

Policy Advisory Briefings

Some Observations, Issues and Recommendations from the Review Report

- ### Features regarding PAB in the ISG Work Plan include:
- Six monthly briefings (2/yr)
 - The purpose of PAB is to provide advice to the Minister
 - One page summary of issues related to a particular theme
 - PAB should indicate where there are consensus/no-consensus among stakeholders
 - Initial draft to be prepared by Department Heads
 - ISG-secretariat to prepare template & circulate drafts for comments & finalising the PAB
 - Each PAB to be considered and approved by SB and forwarded to the Minister
- (Paragraph 15 in the Review Report)

- ### Expectations among ISG members differs from the ISG Work Plan
- An attempt is made in the report to summarise these expectations. PAB should be for:
- MARD representatives to raise issues in ISG,
 - Donor representatives to present their views, and
 - Understanding policies and policy processes, both in MARD and among the donors.
- (Paragraph 20 & 21)
- issue:** These expectations are not necessarily in conflict with the purpose in ISG WP. But they are different and should have consequences for how to develop PABs.

- ### There were more initial attention for selecting policy subjects than for the process of developing PAB
- The consequences have been that:
- The importance of clearly articulating the issues for a “policy subject” has been underestimated or neglected
 - Many proposed PAB subjects are vague or ambiguous
 - This has been clearly demonstrated by the first PAB subjects on “CPRGS integration in MARD strategies”
- (Paragraph 22, 23, 25)
- Issue:** Should future focus (next 6 month?) be on the selection of most urgent policy subjects or can it also be strategic to support the process of developing PABs?

- ### Policy is complex
- This need more attention. Policy includes different aspects such as e.g.
- The process by which policy is informed and formulated
 - The measures for implementing policies
 - The context that shapes policy development and implementation
 - The difference between Macro level, Sector level, Cross-cutting themes etc.
 - The difference between strategies, action-plans and programmes
- (Section 4.3.1)
- Issue:** This may require more considerations for a shared understanding of concepts and even terminology.

- ### The policy context in Vietnam is complicated
- This will require careful
- Planning in order to be timely
 - Consideration of “how” and by “whom” a PAB should be prepared.
 - Consideration for previous and ongoing similar initiatives in MARD
 - Articulation of the subject
- e.g. The first PAB subject referred to a strategy that does not exist. The title was “CPRGS integration in MARD Rural Development Strategy”
- (Paragraph 23, 24 & Annex 5)

Formats/templates for PAB

The ambition has been to apply one template for different policy subjects both for gathering information & for presentation of the result. It consisted of

- A questionnaire with "standardised open ended questions", to gather information
- A matrix to present the results

Issue: Is it realistic to work with one format or template, considering the different nature of policy subjects suggested?

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Policy subjects varies considerably along different dimensions

This will require some categorisation if a standardised process should be developed

A balance needs to be found between

- a reasonable PAB process,
- different purposes and
- the different aspects of "policy"

Issue: Is it possible to categorise policy subjects according to purpose (e.g. Fact finding, Defining issues and Clarifying views) and different aspects of policy at different policy levels (section 4.3.3 in Review Report)

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Recommendations

- Expand the purpose to accommodate different expectations in order to enhance the policy dialogue
- PABs should be brief, but will require more than one page to allow a more meaningful summary
- Other actors than MARD departments only should be involved in the preparation of PABs depending on the subject
- The different PAB subjects should be reassessed with the dual purpose of being useful both for the process (initially) and the content

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Recommendations..cont.

- The articulation of policy subjects need more attention. This will help in categorising PABs and the process for preparing them
- More shared understanding of concepts & terms in policy will be required among ISG members to engage in policy dialogue and to make PABs more useful
- This shared understanding may call for a special workshop and/or a brief document that elaborate concepts and terms in Vietnamese and English.

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The PAB Guideline attempts to address the issues below*

- Why using PABs?
- What constitutes a PAB?
- When should different steps in PAB process be done?
- Who should do them?
- How should they be done?

*The Guideline will have to be updated though as experiences are gained

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Why using PABs

The Guideline suggest the following objective for PABs

- Facilitation of policy dialogue within and between MARD and donors. In doing this PABs should serve as a mechanism
 - ➔ For MARD representatives to raise and discuss policy issues in ISG
 - ➔ For donor representatives to present their views.
 - ➔ For understanding policy processes, both in MARD and in the donor community

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What constitutes a PAB

- A PAB should be brief, but more than a *one page summary** might be required to be meaningful. It is suggested that a PAB can cover up to three pages.
- PAB should add value to existing fora in ISG
- A PAB may also generate additional studies and initiatives or an additional PAB
- PABs are not substitutes for comprehensive special in depth studies, project feasibility studies, project evaluations etc.

*as seems to be indicated in ISG WP

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When should different steps in preparing PABs be done?

- The ISG WP suggest that PABs should be prepared and presented at the two annual SB meetings, without specifying the number. The Guideline suggest that maximum 4 - 6 PABs should prepared for the first full year to allow sufficient focus on the process as well.
- In order to be timely, the various steps included in the PAB process needs to be scheduled. The Guideline provide a time schedule*, which has been adapted to the overall annual time schedule for ISG.

*This time schedule is illustrated in the Guideline

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Who should do what in the PAB process?

- All actors in ISG can propose PAB subjects
- Screening of proposals can be done by ISG Secretariat with assistance of relevant TAGs and/or the CDG. This group can also propose changes
- Approving & scheduling PAB preparations can be done by ISG SB
- Assigning responsibilities (who should prepare PAB) and ensure that resources are allocated (if needed*) can be done by ISG SB

*There are two slightly different versions of the Guidelines regarding roles and responsibilities. Proposals from ISG actors made it difficult to provide a more conclusive advice. The ISG is advised to decide which one is the most appropriate to continue with)

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Who should do what in the PAB process? cont..

- Any ISG member can prepare the initial PAB draft (This can be a more comprehensive document than the final PAB)
- Preparation of the final PAB (the "brief") can be done by the actors responsible for the draft preparation together with the ISG Secretariat
- Circulation of the PAB and the presentation in ISG SB meeting can be done by the actor who prepared the draft/brief and the Secretariat.
- Assessment, approval (or rejection) and wider dissemination will be decided and done by ISG SB and the Secretariat

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How should PAB be prepared?

- Different PAB subjects can have different purposes and can address different policy aspects. In order to develop routines and methods, some categorisation will be required. A system for categorisation is proposed in Guideline (Section 6.1)*.
- A variety of methods can be used to gather information and get inputs in the preparations of PABs. This is elaborated in section 6.2
- A variety of tools can be used to facilitate discussions and present results in PABs. Some of these are described in section 6.3.
- Templates for presenting PABs can vary slightly according to category (Section 6.4 and the Appendices)

*Only some of the current PAB subjects appears to be sufficiently articulated to allow categorisation

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SWOT analysis of PAB and the PAB process (Box 4 in Review Report)

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overall purpose of enhancing policy dialogue is recognised, but also the need to further develop the mechanisms for this (highlighted in the SWOT in the ISG Workplan 2004 - 2006) • There appears to be support by a clear majority of ISG members for the general idea of preparing PABs on a regular basis • Enthusiastic and capable people staff the Secretariat • High degree of commitment from the MARD leadership and from the Core Donor Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of the PAB as expressed in the WP and the expectations among stakeholders differs. • The process for development of PABs lack realistic routines to function properly. • The role of different actors in developing PABs has not yet been convincingly addressed (42).
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The expectations among ISG members could be further explored to strengthen initial momentum • The PAB can serve the dual purpose of enhancing the policy dialogue as well as increasing the understanding of policy processes among all stakeholders in ISG 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose, expectations and value added of the PABs has not been convincingly addressed in ISG (37). • The ISG members may not appreciate the need for the development of the PAB process as much as their enthusiasm for the PAB product (22, 27) • The understanding of what constitutes the PAB has not been convincingly addressed (26) • The complexities of "policy analysis" are perhaps not fully recognised among ISG members (34)

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General Time Schedule for PAB

PAB PROCESS	Month											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1. Proposal for PAB topics	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
2. Reviewing proposed topics			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
3. Selecting topics in SB					X							X
4. Preparing PAB drafts	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
5. Approving PABs			■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
6. Approving PABs in SB					X						X	
7. Policy						X						
IAG 1, 2, 3		3	2	1				3	2			
Joint IAG				X								
Expert Network							X					
Thematic Workshop			X			X			X			
Provincial Forum						X						