

International Partner Comments on 2nd Draft of MARD's 5-Year Plan (2006-2010) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) requested comments from its international partners on its (incomplete) second draft of the MARD five-year plan for 2006-2010. Some key donors and technical advisors were invited by ISG to a meeting on 4 March, and provided with the draft plan. Written comments on the draft plan were provided by the Embassies of Australia, Denmark, the Netherlands, the European Commission Delegation, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Public Administration Reform project of MARD, the Forest Sector Support Program Coordination Office of MARD, and technical advisors and consultants working with MARD programmes and projects dealing with water, forestry, and gender issues.

Subsequently, a Joint Task Force was convened, consisting of MARD staff and international representatives nominated by donors, to work on ideas for a subsequent consultation meeting to be held on 18 March.

Some members of this Task Force prepared a synthesis document based upon written comments received from MARD's international partners by 11 March. These comments were made on the English translation of the second draft "results-based" format of the MARD plan and logical framework, dated February 2005. Subsequently, on 12 March, English translations of a complete version of the "new format" of the plan, as well as the alternative "traditional format" were circulated to international partners. A group of donor representatives then met on 14 March for further discussion on the issues, to agree upon the key points for discussion at the 18 March workshop.

Meanwhile, other members of the Task Force worked together to develop an alternative logical framework, to guide revision of the draft 5-year MARD plan and the draft sub-sectoral plans.

1. Overall Approach for Preparation of MARD's 5-Year Plan (2006-2010)

Overall Appreciation of the Consultation Process and Draft Plan

International partners greatly appreciate the efforts by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development to consult with them on the second draft of MARD's 5-year plan (2006-2010). In general, commenters appreciate both MARD's more transparent and result-oriented approach to the sector's five-year plan (FYP) preparation, which is prepared in the new, more result-oriented format, with use of planning matrices and an interest in development of a logical framework matrix. They see that the planning reform should be institutionalised in the sector's regular management activities and sustained throughout the entire planning and management cycle. They recognize the draft as a good starting point for further development.

2. Format of the Plan

International colleagues have been informed that MARD has been preparing two versions, or formats, of its draft 5-year plan. Concern has been raised about the existence of two versions of the plan, and which version would actually be submitted and used. More clarity is still needed, however, concerning the link between the new effort and MARD's "regular" planning, which is still largely in the traditional format.

3. Overall Scope of the Plan

This 5-year plan will serve as the key macro-level planning framework for MARD. To effectively fulfill this important function, Joint Task Force working group thinks that the plan should include the following elements:

Defining overall direction for sector development

The FYP should establish a stronger overall long-term vision for the future direction of the agriculture and rural development sector at large. This vision would help anchor other elements of the plan. It should be based on genuine and thorough scenario planning and analysis.

The FYP should be based on market-oriented growth, sustainable natural resource management and empowerment, and especially include provision for specific targeting of priority programmes towards poor people and regions. It should outline application of equitable and participatory approaches.

Linkages to cross-sectoral issues and frameworks

Better linkages should be created between, on the one side, the overall objectives and targets and, on the other, priority programmes, resource allocation, definition of institutional delivery mechanisms and indicators for measuring success. These linkages are critical to allow assessment of real needs at the sub-sectoral level. It is also critical to align public spending and institutional setting.

The FYP has a strong agriculture basis but other sub-sectors need to be covered adequately and cross-sectoral linkages needs to be established. MARD and its departments should promote cross-sector collaboration in the rural space as a whole, consistent with its mandate.

The FYP should also reflect existing priorities and commitments embedded in current national and MARD-level action plans, strategies, legal frameworks and in international conventions signed by Viet Nam. In this context care needs to be taken to ensure that the FYP, the sub-sector strategies (e.g., forestry), and the underlying sub-sectoral work plans, are all internally consistent and reflect agreed priorities and outcomes.

Defining key implementation mechanisms and approaches

While the overall goals support poverty and sustainability concerns, the FYP in its current form does not provide clear direction as to *how* these goals and concerns are to be addressed in priority programmes. This critical element is still missing.

In addition, the FYP should clarify *what services* MARD and its network intends to deliver to rural peoples in view of the market-oriented directions and the emphasis on increasing decentralisation.

Institutional and financial capacity to implement, monitor and update plan

Implementation capacity should also be considered in greater detail. This will be applicable at all levels. The FYP should include a critical assessment of how this issue is to be addressed.

This report presents the international partner comments on these elements in more detail.

4. Observations, Recommendations and Suggestions for Follow-up

Some additional issues warrant further consideration:

Essential to reach agreement upon a single format to be further developed. Many international partners do not endorse the idea of MARD preparing two different formats of the plan. Overall, international partners recommend that the results-based approach be adopted as the single plan format, and that MPI encourage other ministries to use this format for their plans. They differed, however, in their assessment as to whether it could be achieved in the time available, or would have to be phased in through annual updates of the plan.

Further revision of the draft plan and further analytical work required. A number of international colleagues commented on the importance of clarifying in MARD's 5-year plan exactly the process of reaching the objectives, and setting clearer priorities. Many expressed the importance of building the MARD plan from the bottom up, and basing it upon the relevant sub-sectoral and provincial plans and relevant national, sectoral, and MARD strategies.

Sector-specific analyses: It is also vital that the sub-sector plans themselves be reviewed in terms of their adequacy, and consistency with the overall national goals, especially the goal of merging the plans with the CPRGS. **More transparency in the Plan preparation is still required.** Most partners requested additional information to be provided for their review and comments, such as the sub-sector plans, and more details from underlying analytical studies.

Broader consultations with stakeholders on MARD's draft 5-year Plan are needed. Many international colleagues have recommended that MARD needs to undertake wider consultation not only with the international donors and international partners, but also with a wide range of stakeholders. These would include Vietnamese stakeholders in other sectors and ministries, various departments (especially with respect to integration of the sectoral plans and overall MARD plan), provinces and the private sector.

Overall Plan for Continuation of the Planning and Consultation Process. Some strategic decisions must be made regarding the planning process. It is vital to decide upon, and communicate to stakeholders, a clear schedule for the planning process, and further future improvements.