



**TERMS OF REFERENCE**  
**MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT**  
**INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT GROUP (ISG)**  
*(Final Version)*

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The International support Group (ISG) was established in 1997 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. The focus of ISG was then on forestry. However, a review was undertaken in 1999. The review recommended widening the scope of ISG to include more sectors and activities than forestry. A new set of ToRs was therefore developed for the period 2000 to 2002 and it was decided to fund ISG activities through a Trust Fund arrangement to which donors could contribute funds. The present ISG Trust Fund was established in accordance with Decision No 1167/CP-QHQT dated 18<sup>th</sup> December 2000 by the Government and extended until 31 December 2005 by Decision No 4299/VPCP-QHQT dated 5<sup>th</sup> August 2002 issued by the Government.

The ISG reports to MARD Minister via the Director General of the International Cooperation Department (ICD), who is also the Director of ISG Secretariat. The present hierarchical composition of the four ISG bodies is: ISG Plenary, ISG Steering Board, Thematic Ad-hoc Groups (TAGs) and ISG Secretariat.

ISG has since establishment provided significant support to MARD generally and ICD specifically. Efforts have been geared towards; (i) dissemination of information, (ii) coordination with donors and within MARD, (iii) policy dialogue and (iv) preparation of workshops, seminars and (v) other activities.

However given new policies, priorities and strategies to address present development challenges, opportunities and constraints faced by the agricultural and rural sector in Vietnam, the present review has been undertaken (April/May 2003) to up-date and revise the ToRs for the ISG.

This review concludes that the ISG has achieved commended results and that ISG's scope of work being further widened to meet the current needs and challenges. It is in particular found that ISG should assist MARD, ICD with coordination and policy dialogue at horizontal and vertical levels during all levels of the project cycle: identification through to impact evaluation and dissemination of lessons learned.

## **2.0 RATIONALE**

The ISG was established in 1997 and consolidated in 2000 to support MARD establishing and maintaining dialogue with MARD and the International Donors. There were a number of reasons for this initiative:

- One reason was to facilitate coordination between MARD/ICD and the international donors;
- Another reason was to endeavour streamlining the process of identifying and preparing project proposals, since donors had different approaches and priorities when identifying and preparing projects and programmes;
- A third reason was that ICD could communicate and dialogue with the donor community regarding Government of Vietnam and MARD's policies, priorities and strategies in rural and agricultural development, and henceforth catalyse a process, which would enable donors to adjust up-coming projects and programmes to these policies, priorities and strategies;
- A fourth reason was to overcome the language barrier prevailing at that time; and
- A fifth reason was to reduce the workload of the MARD officials being involved in coordination and dialogue with the international donors.

Although the situation has improved since 1997 there is still a need for an ISG and now to strengthen its scope of work. This is caused by: (i) several new and large projects are on-going and/or being prepared and (ii) the five reasons listed above are to a large extent still applicable.

MARD is facing major challenges and opportunities. The list below gives a few examples and is therefore incomplete:

- To balance food, livelihood and economic security with economic growth;
- To increase agricultural production and productivity in an economically viable and ecologically sustainable manner;
- To adjust agricultural production to local, national and international needs;
- To disseminate technology changes and lessons learned to the farming community;
- To manage delivery of water for domestic and irrigation purposes;
- To strengthen the dialogue with the farming community;
- To encourage and support agro-processing units;
- To strengthen relevant research activities;
- To mainstream gender and ethnic minorities;
- To play a proactive and instrumental role in poverty alleviation;
- And many others.

MARD/ICD will play a crucial role to meet forthcoming opportunities and challenges. However, MARD will also need the help of other ministries, international donors, NGOs and the provinces to meet above mentioned challenges and opportunities.

Donors tend at present to develop specialised support measures and foci in their development aid. This is holding many advantages, but a major disadvantage is that the specialised support measures might not address the policies, priorities and strategies of the existing five and ten year plans of MARD. Another disadvantage is that it is difficult for MARD to apply a holistic implementation approach to achieve objectives and targets of the five and ten year plans, since donors and NGOs tend to restrict their support to very specialised areas and on special conditions. Consequently vital areas of development might not be attended to by the donors, and left to local initiatives with scarce resources.

It is therefore important that donors, NGOs, MARD and other concerned Vietnamese institutions meet regularly to review and discuss existing MARD plans, policies, priorities and strategies. This will enable donors to adjust their support measures to the current

needs of Vietnam and for MARD to develop and coordinate plans and donor support in a timely and holistic manner.

ISG will be a prime mover in above process. The scope of work of ISG will therefore be extended to include parts of the technical coordination and policy dialogue as well. The technical dialogue and coordination will be taken care of by national high calibre technical coordinators working on part time basis (40% of their working time). The inclusion of technical coordinators in ISG should promote technical and timely coordination with the international donors, NGOs, other ministries and provinces.

### **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

The following is the overall and specific objectives of the International Support Group (ISG):

#### Overall:

- To support MARD generally and ICD particularly in; (i) coordinating with international donors, including NGOs on up-coming projects and programmes, (ii) building partnerships, (iii) fostering Vietnamese ownership of foreign supported projects; and (iv) act as a facilitating mechanism in policy dialogue and coordination at vertical and horizontal levels (donors, ministries and provinces).

#### Specific:

- Remain updated on Government and donor policies, priorities and strategies in rural and agricultural development through on-going dialogue and exchange of information with relevant ministries, donors, provinces and within MARD;
- Facilitate and enrich a pro-active policy dialogue with and between donors, ministries, provinces and MARD departments, including all stages of the project cycle e.g. identification through impact studies and dissemination of lessons learned;
- Assist ICD with coordination of information, lessons learned, resources, databases etc. between existing and would be projects and programmes, donors, provinces and other ministries;
- Assist ICD, and in close collaboration with relevant ministries, donors, provinces and MARD departments, with the development of short, medium and long-term policies, priorities, strategies and planning parameters for the agricultural sector;
- Provide forum for regular review, discussions, exchange of experience and drawing lessons learned for projects, relevant ministries, donors, provinces and MARD departments within MARD's priority areas of operation;
- Assist in establishing dialogue platforms in piloted provinces to (i) develop an on-going dialogue with the farming community to facilitate that agricultural production is in accordance with local, national and international needs and standards, and (ii) coordinate operations, resources and lessons learned of Government of Vietnam and donor supported projects and programmes;

- Disseminate relevant information, including lessons learned, to projects, programmes, relevant ministries, donors, provinces and MARD departments;
- Develop and update databases of existing (i) policies, priorities and strategies, (ii) planning policies, priorities, parameters and targets; (iii) existing and pipelined projects, (iv) MARD activities, (v) upcoming events, (vi) available resources, including consultants and other resource persons;
- Assist ICD to enhance coordination and dialoguing within MARD.

#### **4.0 SCOPE AND ACTIVITIES**

This chapter aims at describing scope and activities of ISG. The chapter should be read in conjunction with the overall and specific objectives listed above.

##### *Ownership*

Several ministries, departments, NGOs and donors have been, and are, involved in the agricultural and rural development sector in Vietnam. A common problem has so far been that introduced interventions are often not sustainable when donor support phases out. Another typical problem for the donors is the difficulty of entering into a dialogue with the recipient structures regarding counterpart support and responsibilities. This is frequently being caused by that departments and provinces being targeted by donor supported projects and programmes are often not involved in identification, appraisal and formulation, since this is being done by specialised agencies. The ISG will therefore assist ICD to assume a more pro-active role bringing; (i) funding, (ii) implementing and (iii) recipient partners together at a very early stage of the project cycle, e.g. identification, view the view of fostering ownership and partnership and ultimately sustainability.

##### *Partnerships*

There is presently two formalised existing partnerships under MARD: Forest Sector Support Programme (FSSP) and Natural Disaster Mitigation Partnership (NDMP). ISG will work very closely with these with a view of sharing resources, information, experience etc.

ISG will facilitate the building of partnerships between MARD, donors, other partners and NGOs. The partnership process will aim at working closely together to share experience and information, but also to work closely together during all steps of the project cycle.

##### *Coordination*

ISG will assist ICD in coordinating information, databases and other resources between donors, MARD departments, other ministries and provinces related to; (i) existing and pipelined projects, (ii) lessons learned, (iii) resource-persons etc. The coordination

function comprises several facets: seminars, regular workshops, dialoguing, consultations, study visits, newsletter, web-site etc.

### *Policy dialogue*

ISG will support ICD particularly and MARD generally with policy dialogue aiming at developing comprehension at MARD's departments, donors, NGOs, other ministries and provinces of; (i) national policies, (ii) priorities, (iii) strategies and (iv) planning parameters relevant for agricultural and rural development in Viet nam. The rationale of the policy dialogue is to facilitate that short, medium and long term plans and priorities are known to the donors and for donors to identify areas of support at a very early stage.

The policy dialogue will also encompass sharing of relevant information and forecasts of local, national and international market tendencies for agricultural products.

### *Thematic Ad-hoc Groups*

ISG will be assisted by Thematic Ad-Hoc Groups (TAGs). The function of TAGs is to review and examine specific technical topics identified by the Steering Board and the Plenary Meeting. A TAG is temporary by nature and will become dissolved upon completion of the work. More than one TAG can work in parallel and will report to the Steering Board and Plenary Meetings.

The TAGs have a technical role and each with a specific Terms of Reference. Interaction and coordination between the TAGs are ensured through ISG and by direct dialogue between the TAGs.

### *Provinces*

ISG will play an instrumental role assisting ICD in establishing dialogue platforms in piloted provinces. The dialogue platforms will be founded in provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and will comprise relevant technical staff with the following functions: (i) platform for coordination between ISG and the province to prevent overlapping of donor funding activities, (ii) exchange of information and lessons learned, (iii) coordination and sharing of resources, whenever possible (iv) policy dialogue with ISG to ensure topicality of interventions and production recommendations disseminated to farmers, and (v) feed-back mechanisms from the farming community to MARD and other relevant partners to ensure that cultivated agro-forestry products are in high demand and economically feasible. The following is two key criteria for selecting provinces: (i) several donor supported projects and programmes are active in the provinces, and (ii) interest of the province to participate.

### *Dissemination of Information*

ISG will actively disseminate relevant information to MARD departments, donors, other ministries and provinces related to national policies, priorities, strategies, planning parameters, lessons learned etc. through its website, regular newsletters, workshops etc.

ISG, in close collaboration, will strengthen the information dialogue with MARD departments, donors, other ministries and provinces with the view of being able to enrich sharing of information between actors involved in agricultural and rural development.

ISG will moreover develop databases of concluded, on-going and pipelined projects, consultants and other resources to be available on the web-site.

ISG will furthermore identify and arrange study visits by members of the International Support Group and other relevant persons to projects and other relevant activities. The study visit will serve a technical purpose, but will also aim at developing comprehension of the practical side of agricultural and rural development initiatives in Vietnam.

### *Sector Wide Approach*

Several donors are presently keen to pursue the sector wide approaches (SWAP) concept and preparations are accordingly underway. SWAP will require coordination and cooperation within MARD departments to an extent that might go beyond MARD's present organisational culture and capacity. It is therefore important that MARD and ISG become equipped and prepared for SWAP. ISG should play a key role towards successful application of SWAP, and it is now vital that ISG starts preparations well ahead of actual inception of SWAP to develop viable and adequate recipient structures and absorbing capacity. ISG will therefore review and bring forward recommendations (i) how the Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) can be integrated into the present coordination and implementation modalities of ISG/MARD and (ii) and how MARD/ISG can prepare for the SWAP with particular attention to capacity building, coordination and sustainability. The findings and recommendations should be presented to the Plenary Meeting and the Steering Board.

### *Annual Work Plan and Budget*

ISG will prepare annual workplans and budgets in accordance with the framework provided in the logframe (see Appendix attached). The annual planning process will start early in July with five major steps to ensure active participation:

1. ISG Secretariat in close collaboration with the TAGs draw-up a planning framework and parameters for review and comments by members of the TAGs, Steering Board and Plenary Meeting. No formal meeting will be arranged during this step. The ISG Secretariat manager and the technical coordinators of ISG will facilitate the process;
2. Each TAG will prepare a draft workplan and budget for the forthcoming year;
3. The ISG Secretariat will compile the workplans and budgets of the TAGs and will include other foreseen activities and expenses of other ISG entities for the forthcoming year into a draft annual workplan and budget. This ISG annual workplan and budget will be presented to the Steering Board for comments and subsequent approval;
4. ISG Steering Board will be conveyed to make comments and to approve the annual workplan and budget;

5. ISG Secretariat revises the workplan and budget in accordance with the comments given and distribute to participants of TAGs, Steering Board, Plenary Meeting and other interested parties and persons.

It should be aimed at having the annual workplan and budget ready by end of November.

## **5.0 ORGANISATION**

The following describes some key issues of the ISG organisation:

### *Steering Board*

The Steering Board (established in accordance with Decision No 120/2000-QD-BNN-TCCB dated 24 November, 2000 by Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development) comprises 22 permanent members; the Minister, the Vice-minister, the Director General of the International Cooperation Department, the Director Generals of other MARD departments, Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI), Ministry of Finance (MOF), and 10 members from the international donors and NGOs. Additional ministries and members can be invited to participate in the meetings.

The Minister of MARD is the Chairman of the Steering Board meetings. The ISG Secretariat is responsible for preparing and arranging the meetings, including minutes and other proceedings.

The Steering Board meets twice a year to; (i) update and outline policy framework for ISG and its cooperation with the donors, (ii) to discuss and select thematic issues to be reviewed and coordinated, and (iii) review and approve plans and budgets.

The Chairman of ISG can call ad-hoc meetings and the ISG Secretariat will disseminate minutes and other important proceedings of the Steering Board.

### *Plenary Meeting*

The ISG Secretariat will arrange one Plenary Meeting within any calendar year.

The Minister of MARD will chair the Plenary Meeting.

The Plenary Meeting will serve five major functions: (i) briefing on MARD's and Government of Vietnam's current development policies with particular relevance to MARD's mandate, (ii) development priorities (iii) trends and tendencies in donor support; (iv) up-date on on-going and up-coming projects and programmes, (v) review and discussions of lessons learned and (vi) presentation of a relevant technical topic by a resource person.

It will be endeavoured to apply participatory methodologies in the Plenary Meetings.

### *ISG Secretariat*

Parts of ISG's activities will be anchored in the ISG Secretariat. The ISG Secretariat is assisting ISG in accordance with Decision No 121/2000-QD-BNN-TCCB of 24<sup>th</sup> November 2000.

The ISG Secretariat plays a very crucial role for ISG to achieve its objectives. Some of the major functions of the ISG Secretariat are: (i) coordination and networking within MARD as well as with other ministries, donors, NGOs and provinces, (ii) organise Steering Board and Plenary Meetings, (iii) assist in coordinating TAG activities, disseminate information and lessons learned, (iv) maintain and update the ISG web-site, (v) produce and distribute the ISG newsletter on a regular basis, (vi) liaise very closely with ICARD regarding dissemination activities, and (vii) to manage ISG's funds and assets.

The ISG Secretariat has the following staff: Director (also Director General of the International Cooperation Department, MARD), manager, secretary, accountant, and information specialist. The Director will work on a part-time basis. In addition to the staff already mentioned additional technical coordinators will also be part of the ISG Secretariat. These will be seconded by MARD and work on part-time basis (40% of their time). The technical coordinators will be of high calibre and responsible for the technical dialogue with the donors, MARD departments, other ministries, NGOs and provinces. The technical coordinators will report to the ISG Secretariat, and will on a daily basis work and support the work of ISG and the respective TAGs.

### *Thematic Ad-hoc Groups (TAGs)*

A TAG is temporary by nature and will become dissolved upon completion of the work. Functions of each TAG are to review and examine specific technical topics identified by the Steering Board and the Plenary Meeting. MARD department Director Generals will chair the TAGs. Each TAG will be assisted by a technical coordinator seconded by MARD to work on part time basis.

## **6.0 FINANCE**

The day-to-day management of ISG funds and assets is the responsibility of the ISG Secretariat.

The accountant maintains the accounts in accordance with the financial and administrative procedures of the Government of Vietnam and the requirements of the donors.

ISG's activities are financed through ISG Trust Fund in which MARD and some international donors provide contributions in kind or in cash.

The manager, secretary, accountant and information specialist of the Secretariat are employed by ISG and receive salaries and other benefits in accordance with rules and regulations. The technical coordinators are seconded by MARD to work on part time basis and will receive an ISG allowance.

## **7.0 MONITORING**

ISG will develop and implement three monitoring instruments:

- ISG will monitor itself towards workplans and budgets on a monthly basis. Progress, constraints and adjustments will be highlighted in the monthly reports;
- ISG will develop and implement monitoring of benefits; (i) increased donor interest, (ii) improved policy dialogue, (iii) improved coordination within MARD and with other ministries, (iv) increase in donor support to existing Government of Vietnam and MARD's five and ten year development plans (v) through the provinces (DARD: frequency and content of dialogue (adoption rates) with the farming community, and (vi) trust fund contribution. ISG will develop and publish monitoring reports on a semi-annual basis. The reports will highlight achievements, constraints, areas of special attention, recommendations etc;

## **8.0 REPORTING**

ISG reports to the Director General of ICD MARD. The ISG Secretariat will prepare monthly workplans and brief progress reports to be submitted to the Director General prior to commencing a new calendar month. Workplans and progress reports should reflect work done in accordance with the ToRs and the annual workplan. However, elasticity should be available for being able to attend to cropped-up activities and needs.

ISG and its staff will devote some 50% of their working time out-of-office to undertake consultations with MARD departments, international donors, NGOs, other ministries and provinces in their offices. The purpose of this is to promote awareness and comprehension of ISG's functions and job tasks.

The annual reports will be sent to the donors and concerned Vietnamese institutions according to the regulations of Vietnam on ODA management.

**APPENDIX:****LOGFRAME FOR ISG, 2003-2005**

	<b>NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>OBJECTIVELY VARIFIABLE INDICATORS</b>	<b>SOURCES OF VERIFICATION</b>	<b>ASSUMPTIONS</b>
<b>OVERALL OBJECTIVE</b>	Strengthening MARD ownership, capacity and building partnerships for the effective and efficient utilization of external support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty reduced;</li> <li>• Food, social and economic security improved (secured) for rural households;</li> <li>• Agricultural production and productivity are increased;</li> <li>• Revenue from export crops increased</li> </ul>	Social surveys, statistics, quality of agricultural products, export registers, and balance of payment	
<b>PROJECT PURPOSE</b>	Improved coordination and policy dialogue within MARD and between MARD and other ministries, donors, NGOs and provinces with particular relevance to addressing existing GoV and MARD development plans, policies, priorities, strategies, best practices, lessons learned and research findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MARD's capacity and capability to handle ODA resources improved.</li> <li>• And increased tendency among donors to adjust and prepare support to existing plans, priorities, policies and strategies of GoV and MARD.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved tangible impact and effects at beneficiary level of donor and NGO supported projects, programmes and activities.</li> <li>• Impact studies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MARD, MARD staff and donors participate actively in the coordination and policy dialogue effort.</li> <li>• GoV and MARD plans, priorities, policies and strategies are available and known to donors, NGOs and other partners.</li> <li>• MARD initiate the necessary capacity building programmes and institutional adjustments.</li> </ul>
<b>RESULTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination and policy dialogue with MARD and between MARD and other ministries, donors, NGOs and provinces improved.</li> <li>• Increase in donor and NGO supported projects and activities addressing existing GoV and MARD</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequency in meetings</li> <li>• Venue of meetings</li> <li>• Participation and counterpart funding</li> <li>• Dialogue platforms in piloted provinces established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agenda and minutes of meetings</li> <li>• Contributions to ISG Trust Fund</li> <li>• Plans and budgets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISG (TAGs and Secretariat) to increase coordination, dialogue, information sharing, and awareness initiatives within MARD, and with other ministries, donors, NGOs and provinces.</li> <li>• ISG to assume a troubleshooting</li> </ul>

	<p>development plans, priorities, policies and strategies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased ownership by target groups and beneficiaries of foreign funded projects.</li> <li>• Dialogue with provinces strengthened.</li> <li>• Tendency to draw upon lesson-learned when preparing projects and annual plans is increased.</li> <li>• Sharing of information between MARD, other ministries, donors and NGOs increased.</li> </ul>			<p>function to resolve bottlenecks and communication gaps.</p>
<b>ACTIVITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regular meetings</li> <li>• Workshops</li> <li>• Coordination</li> <li>• Policy Dialogue</li> <li>• TAGs</li> <li>• Capacity building</li> <li>• Awareness</li> <li>• Study visits</li> <li>• Web-site</li> <li>• Newsletter</li> </ul>	<p><u>INPUTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISG;</li> <li>• Trust Fund;</li> <li>• Office facilities;</li> <li>• Human resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of activity and interest</li> <li>• Nos. of participants</li> <li>• Volume of Trust Fund</li> <li>• Physical facilities</li> <li>• Contracted staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings, workshops etc are relevant</li> <li>• TAGs are well functioning and with clear role and mandate</li> <li>• Awareness building programmes are implemented</li> <li>• Information activities are regular and relevant</li> </ul>
				<p><u>PRECONDITIONS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All partners involved are interested</li> <li>• Sufficient Trust funds are available</li> </ul>