

**National Workshop on Institutional Arrangements for the 2030 Agenda:  
Advancing Coordination and SDGs Integration in the Lao PDR  
3-4 Oct 2019 at Settha Palace, Vientiane Capital, Laos**

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The rationale for the agenda envisaged a two-day Workshop. On the first day, the main theme was vertical and horizontal institutional coordination for innovation and public service delivery, with emphasis on homegrown cases presented by Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) and gender (LWU) and overall community engagement for service delivery, including inter-agency group discussions. On the second day there were presentations from Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Ministry of Health (MOH), with emphasis on sectoral contributions into the 9<sup>th</sup> National Socio-Economic Development Plan with participatory discussions on how to mainstream the SDGs into it.

**Day1: Advancing Coordination**

**Opening Remarks Day 1:**

Mr. Thongphan Savanphet, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; and Ms. Ricarda Rieger, Resident Representative of UNDP

Mr. Thongphan Savanphet: empathized the importance of effective coordination and the fact that this workshop represents a follow-up from the stakeholder engagement workshop held in May 2019, also organized by UNDESA. He encouraged all sectors to be part of the process of the SDG implementation. All the important documents were approved as the foundation for SDG implementation, but in reality, coordination of institutions to deliver what they are supposed to deliver is still challenging. This might be because some sectors still do not fully understand their roles and responsibilities. On this note, he stressed that we need concerted efforts from everyone to close the gap. Despite all these challenges, the GOL firmly supports and commits to the partnership with UN agencies to elevate vertical and horizontal coordination prospects. This workshop will form the foundation for further development. He hopes UNDESA and other agencies will continue to support Lao PDR in the endeavor to promote SDG implementation.

Ms. Ricarda Rieger: stressed that her presence today is to speak on behalf of all UN agencies in Laos and non-resident agencies as well by representing the Resident Coordinator, Ms. Sara Sekkenes who is away from the country (the RC spoke at the

closing). Ms. Rieger pointed out that the 2030 agenda for sustainable development is the blueprint which addresses usual challenges that we face every day when delivering services on behalf of a government. In order to leave no one behind, it is important for all countries in the world to achieve all goals by 2030; and in Lao PDR, she mentioned that we also have the SDG 18 (unexploded ordnances such as mines, bombs, etc.) to address. In many countries, coordination is still a challenging issue that grows depending on the complexity of the institution framework. Hence, Lao PDR is not the only country facing this challenge. Poverty eradication can only be addressed if all the ministries in Lao PDR come together. In the process of addressing coordination issues, there will be competition, but we must prioritize and work together. The National SDG Steering Committee fulfils the role of coordination in SDG implementation in Lao PDR. Apart from coordination, successful SDG implementation comes from many factors such as capacity development and SDG awareness. She also mentions the local challenges to be shared by MOHA (Foreign Affairs), LWU (Lao's Women's Union – gender), MPI (Planning and Investment), MOES (Education and Sports) and MOH (Health) will be very valuable for this workshop.

### **Co-chairs Day 1:**

The event was co-chaired by Mr. Kanya Khamnouxhoun, Deputy Director General of Department of International Organization (MOFA) and Mr. Jonas Rabinovitch, Senior Policy Advisor of UN DESA.

Mr. Kanya Khammoukhoun: Emphasized that the lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities is key to causing issues of institutional coordination and delivery, which is so crucial to the implementation of SDGs. We are now in the process of preparing the 9th NSEDP and examining how we can mainstream SDGs into the 9th NSEDP more effectively. To achieve this, all sectors must coordinate and work together.

Mr. Jonas Rabinovitch: Presented the role of innovation and institutional coordination for service delivery, sharing examples of other countries with Lao PDR. He emphasized that even in the most advanced countries, there are challenges of coordination and service delivery. In fact, institutional coordination is not a positive consequence of development but a major cause for development. Even if policy and norms change through decrees and introductions of new laws, policies, etc. it is important to address values and behaviors of civil servants. Coordination needs to be practiced, actively and routinely conducted so that the government improved as a whole. In his presentations he highlighted empirical lessons learned on innovation and public service delivery from all regions and from the sub-region.

### **Peer-to-Peer Learning:**

Day 1 was accompanied by presentations from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Lao Women's Union on how they adopted Stakeholder Engagement to advance coordination and service delivery.

**Ms. Vilaythone MOHA, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Home Affairs:** She narrated the past activities with some challenges on coordination prior to adopting stakeholder engagement mechanisms to advance coordination, including the village level. After the presentation, questions raised by the participants on the mechanism in place to engage different stakeholders, which include SWG (Stakeholder Working Groups), RTM (Round Table Mechanism) and so on. In addition, a representative from MOJ (Ministry of Justice) mentioned that they utilized 3S Rule of Law Programme to support them in terms of engaging stakeholders down to the local government levels.

<https://www.la.undp.org/content/laopdr/en/home/projects/strategic-support-to-strengthen-the-rule-of-law111.html>

**Ms. Ninpaseuth Xayphonesy, Director General, Lao Women's Union:** She stressed the critical role women play in the socio-economic development and mentioned that the role of LWU is equivalent to many other ministries. The coordination issue has made it challenging to harmonize data, especially the administrative and national data (especially the gender sensitive data). One of the mechanisms to ensure smooth coordination is the leveraging of existing networks. In this case, LWU utilizes the presence of LWU chapters across all the 8,000 plus villages in the country to collect data and support in the implementation of the SDG 5. On this, she also suggested to the National SDG Secretariat to produce standardized reporting formats and an SDG awareness handbook so that all the concerned will have access to harmonized information. Initiatives on action-research should also be in place to implement pilot projects related to SDGs at sub-national level.

#### **Comments from the Participants:**

MOPT (Ministry of Post and Telecommunication) mentioned that coordination is still challenging. We are not ready to supply the information as per request. On this, LSB (Laos Statistical Bureau) should work closely with all line ministries.

MOIC (Ministry of Industry and Commerce) stressed the importance of data harmonization. They also shared that the information related to SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) and businesses registrations in Lao PDR is now available on the website for people to access.

MOHA (Ministry of Home Affairs) stressed that one of the ways to achieve smooth coordination is to build local capacity and expertise so that the local experts can be the contact points for SDGs across all ministries. On this, we will also become more self-dependent and start to build our own capacity.

## **Activities**

In terms of vertical coordination, the participants mentioned:

- People (public officials) still do not understand roles and responsibilities clearly as far as SDG implementation is concerned. This can also stem from the fact that there are no clear roles and responsibilities clearly defined in the first place.
- Limited human resources. There should be the same professionals serving as the focal points. One problem that we face now is the frequent rotation of staff.
- Lack of budget to support the SDG awareness programmes. In order to have smooth coordination, people should be sensitized on SDGs first (not only UN jargon and wording but the language should be clear in terms of what is expected in terms of action from village administrations, provincial officials and ministerial focal points, among others).
- Access to information is still limited. Even when there is information, it is still not clear at times. Moreover, SDG information is mainly available in foreign languages.
- Internal procedures can also represent hurdles to improve coordination.
- The coordination from the village to the ministry level is challenging and sometimes it is overlapping as the different ministries go to the same villages to implement similar projects.
- The stakeholders should be clear of what is expected of them.

In terms of horizontal coordination (SDGi or SDGr) <sup>1</sup>, the participants mentioned:

- Lack of laws, decrees/order for SDGi owners to report to SDGr owners. To solve this issue, clear instructions from senior relevant bodies should be passed.
- Organize workshops and conferences for people who work on the field so that they can understand better of their roles and responsibilities in relation to SDGi and SDGr owners

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<sup>1</sup> One of the proposals from MOFA (Foreign Affairs) is to map national institutions according to a system of “indicator owners (SDGi)” and “indicator reporters (SDGr)”. It is a good idea and well defined theoretically, but not yet mainstreamed in practice in terms of workflows, legal frameworks, reporting lines, specific responsibilities, funding and accountability mechanisms.

- English capacity is still limited; which makes it difficult to coordinate with counterparts sometimes. The SDGr owners usually send English documents to SDGi owners to request information, which makes it difficult. Sometimes the request letter is not clear; hence making it difficult for the SDGi owners to report.

In terms of horizontal coordination (SDGr to Secretariat), the participants mentioned:

- Insufficient training on SDGs (eg: data collection)
- Short notice from the Secretariat
- The Secretariat is not always clear in what they expect from stakeholders
- Capacity and budgets from the Secretariat to support SDG focal points is still limited

Some of the solutions proposed to tackle the challenges highlighted above:

- We can leverage on the existence of the Village Speakers (i.e Tholakhong) set up in the villages. The village chief or committee can make announcements to all the villagers to spread awareness on SDGs.
- There should be clear instructions with clear plans from those leading the process.
- The Secretariat should continue to raise the awareness to support the line ministries
- Providing incentives for the SDG focal points (eg: sending people for specific and tailored courses)
- The format should be agreed and harmonized with clear reporting timelines
- There should only be a single point for reporting and coordination to avoid any information duplication or error
- More workshops should be organized and conducted (For example, the format on metadata organized by LSB Laos Statistical Bureau was very useful)
- Leadership roles are very important
- The five-year sectoral plans that are sent to MPI for the 9th NSEDP should have specific targets that are harmonized to the extent possible with the SDGs to help monitoring activities during the Technical Working Groups and reporting for the Round Table Meetings.
- The M&E framework for the NSEDP and each sector should be harmonized with the SDG monitoring framework
- The challenge is that there is considerable overlapping with the national indicator and the SDG indicator though not all of the SDGs are monitored/included – thus making it difficult to track some of them.
- Timing of when data is collected and when due to be reported for SDG monitoring are not always in sync

- If the national indicator and the SDG indicator are is the same (to the extent possible) they would be more regularly monitored

## **Day 2: SDGs integration in the Lao PDR**

### **Peer-to-Peer Learning:**

Presentations by Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) and Ministry of Health (MOH)

Mr. Somxay, Director of Department of Planning of MPI shared lessons learned from the implementation of 8<sup>th</sup> NSEDP and the development plan for the 9<sup>th</sup> NSEDP. There are 6 pillars for the 9<sup>th</sup> NSEDP: (1) Sustained economic growth; (2) Human development; (3) High living standards; (4) Reduced income gap; (5) Green growth and environmental development; (6) Connectivity.

1. Sustained economic growth: there are four expected outputs
  - Stable economic growth: transparent exchange: revenue and taxation; but taxation cannot hinder the investment landscape
  - Using science and technology in the production: how to make agriculture more conducive for growth, access to loan, green and less-pesticide agriculture; bridging the supply chain.
  - Conducive investment environment: Ease of doing business, linking SMEs to a larger market
  - SMEs development:
2. Human development: there are five expected outputs
  - HAI (Human Assets Index)
  - Education quality
  - Skill development to meet the needs of the market
  - TVET and TVET teacher and quality
  - Research and development
3. High living standard: there are 6 expected outputs
  - Agriculture investment
  - Making public service accessible for all with high quality:
  - Gender equality
  - Improve the welfare of the people
  - Safe living environment

4. Reduce income gap and the development gap
5. Green growth and environment strategy: there are 2 expected outputs
  - Disaster readiness
  - Sustainable natural resources
6. Connectivity with 5 expected outputs
  - Promote partnership with countries and international counterparts
  - Regional connectivity
  - One belt one road
  - Build infrastructure to improve service, commerce and investment to link with regional and international market
  - Promote local comparative advantages

Comments from the participants on MPI's presentation:

- MOIC (Industry and Commerce): For outcome 1: If we continue to find ways to increase the revenue, would not this make the investment less conducive? MPI replied that in order to increase the revenue collection base, MPI will have to consult with the line ministries further. For R&D, MOIC suggested that it should be parked under Outcome 2.
- LSB (Laos Statistical Bureau): How to measure the progress? On baseline or on the latest data? How indicators in the 9th NSEDP and statistics be linked? LSB's suggestion for the baseline is 2015. To achieve all these plans, budget is key challenge. The pressure from public and technical team is also the challenge. MPI replied that it absolutely agreed with LSB. Despite the challenges ahead, MPI is still working on various measures to address them.
- MOIC: Is there an evaluation on the 92 indicators linked to SDGs in the 8<sup>th</sup> NSEDP before moving to the 9th NSEDP? If not, it will not help much. MPI replied that at the moment, we are still not clear how many indicators we mainstream into the 9th NSEDP. If the indicator is not in line with the 9th NSEDP priorities, we will not mainstream yet.

Mr. Jonas Rabinovitch comments on the MPI presentation and other comments: The quality of the presentation by MPI and the questions raised by participants are on target and absolutely of high standard. The question of which indicator to use will all depend to a great extent on the "National Policy Space" as defined by the 2030 Agenda. Each country can react in line with their priorities and adopt or develop SDG indicators that are relevant for them. On this note, countries can also choose to report on issues they would like to report focusing on the SDG thematic areas defined for the High-Level Political

Forum (HLPF) every year; this is also why it is called a Voluntary National Report. On this, it would be important for Lao PDR to reflect on mechanisms we could envision to bridge the important gaps raised by the participants. The follow-up to this Workshop could also attempt to address these gaps in subsequent project activities, in cooperation with the UN Country Team activities. I would also encourage the groups to spend more time in today's workshop discussing these relevant issues.

**Ms. Manola, Director of the Statistics Division of MOES (Education and Sports):** shared with the participants the background of SDG integration into MOES activities. She highlighted that the key to success rests with the overall strategy of the Ministry. Apart from that, MOES has also received a lot of support from international counterparts and shared best practices with the ASEAN region on SDGs linkages to education.

Comments from Ms. Phetsamone Sone, Deputy Head of Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB):

- She further emphasized the importance of SDGs integration into the 9th NSEDP. But how do we know about progress? We should have a robust M&E framework, budget, human capacity and planned outputs that can lead to the overall outcome.
- For indicators without data, how to improve further? We should perhaps focus on this challenge by having the work of MOES as a reference. It is a good example.
- Institutional arrangements are more than just coordination. How to communicate? How to collaborate? How to work together?
- We will also have to discuss the baseline year. Is it 2015 or some other years? If we stick to 2015 we can do so by leveraging. How do we maintain this data and make it accessible to all? We are now in the process of building the SDG data portal.

Comments from other participants to MOES:

- How did MOES mainstream SDG 4 from central to local? How to ensure the indicators at the central and local government are the same? How do you create materials to raise awareness? MOES replied to the questions: Before we even got the data, it is not easy. It is a long process. There are three forms to collect data ranging from ECE, primary and secondary schools. Now, all the schools have to submit the details by 15 Oct to send to the District, and from District level it goes to central government directly. Apart from that, MOES has also implemented the school grant system to entice students to enroll in schools.
- Some participants mentioned that in order to implement, we need to have the will. We should start submitting proposals. MOES has just demonstrated this to us.



- LSB mentioned that 7th NSEDP was without M&E; 8th NSEDP was with M&E but still not robust. The intention for the 9th NSEDP is to count on a more robust M&E structure.
- LSB mentioned that pro-activeness is still lacking in the system. Everyone should be proactive and work together.
- At the policy level, the Lao government has mainstreamed SDGs into 8th NSEDP already. At the statistical level, we are committed to continuing doing this.

**Presentation by Dr. Founkham Rattanaovong, Director General of the Department of Planning, MOH:** mentioned that the environment is conducive for MOH to mainstream SDGs into the sectoral plans similarly to MOES, most of the policies and strategies of MOH are in line with the spirit of SDG 3. He also mentioned that 2030 seemed to be too far for many ministries. Hence, we should break it down. On this, MOH focuses on Universal Health Coverage (2025) first and this has already answered to many of the SDG 3 indicators. What also helped MOH to be able to mainstream SDGs into the sector plan is the data obtain via DHIS II.

General information gathered during MOH's presentation:

- Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is the key goal for MOH and this is supported by the Health Sector Reform Strategy and Framework. If we can do this, we can indirectly lead to the achievement of SDGs. UHC Action Plan aims to cover these four pillars: Population covered; Service covered; Costs covered; Quality of services.
- One of the main challenges is the freeze of headcount in the health sector
- At the moment, MOH can only track 50% of the indicators. We still need to work with LSB to get data from LSIS. The best we can do is 3/4 of the total 39 indicators.
- SDG report for WHO - Global status report on health data systems and capacity (SCORE) for Lao PDR. In Laos, the challenge is there is unaccountable death cause.
- In Lao PDR, the maternal mortality has been declining, but still high. The same happens to the infant mortality rate.

Comments from the participants on MOH's presentation:

- The template provided by MOH is useful and practical
- If we plan for frequent reporting, it might be too costly – the budget is not compatible.

- MOJ (Minister of Justice): As a junior official, I often find it confusing where to start. How can our work lead to RTM (Round Table Mechanism)? How can I even start to make the senior management aware of SDGs? How can we turn this into action?
- SDG reporting is not something new. We must build that into the NSEDP report (National Development Plan).
- We cannot just achieve one SDG if we do not work with other partners to achieve other SDGs (For example SDG3, there will some trade-offs, as they are connected). For the SDG implementation to be positive, we should work together.
- Can SDG costing be feasible?
- UN should be the platform for bringing all the experts together to ensure it is harmonized and unified
- We should celebrate and award the ones who do the work so that people will be motivated to work.

Additional follow-up aspects based on Ms. Sara Sekennes's final remarks:

- The UN will Report/summarize discussions
- Government Roundtable meetings later this year will provide additional guidance on institutional arrangements for SDG implementation
- Presentation of sectoral plans to MPI with emphasis on mainstreaming SDGs towards approval of 9<sup>th</sup> NSEDP
- The Peer-to-Peer learning mechanism between Ministerial focal points to be continued
- The UN will continue supporting this exchange, which can represent a relevant modality for capacity development
- UNDESA will send additional tools such as the Self-Assessment on Principles and Strategies for Effective Governance and the Institutional Readiness Report which was partially used for the Workshop, among others.
- UNDESA is also preparing a set of peer-to-peer learning tools, including a Training of Trainers curriculum on Governance for the SDGs, to be shared with you in due course.

The Workshop represented a relevant round of discussions undertaken by SDG focal points, thus outlining practical inter-agency suggestions and areas for cooperation. This mechanism could perhaps become institutionalized in the next sessions of the SDG Secretariat and/or through the thematic working groups