



Government of Lao PDR



Lao PDR

## Governance & Public Administration Reform Programme

### JOINT ANNUAL PROJECT REVIEW

DECEMBER 2007

### MINUTES OF MEETING

Approved by:

Handwritten signature of Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay.

Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay  
Vice Chairperson, PACSA  
Project Director, GPAR SBSB Programme

Handwritten signature of Ms. Sonam Y. Rana.

Ms. Sonam Y. Rana  
Resident Representative  
United Nations Development Programme, Lao PDR

# Governance & Public Administration Reform Programme 2007

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### Minutes of Meeting

The first Joint Annual Review Meeting (JARM) of all the Governance & Public Administration Reform Projects (GPAR) in Lao PDR took place at Vientiane on December 18 and 19, 2007.

The JARM was jointly chaired by Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay, Vice Chairperson of Public Administration & Civil Service Authority (PACSA), in the Prime Minister's Office and Ms. Sonam Yangchen Rana, UNDP Resident Representative for Lao PDR. Representatives of development partners who are supporting different GPAR projects, ministries and provincial administrations of the Govt. of Lao PDR, and GPAR project teams participated in the JARM. Detailed list of participants is provided in Annex 1 and agenda for the JARM in Annex 2. All projects prepared reports in a standardized format for the JARM, which included sections on progress during 2007 and the Annual Work Plan and Budget for 2008.

### Opening remarks

Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay opened the Joint Annual Review Meeting. He welcomed all the participants and outlined the agenda for the meeting. In his opening address (Annex 3), Mr. Khammoune provided an overview of the broad directions of GPAR, and the role played by the Govt. of Lao PDR in overseeing and managing governance reform in the country. Ms. Sonam, in her opening address (Annex 4), reflected on the significant steps taken by the Govt. of Lao PDR, highlighting those of Her Excellency Madame Bounpheng Mounphoxay and PACSA, is achieving successes and expanding the programme across the country. The opening speeches focused on the significance of collaboration of all development partners in the spirit of the Vientiane declaration and the need to proceed further in that direction, and expressed gratitude to all partners for their continuing support.

Starting the discussion, the representative of Swedish International Agency, referred to the questions mentioned in the note prepared by some of the development partners supporting the GPAR projects, and circulated with UNDP and PACSA prior to the Annual Review (Annex 5). The questions related to manner in which GPAR projects were implementing the strategic vision of the Government, results achieved by the projects and Government's role in influencing direction of GPAR projects. She mentioned that these questions had been addressed in the opening remarks of the Chair. The representative of Dept. of International Cooperation remarked that the Joint Review was a good step, and that the lessons from several projects would be well shared.

### Annual Review of GPAR Luang Prabang

The Annual Project Report 2007 was introduced by the National Project Director, Dr. Bouakhong Nammavong, and the detailed report presented by the National Project Manager, Mr. Bounthanh Sisouphanh. The presentation (Annex 6) highlighted that the project well on the way to achieving the final goal of supporting Province improve delivery of key services for rural households and urban businesses, and that at the end of 2007, progress is a little ahead of the implementation plan and time line. The presentation also highlighted the challenge of increasing local ownership and management responsibility of the Project, in line with the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and recommended comprehensive training programme for existing and future project management professionals to be instituted as soon as possible.

The Annual Work Plan for 2008 was presented by Mr. Bounthanh Sisouphanh (Annex 7). He informed the participants that the work plan was addressing key problems encountered by the provincial administration while attempting to alleviate poverty and stimulate economic growth through better governance. By tackling organizational impediments to primary service delivery to remote poorly serviced communities, the project expected to realize better delivery of primary services to citizens, with emphasis on Health and Education services, and improved business facilitation and agriculture extension. These activities are also expected to strengthen the Provincial government's ability to monitor and influence critical pro-poor services through the Service Delivery Information System and Fund. The project also pointed out challenges in terms of limited grassroots administrative capacity, particularly when it came to implementation of the Service Delivery Information System, and effective planning and delivery of core services at District level and below. The project planned to address these challenges through the leadership of the Office of the Governor, and PACSA collaboration, to develop and deliver focused support to these administrative levels in 2008.

There was a lively discussion after the presentations. The representative from development partners made several suggestions. At the outset, the representative suggested that all GPAR projects need to be guided by a shared vision developed by PACSA, with emphasis on partnerships rather than narrow concentration. She also suggested that the GPAR projects need to be well integrated into the work of the office of Governor to improve sustainability, and that they should coordinate with nation-wide reforms like Public Expenditure Management. A representative from Government referred to the overlaps between sector initiatives like that in health and governance reform, and suggested that there be focus and consistency across these efforts. The representative from the National Assembly pointed out that tasks such as capacity building and awareness building on role of the assembly are primarily responsibilities of the National Assembly; and requested that there be good coordination in 2008. The representative from Government reiterated the need for coordination, and emphasized the importance of continuing training for school administrators as well as provision of equipment. The representative from Government supported the earlier points on GPAR support to the service sectors to ensure that access to services improves, and wanted GPAR Luang Prabang to address aspects where other sources of support were not available. The representative of UNDP pointed out the GPAR projects need to be embedded in the Office of Governor, and queried about measuring results, delivering on the budget, and clarify challenges. A development partner representative wanted to know more about the Service Delivery Fund and lessons that could be fed into other GPAR projects. The Resident Representative of UNDP highlighted the need for concrete recommendations and focus. The PACSA representative suggested that an inter-project coordination committee be set up with the mandate to facilitate collaborations and sharing of lessons learnt.

### **Annual Review of GPAR Saravan**

The Annual Project Report 2007 was presented (Annex 8) by the National Project Manager, Mr. Thavone Bouphavong. He informed the participants that DDF activities had expanded to cover four districts and that during the period under review, 46 from 59 planned activities were effectively implemented. He pointed out that ownership and awareness of government policies was critical. He also observed that local authorities need to have creative vision, culture of accountability and willingness to look for improvement to achieve outputs 4 and 5. At the field level, the planning process led to high community expectation and several sub-projects were proposed. But the limited budget and high cost of implementing activities in remote and distant areas were constraints. The project suggested that district plans need to be carefully prepared to avoid weak implementation and frustration in communities where the planning has taken place. The National Project Manager, Mr. Thavone Bouphavong thereafter presented the annual work plan for 2008 (Annex 9).

The discussion that followed raised a number of questions. Some of the key questions were about approach followed to ensure community participation in the District Development Fund planning process. A related question was about how the activities of GPAR Saravane fitted into the long term vision of and scope of GPAR Programme. A representative from the development partners queried about how the project had taken on the Vientiane Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and the Country Action Plan. Another query was about the DDF allocations, specifically calling for details on allocations for infrastructure and operations in percentage terms. Responding to these questions, the project clarified that the DDF funds were not meant to carry out big projects or to compete with the PRF. While 70% of the funds were applied to respond to kumban level priorities, 30% was kept to respond to district priorities. The community and representatives identified the kumban priorities, and were also present to help make the district priorities. The National Project Director, Mr. Siheng Homsombath explained that Vientiane declaration was addressed through the four pillars of the Governance Strategic Plan, and that are some basic differences in the modalities adopted by different funds. The PACSA representative pointed out that the DDF implemented by the project, is well aligned to the Vientiane Declaration.

### **Annual Review of GPAR Sekong**

The National Project Manager, Dr. Lamthong Chanmivong presented the annual progress report for 2007 and work plan for 2008 (Annex 10). He explained that several activities were taken up during the inception stage, and that good progress has been achieved in preparation for implementation of major activities like DDF in 2008. Experiences from GPAR Saravane provided important inputs and lessons for capacity building in Sekong. The project has already identified several challenges that need to be addressed. There are large variations in the capacity of team leaders from the different Departments working with the GPAR project. Besides, the office equipment is not enough for the load of project activities. Communication with the districts is difficult especially the absence of telephone services in Kaleum District and electricity in Dakcheung District. The gender agenda/concerns, does not seem to have been adequately addressed in project activities. Coordination between the project and its partners from different Departments and offices needs to be strengthened. During 2008, GPAR Sekong plans to commence implementation of the District Development Fund; this will be assisted by zoning of Kumban and Ban using Global Positioning System (GPS) transceivers. The Citizen Information project will conduct a survey and install radio station, a speaker phone and a village sign board in Dakcheung and Thateng Districts covering 20 villages. It plans to improve the capability of Naibans by providing support to training in village administration and development planning, and promote the use of Village Information Book to strengthen the village reporting system.

In the discussion that followed, queries were raised about the proposed modalities for sharing technical assistance between the two projects. Other questions were about the extent to which the project was following kumban planning tools formulated by CPI and strategies to deal with gender issues. In response, the project clarified that the shared Advisor will be focusing on supporting routine project implementation. The discussions have commenced regarding kumban development, and implementation will take place only after elaborate consultations with ministries. The same applies to the gender strategy, which is yet to be elaborated and discussed. The representative from UNDP emphasized that communication is a key tool that needs to be leveraged in a proactive manner. He suggested that a section be included in the work plan that addressed communication; and that references to how the plans for 2008 align with the Vientiane declaration would be useful.



## **Annual Review of GPAR Xiengkhouang**

The National Project Manager, Mr. Sithone Sorboualapha presented the Annual Project Report 2007 (Annex 11). He highlighted the main achievements of the project, which included roll out of national accounting to provincial departments commenced and developing internal provincial trainers developed, initiating kumban based planning in DAFEOs of partner districts, and mainstreaming it to cover all districts alongside provincial budget support for agriculture extension following the model introduced by the project, introduction of ESSS based payroll system in key offices, training in participatory planning for extension staff with assistance of NAFES, and development of enterprise database to monitor trade and investment. The presentation also highlighted some issues and constraints. The main related to difficulties in securing replacement for international and full time technical advisors, non availability of suitable national consultants for One Door Service Centre, Urban Village Planning, etc., securing policy support for establishing One Door Service and Information Centre, district level coordination of poverty reduction constrained by limited role and resources of district administration and infrastructure constraints of provincial offices in implementing reforms such as payroll system. The key results expected in 2008 are design and implementation of One Door Service & Information Centre in Paek district, introduction of inter-village information sharing as part of the expansion of extension services, expansion of agriculture extension by DAFEOs to reach 30% of villages in partner districts, gender mainstreaming in planning and delivering agriculture extension services, development of model and implementation of mechanism to coordinate poverty reduction at district level, complete implementation of national accounting system in all key provincial departments and potential district, complete implementation of human resource database and payroll system in all key provincial departments and preparation of draft provincial GPAR strategy.

In the discussion that followed, the provincial representatives highlighted the support received from other projects, including the SIDA supported tax project. He reiterated the commitment of the provincial administration to expand agriculture extension services and the importance of supporting gender sensitive initiatives like promotion of female entrepreneurs. The ministry representatives emphasized the importance of knowledge transfer by consultants and the responsibility of the project in assigning counterparts. He also informed participants about the ministry's plans to disseminate the Vientiane declaration widely. The SDC representative (Annex 12) pointed out that several good results have been achieved, and they need to be documented and shared widely. On the other hand, there areas of work were many, and there is need to prioritize and focus the limited resources available. He emphasized the need for a results oriented approach and inter-project exchange of lessons. Other development partner representatives raised queries on the scope of support of the project to Village Development Funds, and whether the provincial GPAR strategies are being developed in other provinces with GPAR projects. Responses were provided by the project on how the focus was being improved after the mid-term evaluation and several steps were being taken to share lessons and good practices within the province and with other provinces.

## **Annual Review of GPARLSP Khammouane**

The report on activities of GPARLSP Khammouane was presented by Mr. Daolay Keodouangdy, Deputy-Chairperson of the project coordination team. Since the project was coming to a close, the results of the entire project phase were presented (Annex 13). A major effort for English Language and computer skills for provincial and district staffs, and training through a Junior and Senior Manager Development Programme (J/SMDP) took place. Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion training was provided for provincial and district departments, and Village Management training organized for Thakek and Yommalat districts. The "Khammouane Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy 2007-2015" was completed with

the help of a team of 12 International consultants, and included Village consultations in three sample districts and sectoral workshops. The province finalized editing, incorporating the feedback and has sent the report sent to central government for approval.

The project faced several constraints. This included limited technical and managerial competency of project management team, delay in completion of Khammouane Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy, and complexity of financial and project management due to multiple donors with different regulation. The project proposed to PACSA to consider continuation of the project, in two parts: a Rural livelihood strengthening project (supported by World Bank) with implementing agency as Department of Planning and Investment, and a GPAR project (supported by UNDP) with implementing agency as provincial governor's office under supervision of PACSA.

In the discussion that followed, UNDP representative informed Khammouane will receive support for governance reform through GPAR SBSB like all other Lao provinces. Above and beyond this normal support, additional assistance would also be provided through the GPAR SBSB Programme during 2008, to enable a one-year transition period and allow for a smooth phasing out of the existing project set up. This additional assistance will be provided to implement on a work plan with clear activities and expected results to be prepared by the provincial authorities and GPAR SBSB Programme.

### **Annual Review of GPAR SBSB**

The National Project Manager, Mr. Nisith Keopanya presented the Annual Project Report 2007 (Annex 14). He highlighted some of the key activities that have taken place during the inception period, which includes capacity development pilots including model office management and leadership development, in depth studies on capacity building and job description initiatives and experiences across the country, Personnel Information Management System piloted in six Ministries and two provinces and development of a framework to mainstream One Door Service Centres. He informed participants about some of the major challenges faced by the project, which were time required to mobilize complete project team, significant time required to establish Government and institutional mechanisms for oversight of reforms, detailed inception activities required to prepare detailed activity plans in new thematic areas and with service ministries and substantial preparation required to establish thematic collaboration on governance reform among multiple ministries, projects and agencies. The key elements of the work plan for 2008 are finalization of Governance Sector Strategic Plan & Reform Roadmap, sharing information on governance reforms initiatives, developing a framework for Organizational Analysis and conducting analysis in three service ministries, finalizing framework to set up for One Door Service Centres and establishing them in three provinces, developing a road map to set up municipalities and piloting it in Luang Prabang, implementing performance management in the civil service, finalizing instructions on recruitment & retention in remote areas, presenting code of conduct for civil service to Govt., securing approval of national training and development framework, commencing delivery of district development funds in 8 districts, and initiating the GPAR Fund provided to implement governance road map.

Initiating the discussion, the SDC representative (Annex 15) drew attention to the need to clarify and refine the results expected from the project during the inception process. He noted that the GPAR SBSB Programme is much bigger than earlier phases, and that special attention needs to be paid to the task of sharing lessons with other GPAR projects and beyond. In this context, he placed emphasis on four key aspects: development of a governance sector road map, rapid expansion of One Door Service Centres, scaling up the DDF to improve planning at district level while coordinating with existing approaches like Poverty Reduction Fund and Agriculture development Support Fund, and using the GPAR Fund to

improve organizational systems for service delivery whereby good practices are analyzed and supported for replication. The UNDP representative congratulated the leadership, including Madam Bounpheng, Mr. Khammoune and Mr. Nisith for the progress made, and suggested that coordination within the sector is a high priority for which technical assistance may be procured. He queried about the status of the nation-wide capacity building study, and reflected that the capacity development agenda for the NSEDP called for working closely with sector ministries. Responding to these points, the SBSD representative pointed out the governance strategy has been submitted to the government for approval. The expansion of One Door Service is a high priority, and provision of guidelines for implementation will speed up the expansion. The framework for the DDF comes from the experience in Saravane, and is being scaled up widely. The GPAR Fund is a new concept and will have a new Advisor and related to team, and is expected to be scaled up. It was agreed that the preparation, discussion and circulation of a report capturing all lessons learned during the initial pilot phase of the GPAR programme would be included in the GPAR SBSD 2008 work plan. Sharing of information is on the agenda of the Programme, and a Retreat will be held to facilitate this task after the meeting.

### **Update on civil service improvement and service delivery initiatives**

The Project Manager of GPAR SBSD Programme, Mr. Nisith Keopanya presented an update (Annex 16) on key initiatives and lessons learnt in the GPAR Programme. He provided an overview of the context in which that GPAR programme was set up and explained that the Governance Reform Strategy proposed for the Government consists of 4 parts, namely Public service improvement, Strengthening people's participation, Improving Rule of law, and sound financial management. He explained that the GPAR projects mainly implement activities related to public service improvement and strengthening people's participation and that they coordinate with Ministries of Finance, Planning, Health, Agriculture and Education to implement activities. The key activities described in his update were:

- Development of the Civil Service Management Strategic Framework
- Development of the National Training and Development Framework and Curriculum
- Development and commissioning of a Personnel Information Management system
- Establishing job descriptions for the Civil Service;
- Capacity building on leadership and effective office management
- Designing One Door Service Centres to deliver public services
- District Development Funds to provide small public infrastructure
- Agriculture Development Support Fund to expand extension services to farmers

### **Concluding remarks**

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Stéphane Vigié, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Lao PDR, observed that the GPAR Programme has evolved to a new phase, where the focus is moving from pilots to systematic mainstreaming and replication of lessons from pilots. He called upon projects and partners to be more strategic in their approach, and periodically carry out some prioritization to ensure that resources are best utilized. This effort calls for greater convergence in thinking among the development partners and governments, for which the Sector Working Group can provide a sound platform. The progressive expansion of government ownership has been strengthened with the introduction of HACT, and further steps will call for greater initiative and capacity development in government.

Mr. Khammoune, Vice Chairperson of Public Administration & Civil Service Authority (PACSA), in the Prime Minister's Office, in his closing remarks expressed happiness with the Joint Annual Review. He noted that it was not just reporting but also had discussion on substantive issues and possible solutions from different perspectives, while identifying areas for further action. He saw this process as a very useful for development partners, who are not involved in the project on a day to day basis, to provide feedback and suggestions, and suggested that

there be greater participation in future. He reaffirmed that all GPAR projects work within the framework of the government's Governance Strategy, and that the SBSB Programme is helping PACSA play this role, and called upon local authorities to be closely involved in the work of the projects. After warmly thanking all the development partners, officials from the ministries and provinces, and project teams, for their active participation and support, and wished them good health and success, Mr. Khammoune declared the meeting closed.



