



Government of Lao PDR



Lao PDR

Governance & Public Administration Reform Programme

JOINT ANNUAL PROJECT REVIEW: 2010

DECEMBER 2010

MINUTES OF MEETING

Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Khammoune Viphongxay'.

Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay
Vice Chairperson, Public Administration & Civil
Service Authority, Prime Minister's Office

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Holland'.

Mr. Ian Holland
Deputy Resident Representative
United Nations Development Programme, Lao PDR

Governance & Public Administration Reform Programme

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Minutes of Meeting

The fourth Joint Annual Review Meeting (JARM) of Governance & Public Administration Reform Projects (GPAR) in Lao PDR took place at Vientiane on December 9 and 10, 2010. The first day focused on the project by project review, while the second day was used to discuss and brainstorm on ideas for the upcoming National GPAR Programme.

Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay, Vice Chairperson of Public Administration & Civil Service Authority (PACSA), in the Prime Minister's Office and Mr. Ian Holland, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Lao PDR jointly chaired the Joint Annual Review Meeting. All GPAR projects, provincial administrations where GPAR projects are being implemented, the development partners supporting the GPAR projects, some key ministries of the Govt. of Lao PDR, and GPAR project teams participated in the JARM 2010. The detailed list of participants is provided in Annex 1 and agenda for the JARM in Annex 2. The reports by projects followed a standard format and covered progress of projects during 2010 as well as Annual Work Plans and Budget for 2011 for projects that continue to work in 2011.

Opening remarks

Mr. Khammoune Viphongxay opened the Joint Annual Review Meeting. In his opening address (Annex 3), Mr. Khammoune highlighted the importance of this Review, which would be the last in the current phase of the GPAR Programme, and the need to draw lessons for formulating the next phase of the Programme. Complimenting the GPAR projects for their outstanding contributions to improving service delivery, he called for mainstreaming the lessons, and the importance of partnerships established through the Governance Sector Working Group. In his opening address (Annex 4), Mr. Ian reflected on the contributions of the GPAR Projects to strengthening the regulatory mechanisms, capacity building and service delivery in Lao PDR. He pointed to the critical importance of aligning GPAR initiatives around the priorities of the Government, as proposed in the National Socio Economic Development Plans. Mr. Ian complimented the efforts of the Government, the support of all development partners and the project teams for the impressive results.

Annual Review of GPAR SBSD

Mr. Nisith Keopanya, Project Manager of the GPAR SBSD Project, presented the Annual Project Report 2010 and Work Plan for 2011 (Annex 5). A detailed overview of the activities completed in relation to each of the outputs, and key constraints in 2010 were covered in the presentation. The presentation also provided details related to each output planned activities for 2011.

Initiating the discussion, the representative of United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) congratulated the project for its important achievements during the year. She drew attention to the significance of efforts to accelerate local development, and called for greater support from national resources to support this critical area. The representative of the Swiss Agency for Development (SDC) complimented the Government and the project for the systematic development of the next Strategic Plan on Governance, as well as achievements related to One Door Service, Civil Service Training, and related areas (Annex 6). He also pointed to some key reforms and policy initiatives that are yet to be approved, including the Gender in Governance Strategy, Civil Service Management Strategy, and Code of Conduct. He also observed that the Annual Work Plan for 2011 envisages several activities for the next six months, and proposed that priority be accorded to the key activities, namely

finalizing the Strategic Plan on Governance and road map, the service delivery monitoring report, expanding PIMS to all ministries, long term strategy for One Door Service and the national Civil Service Management Strategy. He called for a careful review of achievements to guide the design of the next Programme, and suggested that emphasis be directed towards building on successes. The discussion also went into the areas of work of the PIMS, as well as long term resources to support maintenance of assets established for local development. The representative of UNDP reaffirmed the strategic significance of the project's contribution to sector coordination, as well as the urgency to complete some of the outstanding outputs well before the next Programme is formulated.

Annual Review of GPAR Luang Prabang

The National Project Manager, Mr. Bounthanh Sisouphanh presented the Annual Project Report for 2010 (Annex 7). The presentation also shared suggestions for future activities in Luang Prabang that could be taken up as follow up to the current project.

Several observations and suggestions related to GPAR Luang Prabang were made by representatives of development partners and government, during the discussion. Complimenting the project for its excellent proposals for the future programme, the representative of UNDP initiated the discussion on the sustainability of the Service Delivery Information System. The representative of SDC observed that the many good results need to be shared more widely, and documentation of the good practices developed by the project be shared with the team formulating the new Programme. The representative of the Ministry of Education discussed the need to bring in sectoral expertise into training offered through the project.

The Project Manager clarified the nature of constraints experienced by the SDIS, and the leadership of technical departments in implementing training. The discussion explored issues that affected sustainability of good practices introduced by projects, beyond budgets and movement of staff, and the need for a sound strategic plan to guide such initiatives.

Annual Review of GPAR Sekong

The Annual Progress Report for 2010 and work plan for 2011 were presented by the National Project Manager, Dr. Lamthong Chanmivong (Annex 8). The presentation provided an overview of the several activities that had been carried out, including the District Development Funds, community information systems and establishing community radio. The benefits of these initiatives have served the ethnic groups and the poorest households have benefited from these activities, in spite of budget constraints experienced by activities like the community radio in Dakcheung.

Representatives of the provincial administration participated in the discussion, and placed the achievements in the perspective of the long term effort in Sekong that had commenced with SepDev project in 1996. The significant impact of the One Door Service initiative, particularly in increasing the capacity of key staff, came in for special mention, while thanking the development partners for their support. The representative of SDC pointed to the village level activities and impact achieved by the provincial project, while the representative of UNDP highlighted the difficult conditions under which information dissemination was taking place. The representative of the Lao Women's Union complimented the project for its active support. The representative from UNV complimented the project for creating opportunities for volunteerism to expand, and that this is integral to the culture and traditions of Lao PDR.

Annual Review of GPAR Saravane

The National Project Manager, Mr. Thavone Bouphavong, presented the Annual Project Report 2010 (Annex 9). The presentation outlines the key activities that were completed and the impact that had been achieved.

Initiating the discussion, the representative of SDC drew attention to the pro-poor planning approach, which is also followed by the Poverty Reduction Fund, and the manner in which participation of women was ensured. The representative of EU complimented the project for the presentation which clarified the achievements and constraints. The Project Manager provided detailed clarifications and that some constraints were due to some limitations in information about project management modalities.

Lessons from GPAR Programme

Initiating the discussion on lessons from the GPAR Programme (Annex 10), Mr. Nisith Keopanya, Director General of PACSA reflected on three sets of lessons - lessons from designing and managing one of Lao PDR's largest development programmes, lessons related to six thematic areas of governance reform interventions, and scalable best practices that have emerged from programme implementation.

Commenting on the presentation, the representative of SDC noted the complexity of reforms which make it difficult for projects to see them through to the final stage. He saw the projects and technical assistance as mechanisms to initiate reforms, and that the actual implementation needs high level support of the kind envisaged in the GPAR SBSB project concept in order to minimize delays. He pointed to the large number of pilots that have already been successfully completed, and the need to focus on mainstreaming and widening implementation, particularly at the sub-national level rather than piloting more new ideas. He emphasized the importance of continued focus on service delivery, and the best practices that are well developed be taken forward.

Reflecting on the several lessons, the representative from EC called for prioritization and focus in planning for the future. He saw different options emerging, which included transforming into a multi-sectoral programme addressing the wide range of service delivery requirements. The other important issue was about linking governance reforms with the MDGs, for which clear linkages and working arrangements vis a vis the with PRF would be important to avoid redundancies. While noting the need to maintain a balance between policy and field impact, he noted that policy focus would more time consuming, while modest targets and field focus with may produce greater impact in the next five years when implemented through the government machinery like in the case of the DDF.

The UNCDF representative called for attention to the resource requirements, and the need to give higher priority to approaches that were less resource intensive for scale up. The representative of the Xiengkhouang provincial administration highlighted the key successes and lessons from GPAR implementation in their province. Representatives of PACSA clarified the importance of key policy frameworks like the Law on Government and Law on Local Administration to facilitate effective central-local linkages for implementing best practices. Some examples on how these linkages worked in relation to expansion of One Door Service, and restructuring of District Administration, were discussed. Given the crosscutting nature of many of the GPAR activities, there is need to work together with key agencies such as CCOP, MoJ, MoF and MPI using a Programme approach.

Preparations for the GPAR Programme (2011-15)

The Vice Chairperson of PACSA, Dr. Khammoune Viphongxay presented the Programme based approach for the new National GPAR Programme (2011-15) and the preparations for the same (Annex 11). The presentation outlines the main objectives of the Programme, the seven key components and proposed management structure, before describing the next steps in formulating the Programme and projects.

The discussion that followed covered a wide range of issues and suggestions. Opening the discussion, the representative of EC went into the structure of the Programme Board and representation of sub-national offices in the same. The representative of SDC reflected on the broad canvas of the Programme, and that it allowed for development partners to focus on areas that were more aligned to their respective country assistance strategies. He gave the example of SDC, which focuses on supporting implementation of reforms and activities at the sub-national level would like to take a flexible approach while responding to the formulation process. He called for the latest draft of the Strategic Plan on Governance to be shared with the formulation team, and for involvement of sub-national stakeholders in the formulation process. The representative of the World Bank congratulated the government for taking the Programme based approach and the proposed seven components which would develop capacity at all levels. He raised the question about role of Ministry of Finance, and the manner in which development partners would participate in the Programme Board. The representative of UNCDF reiterated the importance of the Programme Board, in scaling up activities such as DDF across the country, and confirmed the strong commitment of the UNCDF to the upcoming programme.

Representatives of provincial administrations provided important insights. The representative of the Xiengkhouang provincial administration saw the Programme approach as an effective mechanism for central plans to delegate tasks to provinces for implementation. The representative from Saravane province wondered whether there would be some mechanism to retain key staff and maintain the momentum at the provinces while the new Programme is formulated and launched. The representative from Khammouane reflected on the experience with pilot implementation in some districts, and observed that it created imbalances, which could be avoided with quick follow up implementation across all districts.

Responding the comments, Dr. Khammoune saw wide agreement with the concept. He observed that the timing for formulating the new Programme was very good, and makes it possible to align it with Strategic Plan on Governance as well as the 7th NSEDP. He confirmed that a very high level leading committee will oversee the Programme, which may meet once or twice a year, while the more regular direction will be provided by the Programme Board. The nature of membership in the Programme Board, including representation from the sub-national level, is to be discussed during the formulation stage. There is also need to discuss and plan to deal with the bridging period, in the case of projects that are coming to an end.

Approach for GPAR Support to NSEDP

Mr. Dirk Wagener, Chief of the Governance Unit, UNDP, Lao PDR presented the approach for GPAR support to the NSEDP (Annex 12). The presentation outlined the key challenges that need to be addressed in the NSEDP, the key priorities of the NSEDP and the areas where activities of the GPAR Programme could offer significant assistance to achieve the NSEDP targets, and the guiding principles to be followed.

Opening the discussion, the representatives of SDC reflected on the value of focusing on some sectors/ministries and that this would help define the niche where GPAR could make a

major impact. From this perspective, they saw the need to further strengthen the support for service delivery approach which is already part of the GPAR Programme.

The representative from Khammouane province observed that good plans sometimes fail at the local level because of limited understanding as well as confusion about procedures and standards to be followed during implementation. The representative from Saravane called for clear legislation and direction, since the changes being initiated at the central level and the manner in which they are documented are not easily understood at the local level. The representative from Xiengkhouang highlighted the importance of having consistency with different sectoral plans, in order to facilitate smooth implementation.

Capacity development at the district level

The Director General of the Department of Civil Service Management in PACSA, Mr. Nisith Keopanya shared the proposed approach for Capacity Development at the District level. (Annex 13). The presentation described the strategic significance of district administrations in implementing the NSEDP, the key initiatives already in place to strengthen districts and the three focal components of this approach.

The discussion was initiated by the representative of UNDP, who called for a closer look at district level planning. He suggested that training needs to be carried out in close cooperation with sectors, and that dimensions such as monitoring and performance management are integral to the effort. The representative of EU pointed out that there are different perspectives about developing capacity at the district level, and that clear guidelines are required about financing, transparency mechanisms as well as audit. The representative of the Ministry of Education reiterated the need to have sector specific capacity assessments at the districts and then define the capacity building steps. The need to build capacity of the village leadership was highlighted by the representative from Saravane, and reference made to the large variety of tasks since they implement for the district. The representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare informed the meeting of the data on needs that has already been collected, and would be available to the initiative. The need to take into account rotation and movement of staff while planning capacity development was raised by the representative of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. In closing, the representative of SDC suggested that due attention be paid to the systematic capacity assessment as well as staff turnover practices in the capacity development approach.

Responding to the discussion, Mr. Nisith clarified that an overview of the approach had been presented, which would need to be detailed out and clarified. He reiterated that resource persons from sectors play the main role in conducting the training, and that in the years ahead civil society will also come to play an important role at the local level. Mr. Khammoune added that there is need to look closely at the improvements that have been realized from the big investments that have so far gone into developing capacities. He reaffirmed the commitment to devolve more responsibilities to the local level, clarify mandates and scale up initiatives such as the DDF and ODS.

Closing remarks

Mr. Ian Holland, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Lao PDR, observed that sector leadership and partnership are going hand-in-hand, and that mechanisms to develop critical capacities at local level, improving clarity of mandates and clarity in legal framework and coordination among Government agencies are critical (Annex 14). He reiterated that UNDP and development partners are ready and eager to continue to work with all actors in addressing the challenges of governance. He called upon the Government to sustain their

high-level support for this Programme, and Provincial authorities to develop local governance for better, pro-poor and sustainable service delivery.

Dr. Khammoune Viphongxay, Vice-Chairperson of Public Administration & Civil Service Authority (PACSA), in the Prime Minister's Office, in his closing remarks (Annex 15). congratulated the GPAR projects, their Leading Committees and Project Boards, for their impressive progress and achievements during 2010 and the lessons from the experience concluding that the Joint Annual Review was very successful, and had met the objectives. He observed that this review was not just about the performance but also insights into constraints and gaps that the next GPAR Programme will address in a systematic manner. While a major focus will be on clarifying and improving relationships between different levels of the administration, a large part of the effort will be in scaling up the implementation of best practices developed by GPAR so far, including a strong and well trained civil service. The other key point was the move to a programme based approach, with national level and sub national levels working both closely and harmoniously. He mentioned the oversight of the new Programme by a high level committee headed by the Deputy Prime Minister. Before concluding, Dr. Khammoune thanked all development partners for their whole hearted support, and the representatives of all ministries and provincial administrations for their impressive efforts and continuing contributions, and declared the meeting closed.