

Meeting Minutes

Round Table Process Retreat/Chair & Co-Chair of Sector Working Group Meeting

Date: 16 January 2024

Venue: Lao Plaza Hotel

1. Background and Objectives

The Round Table Process Retreat/Chair & Co-Chair of the Sector Working Group (SWG) Meeting was chaired by the H.E. Mme. Phonevanh Outhavong, Vice Minister, Ministry of Planning and Investment, and co-chaired by Mr. Bakhodir Burkhanov, UN Resident Coordinator.

The objectives of the meeting were provide a platform for participants to discuss the progress made in implementing the recommendations from the 2022 RTIM, as well as to deliberate on the themes for the upcoming RTIM 2023. Additionally, the event will introduce the draft Round Table Process guideline, which is intended to serve as a key reference for the workings of the Sector Working Groups and the RTP secretariat in the coming years. The draft guideline will be shared with participants ahead of the retreat to allow for review and productive discussions during the event, with expectation to finalize it by the RTIM in February.

2. Opening Remarks

H.E. Mme. Phonevanh Outhavong, Vice Minister, Ministry of Planning and Investment

In her opening remarks, H.E. Mme. Phonevanh Outhavong, expressed honour to co-chair the RTP retreat/Chair & Co-Chair meeting with the UN Resident Coordinator to prepare for the upcoming RTIM, and commended the efforts of all stakeholders in the progress of their sectors. The Chairperson emphasized that the RTIM is an important platform for policy dialogue between Governments and Development Partners (DPs) to communicate the country's priorities and garner DP support to achieve the national priorities. The Chair encouraged participants to provide their input to the preparation of the RTIM. The Chairperson also acknowledged the progress made in the National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) as evidenced by the preliminary results of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the 9th NSED and stressed the need to continue the implementation of the NSED in 2024 to tackle the two national challenges related to financial and economic difficulties and narcotics issues, even though it would be a busy year due to the Visit Laos Year and the ASEAN chairmanship.

Mr. Bakhodir Burkhanov, UN Resident Coordinator

Mr. Burkhanov as the Co-Chair of the meeting appreciated the participation in the meeting to discuss the RTP. The Co-Chair touched upon the progress and challenges identified in the MTR, including urgent implementation to address economic and financial difficulties and to ensure investment in the health and education sectors, and stressed that the need to take responsibility for the remaining year of the 9th NSED implementation period. The Co-Chair

encouraged the participants to use the opportunity of the meeting for substantive discussion to rethink the format to provide more space for a clear national policy forum, referring to the circulated draft RTP Guideline developed on the basis of the previous SWG review.

3. Presentations

- a. the follow up on Implementation of the recommendations of the RTIM 2022
- b. the draft Concept Note for the 2023 Round Table Implementation Meeting
- c. the draft guideline of the RTP mechanism

4. Discussion Summary

EU

- According to the agreement, SWGs need to meet once in a quarter, but it did not happen. Even twice a year SWG meetings would be helpful for co-chairs to be more active to help the government chairs.
- The generic TOR for SWGs could be endorsed and put to the RTP website.
- The RTP website may need to be updated by focusing on more SWG issues.
- The process to change co-chairs is taking long time, nearly two years.
- The signing process of the MOU is very slow. Please take some measures to speed up the signing of the MOU.

Asian Development Bank

- ADB is the co-chair of the Infrastructure and the Macroeconomics SWGs.
- There are cross-cutting issues such as issues on financing, climate change and green growth. In particular, on the financing issue, we need to assess how much new funds to come to all development plans in ministries.
- On the frequency of the meeting, the Infrastructure SWG held only once a year. More frequent discussions with substantive working groups would be useful. It would be difficult to organize a big meeting each time.
- Due to the limited resources, it is crucial how to prioritize activities in line with the NSEDP. We need to have some reality to allocate resources to the prioritized activities.

World Bank

- There is a big gap in the architecture to discuss issues in the energy sector where there is large amount of assistance, many partners involved as well as 40% of country external debt related to the sector. It is the huge macroeconomic issue, which has not been covered in the current SWG structure. The idea to incorporate the energy issue in the infrastructure seems not to be possible as the MPWT which is a different chair in the energy sector is leading the infrastructure SWG, but we need to address this issue.
- The composition of the Macroeconomic SWG is not effective as most of sector issues related to Ministry of Finance, which should lead its discussion.
- The infrastructure SWG spends too much time on the presentation and little for discussion on the policy. Presentation slides should be shared in advance for participants to read before the meeting to save time for discussion during a meeting.

- As a cross-cutting issue, it takes time for grants process. We don't have a forum in a multisectoral way, in particular with Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Investment and Planning and Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
- A guideline mechanism for rotation of co-chairs needs to be prepared to nominate a new co-chair as DPs priorities would change.

Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA)

- Governance SWG
 - The SWG approved 2023 action plan and plan for 2024.
 - There are two Sub-SWGs on the public administration and the rule of law on access to justice.
 - There are some progresses in the SWG:
 - The TOR for the public participation was established and approved by Sub-SWGs.
 - The NPA approval process was revised.
 - Closely working with local administration on the access to legal aid in line with the Sam Sang policy.
 - The one stop service strategy on the public services was translated into the action now.

WHO

- The RTIM agenda looks good.
- On the transversal issues, we should find a mechanism to discuss across different SWGs. For example, the Governance SWG may invite the Health SWG members because the primary health care is relying on the governance. On the climate change and natural resources, WHO would be invited to related SWG discussion as WHO with the save the children receives 17 million USD from the Green Climate Fund to implement in Laos.

Ministry of Finance (MOF)

- On the economic and financial difficulties, we should highlight more policy actions including the issues related to inflation, the Public Finance Management reform strategy, etc.
- To improve domestic revenue collection, we may need to take up some issues on key laws for discussion such as the revision of the exercise tax on alcohol, the process of reversing Value-Added Tax from 7% to 10%, the tax policy on luxury goods etc.
- It is recommended that key policy actions are shared in the way forward.

USA

- USA is the co-chair of the Trade and Private Sector and the UXO SWGs.
- More frequent SWG meetings at some levels would be useful.
- Supporting development cooperation is the top priority of USA, as USAID is supporting this retreat/meeting event in partnership with UNDP and MPI.
- USA Supports WHO's comment related to health issues and the comments made by other colleagues such as World Bank.
- Look forward to participating in the RTIM
- 2024 is the busy year, USA continues to support Laos for the RTIM and the ASEAN chairmanship.

MOHA

- The RTIM format looks good.
- On the draft Guideline,
 - As the Governance SWG secretariat working closely with UNDP and EU, we will consult with co-chairs.
 - We appreciate the WHO's suggestion on collaboration with the health SWG to deliver the primary health care which is important for us to achieve the universal health care. The Health SWG could be part of the Governance SWG discussion. We can put this in the annual SWG work plan where the priorities in the Governance SWG would be identified. We can have thematic discussion on this under the Governance SWG.

Ministry of Natural Resource and Environment (MONRE)

- The Natural Resource and Environment SWG wrapped up our SWG last week and got good input from DPs and others for the RTIM.
- On the suggestion by WHO, as the SWG sec, we would like to support WHO to be part of discussion on climate change issues.
- The generic TOR for SWGs is welcomed. I agree with the EU ambassador that the RTP guideline should be straight forward and SWG meetings would be organized at least twice a year.

Ministry of Health (MOH)

- We would like to request more inclusion of work under MOH. There are some progresses with 11 indicators under tasks by National Assembly.
- On the RTP guideline, we welcome the progress and will consult again with management to provide further feedback.
- On the suggestions by WHO, we want to highlight the importance that the Health SWG can work with other SWGs to connect between ministries.

National Commission for Drug Control (Ministry of Public Security)

- The Illicit Drug Control SWG organized the SWG meeting and the results on narcotics issues will be shared with the RTP secretariat. This national agenda is still effective until 2025 as one of the top priorities in the government to combat in the region.
- Over the past three years, the SWG has implemented the national agenda. As a key progress, there was a big drug seizure two years ago.
- We need to involve different actors to address drug challenges, in particular the issue related to precursors which are active in the golden triangle area.
- In the relation to other sectors such as education and infrastructure, health, although we have made good progress in these sectors, it is not good enough and we need to work on drug control issues as well.

Ministry of Education and Sports

- In the Education SWG, there are three levels of engagement: the high-level chaired by Minister, technical levels by deputy ministers and DP co-chairs.
- There are high-level meetings twice a year and technical ones every quarter. There are 7 focal groups with EU, World Bank, etc.

- On the RTIM, we've already submitted the SWG progress report to the RTP secretariat.
- There is a bit delay on the implementation on the RTIM 2022 results.

UNDP

- We would like to introduce key results of the e-survey which was circulated to the Chairs and Co-Chairs previously.
 - There are 16 responses from 9 SWGs
 - Responses shows the overall satisfaction with the SWG secretariat:
 - Very satisfied: 4
 - Satisfied: 10
 - Slightly satisfied: 2
 - And with the RTP secretariat:
 - Very satisfied: 4
 - Satisfied: 9
 - Slightly satisfied: 3
 - There are various suggestions to improve the RTP and SWG processes such as how to strengthen the RTP secretariat with the ideas on the mobilization of funds to support SWG meetings and capacity building.
- Cross-cutting interaction is key. For example, in addition to the energy issues, the social protection issue is also not covered in the current architecture. As the formulation process of the 10th NSEDP will start, the Government may consider such areas that would deserve to have a dedicated working group to discuss.

UNRC

- We need to study the results of the e-survey, best practices and lessons learned.
- SWGs are not set in stone. They are as relevant as the guiding framework for us belonging to the national development plan. We should absolutely keep open-mind to revisit the focus such as the configuration of sector working groups on change, updates retire some working groups from the current architecture.

The RTP Secretariat

- Appreciation for all input provided by the participants.

Vice Minister of MPI

- I agree on the point raised by WB that other lead ministries need to be involved in the Macroeconomic SWG.
- Too much time spent on presentations in SWG meetings would also be the point that we need to address and ensure the discussion time.
- ODA has still key roles in development in Laos but in addition to that, we would like to see more investment from the private sector.
- The all suggestions made are useful.
- On the issue of Energy SWG, we need to explore to capture and discuss energy issues.
- It would be a great opportunity when the 10th NSEDP start its formulation process to see how the SWG structure can align with the 10th NSEDP.
- It was good to see the participation from MOF so that we can address the challenge on economic and financial difficulties.

- We recognized that the primary health care issue closely links to the public administration.
- Please feel free to provide any further input to the RTP secretariat. For example, as MOF mentioned the VAT re-adjustment from 7 to 10%, which would have impact on domestic revenue collection.
- On the rotation of Co-chairs, we will have more opportunities to discuss how to fill the gap.

5. Participant List

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