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Issue No. 29 - Dec 2005

In this issue:

[The 11th Meeting of ISG Steering Board](#)

[Seminar on economic impacts and growth stemmed from WTO's membership of Vietnam](#)

[Support from Sweden for prevention and control of the Avian Influenza in Viet Nam](#)

[The Netherlands Commits \\$1.2 million to Support National Programme Against Avian Influenza](#)

[Quality Statistics Needed for Monitoring Socio-Economic Development Plan](#)

[UNDP and Viet Nam continue partnership for poverty reduction](#)

[MONRE, DFID and UNDP initiative to further link poverty and the environment launched](#)

[Millennium development goals to be linked in local planning](#)

[East Asia Resilient to Year's Shocks, Growing at 6 Percent](#)

[Stocktaking on Poverty Reduction Support Credits: What Works Well, What Doesn't And Looking Forward In Vietnam](#)

[CPRGS Monitoring and Evaluation \(M&E\) Indicators in the agricultural and rural development sector](#)

[International Consultative Workshop on the MONRE's 2006-2010 draft 5-year plan](#)

**Merry Christmas and
Happy New Year!**

The 11th Meeting of ISG Steering Board

Hanoi - 2nd November 2005 - Vice Minister Hứa Đức Nhị (on behalf of MARD Minister); and Dr. Lê Văn Minh, Vice Chairman of ISG Steering Board, Director General of ICD co-chaired the 11th meeting of the ISG Steering Board. The objectives of the meeting are to:

- Discuss and approve the drafts of the Review Report of 2003-2005 ISG performance and Proposed ISG Work Plan for 2006-2010;
- Agree to the follow-up steps after the 11th meeting of the Board.

At the Meeting, participants listened to the Report on ISG progress as of November 2005 presented by Dr. Le Van Minh and Brief Presentation on the ISG review 2003-2005 and proposed work plan for 2006-2010 by presented Dr. Biltonel.

The follow-up discussions, then, were facilitated in an opened, frank and constructive manner. (please detailed Minutes of the Meeting on ISG website)

The Meeting conclusions can be brief as followed:

- ISG SB members agreed to extend the ISG Trust Fund until 2010 to link with the implementation of the new work plan.
- ISG SB members approved in principle the review report and the ISG work plan 2006-2010.
- ISG review team is requested to complete the review report as well as the proposed work plan 2006-2010. Comments made at this meeting should be considered incorporated into the final documents.
- MARD would ask its Department of Planning to facilitate a counterpart fund for the ISG process in the new period.
- ISG SB agreed that the annual Work Plan 2006 of the ISG process should also be prepared and submitted by ISG Secretariat to the ISG Steering Board for consideration and approval.
- The Board also agreed to the follow-up steps presented at the meeting.
- Other comments made at the meeting would be incorporated into the meeting minutes, and incorporated

into the ISG activities planned for 2006 and in the time to come.

Source: ISG Sec

Seminar on economic impacts and growth stemmed from WTO's membership of Vietnam

Hanoi, 2/11/2005 - In the framework of the "Technical assistance program supporting Vietnam's membership to the WTO" financed by the World Bank, Vietnam Institute of Social Sciences cooperated with the World Bank to organize the seminar "economic impacts and growth when joining WTO: international experiences and preliminary research results" with the aim of improving the awareness, sharing experiences and defining research priorities to evaluate socio-economic impacts after Vietnam become the membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Those taking part in the seminar are policy officers including specialists in the negotiation delegation of Vietnam to become the WTO's membership; representatives from the new 5-year plan drafting task force; those from ministries and concerned agencies; research staff from the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanity, Central Institute of Economic Management, Institute of Agricultural Economics, National Economic University, Hue University, Institute of Economic Research in Ho Chi Minh City, Research Institute of Labor and Social Affairs (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs); representatives from donor community (donors who jointly finance the Poverty Reduction Support Credit (PRSC), the United Nations Development Programme and non-government organizations).

For detail presentations delivered at the seminar, please go to the ISG website at: <http://www.isgmard.org.vn>

Source: ISG Sec

Support from Sweden for prevention and control of the Avian Influenza in Viet Nam

Following the recent joint government of Vietnam and Donor Meeting on Avian Influenza (AI) at MARD, the Embassy of Sweden has examined its possibilities of financially supporting the work by the

Government of Vietnam in preventing and controlling a further outbreak of the AI.

In view of the urgency of the situation, the Embassy would thus like to propose to use funds from the on-going MARD - Sida Cooperation Program (MSCP) to support the government efforts in controlling the AI as well as strengthening the management capacity for the poultry sector when coping with the disease.

Source: ICD-MARD

The Netherlands Commits \$1.2 million to Support National Programme Against Avian Influenza

HA NOI, October 26, 2005 -- The Netherlands agreed to contribute one million euros (\$1.2 million USD) to support the United Nations-coordinated emergency preparedness programme against Avian Influenza in Viet Nam.

"It is essential that Viet Nam have a harmonized and effective strategy to combat Avian Influenza at local and national levels. It is also essential for donors to coordinate their efforts in order to support Vietnam in the most effective and efficient way," said Dutch Ambassador, Mr. André Haspels. "The programme provides a single point to focus country-wide efforts, looking at both immediate actions and at long-term investment in the public health sector."

Earlier this month, at the request of the Government, the United Nations in Viet Nam agreed to provide immediate assistance to control the potential human outbreak of Avian Flu in Viet Nam and to support an emergency preparedness plan, in the event of an epidemic.

Working directly in support of the Government efforts, the initiative, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), will tackle not only the immediate emergency needs of the Government, but will build the capacity of the public health system so that in the longer term, Viet Nam can manage future outbreaks caused by pathogenic organisms. UNDP will act as an administrative agent for the project, allowing donors to deal with a single agency.

Over the next six months, the emergency phase of the project will immediately work to

control and eradicate the H5N1 - Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in domestic poultry. A national vaccination campaign will be carried out, along with improvements in: post-vaccination surveillance, the quality of Vietnamese laboratories and the systems to share information on the outbreak. A national education campaign will be held in the hopes of reducing the risk of transmission to, and among the human population.

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Source: UNDP

Quality Statistics Needed for Monitoring Socio-Economic Development Plan

HANOI, October 20, 2005 – In an effort to better support the upcoming Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP) and the monitoring of its implementation, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) will work with Viet Nam's General Statistics Office (GSO) and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) to improve the collection, storage, overall quality and wider use of statistics in Viet Nam.

With the support of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID), this three-year, \$2.56 million project aims to improve all areas of data collection in Viet Nam and to strengthen Viet Nam's ability to monitor its commitments in the SEDP, Viet Nam Development Goals (VDGs) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

With the introduction of the Statistical Law in 2004, GSO has taken on an increasingly important role in coordinating the national statistical system and providing technical assistance to government agencies. The next five-year-plan is required to include more targets and indicators on social development and these targets could lead to greater promotion of the quality of growth, human and sustainable development.

By providing better statistical data, monitoring will be greatly improved and links

to government planning will be encouraged among government ministries at all levels, through more frequent and structured dialogue between those who use the data, and those who produce it.

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Source: UNDP

UNDP and Viet Nam continue partnership for poverty reduction

HA NOI, October 17, 2005 – On the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty and the National Day for the Poor, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reaffirmed its support of Viet Nam's key national programmes for poverty eradication today at a signing ceremony in Ha Noi.

With additional contributions from the United Kingdom and Finland, the \$5 million (USD) project extension will continue to offer direct technical assistance to two of the most important government programmes for Poverty Reduction: the National Targeted Programme for Poverty Reduction (NTPPR) and the Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Ethnic Minority Areas (SEDEMA), both designed to channel resources of about \$3.6 billion (USD) to the poorest areas of Viet Nam in the next five years.

UNDP will work closely with Viet Nam to share international experiences and ensure the best possible practices are adopted in the planning, implementation, financial management, and monitoring and evaluation systems of the two programmes. The project will focus on training national programme staff at all levels, including at communes, for effective implementation and greater transparency to better target the most vulnerable groups in Viet Nam.

This agreement, which continues until 2010, carries on from the original project begun in 2002, which included an evaluation of the two original programmes, the Hunger Eradication

Programme (HEPR) and Programme 135 (P135). Findings from the original project supported the design of programmes for 2006-2010, incorporating the recommendations from the evaluation.

SEDEMA will focus primarily on developing village and communal infrastructure covering 1.850 communes and 2.500 villages, the majority in mountainous and ethnic minority areas. NTP-PR focuses on thirteen policies and projects including support to poor households to expand their production and increase income, by providing credit, vocational training, productive land, basic infrastructure and more funds at the commune level. Improved access to health, education, housing and clean water will be provided while improving capacity building through dissemination strategies, training, and monitoring and evaluation.

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Source: UNDP

MONRE, DFID and UNDP initiative to further link poverty and the environment launched

HANOI, October 7, 2005 – The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), the United Nations Development Programme) and UK's Department for International Development (DFID) formally launched a new initiative to support efforts in integrating poverty reduction and environmental protection.

The project, signed today at a ceremony in Ha Noi, is referred to as the "Poverty-Environment Project" or PEP. It will work to link poverty reduction and environment by analyzing and developing policy that effectively bring the two areas together, while working with MONRE to better coordinate donor support and partnerships. UNDP's Global Poverty and Environment Initiative chose Viet Nam as one of only four countries in the world to pilot this programme. DFID

also provided \$2million to support MONRE in this process.

One key goal of the program is to integrate poverty reduction targets into all environmental policies in the next socio-economic five-year plan, including at the sector and provincial levels. In an effort to improve cooperation and coordination among donors, the project will create opportunities for donors to work closely with MONRE to share information and work to increase aid effectiveness in environmental policy.

Source: UNDP

Millennium development goals to be linked in local planning

HUE CITY 4 October 2005– To link the targets and indicators of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the socio-economic development plan of Thua Thien-Hue province is the purpose of a new project, which has been launched by the Provincial People's Committee with support from the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Netherlands Development Organization (SNV).

The "Piloting Improved Local Planning Processes in Thua Thien - Hue Province" project, in the coming two years, will work to enable local government in Thua Thien Hue Province and its mountainous district of A Luoi to incorporate the targets of the MDGs, Viet Nam Development Goals (VDGs) and the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) into local annual and 5-year socio-economic development plans.

Another objective of the project is to involve local civil society organisations, businesses and people in annual and 5- year socio-economic planning processes. Existing participatory tools such as Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Commune Development Plan (CDP), Village Development Plan (VDP) and so on will be applied for this purpose. In an effort to extend its effectiveness, the project will document best practices and share with other districts within Thua Thien Hue province as well as with other provinces.

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Source: UNDP

East Asia Resilient to Year's Shocks, Growing at 6 Percent

WASHINGTON, November 03, 2005 — Emerging East Asia grew at just over 6 percent in 2005 as the region's economies countered a series of threats, including rising oil prices and interest rates, the high-tech slowdown, and the end of preferential export quotas for garments, according to the World Bank's latest East Asia Update.

Avian flu, which is endemic in the poultry flocks of many East Asian countries, is a growing concern, however, for regional economies as the disease spreads among birds and as health experts look for signs of human-to-human transmission.

The latest edition of the World Bank's twice-yearly economic survey of East Asia and the Pacific shows growth in the region moderating from 2004's exceptionally strong rate of 7.2 percent. Japan is showing signs a robust economic recovery, and China's GDP, which has continued to grow at more than 9 percent this year, is expected to slow only modestly next year to just under 9 percent.

Poverty continues to fall in most parts of East Asia with the number of people living on less than \$2 a day falling by 37 million to just less than 32 percent in 2005, which is down from 50 percent in 1996.

For access to the full Report please click here:

<http://www.worldbank.org/eapupdate>

Source: WB

Stocktaking on Poverty Reduction Support Credits: What Works Well, What Doesn't And Looking Forward In Vietnam

HANOI, October 25, 2005 – The World Bank, in cooperation with State Bank of Vietnam and the Asian Development Bank, is organizing a workshop to evaluate the performance of Poverty Reduction Support Credits (PRSCs) in Vietnam.

PRSCs are new instrument to support nationally owned strategies for economic growth and poverty reduction. Providing resources directly to the budget on an annual basis, they aim at facilitating the implementation of the reform agenda of the government of Vietnam. The first four PRSCs for Vietnam built on a series of Government plans and strategies for economic and social development, including the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS).

In this two-day event, representatives from the Government, donors and civil society took stock of past achievements in the first four PRSCs for Vietnam, in terms of policy reforms, resource mobilization and donor coordination. They will also review the lessons learned from PRSC operations in other developing countries and transition economies.

The main goal of the workshop is to understand what worked well and what can be improved in the way donors have jointly worked towards supporting Vietnam's reform agenda while providing resources directly to the budget. The workshop also seeks to forge an understanding on how to use this instrument to support the implementation of the next five- year Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP).

Looking forward, the Government is now in the process of finalizing the new 5-Year Socioeconomic Development Plan (SEDP) 2006-2010. The SEDP has incorporated the commendable approach used in preparing the CPRGS such as wide participation of all stakeholders and the inclusion of policy actions that are performance-oriented and the focus on monitorable development outcomes. In formulating the new SEDP, the Government is conducting a board consultation with all stakeholders including the donor community. A high-quality SEDP could be used by future PRSCs as Vietnam's new medium-term national strategy for economic growth and poverty reduction.

Source: WB

CPRGS Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Indicators in the agricultural and rural development sector

Hanoi, 18 November 2005 – Within the CPRGS Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Project for the Agricultural and Rural Development financed by the World Bank, the Department of Cooperatives and Rural Development under MARD has coordinated with the concerned agencies in the Ministry to establish a set of M&E indicators, which are to be used to evaluate the performance of the five-year plan and integration of CPRGS into the MARD's 2006 - 2010 five-year plan.

The workshop is organized to provide an opportunity for the Experts Group to present their results of study and consult with the concerned agencies and organizations in and outside the MARD before finalizing this set of indicators.

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Source: ISG Sec

International Consultative Workshop on the MONRE's 2006-2010 draft 5-year plan

Hanoi, 17 November 2005 – The International Support Group for Natural Resources and Environment (ISGE) has supported MONRE to organize the workshop under the co-chairmanship of Mr. Mai Ai Truc, MONRE's Minister, and Mme. Anna Lindstedt, the Ambassador of Sweden in Vietnam. Participated in the workshop were also other leaders of MONRE and high-ranking representatives from the Embassies of Sweden, Denmark, Canada, the Netherlands and Switzerland, as well as representatives of the ISGE's membership, domestic and international organizations.

This workshop consulted on the 5th draft of the MONRE's 5-year plan. Comments and inputs by the participants highly appreciated

the openness and new approach used to formulate the Ministry's 5-year plan. However, this draft needs to be amended to clarify some major issues as follows: i) contents of the Hanoi Declaration and 5 "frame programs" for ODA management; ii) MONRE's priorities in the 5-year plan; iii) interrelations between costs and objectives; iv) organizational structure and management capacity strengthening; v) the community's participation in management and investment in the natural resources and environment sector; vi) coordination and cooperation with other Ministries and sectors in formulating, implementing and monitoring the implementation of the plan; vii) evaluation criteria; viii) linkages of the 5-year plan with MDGs, CPRGS and other national strategies and targets.

Minister Mai Ai Truc highly appreciated the endorsement and support from the donor community and undertook to consider revisions and amendments of the Plan in line with the comments shared in the Workshop. Nevertheless, it has been indicated that the Plan needs to be in consistency with those of other ministries and sectors, and furthermore, there are a lot of problems relating to capacity, resources, changes of the economy and other objective matters. Therefore, it will be difficult to incorporate all the suggestions of the participants. MONRE, however, is looking forward to receiving further assistance from the donors community for MONRE's and the sector's activities in the coming time.

Source: ISGE