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MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT:

"Investment for the agriculture and rural development sector"

Please kindly be informed that the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) via the International Support Group (ISG) of MARD is organizing its ISG Annual Plenary Meeting 2005, tentatively on 22nd and half day of 23rd September 2005.

ISG Plenary Meeting is held every year to serve as an open forum for policy dialogue between MARD and Vietnam's relevant agencies, the donor community including governmental, non-governmental, international organisations and foreign investors involved in the agriculture and rural development activities in Vietnam.

The theme for the Plenary Meeting this year is *"Investment for the agriculture and rural development sector"*.

Information of the meeting can be obtained from the tentative meeting programme attached. We appreciate your precious comments and recommendations to the meeting agenda.

MARD would like to inform the enterprises, international donors and all other ISG stakeholders of the event. You are kindly requested to make registration to the ISG Secretariat in accordance with the registration forms which can be obtained from the address below.

Please kindly be noted that registration is free, however, participants will cover their own costs for their participation, including accomodations and travels during the meeting.

Please kindly requested to send these forms back to us **best before 10 September 2005**. Official invitations will be only be sent to the registered participants.

Thank you very much for your cooperation. Look forward to your prompt feedback.
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Source: ISG Secretariat

New publications updated on ISG

Website

ISG Sec would like to inform that the Final Report and Final Sector Status Report of the Joint GoV-Donor sector Review on Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Health can be obtained from the following links:

Final Report - May 2005:

http://www.isgmard.org.vn/Information/Service/Report/Water-Irrigation/RWSS/Review_04/Final_report-2005/Final_Report-May2005-e.pdf

Final Sector Status Report - May 2005:

http://www.isgmard.org.vn/Information/Service/Report/Water-Irrigation/RWSS/Review_04/Final_report-2005/Final_Report-May2005-v.pdf

Sharing experiences in community-based planning and empowerment to localities

From 22nd to 24th August 2005, in Thien Cam, Ha Tinh - International Supporting Group (ISG), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development cooperated with the United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) to organize a forum in order to exchange experiences between provinces to improve the institutions enabling integrated and participatory development at local levels. The workshop attracted participation of more than 60 specialists from Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs and mass organizations as well as representatives from Provincial Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development, Planning and Investment, rural development projects in 12 provinces and centrally-administered cities. A great deal of experiences and lessons on mobilizing participation of the communities to local development planning process were shared during the 3-day workshop. It is clearly shown from the workshop that most of projects with participation of the communities in the planning process are implemented more effectively and sustainably.

A prominent example for this judgment is the rural development project in Ha Tinh (funded by IFAD). After 3-year implementation, the project has built hundreds of structures in service of local development to create conditions for dozen of thousands of households in 48 poor communes to impressively escape from poverty. As stated by many participants, these are very useful experiences, however, it is not easy to achieve because of many subjective and objective difficulties.

During the workshop, many participants expressed their concerns on high volume of time and costs for collecting feedback and comments from the people. Additionally, capacity of the people is also a considerable hindrance.

Form these comments and ideas, ISG will cooperate with IFAD and WB to synthesize and develop a Policy Advisory Briefing (PAB) and send it to concerned agencies of the Government and donor community for consideration to improve planning capacity and integrated implementation of local development projects/programs with participation of the communities.

To read related documents and presentations delivered at the workshop, please visit ISG website at:

<http://www.isgmard.org.vn/Proposal/Proposal-s-e.asp>

Source: ISG Sec

2005 Human Development Report

This year's Human Development Report, entitled *International cooperation at a crossroads: Aid, trade and security in an unequal world* will be launched in New York on September 7th, 2005 and available in Viet Nam on September 8th, 2005. A press launch for the 2005 HDR will take place in Ha Noi at UNDP on Monday, September 12th.

For more information, please visit **UNDP's HDR website**.

For more information on the press launch, please visit UNDP website at:

<http://hdr.undp.org>

Source: UNDP Hanoi

International community gathers to support Viet Nam's first-ever

National MDG Report

Ha Noi, August 9, 2005 – In preparation for Viet Nam's presentation at the United Nations 2005 World Summit, Ha Noi's donor and diplomatic community joined government officials to review Viet Nam's first-ever national report on its progress to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Led and written by the Ministry for Planning and Investment (MPI), the report was prepared in close cooperation with relevant government agencies, with technical assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The report entitled, "Achieving the Millennium Development Goals," evaluates the progress Viet Nam has made toward realizing the eight MDGs that set targets for poverty reduction, improvements in education and health, gender equity and environmental sustainability.

This consultation is one of the final steps before presenting the report to world leaders at the 2005 World Summit at UN Headquarters in New York City on September 14-16.

The National MDG report details the steps forward by Viet Nam in areas like poverty reduction, school enrolment, under-five child mortality rates and increased forest cover. But it also identifies significant challenges to achieving the goals such as, the growing gap between rich and poor, between rural and urban populations, as well as between Kinh and ethnic minorities. In education, for example, despite increased enrolment, the quality of education remains a serious concern. While with 62 percent of new HIV infections affecting Viet Nam's young population between the ages of 20 and 29, HIV/AIDS may pose serious challenges to Viet Nam's ability to sustain its remarkable progress.

The draft Report continues to be consultative process with four regional workshops either passed, or upcoming where officials from local government and organizations provide their input to both the drafts of the national five year Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP - 2006-2010) and the MDG Report.

For more information please contact:
Vu Ngoc Anh, Poverty and Social
Development, UNDP
(84-4) 942-1495 ext.285
vu.ngoc.anh@undp.org

Source: UNDP Hanoi

CARE International launches long-term bid to build Community

Resilience to natural disasters

Long Xuyen, An Giang – August 9, 2005 -

The Australian Government's aid program is funding CARE International in Vietnam to assist the Vietnamese Government and local mass organisations to build sustainable community and household resilience to floods in highly flood-prone areas of the Mekong Delta. The Australian supported project for approximately US\$4.2 million will undertake disaster preparedness and mitigation activities in the provinces of An Giang, Dong Tap and Long An. The Community Resilience to Natural Disaster (CRND) Project will be implemented by CARE and partners over a fifty-four month period.

The low-lying ground in the Mekong Delta - the 'Plain of Reeds' (Dong Thap Muoi) and the 'Long Xuyen Quadrangle' are identified as highly-inundated areas. The project will conduct training and planning activities consistent with the Living with Floods framework of the Vietnamese Government at the hamlet, commune and district levels. CRND Project will also work closely with the private sector to provide employment opportunities to poor householders who are economically affected by floods.

Lastly, the Project will assist in finding ways to increase access of the most vulnerable to pro-poor financial services to smooth income and expenditure flows.

For further information contact:

Country Director, **Carol Sherman**, Hanoi
Representative Office, **Tel: (84-4) 716 1930**

Source: ISG Sec

Oxfam begins drought response in

Ninh Thuan

International agency Oxfam begins the implementation of its drought response project in Ninh Thuan Province in Viet Nam. Drought has been affecting most areas of Viet Nam since mid 2004. This has led to an increase in the severity of food insecurity as well as to an increased risk of disease due to the lack of clean and safe water in the affected provinces. Oxfam project will be implemented in 16 communes in Bac Ai and Ninh Phuoc districts with the total budget of USD 430,800. The project will continue through March 2006.

The project will benefit approximately 5,000 households with a population of 22,600 people including 10,560 males and 12,040 females. The project aims to improve the nutritional and health status of drought-affected women, men and children. Interventions include: cash relief for supplementary feeding for 2,922 households and 300 pregnant women and lactating mothers; cash for work to increase income for nearly 1,000 casual workers; distribution of hygiene kits to 2,335 beneficiaries of Raglei households, of water containers, vessels and water filters to 2,922 poor households; voucher to provide additional hygiene kits to 300 pregnant women and lactating mothers; and establishment and capacity building to a network of community-based hygiene promoters to improve hygiene practices of drought-affected men, women and children.

The project is a collaborative effort of Oxfam GB, Oxfam Hong Kong, and Novib (Oxfam Netherlands) and will be implemented by Bac Ai district People's Committee and Ninh Phuoc district People's committee.

Source: ISG Sec

ADB supports development of

Vietnam capital market

From 25th to 27th July - Asian Development Bank (ADB) delegation had a working session with the State Security Committee in the framework of the assignment to explore the practical conditions for development of a technical assistance

project to prepare for the design of the loan for Banking and Financial Program III, which is expected to begin in 2007.

The two sides discussed assistance contents, being expected to integrate into the framework of the loan for Banking and Financial Program III and came to an agreement that assistance activities will focus on handling remained issues in the fields of legal framework, management, institution and infrastructure.

The objectives of the loan are improving the capital market development infrastructure, establishing a market monitoring system and an integrated management framework, developing organized investors and self-managed organizations, strengthening market microstructure, etc.

Source: VNA

Ending negotiation on Vietnam's

Membership to WTO with Switzerland

In the last round of negotiation with Switzerland on Vietnam's membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO) taking place in Berne on 16th August, the two sides negotiated the remained issues and came to a conclusion of the bilateral negotiation.

According to an announcement of the National Committee on International Economic Cooperation, the signing ceremony of the official agreement will be held at the earliest of August. Previously, in the afternoon of 12th August in Geneva (Switzerland), the Head of economic and trade negotiation delegation of Vietnam Government, Deputy Minister of Trade Luong Van Tu and the Ambassador of India under the witness of representatives from the World Trade Organization officially signed the agreement on bilateral negotiation between Vietnam and India.

India and Switzerland are the two important partners in WTO. As a result, under judgment of the Secretariat of the National Committee on International Economic Cooperation, the completion of negotiation with these two countries will contribute to enhancing the negotiation process for Vietnam's membership to the WTO.

As such, Vietnam has so far completed bilateral negotiation with nearly 20 partners.

Particularly, Vietnam has completed bilateral negotiation with all Asian and most of European partners. Additionally, Vietnam and Norway have come to an agreement on issues concerning goods and are speeding up with the negotiation on services for the completion of the negotiation process.

From now to the 10th multilateral round (which is planned to take place in Geneva in the middle of next month), Vietnam negotiation delegation will process with negotiations with New Zealand and Australia.

Source: VNexpress