the state-of-the-art new NA building provides best environment for a</p>
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	<p>in using local services, by PPA members and local authorities. The experiences of citizens will help to inform efforts to improve service delivery.</p> <p>Inter-ministerial Coordination: Inter-ministerial coordination was highlighted in the draft strategy for the roll out of One Door Service Centres which was presented at a workshop attended by 18 ministries and the Office of the Prime Minister to agree on good practice for coordinating across services at district level One Door Service Centres. Similarly, the E-Governance workshop mentioned above identified key areas for inter-ministerial coordination for the development of the digital masterplan following the completion of the digital maturity assessment.</p> <p>CSO Engagement in SDG and NSEDP Implementation: Finally, the participation of non-governmental organizations in implementation of SDGs and response to COVID-19 was highlighted in a thematic workshop on civil society engagement in September 2021. The workshop drew on the success of a number of CSOs led development initiatives under the CEGGA project, and through a number of successful initiatives under the GDP Public Sector Innovation Facility, which saw 10 partnerships established between local authorities and CSOs to support vulnerable groups impacted by COVID-19, including persons with</p>	<p>‘digitalized’ parliament. Training of MPs and parliamentary on IT literacy continues as part of the digitalization process of Lao parliaments.</p> <p>The COVID-19 lockdown saw a significant focus on immediate COVID-19 response and support to vulnerable groups due to increased return migration, unemployment, and of course those at greatest health risk due to the pandemic. Important resources and priority focus was afforded to key issues including resourcing quarantine centres at border areas with Thailand, supporting healthcare staff and providing equipment and supplies for COVID-19 patients. Development partners and government agencies prioritized these key areas and as a result during the lockdown period some governance related reform efforts were delayed in terms of implementation. This did create an important opportunity for GSWG members to adapt and reprogramme efforts to support the COVID-19 response, including mobilizing resources for health equipment and supplies, and ensuring direct support and training for vulnerable groups recently made unemployed due to the lockdown and failures in local and regional supply chains.</p> <p>Efforts to advance the collection of citizen feedback on service delivery through the SUFS and ODSCs initiatives made important advances in 2021. However, the potential impact of these initiatives is frustrated due to the limited budget in</p>
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	<p>disabilities, unemployed persons and returning migrant workers. Over 20,000 people benefitted from local PSIF initiatives.</p> <p>2. Strengthening effectiveness of GSWG to support implementation of 9th NSEDP</p> <p>Members of the GSWG have developed a new draft Master Plan for the SWG, for the new period to coincide with the 9th NSEDP, and to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the SWG. A draft was prepared for consideration by GSWG members in advance of an online consultation held in July 2021. Key elements of the draft plan build on lessons learned from previous years of the GSWG and include greater alignment with the NSEDP (including relevance of GSWG activities with NSEDP targets and indicators). Comments on the draft plan included the need for greater engagement with key actors such as MOFA and NA/PPAs (MOFA engagement to focus on international law and human rights, and NA/PPA to focus on political representation and participation), outlining more clearly principles of GSWG over vision or objectives (clearer description of how the GSWG should operate), and greater emphasis on the role of GSWG in introducing discussions new trends in governance sector. Finally, more work needs to be done to coordinate more closely with other SWGs, and across the</p>	<p>rolling them out and scaling them up. The SUFS is limited to only 1200 citizens surveyed, and the model OSDC is being piloted in only two districts on the country. Both initiatives hold significant promise in advancing both citizen centric service delivery and inter-ministerial coordination but need greater support in the future to realize this potential.</p> <p>Digital readiness at sub-national levels: On the advancement of digitalization and e-governance, the COVID-19 lockdown demonstrated the huge potential in moving more activities online. However, through the workshop on E-governance, and other initiatives such as the online training on ODSC roll out for 44 districts, it was clear that greater support is required in capacity development of civil servants and in purchasing of equipment and investment in infrastructure to advance digitalization. This is particularly the case at the sub-national level. Future interventions should include support in both people and equipment at these levels to ensure the full potential of digital tools can be realized.</p> <p>All 18 Provincial People’s Assemblies have been facilitated with basic IT equipment in 2019 which is not sufficient to properly work online and hybrid. Despite challenges in terms of possessing sufficient ICT</p>
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	<p>work of the PAR and LIO sub sector working groups, in recognition of the fact that no development challenge can be addressed with a sectoral focus, a systems approach is required. Another draft of the Master Plan will be shared among GSWG members ahead of a final consultation in 2021.</p> <p>3. Recommendations Through GSWG activities, GSWG members have made a number of important recommendations on strengthening good governance, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase utilization of digital tools to advance good governance, including online formats for meetings and online shared document software. Mitigate the risk of digitalisation and ensure it aligns to the principle of – and contribute to – leaving no one behind (LNOB). • Increase collection of feedback and experiences from citizens on using services to inform efforts to reform service delivery, including further rounds of SUFS and systematic feedback collection at newly rolled out ODSCs • Increase participation of CSOs in policy dialogue through GS(S)WG and in SDG and NSEDP implementation, including in service delivery for vulnerable 	<p>infrastructure and equipment, PPAs managed to move meetings, consultations, and exchanges online also in their consultations with the NA. Further improvement of relevant IT equipment and training for all 18 PPAs to facilitate the digitalization of parliaments is envisaged in Q4 2021/Q1 2022.</p> <p>Civil society participation in development: An increased participation of civil society in SWG will strengthen the rule of law and participation of Non-Profit Associations along with other civil society organizations should be encouraged within the Round Table Process. One of the key lessons learned in 2020, and repeated in 2021, is that in order to achieve durable development outcomes that benefit everyone specially the vulnerable groups on an equal basis, public debates and decision-making processes have to be conducted in a transparent and informed manner. Capacity of the NPAs and Foundations must be built so that they can play an active and a positive role, not only for service delivery but also in helping shape effective policies. Furthermore, greater focus must be paid to the registration and reporting systems for NPAs and CSOs so that they can play their critical role in supporting SDG and NSEDP implementation.</p> <p>GSWG Secretariat Support:</p>
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	<p>groups, monitoring of progress against development targets, and greater engagement for the RTM in 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase inter-ministerial coordination on key governance issues, including the acceleration of digitalization efforts and implementation of the strategy for the roll out of ODSCs • Enhanced transparency, accountability and participatory planning and budget process in line with the Sam Sang directives. 	<p>The GSWG Secretariat is supported under the GIDP project, which concluded in September 2021. As a result, ongoing support to the GSWG and implementation of the Annual Workplan was not available for the last Q4 period. Direct support to MOHA was provided by UNDP. Further support for the Secretariat is required if the ambitions of the GSWG Masterplan are to be realized.</p>
<p>B. Communication and outreach activities with the sector and across Sector Working Groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Secretariat has used social media extensively within the sector and across sector working groups. • Print media have been invited to provide wide coverage to the activities conducted by the SSWG. 	
<p>C. Cross-sectoral thematic areas applied to all SWGs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSWG facilitated discussion across key agencies on E-governance challenges and proposals for increased coordination • GSWG facilitated discussion with MOH on Strengthening Local Governance in COVID-19 Prevention, Control and Response • GSWG shared preliminary SUFS results with ministries and departments, including health, transport, education, as well as PPA members to inform public administration reform 	<p>It is observed that the SWGs are functioning in silos and there is not much of cross sectoral collaboration or synergy. Despite ad-hoc and thematic specific collaborations, such as the MOHA and MOH event on COVID response in 2021, there is limited evidence of increased collaboration across SWGs. This is particularly concerning considering the increased evidence of the need for interdisciplinary and cross sectoral responses to persistent development challenges, including public service delivery,</p>

	efforts and local constituent areas of concern respectively	environmental protection and climate change, and increased civic participation in development. With similar experiences from 2020, the participation from civil society has been minimal especially from the INGO sector given the focus of activities in 2021. GSWG expects and calls for an active participation from the INGOs working in the governance sector.
1. Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (in accordance to VDCAP 2016-2025) (Only narrative on each principle)	Sharing information and dialogue through the regular meetings, workshops and other communication channels e.g. thematic workshop, annual workshop of SWG, secretariat meeting, and media	
2. Innovation and technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GSWG championed fully online and hybrid online/offline events in 2021, including the E-governance workshop • MoHA has been piloting mobile application for enabling the citizens to access services provided by ODSCs • GIDP and CEGGA projects have been driving local innovation for local development among non-governmental organizations with a strong focus on supporting vulnerable groups during COVID-19 	
3. Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment and accelerating the adoption and implementation of the National Youth Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CEGGA and GIDP local CSO innovation initiatives including strong support for women's empowerment and gender equality • MoHA implemented round two of SUFS, which ensured 	As Covid19 is still pandemic nationwide, many training activities at the local levels are pending and not yet organize via the online conference due to the difficulty of local officials

	<p>parity in collecting feedback among women and men in local households on their experiences using local services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MOJ successfully extended 125 Legal Aids Office nationwide supported by DPs such as UNDP (3S-RoL), US Aids (TAF, MCC), Luxembourg (Lao/031) based on Decree 77/PM. Over 8.000 Village Mediation Units were established to ensure some civil cases procedures are not directly sent to Courts. The Law on Judgement Enforcement Administration are revised and submitted to the NA for approval. These are key values to strengthen and enhance the A2J ensuring the implementation of SDG 16.3. 	<p>accessing to the ICT and IT equipment for video conference are rare. In these regards, clear guidelines, and instruction on how to use and access to the webinar from central to the provincial level are needed.</p>
<p>Other emerging issues such as impact of COVID-19 and response</p>		