

Consultation on 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM) At Technical Level

Meeting Minutes

Date and time: 8:30-12:00, 28th October 2022

Venue: Second floor meeting room, Muong Thanh Hotel, Vientiane



The consultation on 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting at Technical Level was chaired by Mme Sisomboun Ounavong Director General of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and Co-Chair by Mme Ricarda Reiger UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Resident Representative.

The objective of the meeting is to discuss with government and development stakeholders at the technical level, the progress made towards the implementation of the Government's instruction on the result of the 13th High-Level Round Table Meeting and the draft concept note and agenda for 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting.

1. Background

The RoundTable is an inclusive forum for discussing and exchanging views on the implementation progress of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) between the Government and development partners. Taking place every five years, High-Level Round Table Meetings (HL-RTMs) guide

the design and implementation of the country's NSEDPs. RoundTable Implementation Meetings (RTIMs) are held every year to take stock of progress made in the past year and set joint priorities for the coming year.^[1] The process includes 10 Sector Working Groups (SWGs), brought together under a chairs and co-chairs structure (national leads and international support to the leads).

2. Objective

The objective of the meeting is to discuss with government and development stakeholders at the technical level, the progress made towards the implementation of the instructions of the Prime Minister's Office in relation to the key agreements achieved at the 13th HL-RTM and the draft concept note and agenda for this year's RTIM.

3. Opening remarks

Opening remarks by Ms. Sisomboun Ounnavong, Director General of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment

In the opening remarks, Ms. Sisomboun Ounnavong expressed gratitude towards the contribution of all stakeholders and stressed the importance of the consultation to the successful and smooth implementation of 2022 RTIM. Following up on last year's HL-RTM, the consultation's objective was to help prepare for the upcoming RTIM on 29 November 2022. The chair also acknowledged the support from development partners and significant efforts by line ministries for the key achievements in 2022, which is a second year of the implementation of the 9th NSEDP and the need for continued support from all stakeholders. RTIM is a platform to support dialogues between the Government and development partners which can facilitate effective implementation of national development policies to create greater impacts. The half-day meeting would discuss how to move forwards on the recommendations, with expectations that line ministries would provide feedback and update on the progress of SWGs.

Remarks by Ms. Ricarda Rieger, UNDP Resident Representative

As a co-chair of the meeting, Ms. Ricarda Rieger emphasized the importance of the RTMs as an annual event where the Government, civil society organizations and international communities gather to discuss the most urgent and important matters. Therefore, it was important to plan the event well, and the half-day meeting would be important to that. The half-day meeting would present the draft agenda, including the proposed schedule of chair and co-chair meeting of the 10 SWGs on 16 November 2022. The meeting would also discuss how to move forward on findings and recommendations from the SWG independent review, which has been circulated prior to this meeting, finalization of the Financing Strategy of the 9th NSEDP, Resilience Framework and Smooth Transition Strategy for LDC graduation. The co-chair also emphasized the importance of participants' feedback to RTM and continual improvement to RTP to ensure it works throughout the year.

4. Presentation 1: the notification of the results of the 13th High-Level round table meeting in 2021 (No. 0320/MPI)

Presentation

The first presentation on the results of last year's high-level RTM was presented by Mr. Sysomphorn Phetdaoheuang, Deputy Director General of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning, and Investment. The presentation reiterated the responsibilities of government agencies as outlined in the Government's instruction as the result of the 13th HL-RTM in 2021. The key points of the presentation were as follows:

1. MPI's appointment to coordinate relevant stakeholders to effectively implement the development outcomes and outputs of the 9th NSEDP.
2. MPI's appointment to coordinate relevant stakeholders to implement the VDPEDC (Vientiane Declaration on Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation).
3. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' appointment to coordinate relevant stakeholders to develop Smooth Transition Strategy for LDC graduation.

Please see annex 2, 'Presentation 1: notification of the results of the XIII high-level round table meeting in 2021 (No. 0320/MPI)', for detailed information.

Questions and answers and follow-up discussion for presentation 1

Representative of SDC (Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation), Mr. Christian Engler

The representative has urged for the schedule of RTM to be informed in advance. Secondly, he highlighted some results of the SWG review, emphasizing the difference in performance of SWGs and for some that are dormant may be put on hold. Thirdly, he requested that urgent priorities should be identified for better budget allocation, especially in the face of limited financial resources. He referred to the World Bank's roadmap to recovery as an example of identifying the most urgent tasks among the set priorities where the World Bank selected 6 among its 37 priorities in the recovery roadmap to be the most urgent. All stakeholders should have unanimous agreement on the most urgent tasks for the most efficient allocation of budget. Lastly, Mr. Engler has stressed that while ODA is ready it is not easy to get it on the ground, further pleading for ease of ODA (Official Development Assistance) mobilization, with special requests to line ministries and MPI to get the MOUs signed in time.

Representative of German Embassy, Ms. Christina Seaborg

Ms. Seaborg agreed with the comment by SDC's representative on the advanced notification of meetings. In addition, she urged for more substantive discussions in SWG (Sector Working Groups) meetings and to identify and keep only SWGs deemed useful to save everyone's time and efforts, and to make the most out of limited resources.

Representative of USAID (United States Agency for International Development), Ms. Silavanh Vongphosy

The representative started by congratulating MPI and the UN (United Nations) system for organizing the RTM before requesting for reflections on the usefulness of some processes, which echoed earlier comments by SDC's and German Embassy's representatives. In addition, she recommended including the NSEDP and the Financing Strategy to be discussed in this year's

meeting. Further, the representative suggested including a dedicated platform to discuss the issues related to vulnerable groups of the population and integrating discussion into SWGs; she suggested that SWG for Governance may be the appropriate platform for inclusion. She also suggested that RTIM instructs relevant stakeholders how to implement recommendations.

Education and Sport Sector Working Group Representative, Mr. Khamfong Sommala

Mr. Sommala has shared the achievement of the SWG and the schedule for SWG meetings. The SWG meetings will be held on 9 November 2022 at the technical level and on 22 November 2022 at the management level. The representative has shared some progress including:

- 1) provided safe learning space with preventive measures against Covid-19 and its variants.
- 2) integrated modernized teaching methods into school programs and intensively compensated classes for those who started school late due to the impact of the pandemic combined with lack of access to necessary equipment and premises.
- 3) set up a commitment to resolve the issue of insufficient teachers due to low replacement rates for retired personnel due to limited quota for teacher recruitment.
- 4) promoted early childhood education by adding more programs and provided safe learning space from Covid-19.

The SWG also has “ratified” (agreed) in New York to provide safe learning space, accelerate digitalization and educational transformation. With that said, there were still so many challenges. One of them was low budget allocation, on which the SWG has set up a committee to endeavor to achieve the budget allocation of the targeted 18%.

Health Sector Working Group representative, Ms. Viengmany Bounkhamh

The representative updated the meeting on two aspects of work, technical and financial aspects.

For the technical aspect, the SWG has held 2 SWG meetings at the technical level. The SWG has passed Covid-19 recovery plan and integrated it with the action plan of the health sector, with an aim of reaching 80% of vaccination coverage to prepare for border reopening. There were also achievements of expanding infrastructures, quarantine premises, and acquiring modernized medical equipment. The SWG has also issued manuals on Covid-19 prevention and related psychological support, which have been endorsed and distributed. The SWG was to hold the policy level SWG meeting on 2 November 2022 to summarize the achievements, including the use of ODA, in 2022 as well as plans and priorities for 2023. The health sector was in its phase 3 reform, with a goal to reach 95% of universal health coverage by 2025. The sector has regrouped subsectors to reduce the number of subsectors to 5, from the earlier 6 sub-groups, for better coordination and more efficient implementation. The sector has also implemented the policy on primary health care by establishing a committee to prepare a strategy and action plans and encouraging the people to be more proactive in this regard.

Financially, the SWG was strengthening its financial sustainability. The SWG was preparing for financial independence of the National Health Insurance Bureau from the Ministry of Health. In addition, the sector was also transforming three public hospitals, namely Mahosod, Setthathilath and Mittapharb hospitals, to gradually become financially self-sufficient units by providing guidance on fee collections to ensure the balance between staff size and quality services. Further, the health sector has also discussed with the World Bank about pro-health tax and with WHO (World Health Organization) on the impacts of Covid-19 on health system and financial situation. The sector has held several technical and management level meetings to smoothly transition before the cessation of assistance by some donors, such as GAVI (Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization) who was expected to provide financial support in 2023.

Public Work and Transport Sector Working Group representative, Mr Chanthavong Bounsombat

The work of the sectors was cross-cutting, with a focus on providing connectivity and safe infrastructure. The SWG has discussed to prepare the SWG meeting on 11 November 2022 to be chaired by the minister and co-chaired by Japanese ambassador, the World Bank and ADB (Asian Development Bank). The invitations were expected to be sent by the following week (the week starting 31 October 2022).

The World Bank representative, Ms. Viengsamai Silithilath

It would be more streamlined if the national agendas, the highest national priority, could be integrated. The representative had a further question on how the recovery roadmap by the World Bank (37 priorities and 6 urgent priorities), and other agendas, were integrated with the RTM.

Ministry of Energy and mine Ms. Khotany

The work of the SWG was cross-cutting, with a focus on the 9th development plan of the sector. The achievements of the sector included transitioning to the use of clean energy and promoting the use of electric cars in transportation. The SWG has set up the sector development vision to 2030 and the sector development strategy, which was expected to be endorsed soon. In addition, the sector was trying to generate power from other clean sources such as wind power in addition to hydro and solar power in the current stage. The sector would also prioritize the two national agendas.

Trade and Private Sector Working Group representative, Ms. Chanthong Phommachanh

The ministry has discussed with the EU (European Union) to hold an SWG meeting on 25 November 2022 and proposed a new co-chair of the SWG.

In summary, MPI called on all SWGs to submit a report on their progress on the notification to the RTP Secretariat (DIC) for compilation purposes.

5. Presentation 2: Concept Note for the 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM)

Presentation

The concept note for the 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM) was presented by Mr. Sysomephorn Phetdaoheuang, Deputy Director General of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning, and Investment. The key points of the presentation included the timeline of RTIM activities, RTIM concept and draft RTIM schedule.

Please refer to Annex 3, 'Presentation 2: concept note for the 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM)', for detailed information.

Questions and answers and follow-up discussion for presentation 2

JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) Lao office representative Mr. Koga Toshimishi

The representative asked if it would be possible to receive materials for the meeting in advance and who represents the private sector.

Response from chair and co-chair: materials would be shared beforehand, and efforts would be made to ensure this. As to who represents the private sector, normally this would be represented by LNCCI (Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry), international chambers of commerce such as EU or Australian Chambers of Commerce. There can also be companies from the private sector.

USAID representative Ms. Sthawanh Vongphosy

The representative asked about SWG review. The chair and co-chair meeting that will be held on 16 November will discuss SWG review. What was the purpose of RTIM on 29 November? Was it to present the summary of the meeting on 16 November?

Response from chair and co-chair: like any other processes, RTM needed a long gestation period, involving several consultations. The chair and co-chair meeting, on 16 November, was for chairs and co-chairs of SWGs to discuss findings and what they need and how they would like to move things forward. The meeting on 16 November was a higher-level step needed before RTIM in which the preparedness for RTM and the outcomes of SWG review shall be presented. Therefore, SWGs should hold SWG meetings before the chair and co-chair meeting. Tentatively, the chair and co-chair meeting would be chaired by Ms. Phonevanh Outhavong, MPI vice minister, and co-chaired by Ms. Sara Sekkenese, UN Resident Coordinator.

UNFPA (United Nations Fund for Population Activity) representative, Kambiz Kabiri

The representative asked if there were outcome documents from previous RTMs? Or what would be the outline of this document for the upcoming RTM?

Response from chair and co-chair: the outcome documents usually included background document or report on the implementation of the NSEDP, national agendas or findings on urgent issues. The background documents can be distributed in advance. After the RTIM on 29 November, there will be a presentation to the prime minister by senior officers from line ministries. Then, PM (Prime Minister) instruction would be distributed to each line ministry to inform of the priority tasks to

focus on. RTM is an important process for all stakeholder consultation and crucial to multilateral cooperation, the effective implementation of the NSEDP and other agendas.

4. Closing

Remarks by Ms. Ricarda Rieger, UN Resident Representative

Ms. Rieger took notes of requests about informing and distributing meeting materials in advance in a manner that allows participants to prepare for the most constructive participation.

Closing remarks by Ms. Sisomboun Ounnavong, Director General of the Department of International Cooperation, Ministry of Planning and Investment

Closing remarks by DG (Director General) Sisomboun Ounnavong also echoed her co-chair in acknowledging the recommendations from participants to be the solid foundation for the preparation of the upcoming RTIM. The timing of RTM process is always towards the end of the year, but the team took notes to inform all relevant parties promptly and would have close consultations with all partners. Meanwhile, reviews of SWGs have just been completed and, therefore, there was a need for follow-up actions based on recommendations. The chair hoped that in 2023 there would be new elements to SWGs to better support the implementation of development agendas, which is the goal of this work process. The chair also called for a simpler mapping of problems and solutions to better name what was needed in the development efforts. Upon the conclusion of the first discussion, the chair requested all SWGs to submit progress reports to be posted on the RTM website.

5. Annexes

Annex 1: list of participants

Annex 2: Presentation 1: notification of the results of the XIII high-level round table meeting in 2021 (No. 0320/MPI)

Annex 3: Presentation 2: concept note for the 2022 Round Table Implementation Meeting (RTIM)