

# **Review of the Policy Advisory Briefing Process in the International Support Group**

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All these resource persons, whose assistance has made this review possible, are listed in Annex 2 of this report.

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## Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFPPSPD	Agro-Forestry Products Processing and Salt Production Department
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CDG	Core Donor Group
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
CRDD	Cooperative and Rural Development Department
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (provincial)
DMFCD	Dyke Management and Flood Control Department
FD	Finance Department
GOV	Government of Vietnam
ICARD	Information Center for Agriculture and Rural Development
ICD	International Cooperation Department
ISG	International Support Group
LD	Legal Department
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoFi	Ministry of Finance
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
NDMP	Natural Disaster Mitigation Partnership
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PAB	Policy Advisory Briefing
PD	Planning Department
PIM	Participatory Irrigation Management
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
PPD	Plant Protection Department
RNE	Royal Netherlands Embassy
Sida	Swedish international development cooperation agency
TAG	Thematic Ad-Hoc Group
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
VIASE	Vietnam Institute of Agro-Sciences and Engineering
WB	World Bank
WG	Working group
WP	Work Plan
WRD	Water Resources Department
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## **Executive summary**

This short report provides a review of the Policy Advisory Briefing process in the ISG . The PAB process was initiated slightly less than a year ago as it was included in the ISG Work Plan for 2004 - 2006. The output of the first PAB did not meet the expectation among many of the ISG's members, but has provided very useful experiences for this review.

These expectations are different from what the purpose of the PAB is suggested to be in the WP. The review recommends that the purpose is reformulated in order to better fulfil these expectations as well as one of the main ambitions of ISG (expressed as key area 1 in the WP), namely to facilitate the policy dialogue between MARD and donors.

There are also other features of the PAB process in the WP that either limits the potential of the PABs or are not practical e.g. i/ that only MARD department heads should be charged with task of preparing PABs or ii/ that the PABs appear to be seen as a "one page" summary note only. Preparing briefs on "policies" is indeed not an easy task considering the many different aspects that one can find under the term "Policy". One of the main challenges is to accommodate some flexibility to be able to meaningfully address policy issues, while at the same time establish some routines and methods for the PAB process in order not to make the process overly cumbersome.

Among the most significant experiences from the first attempt to prepare a PAB is that the process can not rely on a standardised questionnaire to solicit information for different policy subjects, where the purposes may differ. A variety of methods will be required depending on the subjects and the purpose. An attempt has been made in this review – particularly in the draft guideline in one of the annexes - to categorise purposes as well as different aspects of policy in order to be able to facilitate the choice of methods and more important to have a common template – with slight variations – for the presentation of the PABs.

Another ambition of this review is to clarify roles and responsibilities of various actors in ISG as well as to be specific about the "value added" of the PAB. There is no point to have a process that overlaps with other functions in ISG or a product that attempts to be something that it should not be e.g. a substitute for special studies, evaluations etc.

Together with the review itself, the key document is the draft guideline attached as an annex of this report. The guideline try to answer key issues like " Why, What, When, Who and How". An example of a PAB based on the experiences of the first is also attached.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 To the reader of this report

1. This report provides a review of the initial experiences from developing a Policy Advisory Briefing (PAB) as part of ISG Work Plan (WP). The assignment has resulted in three “outputs” as specified in the ToR attached in Annex 1 . These include i/ this review report; ii/ a draft guideline for preparing PABs; and iii/ an example of what PAB might look like. The last two “outputs” are included with this review report as annexes (Annex 4 and 5). products included a variety of tasks with consisted of three differ

2. The structure of this report is evident from the Table of Content. A brief presentation of International Support Group (ISG) is included as well for those potential readers who are not familiar with ISG. Important observations and conclusions are indicated throughout the text in “*italics*”. The main conclusions and the recommendations are compiled in the last section. Some of these recommendations are addressed in the draft guideline for PABs (in Annex 4) and the example of a PAB provided (in Annex 5). Other recommendations should be followed up by ISG, if - that is - they are seen as feasible.

3. This review will hopefully help in bringing some structure and methods into the PAB process. It is however still likely or even recommended that the process is reviewed again after a few different PABs has been produced, after let’s say one year or so.

## 2. Methods

4. In order to carry out this evaluation different documents (ToR for different functions in ISG, the ISG Work Plan, the draft from the first PAB, minutes and notes from different meetings and events in ISG and a fair number of other relevant documents, studies and publications) has been studied. These are all listed in Annex 2.

5. Meetings and interviews have been a significant part of the work as well. These meetings and interviews included both different MARD as well as Donor representatives. A special brainstorming event was organised as well in order to solicit views and ideas on how the PAB process could be improved. The persons met are included in Annex 3

## 3. Background information about ISG<sup>1</sup>

6. The International Support Group<sup>2</sup> was established in 1997 as a mechanism for donor/MARD coordination and information sharing. The functions and components of ISG is organised as follows

- ISG Plenary, which meets once a year and is opened to all participants
- ISG Steering Board under the chairmanship of MARD with 22 permanent representatives from different ministries - such as MARD, MPI, MoFi - and from Donors.
- ISG secretariat, and

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<sup>1</sup> More comprehensive information can be found on the ISG website: [www.isgmard.org.vn](http://www.isgmard.org.vn)

<sup>2</sup> Some see ISG as a partnership, although the term is sparsely used in ISG documentation, if at all.

- Three Thematic Ad Hoc Groups (TAG). The number of TAGs can change, but has so far not exceeded three.

7. The ISG and its secretariat are based in the International Cooperation Department (ICD) of MARD<sup>3</sup> and ICDs department head also acts as the director for the secretariat. The secretariat is crucial for ISG as it provides various services in terms of  
=> logistical support (organisation of the meeting for the plenary sessions (once a year), of the Steering Board (twice a year), the TAGs and a number ad hoc meetings as the need arises as well as assistance for different studies and consultancies) ,  
=> information services (monthly briefings, a quarterly newsletter, a web site and a fairly comprehensive data base on ODA of relevance for Natural Resource Management and Rural Development).

8. The management of the ISG secretariat is since 2001<sup>4</sup> funded through a trust fund to which Sida, AusAID, Danida, and the Netherlands contribute resources. These four donors are also part of an “informal” core donor group together with the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and UNDP. In addition to the support through the trust fund, there are also “earmarked” support for special interventions such as special studies, ad hoc meetings etc. plus a lot of “voluntary” time and resources from individuals – mainly advisors from different projects and staff in MARD.

9. The TAGs currently cover three different themes. These aim at supporting i/ International agro-economic integration and policy; ii/ Hydraulic works development, disaster control, and rural water supply and; iii/ Implementation of CPRGS in the agriculture and rural areas.

### 3.1 Defining ISG’s mission

10. There were two studies or reviews done in 2003 that has been significant for the function and even ambitions of ISG. The first of these studies - done in mid 2003 – was a review of the guiding documents of ISG<sup>5</sup>. This included

- The ToR for ISG,
- The ToR for the three TAGs respectively
- The ToR for the technical coordination of the TAGs
- A draft ISG Action Programme

11. Out of these, the ToRs were approved by the Steering Board Meeting in June 2003, while the action programme were to be further developed as part of the second study that focused on the development of an ISG Work Plan (WP) for 2004 – 2006<sup>6</sup>. It also defined objectives and strategies in a structured way and can in this sense be seen as a project document for ISG. Finally it proposed a draft MoA for the ISG trust fund, something that had been missing<sup>7</sup> up

<sup>3</sup> This department has, as also the name suggests, an important role to interact with bilateral and multilateral development organisation particularly in the identification and design phase of most natural resource management and rural development projects.

<sup>4</sup> The trust fund became operational this year although the principle agreement was reached already in 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Prepared by Dr Hans Green with assistance from the ISG secretariat.

<sup>6</sup> Prepared by Dr Geoff Wright with assistance from the ISG secretariat.

<sup>7</sup> Previous arrangement has essential been the reference to relevant agreed minutes from ISG Steering Board Meetings.

to 2004.

12. This second study was more comprehensive than the title may suggest as it provided a review of ISG including an assessment of its strength/opportunities and weaknesses/threats. These were summarised in a SWOT matrix and is included below (slightly modified) as it will be referred to later in this report.

**Box 1: SWOT analysis of ISG**

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is strong support by all stakeholders, and a recognition that the ISG process is good</li> <li>• Enthusiastic and capable people staff the Secretariat</li> <li>• Information dissemination functions are carried out well</li> <li>• There is a good “track record” of improved donor coordination and cooperation with MARD since ISG was established</li> <li>• The structure of ISG is seen to be very appropriate</li> <li>• There is involvement of people from all key stakeholders (but perhaps not always at a senior enough level)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a lack of clarity (agreement) about role and scope of activities of ISG, and future directions</li> <li>• There is a lack of effective policy dialogue</li> <li>• Coordination could be improved along a number of “dimensions”</li> <li>• MARD staff are not as involved in the process as they should be</li> <li>• Meetings are not as effective as they could be</li> <li>• There is an ill-defined process for plan development and approval</li> </ul>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Donors could provide information and advice to ISG, as well as funds, through locally-based advisors</li> <li>• Could use provincial contacts involved in existing donor-funded projects to improve vertical coordination</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The effectiveness of future MARD policies will not be maximised if policy dialogue is not improved.</li> <li>• The “value for money” of ODA will not be maximised if donor coordination is not well facilitated.</li> <li>• Donor support and funding for ISG could be diminished if expectations are not met</li> <li>• Use of Trust Fund monies will be stopped in 2005 if no extension is approved and alternative funding mechanism is put in place</li> </ul>

13. The WP<sup>8</sup> is structured around 7 Key Areas, each with their own objectives. The Key Areas are

1. Facilitation of policy dialogue
2. Donor funding coordination
3. Development and coordination of thematic studies
4. Support to ICD
5. Information gathering and dissemination
6. Capacity building and management processes
7. Monitoring and evaluation

For more information and details the reader is referred to the WP itself, which can be found on the ISG website<sup>9</sup>.

14. The objective of Key Area 1 is formulated as follows: “*Frequent and meaningful dialogue takes place between officials of MARD that are responsible for formulation of agricultural and rural development policy, and donor representatives that are responsible for donor funded programs and projects*”. In order to achieve this, the Work Plan lists six

<sup>8</sup> There are in addition also special workplans for the three different TAGs.

<sup>9</sup> [www.isgmard.org.vn](http://www.isgmard.org.vn)

strategies. This study addresses one these six strategies, namely to prepare six monthly “Policy Advisory Briefings” (PAB).

## 4. Observations

### 4.1 Purpose and expectations

15. The purpose suggested in the ISG Work Plan (WP) is that the PAB and “Roadmaps” are part of a “Process for providing advice to the Minister”<sup>10</sup>. Other features regarding the PAB process in particular in the WP includes:

- The intention to produce PAB every six month.
- That the PAB should be a one-page summary of issues related to a particular subject or theme.
- It should indicate where there is consensus/no-consensus among stakeholders.
- MARD department heads should prepare the initial drafts.
- The ISG-secretariat should prepare template & circulate drafts for comments & finalising the PAB
- Each PAB to be considered and approved by SB and forwarded to the Minister

16. *These features are however not that clear on some aspects.* For instance it is not clear whether the “one page summary” constitutes the PAB or if the PAB can be a more comprehensive document that also should include a summary. We will come back to this later in this note (paragraph 26). Another ambiguity is whether the WP suggest that only one PAB should be produced every six month or if more PABs could be produced. One may also ask what exactly the ISG SB should consider and approve before PABs are submitted to the Minister. These limitations seem to place unnecessary limitations on the PABs in relation to *the overall ISG intention of “enhancing policy dialogue” among it’s members*, something that might be further aggravated if only MARD department heads should be charged with the responsibility to develop the initial PAB drafts

17. These limitations has since the ISG WP was presented and approved been partly demonstrated through additional ideas/proposals that are floating around e.g. that far more PAB subjects has been proposed for the first year than the two suggested in the WP (if indeed this was the intention) and that PABs could be quarterly etc. These ideas are perhaps well justified, but are not necessarily making the efforts of establishing routines for the PAB process easier.

18. The observation in the previous paragraph (P 17) illustrates some of the weaknesses in ISG identified in the SWOT matrix above ( Box 1). The observation “There is an ill defined process for plan development and approval” is partly applicable here. If one allow a slight reformulation to say that *“There is an ill defined process for activities/events that require established and clear routines to function effectively. This might in view of this mission include the development of PABs, if this is not addressed.* The PAB process will require routines and clear responsibilities in order to function properly.

19. This and similar weaknesses in the SWOT analysis also mirrors an important strength with ISG, namely the flexibility by which different issues and tasks can be addressed. This

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<sup>10</sup> See ISG WP for more details

mission however believe that the *ISG would benefit substantially if a better balance between flexibility and how this flexibility should be exercised on one hand and established principles and routines for the ISG process on the other* could be established. The PABs for instance never even had the chance to be tested before changes were proposed.

20. This general weakness is probably behind the different expectations on the PABs expressed to the mission by different partners/stakeholders. For reference a fair number of these expectations<sup>11</sup> are listed here e.g.

- Provide background information and views from MARD to be discussed by ISG partners in ISG fora with a summary of outcome forwarded to the Minister
- Special channel to reach the leadership of MARD.
- Mechanism for donor partners to present their consolidated view on policy issues.
- There is a need for change in MARD and MARD should provide information on how it is addressing the issues.
- Policy or similar guiding documents appear to just pop up (for the donors) and little is known about the process behind this.
- MARD could also solicit the donor's view on MARD policies, strategies, and guidelines.
- Small donors do not have the same access to policy dialogue as the big development banks and PAB can fulfil a function in this regard.
- PAB can be useful in both directions both for MARD as well as for Donors.
- PAB can be used to make donor better understand MARDs intention.
- Some parts of the policy dialogue need to be documented.
- MARD have one boss, but donors don't. PAB can be used to express a consolidated view from the donors on a particular issue.
- PAB can be used as a tool bypassing the existing system for policy dialogue etc for staff and departments to raise issues with the leadership of MARD. But how open can actors be...

21. If an attempt is made to categorise these expectations, it appears as if three main categories can be distinguished. These are that PABs should serve as a mechanism

- ⇒ For MARD representatives to raise issues in ISG,
- ⇒ For donor representatives to present their views, and
- ⇒ For understanding policies and policy processes, both in MARD and among the donors.

These expectations are not necessarily in conflict with what the ISG Workplan suggest. *But they are different and have different consequences for how to develop PABs and clearly suggest the need to develop more specific details as to what the PABs can contribute with and the process for developing them.*

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<sup>11</sup> While most of the people met saw the PABs as potentially useful there were also some scepticism expressed, but these were rare and only one questioned the PABs as such

## 4.2 Experiences so far

22. The initial attention for developing PABs appears to have been for selection of policy subjects, rather than the process and purpose as such. A number of policy themes have been suggested by various partners and through different channels. The different proposed policy themes - that this mission came across more frequently and their origin - are listed in Box 2 below:

<b>BOX 2: SUBJECTS PROPOSED FOR PREPARATION OF PAB</b>	
<b>Proposed policy themes</b>	<b>Source</b>
1. Preparing for the WTO membership (Status of negotiations and implications of WTO accession for Vietnamese agriculture)	ISG & CDG
2. Forest Protection and Development Law (Status and preparation of the draft law on forestry and in particular on-going issues related to community right to forest land)	ISG & CDG
3. Implementing the water strategy and operationalising PIM	ISG & CDG
4. SOE reform	ISG & CDG
5. Public Administrative Reform in MARD	ISG & CDG
6. Sustainable Rural and Agricultural development	CRDD
7. Solutions and action plan to consolidate the sector organisation and management in service of the agricultural and rural development strategy	WRD
8. Strengthening Vietnam's plants quarantine and protection	PPD
9. Encouraging the development of small and medium off-farm industries	AFPPSPD
10. Impact of disasters on poverty reduction and agriculture development	DMFCD
	FD
11. Population allocation to implement CPRGS	PD
12. Facilitation of farmers cooperative agriculture service organisations for the sake of the poor	VIASE
13. Increasing the quality of formulation of laws and legal documents	LD
14. Formulation of a rural information strategy	ICARD
15. Streamlining CPRGS into MARD rural development strategy	ISG & CDG

23. While it is understandable that the enthusiasm will be for selection of policy themes, the initial "policy theme" – Streamlining Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) into MARD Rural Development Strategy – was probably one of the most difficult. Moreover the preparation of this first PAB involved different departments of MARD. Some general observations related to this particular policy subject or theme<sup>12</sup> are as follows

- The theme cuts across sectors as well as other crosscutting themes/topics (environment, gender etc.) and systems for planning/management.
- CPRGS is not internalised in any operational sense in the Vietnamese system for strategy development and planning. Even if the awareness probably is reasonably satisfactory in MARD, it is still not well understood.
- Horizontal interaction between ministries as well as internally between departments and other ministerial organisations are still rare in Vietnam and cross cutting themes like the CPRGS are particularly difficult in this regard. MARD departments are generally occupied with the routine work of their departments and only involved in policy/strategy issues of more immediate relevance for their particular mandate.
- CPRGS is commonly seen as a donor agenda rather than a Vietnamese strategy.

<sup>12</sup> A special PAB has been prepared with more elaborated observations of this first PAB as part of this review mission. This is attached in Annex 5.

- One can wonder whether the reference to MARD's "rural development strategy" made the task even more difficult, as there exist no consolidated rural development strategy. It certainly can be misleading and confusing for outsiders (e.g. donor representatives), who have limited experience of MARD. The closest one comes to a rural development strategy are the 10 yr, 5 yr and 1 yr plans.

24. This first policy theme, when it was addressed by different MARD departments/ organisations resulted in responses highlighting different department's priorities in relation to Vietnamese policies/guidelines and/or the need for special support, while virtually nothing was said about the CPRGS.

25. One could possibly argue that the selection of this complicated subject on the other hand was fortunate in that it immediately revealed the difficulties that might be involved in developing useful PABs. *The methods for generating information ( a standardised questionnaire with open ended questions) and the template for presenting the result (a standardised matrix) have clearly revealed that either the policy themes have to be far less complicated or the methods and templates have to be further developed.*

26. *The experiences hitherto also suggest that the PAB product itself needs to be more clearly defined.* This is important both in order to articulate the purpose more clearly and to outline the process by which PABs should be prepared. It seems as if there are different views regarding the PAB output/product and if the PAB itself is...

➔ the initial draft prepared (by MARD departments in the case of CPRGS), which is submitted to the ISG SB for discussion, or

➔ a discussed/modified/approved document from the SB

...that constitutes the PAB (possibly the "summary" mentioned in the WP). This ambiguity is already there in the Work Plan and the ISG partners will have elaborate the issue and decide on possible changes/additions in the Work Plan. *This review propose clarifications in the draft guideline attached in Annex 4, as this is fundamental for moving forward on other issues like methods, templates and roles/responsibilities.*

27. The expectation so far among ISG members has been that it would be possible to apply a single method for soliciting information (a standardised questionnaire) and that the information could be processed and presented in a standardised template (in this case a matrix). Besides the difficulties of using a questionnaire with rather generally formulated questions (in order to be able to apply it for a variety of policy themes), *there will always be some difficulties associated with the type of " open-ended" questions used. The experience from the first PAB clearly demonstrates this issue e.g. the challenging task of presenting the answers in a meaningful way.*

28. The issue of preparing questionnaires and whether to use open-ended or the alternative closed end questions (i.e. predetermined answers to choose from<sup>13</sup>) goes beyond this review. It is however further elaborated in Annex 4.

29. *The responsibilities for preparing the first PAB followed - more or less- the roles suggested in the Work Plan (paragraph 15) in that the template (the questionnaire) was*

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. Some sort of ranking and/or Yes or No answers

prepared by the ISG secretariat<sup>14</sup> and that MARD departments were involved in providing their ideas/responses on the proposed policy subject. The questionnaire was however not only distributed to different departments, but also to other organisational units in MARD (e.g. extension/information centres and research institutions). Moreover it appears as if the department heads was not necessarily the persons answering the questionnaire. The ISG secretariat then compiled the answers in a matrix that was circulated to ISG members for comments. *While the efforts made was appreciated – not the least as a first pilot exercise - the outcome did however not meet the expectations, and a more consolidated and final product was never forwarded by the SB to the Minister.* This was also what eventually led to this review of the PAB process.

30. A more fundamental and decisive issue for the development of methods and templates is that “policy” as a topic is fuzzy and does not easily lend itself to standardised methods unless ISG members agree to limit the purpose of the PABs. *This mission believes that the current approach is not a way forward, since it appears to defeat the purpose and to go against the expectations on the PABs.* We will look closer on this issue in the next section.

### 4.3 Reviewing some additional issues

#### 4.3.1 The need to appreciate the complexity of Policy

31. The Selection of policy themes will require recognition that “policy” is fuzzy or complex or to use the analogy of Cunningham - “*Defining policy is rather like the elephant – you know it when you see it but you cannot easily define it*”<sup>15</sup>. This being said – the PAB process and products need to recognise the different dimensions of policy in order to suggest and articulate policy issues/themes for PABs. These dimensions include:

- The process by which policy is informed and formulated
- The measures for implementing policies
- The difference between Macro level, Sector level, Crosscutting themes.
- The difference between strategies, action-plans and programmes etc.
- The context that shapes policy development and implementation

*This will require more attention – than what has been the case in ISG – for i/ who is going to prepare them; ii/ how this should be done; and iii/ that time and resource requirements may vary for different themes.*

32. Policy and policy formulation are incremental and often based on a combination of experimentation, change events, learning from mistakes etc. Information required for monitoring policies may be incomplete or distorted. Formulation is sometime shaped by policy narratives and often pursued by actor networks or interest groups. Power relations between citizens, experts and authorities as well as donors means that the process is not neutral. Different actors and interest groups can influence policy to a varying degree depending on how pluralistic a particular society (or organisation) is allowed to be. These examples makes any analysis of policy and policy formulation to a complex task.

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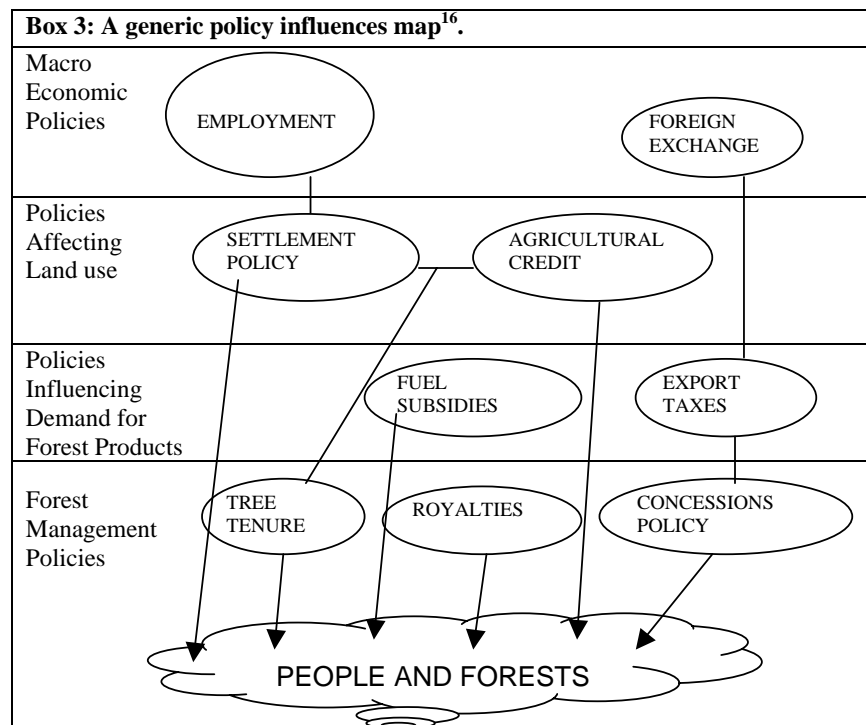
<sup>14</sup> The preparation of the matrix used to compile the results was however developed by the ISG secretariat in consultation with other ISG members,

<sup>15</sup> Cited in Keeley, James and Ian Scoones (1999) *Understanding Environmental Policy Processes: A Review*. IDS working Paper 89. IDS: Brighton.

33. The measures by which policies are implemented is another dimension of policy analysis, which in itself include a variety of entry points. These policy measures can often - with or without intention - combine into desired or unexpected results. Policy measures with some typical examples from the sectors under natural resource management includes e.g.

- Institutional reform and development e.g. in legislation (a relevant example is the recently revised forest law).
- Availability of credit facilities in remote rural areas.
- Market regulations e.g. if farmers are obliged or not to market their products through organisations/enterprises controlled by the government.
- Fiscal e.g. if and how land should be taxed (levels, type and collection).
- Subsidies e.g. for improved seed and/or fertiliser.
- Systems for information, extension etc.
- Different outcome resulting from various combinations of e.g. land reform/allocation in rural areas, which may include revision of laws, decrees and regulations; ii/ changes in the tax system; iii/ changes in subsidies; iv/ launching information/extension campaigns etc.

34. Macro level, sector levels and cross cutting policies and strategies often combines into a complicated web of impacts that may influence people in various ways. This can sometime be illustrated and better understood by developing generic policy influence map exemplified in the box below.



<sup>16</sup> Modified from Mayers, J. and S. Bass (1999) Policy that works for forests and people. IIED: London, p 262.

35. Concepts or terms that are often confused are i/ strategies; ii/ (action) plans; iii/ programmes and ; iv/ institutions and how these relate to policies. As there are no once and for all established definition – at least not in a development context - the understanding can vary for different actors. Hence there is always a potential risk for misunderstandings and confusion and in particular when these terms are translated between English and Vietnamese. *The best way forward in this case is that the ISG partners develop some shared understanding of these different terms and concept (and any additional one that may require clarification).*

36. Finally we have the context that shapes policy and how it is implemented in a particular country (or province or organisation). The policy context in a broad sense<sup>17</sup> for Vietnam is indeed complicated conveying an impression of being both swift and progressive as well as very slow and cumbersome. What appears to be progress may prove to be something else, while real progress perhaps goes un-noticed. In the longer time perspective, this will require more attention for the selection of policy themes that are useful in the ISG partnership context.

#### **4.3.2 The value added**

37. While the value added is closely linked both to the purpose of the PABs (as expressed in the Work Plan) or in terms of expectations (see paragraph 20), the issue may require some special attention. *PABs will or should for obvious reasons not be developed in isolation from other fora in ISG.* The ToR for e.g. the TAGs all include scope and activities aiming at enhancing the policy dialogue. The PABs is also linked to the “road maps” in the Work Plan and the selection of policy themes may be influenced by the road maps, once these are initiated.

38. But there are also other support initiatives (completed, under implementation or in the pipeline) that needs to be considered when PAB themes are selected and scheduled. The first policy theme – streamlining CPRGS into MARD rural development strategy – can (perhaps with the benefit of hindsight) be questioned for this reason. The experiences from e.g. (i) The FAO supported “Implementation of the CPRGS and Capacity Building in Pipeline Development and Project Formulation” and (ii) the formulation of a new project with possible support from SDC – “Rural Policy Support in Implementation of CPRGS” – seem to suggest that *there already were awareness about the lack of understanding of CPRGS and how it should be internalised in MARD.* The weaknesses revealed in the first PAB should therefor not have come as a surprise (see paragraph 23).

39. This is not to say that a PAB theme on CPRGS still could be useful, but then it needs to take into considerations prior relevant experiences and be defined in that context with a more specifically articulated subject.

40. Finally the value added can vary for different partners in ISG. *The rationale in the Work Plan for limiting the preparation of PAB drafts to department heads and the sole purpose of providing advice to the minister is not convincingly argued (if at all).* Many ISG members apparently believe that the preparation of PABs should not only be the responsibilities of MARD department heads and that the purpose of the PABs can be different or more comprehensive than what is stated in the Work Plan. This was expressed during the

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<sup>17</sup> Including institutional arrangements, power relations, transparency etc.

Brainstorming workshop<sup>18</sup> and is also implicit in some member's view on the purpose of the PABs (see paragraph 20). These differences need to be reconciled.

41. As there already are mechanism in MARD in place for channelling advice from departments to MARD's leadership, it is difficult to see the value added with the PAB process<sup>19</sup> as suggested in the WP. Allowing the purpose to be more in line with the overall objective of ISG (enhancing policy dialogue) and to involve different actors in the preparation of PABs (depending on the subject) *would for many policy themes still be valuable for the Minister.*

42. In this context the significance of having SB improving PABs needs to be raised as well. What exactly should be approved?

- the views expressed.
- the information provided (factual errors).
- if the PAB follows a particular template.

Assuming that the SB will not engage themselves in any assessment as to the need of changing any views expressed, the debate itself might be of interest and should be encouraged. The other two points are more a matter of clarifying what the Secretariat and the SB should do. This is elaborated in Annex 4.

### 4.3.3 The need for categorisation of the policy themes

43. The "nature" of "value added" can be different for different themes or subjects. The expectations on the policy themes proposed in Box 2 can vary. To illustrate the point, the policy themes...

- "Preparing for the WTO membership (Status of negotiations and implications of WTO accession for Vietnamese agriculture)" .
- Forest Protection and Development Law (Status and preparation of the draft law on forestry and in particular on-going issues related to community right to forestland).
- Implementing the water strategy and operationalising Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM).

..... may have different purposes. It appears – on a purely speculative note though - as if the first is a matter of *providing information* (fact finding), the second could be about *soliciting different views* while the third perhaps is about *defining the issues/challenges*.

44. It can in this context be useful to categorise different policy themes as in the previous paragraph in order to streamline the methods for preparing the drafts to better match expectations as well as for how the results should be presented (the template). This is addressed in the draft guideline attached in Annex 4.

## 4.4 SWOT analysis of PAB

45. An attempt is made to summarise the observations made in the previous subsections under 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3 in a SWOT analysis for the PAB and the PAB process in Box 4. The

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<sup>18</sup> Organised as part of this review

<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that these mechanisms are satisfactory, but the question is if the PABs would change this.

SWOT is characterised by more "views" under Strength and Threats reflecting that the PAB initiative is new and that "weaknesses" has only been partly revealed. Many of the observations are addressed in the next chapter, but as this represents the ideas and opinions of this mission, the ISG members may not agree with all of them. Chapter 4 and the SWOT analysis can then serve as a departure point for modifying and negotiating alternative approaches, if needed

**Box 4: SWOT analysis of PAB and the PAB process**

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• There appears to be support by a clear majority of ISG members for the general idea of preparing PABs on a regular basis</li> <li>• Enthusiastic and capable people staff the Secretariat</li> <li>• High degree of commitment from the MARD leadership and from the Core Donor Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose of the PAB as expressed in the WP and the expectations among stakeholders differs.</li> <li>• The process for development of PABs lack realistic routines to function properly.</li> <li>• The role of different actors in developing PABs has not yet been convincingly addressed (42).</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The expectations among ISG members could be further explored to strengthen initial momentum</li> <li>• 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</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The purpose, expectations and value added of the PABs has not been convincingly addressed in ISG. (37)</li> <li>• 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)</li> <li>• The understanding of what constitutes the PAB has not been convincingly addressed (26)</li> <li>• The complexities of "policy analysis" are perhaps not fully recognised among ISG members (31)</li> </ul>

**5. Main conclusions and recommendations**

46. The main conclusions from the review of the PABs with implications for how to move the process forward are

- The purpose of the PABs as suggested in the Work Plan (15) pose unnecessary limitations on the usefulness of the PABs. The rationale for this is not clear in the WP. Expectations on the PABs among ISG members varies (20), but could be categorised into three groups (21)

The recommendation is to expand the purpose to accommodate more of these different expectations in order to enhance the policy dialogue in line with the objectives of ISG.

- The issue of what constitutes the PAB needs to be clear. The Work Plan seem to suggest that a "One Page Summary" constitutes the PAB (26), while one could argue that the drafts prepared (if any) should be seen as part of the PAB as well. This has implications for both the process and the product.

The recommendation is that the PAB should be brief, but that more than one page needs to be allowed if a more meaningful summary should be produced. The drafts (if there are any) can be attached or provided to ISG members on request. The PABs should however have a similar template regardless of policy theme, while these restrictions should not apply for any drafts prepared.

- The previous point is closely linked to the role and responsibilities of different actors and fora in ISG. To limit the preparations of PAB drafts to MARD department heads is an unnecessary restriction that does not exploit the potential opportunities with the PAB process/products (40). The designated role of the ISG secretariat is perhaps reasonable as long as a particular policy subject involves several actors inputs for preparing the draft. If however there is one actor behind a particular PAB, it seems reasonable that the same actor also could compile the summary. The role of the SB to consider and approve PABs should be clarified. Presumably this responsibility only refers to the process and content of the PAB in terms of fulfilling certain minimum requirements.

The recommendation is that other actors than the MARD department heads should be involved in the preparation of PABs depending on the subject. The role of the ISG secretariat should be modified, while the role of the ISG SB should be more specified.

- While one strength of ISG process is its flexibility, it is also a weakness. This is probably behind some of the complications for PAB (18, 19). For the development of PABs, it will be important for the ISG members to restrain from proposing too many changes before the experiences of methods and templates has been brought to a more final conclusion.

It is recommended that the number of PABs and the proposed themes are reviewed with the dual purpose of being both useful for ISG as well as for developing and fine tuning the PABs both in terms of process and content.

- A fair number of PAB themes have been proposed, most of which (but not all) are listed in Box 2. Some of these themes will have to be more specified in terms of providing guidance on what the purpose is.

It is recommended that the articulation of policy themes be given more attention. This will help in categorising policy themes (43, 44) and therefore the process for developing them.

- Closely linked to the point above is that the complexity of policy and its various dimensions and terms used (31), needs to be fully appreciated by ISG members. If there are not sufficient common understanding, the issue will have to be addressed.

The ISG members are recommended to organise a special session to discuss different dimensions of policy in order to have a more shared understanding of concepts and terms

- The value added of the PAB and a particular policy theme needs to be assessed from different aspects. There are i/ the roles of other fora and activities in ISG and in particular the TAGs as well as the “road maps” (37); ii/ other (policy support) activities that might address similar topics (38); and finally iii/ the value added can be improved if different partners can be involved in the process of preparing PABs.

It is recommended that the value added of PABs when themes are selected and formulated can be enhanced if more attention is given for the aspects mentioned above.

- A single method for preparing PABs (standardised questionnaire and a matrix) is not likely to be successful, unless the PABs are restricted both in terms of purpose and selection of subjects.

The recommendation is to allow different type of policy subjects as long as these are articulated to match one of a limited number of categorised purposes (42). This would still allow the methods for developing them to be streamlined to a considerable extent and also make it possible to have a limited number of template for presenting them

47. These recommendations are used in the draft guideline attached in Annex 4 in order to suggest useful approaches, methods, and formats/templates for preparing PABs in the future. Some of the proposals may have to be adjusted or excluded in due course as a result of experiences gained.

48. It needs however to be reiterated – policy is a difficult subject, which does not easily lend itself to a single method/approach unless very clear restrictions are imposed on the process.

## **6. Follow up**

49. In order to move the PAB process forward, the first step would be to organise a well prepared workshop to discuss PAB and to use this report (including the draft guidelines in Annex 4 and the sample PAB in Annex 5). While the report presumable will be circulated in advance, it would be advisable if e.g. the ISG Secretariat could prepare a short presentation to highlight the main findings and recommendations.

50. The workshop should also be used to identify and plan for additional needs in terms of developing a common understanding and/or capacity for ISG members to be able to fully engage and benefit from PABs. This could e.g. be the case regarding

- The understanding of different dimensions of policy analysis and to agree on a common terminology. This could be initiated by assigning someone to prepare a draft “Glossary of Policy Terms”.
- Possible need for training associated with the PAB Guideline.

51. The same workshop could be used to select and articulate the next 3 – 4 PAB subjects from the list of themes already suggested . The selection should be strategic - not only in terms of being the most urgent theme to be “briefed on”, but also with consideration for different type of themes e.g. the categories mentioned in paragraph 43 and in the special matrix proposed in the PAB Guideline. These categories represents to some extent different processes for preparing them.

52. Using this workshop for selecting PAB subjects would be an deviation from what is proposed in the Guideline in Annex 4. Here the selection of PAB subjects is proposed to be done by the SB meetings in May and November. This exception is justified, if it is important to gain some time, particularly if the members of the SB also participates in the proposed workshop.

# Annex 1

## **Draft:**

### **Terms of Reference for Consulting Service** Development of ISG Policy Advisory Briefing

#### A. Context

The International support Group (ISG) of the Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (MARD) has been in operational in accordance with Decision No. 541 NN/TCCB-QD on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1997 with advisory function in the effective use of ODA resources. An ISG Steering Board was established under the chairmanship of MARD Minister and representatives from MARD, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Ministry of Finance, and international donors. An ISG Secretariat and an ISG Trust Fund were also formed under the management of ICD to facilitate ISG process. Currently, a core donor group (AusAID, DANIDA, Netherlands Embassy, and SIDA) is contributing their financial assistance to ISG Trust Fund.

In order to support MARD and international donors in ODA coordination and policy dialogue, ISG has formed Thematic Ad-Hoc Groups on International Agro-economic Integration and Policy (TAG1), Hydraulic Works development, disaster control and rural water supply (TAG2), and Support Implementation of the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) in Agriculture and Rural Areas (TAG3). The present hierarchical composition of the four ISG bodies is: ISG Plenary, ISG Steering Board, Thematic Ad-hoc Groups (TAGs) and ISG Secretariat.

As mentioned in the ISG work plan 2004-2006 and in an ISG proposal, ISG Secretariat has been supporting MARD in preparation and completion of the Policy Advisory Briefing 2004. The Advisory Briefing once completed will:

- (i) summarize issues related to a particular policy theme that has been considered in the ISG process;
- (ii) indicate where there is consensus among stakeholders, and where there are alternative views that need to be considered;
- (iii) be submitted bi-annually to MARD Minister and shared with all ISG stakeholders; and
- (iv) be reported to Consultative Group (CG) meeting annually.

The theme for the first round of dialogue that has been agreed among MARD and the donors as members of the ISG Steering Board is “*Streamlining the Comprehensive Poverty reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) into MARD rural development strategy*”. This draft Advisory Briefing was completed by ISG Secretariat after the first round of consultation among MARD departments, and sent to ISG members for comments in late May 2004. The donors were requested to give comments to the contents of the recommendations made by the departments, classification of issues, how to select appropriate policy themes for next round of dialogue, template of the Advisory Briefing, and others if relevant.

As commented by the informal core donor group (including ADB, Embassy of Australia, the Netherlands Embassy, Swedish SIDA and the World Bank), it is clear from the Policy Advisory Briefing note that ISG has been able to engage the attention of a broad range of

departments within MARD in relation to this exercise. However, the format and content of the Policy Advisory Briefing note is not quite as expected from the Policy Advisory Briefing process. The note itself is essentially a list of priority projects from different MARD departments, some of which seem to have only indirect linkages with CPRGS integration.

In this connection, this Terms of Reference (ToR) is designed for an international consultant who will be needed to support the ISG Steering Board and Secretariat in revisiting the policy advisory briefing process in relation to the CPRGS integration topic in order to get a better result, by clarifying remaining issues and develop a complete format and process for preparation and implementation of ISG Policy Advisory Briefing in this round of dialogue as well as in the time to come.

#### B. Objectives

The objectives of the mission are as followed:

1. To analyse the current Policy Advisory Briefing process and propose a standard method and a set of applicable tools for improved quality of the Advisory Briefing;
2. To analyse the available inputs and outputs resulted by and comments from the informal core donor group to synthesize recommendations/proposals from a wide range of stakeholders to the proposed policy theme (*Streamlining the Comprehensive Poverty reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) into MARD rural development strategy*) and policy issues in a comprehensive Advisory Briefing, which will be submitted to MARD Minister and shared with donors.

#### C. Scope of Service

The international consultant, in consultation with ISG Secretariat and ICD-MARD, will :

1. Conduct the desk reviews (list of documents to be reviewed detailed in Section E of this TOR);
2. Discuss with officials of MARD / ICD, ISG Secretariat, TAGs; relevant donor agencies (Meetings will be arranged by ISG Secretariat);
3. Draft a synthesized report on the Advisory Briefing process itself;
4. Draft a standard method and a set of applicable tools for preparation and implementation of the Advisory Briefing in the next rounds of policy discussion;
5. Draft the first Advisory Briefing based on the proposed policy theme *Streamlining the Comprehensive Poverty reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) into MARD rural development strategy*.

#### D. Important Considerations

In carrying out the duties mentioned, the consultant will take into account the following important considerations.

1. Participation of MARD Minister, MARD Departments and other ISG stakeholders in the Policy Advisory Briefing process.
2. The role of donors, representative in ISG Steering Board, TAG1, TAG2, and TAG3
3. The role of ISG Secretariat.

### E. Key Documents

The consultant will study the following documents:

1. Terms of Reference for ISG, 2003 – 2005
2. Terms of Reference for TAG1
3. Terms of Reference for TAG2
4. Terms of Reference for TAG3
5. Minutes of ISG Steering Board, Plenary and TAGs
6. ISG Work Plan 2004-2006
7. Draft of the first Advisory Briefing 2004
8. Briefing Note of May 11, 2004 of the informal core donor group
9. Minutes from the informal core donor group meeting on 22 July 2004

The consultants may need to refer to the following documents, among others:

1. Decision No. 132/1999/QD-BNN-HTQT dated 22nd September 1999 by the Minister of MARD on the Promulgation of Regulation on Management of Programs and Projects Using External Fund Sources and Belonging to Responsibility of of the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.
2. Decision No. 120/TCCB-NN-2000 dated 24th November 2000 by the Minister of MARD on the Establishment of the ISG Steering Board with the participation of 10 donors, Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Ministry of Finance (MoF), several relevant Departments under MARD, and with Vice Minister of MARD being the Chairman of the Board.
3. Decision No. 121/TCCB-NN-2000 dated 24th November 2000 by the Minister of MARD on the Establishment of ISG Secretariat as an assistant unit to the Board, with its clearly-defined functions, tasks and organizational arrangements.
4. Decision No. 1167/CP-QHQT dated 18th December 2000 by the Prime Minister on the establishment of the Trust Fund under MARD management to receive the grant offered by the donor community in support of the implementation of the ToR of the ISG process.
5. Decree No. 17/200192ND-CP dated 4th May 2001 by the Prime Minister on the Issuance of the Regulation on the Management and Use of Official Development Assistance.
6. Decision No. 2204/QD/BNN/TCKT dated 24th May 2001 by the Minister of MARD on the issuance of the Guidelines on the Management and Utilization of the Trust Fund of the ISG process.
7. Regulation on the Code System for the Management of Agriculture and Rural Development Related Projects / Programmes Using Development Support Sources Funded by Countries and International Organizations attached to Decision No. 95/2001/QD-BNN dated 21st September 2001 by the Minister of MARD.
8. Memorandum of Agreement on "Natural Disaster Mitigation Partnership for Central Vietnam" 1 June 2001.
9. Memorandum of Agreement on the Preparation of a Partnership Support Program, "5 Million Hectare Reforestation Program."

### F. Qualifications

The International Consultant with the following qualifications will be contracted to carry out the TORs described above:

1. Experience in strategic planning with a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation process
2. Experience in capacity building and institutional strengthening in Vietnam
3. Good knowledge of the following:
  - i) Policy issues confronted by Vietnam's agriculture and rural sector
  - ii) Government of Vietnam institutions, and MARD in particular
  - iii) Coordination and liaison mechanisms,
  - iv) public sector organization, management and institutional strengthening.
4. Abilities in:
  - i) organizing and undertaking complex, sensitive and strategic planning,
  - ii) consulting with senior Government and donor agency officials,
  - iii) working efficiently under a short timeframe,
  - iv) preparing clear and concise reports in English.

#### G. Inputs

The international consultant will be contracted for 15 working days, spreading over around a one-month period from a date starting in October to November 2004.

#### **Budget**

The estimated budget for this activity is:

Item	Price Unit	Total
International Consultant	12 days @ 750 USD (inclusive of fees and personal subsistence)	USD 9000
Accommodation	8 days @ USD??? (depends on Horizon Hotel's rate) (Reimbursable)	
National Transportation and miscellaneous (in Hanoi)	Traveling (Reimbursable)	USD 200
Total		USD ???

#### **Reporting**

The International Consultant will report to Dr. Le Van Minh, Director General, ICD, MARD and the informal core donor group.

#### **Working arrangement**

ISG Secretariat will collaborate with the consultant during the mission. It will also ensure all the logistic arrangements such as provision of necessary documents, organization of meetings, translation and interpretation.

Office space, telephone, photocopier and fax will be provided by the ISG Secretariat. The consultant will need to mobilise his/her own laptop.

#### H. Working Schedule

The working schedule will be developed by the consultant as soon as he/she is recruited by the Director of ISG Secretariat. The schedule should be sent to ISG Secretariat for logistics arrangements.

## Annex 2

### List of persons consulted

Dr.	Cao Duc Phat	Minister of MARD
Ms.	Carole Ly	Information Centre for Agriculture and Rural Development
Mrs.	Chu Thi Hao	Cooperative and Rural Development Department
Dr.	Dang Kim Son	Information Centre for Agriculture and Rural Development
Ms.	Do Hing Chi	ICARD
Dr.	Hoang Kim Giao	Department of Agriculture
Mr.	Le Quang Tuan	Department of Water Resources
Dr.	Le Van Minh	International Cooperation Department
Dr.	Nguyen Dinh Ninh	Department of Water Resources
Mr	Nguyen Than Muong	NDM – partnership secretariat
Dr.	Nguyen The Dzung	World Bank
Mr.	Nguyen Xuan Dieu	Dyke Management and Flood Control Department
Mr.	Nico Bakker	Royal NetherlandsEmbassy
Mr.	Ole Pedersen	Agriculture Sector Programme Support
Mr.	Pham Van Tham	Centre for Natural Disaster Mitigation
Mr.	Phu Dung	National Disaster Mitigation Partnership
Mr.	Rob MacGregor	AusAid, Australian Embassy
Mr.	Rolf Samuelsson	Swedish Embassy
Mr.	Tram Kim Long	International Cooperation Department
Mr.	Tran Nam Binh	ISG secretariat
Dr.	Trang Hieu Dzung	Department of Planning

## Annex 3

### List of documents consulted

Anon	2002	Rural Dimension of CPRGS: A Cross-Sectoral Vision
Anon	2004	Rural Policy Support in Implementation of CPRGS, Concept Paper Prepared for Task Force Discussion. MARD & SDC
Anon	2002	Implementation of CPRGS and Capacity Building in Pipeline Development and Project Formulation. FAO
Anon	200x	Minutes of ISG Steering Board, Plenary and TAGs
Anon	2003	The Comprehensive Poverty and Growth Strategy. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
CDG	2004	Briefing Note of May 11, 2004
CDG	2004	Minutes from the informal Core Donor Group meeting 22 July 2004.
Green H.	2003	<u>Terms of Reference for ISG, 2003 - 2004</u>
Green H.	2003	<u>Terms of Reference for TAG 1, 2, 3</u>
ISG	2004	Draft questionnaire for preparation of PAB
ISG	2003	ISG Newsletter Vol. 4. ICD
ISG	2004	ISG Newsletter Vol. 2 & 3. ICD
ISG	2004	Draft Template for PAB
Keeley J and Scoones I.	1999	Understanding Environmental Policy Processes: A Review. IDS working Paper 89. IDS: Brighton
MARD Departments	2004	Draft PAB "Streamlining CPRGS in MARD Rural Development Strategy
Mayers, J. and S. Bass	1999	Policy that works for forests and people. IIED
Pasteur K	2001	<u>Tools for Sustainable Livelihoods: Policy Analysis. IDS</u>
Peterson R. A	2000	Constructing effective questionnaires. Sage Publications Inc
Wright G.	2004	Development of ISG Work Plan 2004 - 2006

## **Annex 4**

**Draft 2**

# **Guideline for preparing Policy Advisory Briefings**

Thorsten Celandner

2005-02-28

## Table of Content

1. Introduction
2. Why using PABs
3. What constitutes a PAB
4. When and how frequently should PABs be prepared
5. Who should do what in the PAB process
6. How should PABs be prepared
  - 6.1 Proposing PAB subjects
  - 6.2 Preparing PABs
  - 6.3 Some tools to facilitate discussions and presentation of results
  - 6.4 Templates**

## Boxes

- 1. General time schedule for PAB process in relation to the schedule of the ISG events (as illustrated in the WP)**
- 2. Matrix for categorisation of policy subjects in the PAB process**
- 3. An attempt to classify policy subjects**
- 4. Steps in designing a questionnaire**
- 5. A generic policy influences map**
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## Appendices

- 1. Template for proposing a Policy Subject**
- 2. Template for “Fact Finding” PAB**
- 3. Template for “Defining Issues” PAB**
- 4. Template for “Clarifying Views” PAB**

## Acronyms

BRUSO	Brief, Relevant, Unambiguous, Specific, and Objective
CDG	Core Donor Group
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
DARD	Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (provincial)
GOV	Government of Vietnam
ICD	International Cooperation Department
ISG	International Support Group
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
PAB	Policy Advisory Briefing
PIM	Participatory Irrigation Management
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SB	Steering Board
SOE	State Owned Enterprise
TAG	Thematic Ad-Hoc Group
WG	Working group
WP	Work Plan
WTO	World Trade Organisation

## 1. Introduction

This guideline assume that an alternative approach is required for i/ identifying topics and ii/ preparing Policy Advisory Briefings (PAB), if this initiative should contribute to the policy dialogue in ISG. The process will require more than what ISG seem to have anticipated in their first initial test. A balance will be required between a reasonably simple structure for the process as well as to accommodate the many different dimensions that “policy” as a theme cover. This guideline attempts to provide this balance. This being said, a review of the experiences of the PABs in terms of their usefulness and the PAB process itself – including this guideline - will be required after some time.

The guideline builds to a considerable extent on the review of the PAB process in the main Review Report. The guideline is likely to have to be complemented with additional advice on procedures as experiences are gained. Initially there are some important points of departure that provides the structure for this document. These points addresses issues such as

- Why using PABs
- What constitutes a PAB
- When should they be done
- Who should do them
- How should they be done

The last three bullets makes up the main trust of this guideline, but before going into this the two first needs to be clear, as this defines the product and therefor to a decisive degree determine the process of developing the PABs.

In doing this, an attempt has been made to combine flexibility with proposals for routines and methods to follow. While there should not be any need to justify “flexibility”, the latter is required in order to avoid a too cumbersome process of preparing the PABs. These “routines and methods” can and should be changed as required. This in itself will require some structure as well and not be done on an ad hoc basis.

## 2. Why using PABs

The purpose or overall objective of the PABs is here proposed to be more comprehensive than what is stated in the Work Plan (WP)<sup>20</sup>. The PABs should contribute to Key Area 1 in the WP – “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.

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<sup>20</sup> The reason for this is both the expectations among different ISG members, but also for practical reasons (see Review of PAB process paragraph 20 & 21 )

⇒ For understanding policy processes, both in MARD and in the donor community

The final outcome – the PAB – can be forwarded to the Minister, if the ISG SB so decides

### **3. What constitutes a PAB**

The policy advisory briefing should be short. The notion of a “briefing” is essentially that it should be brief i.e. a summary or a resume of a subject that usually is more comprehensive. In this Guideline it is suggested that a PAB should be maximum 3 pages. A particular PAB may be based on existing documents and publications, but it may also have to rely on discussions/interviews/brainstorming with key informants and in some cases on questionnaires.

The PAB should add value to existing fora in ISG - be it the Plenary, the Steering Board (SB) or the Technical Ad Hoc Groups (TAG) and/or to the Road Maps. This also include Special Studies as well as other initiatives undertaken by MARD and/or Donors - that serve the overall objective of ISG. A PAB may also generate additional studies and initiatives or an additional PAB e.g. a “Fact finding PAB” can lead to a “Clarifying views PAB” (Fact finding and Clarifying views are explained in section 6).

The PABs are not substitutes for comprehensive special in depth studies, project feasibility studies, project evaluations etc. A PAB could however be a summary of a more comprehensive study (completed or in progress).

### **4. When and how frequently should PABs be prepared**

The WP propose that the preparation of PABs should be six monthly so that these can be presented at the two annual/semi-annual SB meetings of ISG. While the WP does not specify the number of PABs, the interpretation can be either that there should be two PABs per year or that the number in principle can be unlimited.

It is however recommended that the numbers are limited to maximum 4 - 6 PABs during the first year after (and if) these guidelines are introduced. This is basically a new undertaking, which may require some tests where the experiences can be used to revise the PAB process including these guidelines.

An important consideration is that the PABs are timely. The selection of PAB subjects and how these are scheduled over the years will therefor require special attention. The time schedule for ISG and the general timing of the PAB process is proposed in Box 1.

**Box 1:** General time schedule for PAB process in relation to the schedule of the ISG events<sup>21</sup>.

PAB PROCESS	Month											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1 Proposal for PAB topics	[Yellow shaded cells]											
2 Assessing proposed topics	[Red shaded cells]											
3 Selecting topics in SB	[X in May, X in Nov]											
4 Preparing PAB drafts	[Blue shaded cells]											
5 Preparing PABs	[Green shaded cells]											
6 Approving PABs in SB	[X in May, X in Nov]											
Plenary	[X in Jun]											
TAG 1, 2, 3	[3 in Feb, 2 in Mar, 1 in Apr, 3 in Aug, 2 in Sep, 1 in Oct]											
Joint TAG	[X in Apr]											
Expert Network	[X in Jul]											
Thematic Workshop	[X in Feb, X in May, X in Sep]											
Provincial Forum	[X in Jun]											

<sup>21</sup> This is a modified version of the Time Schedule in the ISG WP

## 5. Who should do what in the PAB process

The cycle of preparing PABs include different steps. These and the role of different actors are proposed to be as follows

### Step 1. The process of developing PAB proposals.

All actors in ISG can in principle make proposal of subjects for PABs. This include MARD departments, Donors (multilateral, bilateral and NGOs) and Provincial DARDs/Peoples Committees. Additional actors may also be invited to propose policy subjects from e.g. other ministries, provincial authorities, private sector, civil society as long as these subjects contributes to Key Area 1 in the WP (facilitating policy dialogue) and the Mission of ISG (See P 21 in the WP).

A reasonably simple and standardised process for screening and assessing subjects proposed for PABs is recommended. Proposals should be presented according to a simple template (further detailed in Section 6.1 and Appendix 1). The screening and assessment involves different sub-steps as follows

- a. Screening of format and content of the proposed subject to be developed into a PAB. This can be done by the ISG Secretariat with assistance by relevant TAGs and/or Core Donor Group if required<sup>22</sup>.
- b. Propose changes – regarding e.g. how the subject has been articulated, categorised and the formulation of the objective. This can be done by ISG Secretariat with assistance by relevant TAGs and/or Core Donor Group if required. The ISG Secretariat may also propose who should be responsible for preparing the PAB draft, if this is not indicated in the proposal.
- c. Approving, prioritising and scheduling each PAB. This can be done by ISG SB.
- d. Assigning responsibilities and ensure that resources are allocated etc. This can be done by ISG SB

More specifications will sometimes be required as part of the selection and scheduling of a PAB subject in order to move the process forward. This can include

- Any need to specify outputs that will contribute to the objective and the process for producing these; and
- Any need for additional resources (financial/staff time/consultancies), beyond voluntary inputs by ISG members, that might be required for a particular PAB.

It is here proposed that the ISG secretariat with support from other key stakeholders e.g. those mentioned under “a” and “b” above should prepare a brief document which provides further details on the points above, when this is required. This document will then have to go through an approval process as part of “c” and “d” above.

### Step 2. Preparation of the initial draft (see also “What” section above)

Any ISG member, depending on the subject can do the preparation of the initial draft (or non-member e.g. a consultant, if ISG SB decides to do so). This is a deviation from the proposal of

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<sup>22</sup> This does not exclude that groups of partners make their own pre-screening on a case by case basis, if a particular subject involve different departments, group of donors etc. This should be done before submitting the proposal to the ISG Secretariat.

the WP, which states that MARD departments only should propose subject and be responsible for producing the PABs. The rationale for this deviation is that by including the donors and provincial authorities a more vital process of PAB preparations will be accomplished. It would also go hand in hand with the expectations among different members in ISG as they came through during the review (see Review Report).

The ISG SB will assign the responsibilities for preparing the drafts. The ISG Secretariat can also be assigned the responsibilities (or part thereof) for preparing the initial draft, depending on the category of a particular PAB topic and the foreseen methods for doing this<sup>23</sup> (see section 6).

### Step 3. Preparation of summary (the actual brief)

The preparation of the Brief (the resume) should be done by the ISG Secretariat in cooperation with the actor assigned to do the tasks. One way of sharing the responsibility can be that the initial “draft resume” is prepared by the actor assigned for a particular PAB and then submitted to the Secretariat. They would then check and suggest modifications as needed. The templates for preparing the brief will vary slightly with different categories (Section 6.4).

### Step 4. Presentation and approval

The brief will be circulated to ISG SB members before the SB convenes their meetings. At the meeting the actor who prepared the initial draft will present the PAB in cooperation with the Secretariat. The SB will then assess the PAB (according to the objective and outputs in the original PAB proposal) and approve or propose changes (or even reject) the brief.

### Step 5. Submission to MARD and donor partners

The ISG secretariat will on behalf of the SB distribute the approved brief to MARD leadership and all ISG members. The brief can also be made available for a wider audience on ISG’s home page and be presented in the ISG plenary as well.

## **6. How should PABs be prepared**

Before going into the “how” issue, the challenge in addressing policy issues with a “brief” needs to be reiterated and what a PAB “is and isn’t” (see “What” section above). In other words a balance for “how” to develop PABs needs to be found that to some degree recognises the complexity of addressing “policy”, while at the same time having some agreed routines and templates to guide the preparation. The recommendations in this section aim at bringing some structure to this process.

### **6.1 Proposing PAB subjects**

One important finding in the Review Report was that many of the policy subjects already proposed have to be more specified. The indications during the review were that these

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<sup>23</sup> If e.g. a PAB aim at soliciting views among many stakeholders on a particular subject and this can be done through a questionnaire, the ISG Secretariat might be best placed to do much of the work.

specifications would lead to different “types” of issues or rather “purposes”. If these “purposes” can be classified into a limited number of categories, the opportunity is there for outlining some standardised methods and templates for how PABs can be prepared.

In this draft guideline it is proposed that these “purposes” can be classified under one of three categories that either is about

- Fact finding,
- Defining issues, and/or
- Clarifying views among different actors

Another dimension of categorisation is the possibility to classify a proposed subject into different aspects of “policy”. This would address the complexity of “policy” (see Review Report for more elaboration on this issue) by bringing some focus to a particular PAB subject. Here three categories are proposed, namely

- Formulation including policy statements,
- Implementation, which would mainly be about “measures” that influence policy implementation (both by intention as well as unintended) as well as the outcome of policies.
- Contextual aspects that have an impact on policy (formulation as well as implementation)

It could finally be useful to differentiate between different levels of “policy” that have an impact on agriculture and rural development. The Review Report differentiated between

- Macro level,
- Sector levels, and
- Crosscutting issues (e.g. environmental aspects)

All three examples of categorisations above can be combined in a matrix. The matrix can also provide an overview of all subjects proposed to be covered by PABs. This matrix is presented below.

Box 2: Matrix for categorisation of policy subjects in the PAB process

Category by purpose & policy dimension	Purpose 1 (fact finding)	Purpose 2 (defining issues)	Purpose 3 (clarifying views)
<b>Macro level</b>			
<b>Formulation</b>			
Implementation		14	
Context	1		
<b>Sector level</b>			
Formulation			
Implementation	1, 7	2, 3, 9, 13	2, 3
Context	7, 10		
<b>Cross cutting</b>			
Formulation			
Implementation	15	14, 15	
Context	10		

This categorisation of subjects will not make the articulation of the issue to be addressed any less important though. Many of the subjects already proposed for PABs lack a sufficiently

clear formulation of the issue and/or objective. The purpose is therefore difficult to understand. Most of the already proposed policy subjects are listed in Box 3 below and an attempt has been made to classify some of those subjects where the formulation seems to indicate the purpose. Note that this classification is purely on a speculative basis to illustrate both the use of the matrix in Box 2 and the importance of articulating the subjects sufficiently clearly. Those subjects not included from Box 3 were too vague even for any meaningful speculation<sup>24</sup>.

<b>Box 3: An attempt to classify policy subjects ” (see also matrix in Box 2)</b>		
No.	Proposed policy themes	Category
1	Preparing for the WTO membership (Status of negotiations and implications of WTO accession for Vietnamese agriculture)	See Matrix
2	Forest Protection and Development Law (Status and preparation of the draft law on forestry and in particular on-going issues related to community right to forest land)	See Matrix
3	Implementing the water strategy and operationalising PIM	
4	SOE reform	Too vague
5	Public Administrative Reform in MARD	Too vague
6	Sustainable Rural and Agricultural development	Too vague
7	Solutions and action plan to consolidate the sector organisation and management in service of the agricultural and rural development strategy	See Matrix
8	Strengthening Vietnam’s plants quarantine and protection	Too vague
9	Encouraging the development of small and medium off-farm industries	See Matrix
10	Impact of disasters on poverty reduction and agriculture development	See Matrix
11	Population allocation to implement CPRGS	Too vague
12	Facilitation of farmers cooperative agriculture service organisations for the sake of the poor	See Matrix
13	Increasing the quality of formulation of laws and legal documents	See Matrix
14	Formulation of a rural information strategy	
15	Streamlining CPRGS into MARD rural development strategy	Too vague

Some subjects may have dual purposes and in this case one may have to determine where the main focus should be. An example of a template for presenting a proposal is attached in Appendix 1.

## 6.2 Preparing PABs

The actual preparation of the drafts can rely on many different sources of information. The most obvious are to consult documents/reports/publications and resource persons (key informants), but more elaborate methods for soliciting information and/or present the results for the PABs may be required such as Questionnaires, Policy mapping, Stakeholder analysis and Institutional analysis etc.

### Documents

This is perhaps the most obvious source of information, although it often has to be complemented with other sources as well. The documents of relevance in a PAB context include government or donor papers on their policies and measures to implement them.

<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that the purpose might be clear for ISG members, but this does not justify why a subject should not be clearly articulated.

Policy “on paper” however does not necessarily translate into “policy in practice” and other documents might be required. Potentially useful documents are Projects/Programme documents (plans, progress reports), Evaluations, Studies, Statistical Reports, Maps, Satellite images etc.

#### Key informants

Discussion with key informants is often useful and next to a regular ingredient in the arsenal available to get information (facts, views etc.). Discussions in the context of PAB preparations can for instance be organised as interviews, mini-workshops, focused group discussions, or brain storming sessions. There are a number of tools available to solicit information and provoke discussions, some of which are mentioned later in this section.

It is important to remember though that many policy actors may have special agendas that may influence their responses.

Questions can be structured in different ways. One useful categorisation is to differentiate between

- Completely unstructured questions: Here the answers to the first question lead to the next question and so on,
- Semi-structured questions: This is usually a mixture of unstructured and structured questions.
- Completely structured questions: Here all the questions are decided in advance and all respondents are asked to answer exactly the same questions.

Completely structured questions can be Open-ended or Closed-ended. This distinction is one important aspect when questionnaires are developed, which can be seen as a special approach for soliciting information from key informants.

#### Questionnaires

Questionnaires can be useful for collecting a large sample of views from different actors.

Developing useful questionnaires is however more difficult than what one might expect. In this section some brief comments and recommendations are made<sup>25</sup>. If future applications of questionnaires are not providing the results expected, ISG members are recommended to consult some of the more comprehensive literature on this topic<sup>26</sup>.

Questionnaires can be of different types and without going into the details some characterisation of the main types might be useful. First of all, the questions in a questionnaire are either Open-ended or Closed-ended. Open-end questions do not provide a set of response alternatives to choose from while Closed-end does. For example, the questionnaire developed as a standardised template for developing PABs included Open-

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<sup>25</sup> These comments and advises builds on a previous short-term assignment for Sida, which was about development of more focused questionnaires for assessing short courses.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. i/ Peterson R. A. (2000) Constructing effective questionnaires. Sage Publications Inc.,  
ii/ Patten M (1998) Questionnaire research. Pycszak Publishing

end questions<sup>27</sup> only, where all respondents articulated the answers themselves to the same questions. Closed end questions on the other hand include response alternatives that come in different forms and expressions. These questions can for instance be useful when the intention is:

- to collect factual data, e.g. How many visits have you had from DARD extension department during 2004 ? 1/ None, 2/ One , 3 / Two, 4/ More than two
- to gather opinions and views e.g. Do you think that time and resources justify a continuation of ISG in its present form? 1/ Yes, 2/ No, 3/ Don't know (note that this question may require some information/data about resource use, before respondents can answer it)
- for ranking exercises e.g. To what extent are you satisfied with the outcomes of ISG meetings ? 1/ Extremely, 2/ Very, 3/ Barely, 4/ Not at all

Open- and Closed-end questions can be combined. Open-end questions can be included as stand alone questions or as a follow up to Closed-end question, where the respondent can elaborate their answer further. Open-end questions can also be combined with Closed-end questions by first circulating a questionnaire with Open-end questions to a limited number of respondents in order to get some general understanding of a particular subject/theme/issue. This can then be used to develop Closed-end questions that are distributed to a larger number of respondents. Often – but not always – the first circulation aims at getting qualitative information while the second aims at quantifying the information from the first questionnaire.

The wording of questions is another important aspect of developing good questionnaires. The last question above (third bullet point) is a modified version of one of the questions in ISG annual survey (attached in the WP). The formulation of the original question is

- To what extent are you satisfied with the effectiveness and outcomes of ISG meetings? 1/ Extremely, 2/ Very, 3/ Satisfied (Average?) 4/ Barely, 5/ Not at all

The question asks both about “effectiveness” and “outcome” and this makes the question less specific and add unnecessary ambiguity, unless we for some reason argue that the two terms are similar (which still is a questionable justification for using both terms). The second change relates to the response alternatives. There are sometime tendencies by respondents to select an “average” alternative if available, since it is convenient. By removing this “convenient” alternative you force respondents to think more carefully before they answer. This is not to say that questionnaires should not have an alternative in the middle. This will depend on the context and purpose, but this aspect needs to be considered when the questionnaire is developed.

While there are no formal comprehensive theory for developing effective questions, there are useful criteria that provide some guidance. Five easy to apply criteria are that

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<sup>27</sup> This questionnaire was tested on the first PAB subject – “Streamlining CPRGS into MARD Rural Development Strategy”.

questions should be **brief, relevant, unambiguous, specific, and objective** often abbreviated as BRUSO. A few comments are made here with a few examples to illustrate the point:

**Brief:** The questionnaire used for the first PAB is in this sense good examples of questions that are brief and to the point<sup>28</sup>.

**Relevant:** Relevance refers to both the purpose of the questionnaire, but also that the questions raised must have some relevance for the respondents. The questionnaire used for the first PAB were not very relevant neither in relation to the purpose in WP nor to ISG members expectations.

**Unambiguous:** Although not a question, the articulation of the first policy subject “Streamlining CPRGS into MARD rural development strategy” can serve as a good example of an ambiguous subject. There is no MARD strategy and if reference had been made to e.g. the Five-year Plan, the subject would have been unambiguous (if indeed the 5-year plan was what the proponent had in mind)

**Specific:** The example above from one of the questions in ISG annual survey, where two aspects – “effectiveness” and “outcome” – are included in the same question is an example where specificity is partly lost.

**Objective:** This refers to the need to avoid “leading” questions that can lead to biased answers. Questions can be

- Presupposing an answer by adding different expressions e.g. Most Donors in ISG have different policy priorities than MARD, *don't they?*
- Implicitly emphasising one alternative e.g. *Don't you agree* that the DARD is the most reliable supplier of pesticides

There are also more subtle ways of indirectly influence the respondent. By using either the word “satisfied” or “dissatisfied”, you can basically ask the same question but the outcome may differ.

There are different steps that can guide the overall design of a questionnaire. These are illustrated in Box 4 below

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<sup>28</sup> Note that this does not exclude the necessity to explain and elaborate, but then this should not be mixed up in the question itself.

1. Review information requirement and how the questionnaire can contribute to this
2. Develop tentative questions (or issues) that the questionnaire should cover
  - Assess the need for combinations of Open end and Closed End questionnaires
3. Assess each question e.g. regarding
  - Can potential respondents understand the question?
  - Can potential respondents answer the question?
  - Will potential respondents answer the question? Etc.
4. Determine type of questions – Open-ended and/or Closed-ended. This include
  - Any need for combinations of Open ended and Closed ended questions?
  - What type of Closed end questions will best provide the information needed. Etc.
5. Refine wording of the questions selected
6. Determine questionnaire structure
7. Evaluate questionnaire

#### **Box 4: Steps in designing a questionnaire**

When questionnaires are designed some thoughts about how the answers will be compiled, analysed, and presented is a must. In general comprehensive questionnaires with Open-ended questions are more complicated to compile and analyse than Closed end questions. The experiences of the questionnaire used for the first PAB demonstrated this clearly.

The stakeholders involved in PABs are in principle the ISG members. The members are not more than that any use of questionnaires can be distributed to all relevant members needed for a particular PAB. Sampling in the context of PAB preparation is therefor probably less of an issue. In the event that questionnaires will be used outside the sphere of ISG and involve many respondents, sampling might be necessary. One may perhaps wish to assess impact of a policy by asking farmers through a questionnaire. In this case sampling might be required to ensure representation of different type of farmers/households. Those involved in preparing the PAB may in this case have to get advice from literature or an expert on statistics.

### **6.3 Some tools to facilitate discussions and presentation of results**

There are a number of tools available in various guidelines for i/ participatory approaches like PRA and ii/ project/programme formulation as in e.g. LFA besides various diagrams, that can provide good sources of inspiration for PABs as well. What they all have in common are that they visualise “complex issues” and/or “information/data” and can therefor be used to both facilitate discussions and to illustrate issues/findings/conclusions in a PAB.

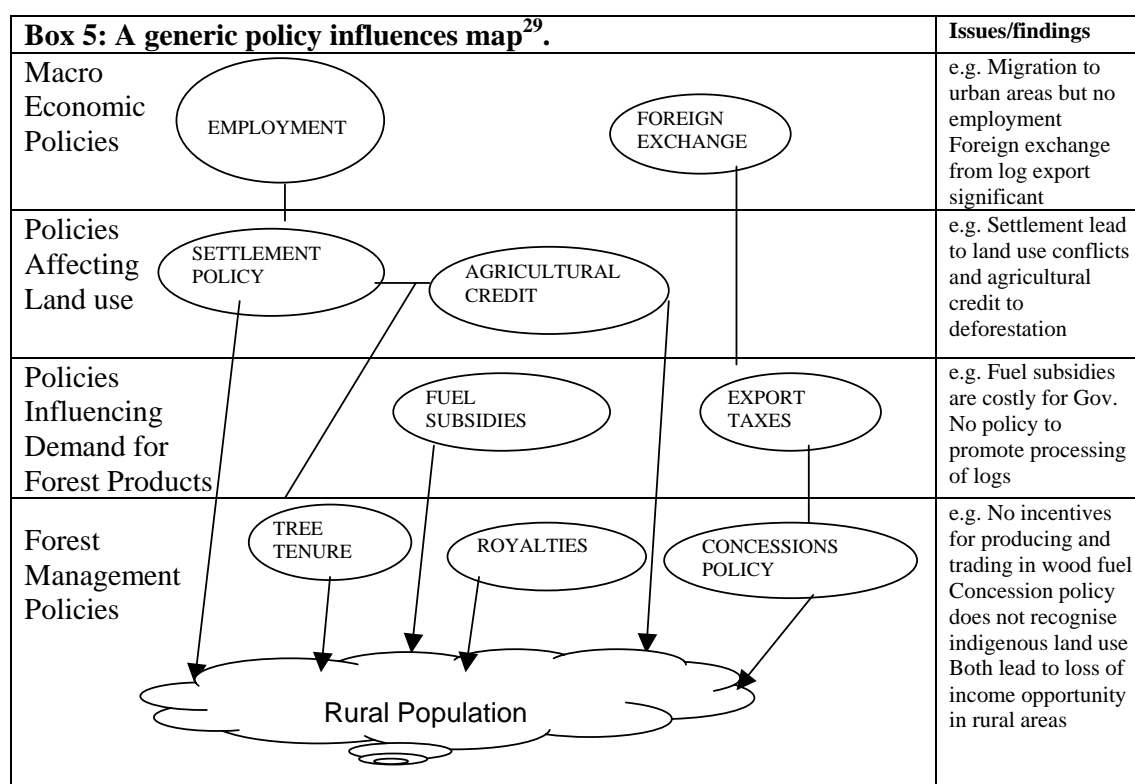
This guideline will only bring attention to a few of these as most ISG members are familiar with different type of diagrams and most of the tools used in methods like PRA, LFA etc. Moreover there are a number of sites on the internet that are useful for getting ideas of useful tools for how a particular issue could be addressed in a PAB (e.g. [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org) and [www.enterprise-impact.org.uk](http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk)).

### Policy mapping

Policy mapping is a good visual technique to illustrate influence and directions. They include a variety of tools and templates for generating information and discussions. One of the more useful – for assessing policy influences across different levels – is the type of policy generic map exemplified Box 5. More complex maps can also be used including different actors and their influence.

### Stakeholder and power analysis

There are many different tools that can be used for analysis of stakeholders and their interest and influence on a particular issue. The various tools allow for a significant degree of flexibility depending on the specific purposes. Tools include various maps, diagrams and matrices/tables (e.g. Stakeholder analysis tables, Venn diagrams, Stakeholder perception mapping). An example of a more advanced Venn diagram is provided in Box 6. Before stakeholder/power analysis are made there might be a need to identify relevant policy and institutions and how influence can be exercised (actual and potential) by different actors.



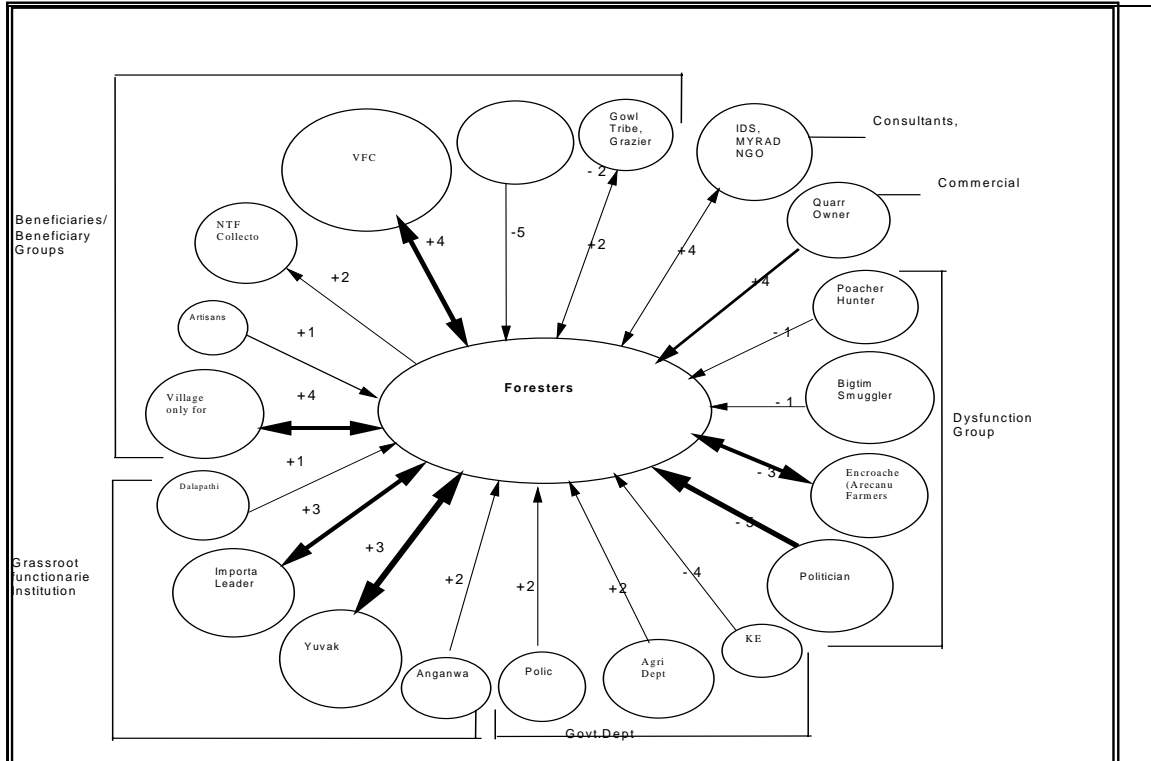
Note that stakeholder analysis usually assume a high degree of participation of concerned stakeholders in soliciting their views. For the PABs this may not always be possible, as this can become a too elaborate exercise.

<sup>29</sup> Modified from Mayers, J. and S. Bass (1999) Policy that works for forests and people. IIED: London, p 262.

### Institutional analysis

**Institutions** in terms rules, procedures and norms as well as the organisations that represents and control them (mainly government, private sector and civil society) form the interface between policy and people.

A range of mapping exercises can be used to explore institutional and organisational relationships. A common tool is the Venn diagram (Box 6), which focus more on the internal relations between stakeholders and institutions (in terms of organisations). Other tools may include various matrices to assess the functions of norms/rules/legislation and/or conflict matrices.



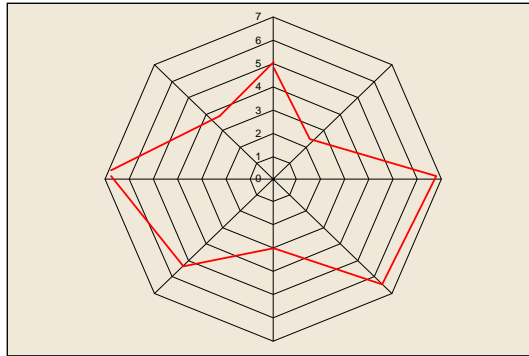
**Box 6: Stakeholders perception mapping of foresters<sup>30</sup>**

The size of the circle illustrates the relative importance of the interest group, and the thickness and direction of the arrow that connects it with the issue in question denotes the strength and direction of the relationship. A broken line denotes an informal relationship. Plus/minus signs can be added to show whether the influence is positive or negative.

### Diamonds

Diamonds is a type of diagram that can be used to illustrate the degree of spread around an established norm or average. They come in different shapes (hexagon, octagon etc.) and are sometime useful for illustrate the outcome of a questionnaire with closed-end questions, where participants has been asked to rank their answers (e.g. the survey about ISG members satisfaction with ISG). Each corner in the octagon below then represents a particular question

<sup>30</sup> Source: Pasteur K. (2001) Tools for Sustainable Livelihood Analysis. IDS



Box 7: Octagon

### Other potentially useful tools and diagrams

Some other potentially useful tools and diagrams in the context of PABs are listed in the Box below

#### **BOX 8: SOME BASIC DIAGRAM TYPES**

**TREES** ,, which start from a trunk representing an issue or an institution, like e.g. Programme 135. Inputs are then shown as roots and outputs as branches.

**Examples of use:** inputs/outputs can e.g. be cost/benefit trees, cause and effect trees, problem and solution trees (as in LFA) etc.

**FLOW AND WEB DIAGRAMS** which show the complex interrelationships between different issues, objects, or concepts. These are also often referred to as Mind or Concept Maps. These are basically more complex forms of "Trees" diagrams.

**Examples of use:** conceptual mapping and more complex causal modelling and institutional mapping etc.

**MAPS**, which - beside the geographical location of things - can be used to add qualitative and quantitative information.

**SWOT** which can be used to provide an overview of an organisations and/or policy in terms of strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

**Examples of use:** See ISG Work Plan.

**MATRICES**, which show the relationship between two variables as a table with quantified values. Matrices can be used also to structure qualitative information.

**Examples of use:** access and control profiles e.g. of fish resources in different waters, actor's relation to a particular policy, conflicts different actors-different resource etc.

**CALENDARS, TIMELINES** which show differences over time or through the year.

**Examples of use:** supply and demand of inputs or products. These can also be plotted against e.g. incidence of particular pests/diseases in agriculture, climatic variation.

**CIRCLE DIAGRAMS (PIE CHARTS)** which represent the different proportions of different elements.

**Examples of use:** to show relative proportions of budget allocations and expenditure used for different purposes and/or by different MARD departments.

**HISTOGRAMS** which illustrates how data are distributed across a range of values

**Examples of use:** a common case is rainfall over the time e.g. for each month

**BAR CHARTS**, which can present a summary variable divided into discrete categories

**Examples of use:** comparing poverty for different geographical regions.

**AREA CHARTS** to demonstrate how changes in relation to a variable change for different categories

**Examples of use:** comparing literacy for different age categories of men and women

**LINE OF DOT CHARTS** to demonstrate a summary function against a variable

**Examples of use:** to illustrate sales of fertiliser over the year.

#### 6.4 Templates

Finally it might be useful to have a limited number of templates for the PAB process. One has already been mentioned under section 5 and 6.1 in order to have a reasonably standardised format for presenting proposals for PAB topics.

It might also be useful to have standardised formats for the PAB brief itself. These might vary slightly according the purpose in terms of “Fact finding”, “Defining issues”, or “Clarifying views”. Templates for these are suggested in Appendix 2, 3, and 4 respectively

Template for proposing a Policy Subject

Subject: Forest Protection and Development Law

Objective/Outputs: To briefly present current status on the draft forest law and in particular highlight on-going issues related to community right to forest land.

There are a number of different issues related to community rights including customary rights and use of forest land including both bare land and land under forest cover (particularly natural forests). These are related both to land classification, administration and land titles, as well as management of forests and forestland. There are also likely to be different views on how to proceed and address these issues among ISG members with experiences from land management and forestry in Vietnam.

Responsible for preparing the draft: It is proposed that the a team of four persons representing MARD (Forest Development Department, Forest Protection Department), MONRE (Land Administration) and a Donor (with experience from land use/forestry) should prepare the draft and the PAB with assistance from ISG secretariat.

This subject would fall under the purpose and category indicated in the matrix below. The main purpose would be to “define issues” for further discussions

Category by purpose & policy dimension	Purpose 1 (fact finding)	Purpose 2 (defining issues)	Purpose 3 (clarifying views)
<b>Macro level</b>			
Formulation			
Implementation			
Context			
<b>Sector level</b>			
Formulation			
Implementation		X (main)	X
Context			
<b>Cross cutting</b>			
Formulation			
Implementation			
Context			

Subject proposed by: *Name(s)*,

**Date:** 2005-01-19

**Template for “Fact Finding” PAB (maximum number of pages 3)**

**Title: Preparing for the WTO membership -(Status of negotiations and implications of WTO accession for Vietnamese agriculture -. (Example from Box 3)**

**Author(s)**

**Date**

**Introduction (maximum 250 words)**

**Section explaining:**

- => Why this Brief has been prepared (the rationale)
- => How it has been prepared reviewing documents, discussions/interviews, brain storming, questionnaires)
- => What this Brief cover and what it does not cover

**Findings**

**Section presenting:**

- =>The main findings. These should not be elaborated (references can be made to source of information, where more “facts” are more elaborated). Illustrations , bullet points, diagrams etc should be applied when feasible.

**Conclusions**

**Section highlighting:**

- => Notable information and observations
- => Proposal for how to proceed
  - => Need for additional PABs (Fact finding, Defining issues or Different views)
  - => Need for additional studies
  - => Need for special events (workshops, conferences...)

**Sources of information**

**References**

**People met**

**Template for “Defining Issues” PAB (max. number of pages 3)**

**Title: Streamlining CPRGS into MARD rural development strategy (Example from Box 3).**

**Author(s)**

**Date**

**Introduction (maximum 250 words)**

**Section explaining:**

- => Why this Brief has been prepared (the rationale)
- => How it has been prepared ( e.g. by reviewing documents, discussions/interviews, brain storming, questionnaires)
- => What this Brief cover and what it does not cover

**The Issues**

**Section presenting:**

- => Context and related issue(s)
- => Actors and related issue(s)
- => Why the issue(s) have emerged

**Conclusions**

**Section highlighting:**

- => The most significant issues
- => Proposal for how to proceed
  - => Need for additional PABs (Fact finding, Defining issues or Different views)
  - => Need for additional studies
  - => Need for special events (workshops, conferences...)

**Sources of information**

**References**

**People met**

**Template for “Clarifying Views” PAB (max. number of pages 3)****Title: Implementing the water strategy and operationalising PIM (Example from Box 3)****Author(s):****Date:****Introduction (maximum 250 words)****Section explaining:**

- => Why this Brief has been prepared (the rationale)
- => How it has been prepared (reviewing documents, discussions/interviews, brain storming, questionnaires)
- => What this Brief cover and what it does not cover

The Views

**Section presenting:**

- => Different actors and their relevance/relation to the PAB title
- => Different actors views
- => The main arguments , explanations behind these views

Conclusions

**Section highlighting:**

- => The most significant difference in opinions
- => Proposal for how to proceed
  - => Entry points for negotiating compromises (if needed)
  - => Need for additional PABs (Fact finding, Defining issues or Different views?)
  - => Need for additional studies
  - => Need for special events (workshops, conferences...)

Sources of information

References

People met

## Annex 5

**Title: Experiences from the first PAB on “ Streamlining CPRGS into MARD Rural Development Strategy”**

**Author(s):** Thorsten Celander

**Date:** 2005-01-23

Introduction

**This PAB is different from what is the expected outcome of future PABs. It will analyse the outcome of the first PAB on the subject of “ Streamlining CPRGS into MARD Rural Development Strategy”. The general view is that this PAB did not result in the expected outcome. These experiences have however been very useful for the development of the PAB-process.**

The PAB is based on a combination of documents (see ref.list) and meetings with some of the MARD departments involved as well as with some representatives of the core donor group (see list of people met).

This PAB will not address the original subject as such, only the experiences from preparing it and provide a brief analysis of the outcome of this first PAB

The Issues

### Observations

The source of information for this PAB is based on a **questionnaire** developed with the intention of being a future standardised format for PAB preparations, regardless of subject. The questionnaire was circulated to 17 MARD Departments, 10 MARD Research institutes, and 3 MARD Centres. The average **response rate** was low (50%), but varies with type of organisation with response rates of 100 % for Centres, 65% for Departments, and 20 % for Research institutes. The overall response rate is hardly satisfactory though.

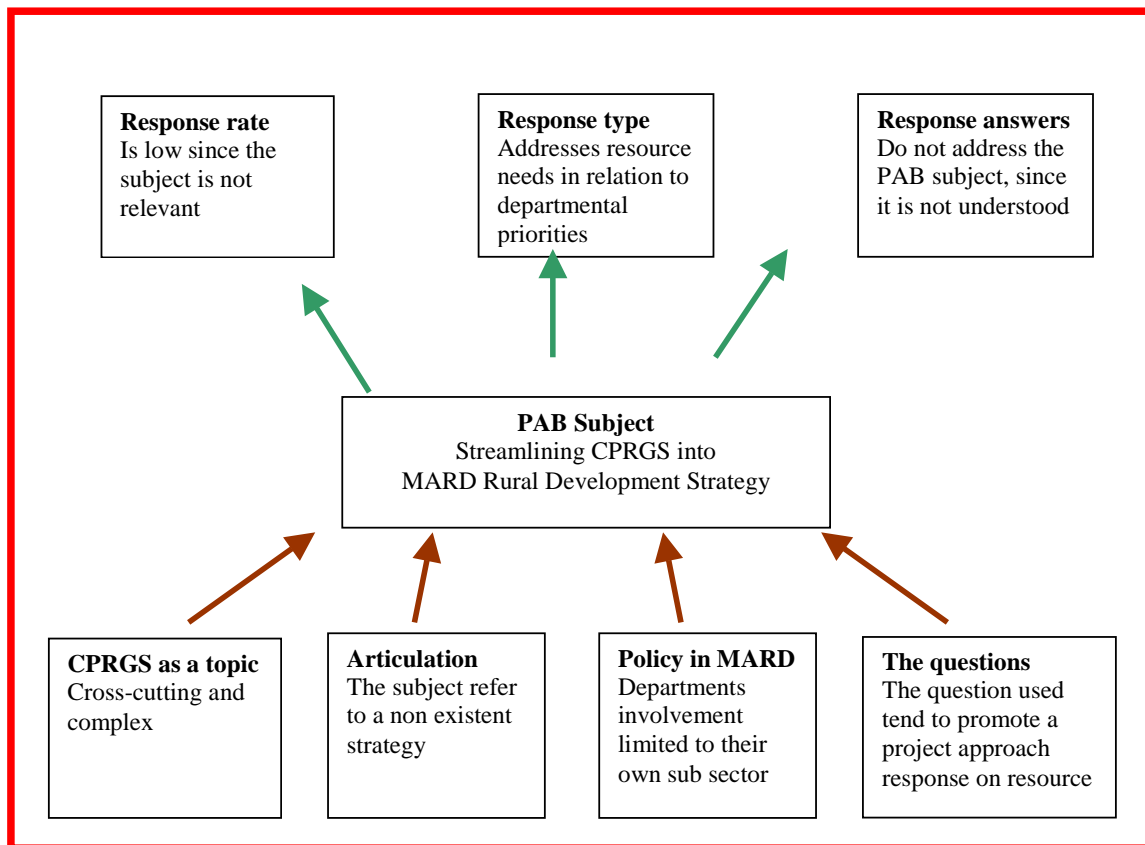
For those who answered the questionnaire, **the responses** address different departments priorities in relation to Vietnamese policies/guidelines and/or the need for special support for this. CPRGS is not even mentioned in any of the answers. The reason for this seem to be

- ⇒ The ambiguity of the subject. As there is no single “MARD rural development strategy” one has to ask how CPRGS should be streamlined into this. If the intention was to streamline CPRGS into any of the rural development planning cycles , why not say so? (e.g. any of the 10 yr, 5 yr or 1 yr plans)
- ⇒ While all departments, centres and most institutions are aware of CPRGS; this poverty strategy is said to be not well understood. Guidelines for CPRGS once expected to be developed by MPI are said to be non-existent. Hence CPRGS has never been internalised in MARD in any operational sense. There are however MARD guidelines on how to address poverty for relevant departments related to e.g. the 5 yr planning cycle

**Other reasons** suggested for the outcome, that might have **implication for other future PABs** is that

- ⇒ The questions in the questionnaire tend to follow the general procedures of project preparations i.e. identify issues => identify desirable status => identify problems to be addressed => the resources needed for these problems
- ⇒ MARD departments are occupied with the routine work of their departments and only involved in policy/strategy issues of more immediate relevance for their particular mandate.
- ⇒ Horizontal interactions between departments are rare and crosscutting themes (like CPRGS) may be difficult to address.
- ⇒ Policy in general and different dimensions of this is not always well understood or concepts and definitions are not necessarily shared. This is not confined to MARD only, but possibly also to other ISG partners (read donors).
- ⇒ Hence, the conditions for a more holistic approach and analysis of in particular “cross cutting” policy subjects require more attention for future PABs at least for how line or sector departments and organisations in MARD could be meaningfully involved.

The main outcome of the first PAB and the reasons as seen by the author of this PAB are summarised in the box below



If one goes beyond this first PAB and review some available documents and other initiatives of relevance for the subject and the observations made above, a mixed picture emerge. In 2002 a Working Group consisting of 14 MARD representatives (from 7 different departments) and 7 Donor representatives addressed a similar subject. The task were essentially about i/ reviewing a draft version of CPRGS; and ii/ propose how MARD strategies and plans could be integrated in the final version of CPRGS.

This was documented in the report “Rural Dimensions of CPRGS: A Cross-Sectoral Vision”. This report is only partially reflected in the final version CPRGS from 2003 (if at all). While the reasons for this are beyond the purpose of this PAB, there are at least two somewhat speculative observations one may highlight that have some relevance for the outcome of the first PAB. These are that

- ⇒ The familiarity and knowledge of CPRGS in MARD may not have been as low as one is lead to believe from the outcome of the first PAB,
- ⇒ The potential frustration that may have developed in MARD from seeing so limited impact of the efforts made by the Working Group.

This may have discouraged resource persons in MARD to engage more actively in CPRGS’s integration into MARD plans and strategies.

Somewhat contrary to the observation above on the knowledge about CPRGS, are some of the projects that aim at enhancing the understanding of CPRGS in MARD. This refers to both finalised, ongoing and potential pipeline projects<sup>31</sup>. Part of the justifications for these projects all seem to suggest that the outcome of the first PAB should not have come as a complete surprise.

The bottom line here is that – whatever conclusion one wish to agree with above – there appears to have been limited considerations for previous initiatives of relevance for the first PAB subject on “Streamlining CPRGS into MARD Rural Development Strategy”. Had this been done the subject could have been formulated differently or abandoned altogether.

#### Conclusions

The overall purpose of this PAB has been to suggest the issues behind the limitations of the outcome of the first PAB on “Streamlining CPRGS into MARD Rural Development Strategy”. An attempt is here made to categorise them. The most significant issues are

#### **Issues related to CPRGS and MARD rural development strategy**

- ⇒ The ambiguous articulation of the subject itself.
- ⇒ Insufficient consideration for previous experiences of relevance for this subject.

#### **Issues related to cross cutting subjects**

- ⇒ The special difficulties that characterise crosscutting subjects are particularly evident; when specialised line departments MARD are expected to address them. MARD has no well-developed system for horizontal interaction between departments.

#### **Issues related to the use of the questions in questionnaires**

- ⇒ The questions used are in general similar to the approaches used to develop project proposals. This is likely to limit the policy dialogue based on PABs to discussions on support (read projects).

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<sup>31</sup> 1/ FAO supported “Implementation of the CPRGS and Capacity Building in Pipeline Development Project Formulation (completed in 2004)

2/ French supported “Information capacity strengthening for agricultural policy formulation (ongoing)

3/ SDC supported project formulation mission in November 2004 on “Rural Policy Support in Implementation of CPRGS” (for potential future support)

## Issues related to lack of experiences and common ground related to policy analysis

- ⇒ While not being immediately revealed from the answers on the questionnaire, the expectation in ISG that a standardised questionnaire can be applied for different policy subjects is overly optimistic. Policy is far too complicated with many different dimensions. Even the understanding of the terminology may not be fully shared among ISG partners.
- ⇒ The partners in ISG needs to ensure that they have a shared understanding of common policy concepts and terms in order to have a meaningful policy dialogue
- ⇒ Different methods may be needed for the preparation of different PAB subjects to reflect these different policy dimensions.

Sources of information

## References

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