



# Mekong Connection

Newsletter of the Mekong Institute Foundation

ISBN : 0859-7006

January - August 2004

## From the Director

I would like to extend my warm greetings to all the alumni of Mekong Institute learning programs. After seven years of providing participatory learning programs for building knowledge, skills and equally important nurturing relationships throughout the GMS, MI is now very proud of our more than 1500 alumni. The only way MI can accomplish our objective of promoting regional cooperation and accelerating regional development is through your impact on development in the GMS. We trust that you gained valuable knowledge, skills and relationships from your "MI Experience". In the future MI intends to provide you with continuing opportunities to develop your potential, your impact and your regional relationships through MI programs, offered both at MI in Khon Kaen and through local events in each GMS country.

The Mekong Institute is now beginning the exciting and challenging transformation to a Greater Mekong Subregion institution. I want to share with you some of the important aspects of our Strategic Management Plan for the implementation of the Charter signed last year by each of your governments. As we look to the future, we want to work together with you in serving the GMS leadership development and cooperation needs of the region.

The Mekong Institute will be expanding to offer new programs and services, building on MI's history and experience in offering high quality participatory learning programs in the form of courses. In 2005 the "MI Experience" of collaborative GMS learning will include not only an annual schedule of core courses in leadership, management, development, and tourism but MI will also begin to offer seminars, conferences and workshops focused on GMS high priority topics and policy making issues. MI will begin establishing a GMS research network, emphasizing the application of

research and its implications to policy and decision making in the GMS. Right now we are looking for GMS nationals from each country who are interested in coming to work with us here in Khon Kaen in our academic and research programs. In particular we need two senior people, one to direct the academic programs, and another to develop the research programs. Please contact me via email or fax if you would be interested in working with us here at MI. We are looking forward to seeing some of you involved in these MI programs.

During October and November we will be scheduling major events with Alumni in each country, to launch the local Alumni Clubs. In a survey conducted in April, many of you indicated you would like to help form such clubs. We will be contacting you again to arrange the best schedule. We plan to have a social event with senior and distinguished alumni as well as some MI staff and one of your favorite former Professors/ Presenters. Please start to talk and think about the organization of your club, the election of officers in your country, and what sort of activities you would like to have. In May 2005 MI plans to have our first Annual Conference and we would like to have many of you come to participate in the special events here in Khon Kaen.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you soon and appreciate all your valuable input into the MI strategic planning. We thank you in advance for all your continued help and advice in the successful implementation of the MI activities and services. I am confident that you will be pleased with the future result as MI plays an expanded role in GMS development.

Best regards,

Dr. Anake Topark-ngam

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# GMS Overview

by Graham Harper

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*The following was presented at the EU-LDC Network Regional Conference at Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Rai on 2 July 2004.*

## Abstract

The Mekong River is a vital resource for the six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries: Cambodia, China (Yunnan), Lao, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. With a combined population of over 300 million people, the countries of the GMS create an area of significant economic potential. Therefore, the governments and peoples of the GMS are communicating on how their river will be shared, protected and / or utilized to develop their economic potential.

In cooperation with The Centre for European Studies, Chulalongkorn University, this paper provides a brief overview of economic and social indicators to introduce constraints and potential of the GMS. In doing so the presenter will refer to his context as a coordinator for learning programmes at Mekong Institute (MI). The conclusion of this brief overview is that while the challenges are great, the region has every reason for future optimism.

## Introduction

As the countries of the GMS move toward more open economies and greater regional integration, the demand for human resource development is increasing, particularly in the areas of economic management and public administration. MI is assisting GMS countries in their transition from command to market economies by developing key management skills for the people of the region. As such MI provides specialised learning programmes for key public and private sector personnel in the fields of economic and administrative reform, governance and poverty alleviation. To do so, over the past seven years, MI has worked closely with over 1500 people from throughout the region. Such institutional experience provides insights into

the economic and human potential of the GMS. Therefore, selected economic and social indicators are presented to provide a starting point for further deliberations. MI's goal in presenting these is to encourage further understanding and appreciation of this diverse region.

## GMS Overview

Table 1 compiles selected economic indicators for GMS countries from the Asian Development Bank, Key Indicators 2003. First is the Human Development Index (HDI). This is a composite index, used by the United Nations Development Programme to measure average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development—a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. The numbers provided are a rank out of 175 countries listed. The GMS countries in general have very low HDI. This is confirmed by the very high percentage of population living below the official government poverty line in all GMS countries. The Gross National Income (GNI) is provided, with the exception of Myanmar being unavailable, as both a country total and per capital figure. These illustrate the strategic importance of Yunnan province as the GMS gateway to the huge Chinese economy. The GNI statistics also highlight, as an example of potential for other GMS members, the relative success that Thailand has achieved in raising per capital income levels. In terms of income distribution equality the Gini Coefficients for the GMS countries are provided. The Gini coefficient varies from perfect equality (a value of zero or every household earning exactly the same), to absolute inequality (a value of one or a single household earning a country's entire income). Latin America, one of the world's most unequal regions has a Gini coefficient of approximately 0.5. Many rich countries are closer to 0.3 (Economist). The average for the GMS is 0.4. In summary these figures are offered to highlight the pervasiveness of poverty throughout the region.

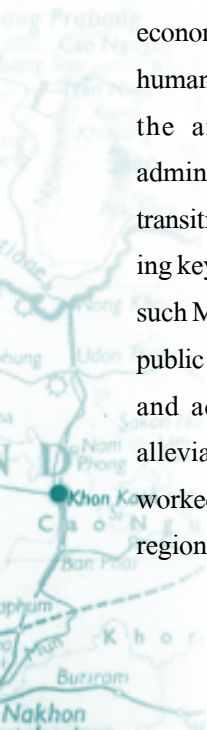


Table 1 GMS Economic Indicators (ADB 2003)

	Human Development Index	Population in Poverty (%) (National Poverty Line)	Total GNI (US\$ million)	Per Capita GNI (US\$)	Gini Coefficient
Cambodia	130	35.9%	3,339	270	0.45
China	96	--	1,131,185	890	0.40
Laos	143	38.6%	1,634	300	0.36
Myanmar	127	22.9%	--	--	--
Thailand	70	13.1%	118,450	1,940	0.43
Vietnam	109	37.4%	32,762	410	0.36

Another important factor in the GMS is the strong shift away from agriculture toward manufacturing over the past 10 years (Table 2). This trend is very much a part of governments changing policies toward more open, market-based economies. Agriculture remains important in all countries, but as Thailand has demonstrated processed food items ready for export offer much better value-added potential.

Table 2: Percentage shift of Major Sectors in GDP from 1990 to 2002 (ADB 2003)

	Agriculture	Manufacturing
Cambodia	-20	+15.0
China	-12.5	+7.9
Laos	-10.8	+9.1
Myanmar	-0.10	0
Thailand	-3.5	+6.5
Vietnam	-15.7	+8.3

As the GMS economies continue to transform and integrate, labour markets are also changing. There are increasing demands for qualified public and private sector personnel who are able to not only compete effectively in a global economy, but are also E<sup>2</sup> Literate (electronic and English literate). In the next ten years current youth will be moving into middle management positions and be a domestic driving force of future economic growth. Literacy rates are therefore significant indicators of the future potential. As shown in table 3 the literacy rates in all countries have increased, especially for women. This is a very positive indicator. However,

tertiary education still remains an elusive goal for most people in the GMS (table 4). Internet and personal computer use also remains out of the reach of most (table 5). While there are no statistics presented on the number of speakers of English as a foreign language in the countries, experience at MI indicates that the numbers should closely match those for tertiary education, Internet and computer use.

Table 3: Literacy Rate 15 – 24 Year Olds (% of population) (ADB 2003)

	1990		2002	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
Cambodia	66	81	76	85
China	93	97	97	99
Laos	61	79	73	86
Myanmar	86	90	91	92
Thailand	98	99	99	99
Vietnam	94	94	96	95

Table 4: Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (% of population) (ADB 2003)

	2000	
	Female	Male
Cambodia	2	4
China (1997)	4	8
Laos	2	4
Myanmar	15	8
Thailand	32	39
Vietnam	8	11

Table 5: Personal Computers in Use and Internet Users (per 100 population) (ADB 2003)

	2001 or 2002	
	Personal Computers in Use	Internet Users
Cambodia	0.15	0.22
China (1997)	1.90	4.60
Laos	0.33	0.27
Myanmar	0.11	0.02
Thailand	2.78	7.76
Vietnam	0.98	1.85





## Conclusion

From the above analysis it may at first seem that the GMS is a region with great challenges and limited potential. It is true that the challenges are great. The economic and social indicators presented are greatly affected by the prevalence of poverty throughout the region. On average 30% of the people in the GMS are poor (average from table 1). The greatest challenge then for GMS is that of poverty alleviation.

At the SEAMEO-UNESCO Congress in Bangkok, May 2004, Sir John Daniel – former Director General for Education at UNESCO and current President of the Commonwealth of Learning – delivered a keynote speech in which he targeted poverty. His argument was not however poverty reduction, but rather poverty abolition. The analogy to slavery was provided. If 18<sup>th</sup> century human rights campaigners had sought slavery reduction they may never have succeeded in outlawing the practice in Europe. The same can hold true for the abolition of poverty in the GMS. Rising income levels will result in higher educational standards that in turn provide a labour force needed by a modern, information-based economy. The growing economies can then alleviate many of the social constraints associated with poverty.

Is this possible? Do GMS countries have the potential to break the grip of poverty? In the statistics presented we can see a potential for trade in the GMS with the huge Chinese economy. We can also see the example of raising standards of living that Thailand is achieving. However, will growth occur throughout the region? Recently an adjunct MI faculty member, Dr. Christopher Gan, encouraged participants from all six GMS countries to be optimistic and “never say never”. Another MI module presenter Dr. Fredric Swierczek reminisced with participants about a postgraduate thesis he wrote many years ago on the Mekong Subregion becoming a cooperative trade area. At that time war was raging throughout the region and his academic advisor said his thesis could never happen. Perhaps the advisor should have listened to Dr. Gan’s advice. Current cooperation and communication in the GMS is creating progress that only a decade ago would not have been possible. This cooperation and communication then is the potential for the future of the GMS.

# Tourism: A Regional Approach for Development

by Graham Harper

Great Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries are in varying transitional phases of economic development. Tourism is a key industry to provide much needed foreign currency and fuel local industries for community - development. The GMS governments and their agencies in cooperation with the private sector play a vital leadership role in promoting such changes and development. However, human resource development (HRD) limitations, particularly knowledge and skill gaps for both public and private sector personnel are major obstacles to growth and development. A critical mass of senior to middle level officials, with appropriate management and leadership skills, is required to deal with expanding regional strategies demanding changes to tourism practices and leadership within communities involved. As such, Mekong Institute (MI) has long wanted to apply its experience to create new learning opportunities that specifically meet the changing tourism industry needs of the GMS. With generous support of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and in cooperation with the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC), Thailand, this is finally accomplished. Dr. Liu Dachang, former MI Academic Director, collaborated with Mr. Mark Pillai, Marksman Wawasan Consulting Co. to develop a tourism curriculum proposal. In doing so, they consulted with Ms. Sachiko Ishikawa, JICA Regional Project Formulation Advisor, and Ms. Panorsri, Director, External Cooperation Division 1, DTEC. Further, to ensure the curriculum accurately represented the regions needs, JICA, in cooperation with DTEC, generously funded nine participants from four GMS countries to attend the MI Tourism Curriculum Review Workshop held in Khon Kaen, Thailand on March 16, 17 2004. The participants were selected from national tourism offices and related ministries<sup>1</sup>. In addition, four JICA and three DTEC representatives

observed and participated in the workshop. MI staff and Mark Pillai facilitated the workshop.

The workshop participants provided innumerable and valuable professional insights and contributions that presented MI with a clear mandate to implement the curriculum and confirmed it specifically meets the needs of tourism industry of *Economic Cooperation Strategy Bloc (ECSB) and East West Corridor (EWC)*. This confirmation was necessary as it had been more than two years since the last MI tourism programme. Changes have taken place regionally and globally that drastically affect tourism markets. SARS, Bird Flu and terrorism pose serious threats to the industry while *ECSB and EWC* regional strategies present opportunities. These dynamics mean new and creative learning programmes are needed to meet growing needs.

The new MI tourism learning programme meets the challenge. It develops four major topics: Partnership in Subregional Tourism based Economic Development, Intercultural Issues and Transborder Challenges, Community Based Tourism Development, and Developing Area Based Tourism Masterplan. Major issues and challenges of the new *ECSB and EWC* comprising of Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam, will be addressed to promote effective economic cooperation and an efficient partnership framework. While the topics are designed for *ECSB and EWC* the concepts are applicable at a broader context, i.e. perfectly appropriate for all practitioners from the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). In the future we look forward to including the North-South corridor to this programme.

This first four-week programme will be conducted at the Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen, Thailand from 6 September to 1 October 2004. We look forward to updating this programme in the next issue of *Mekong Connection*.

<sup>1</sup>**Mr.Somchin Silapheth**, Technical Staff, Planning and Cooperation Division, National Tourism Authority, Lao PDR

**Mr.Phetsomphone Keomongkhoun**, Tourism Officer, National Tourism Authority, Lao PDR

**Mrs.Saymonekham Mangnomek**, Deputy Director, Asia Pacific Division, Department of International Cooperation, Lao PDR

**Mr.Thai Doan Tuu**, Deputy Director, Tourism and Trade Dept., Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vietnam

**Mr.Nguyen Van Binh**, Director, General Affairs, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, Vietnam

**Mr.Tran Quang Hao**, Main Expert, Personnel Department, Vietnam Administration of Tourism, Vietnam

**Ms Heng Sokun, Director**, Bilateral Aid Coordination Department, Council for the Development, Cambodia

**Mr Kim Bunara, Deputy Director**, Education and Training, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia

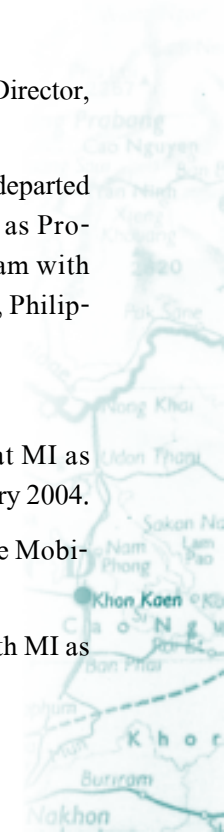
**Ms.Wanna Cholpraves**, Technical Staff, Office of Tourism Development, Ministry of Tourism and Sports, Thailand

### **Staff Changes**

- Ms.Juraiporn Udomsriti, Administration Director, departed MI in January 2004.
- Dr.Liu Dachang, Academic Director departed MI in April 2004. He is now working as Program Manager in the GMS PPP program with the Asian Development Bank in Manila, Philippines.

### **New Staff**

- Mr. Graham Harper started his work at MI as Training & Research Specialist in February 2004.
- Ms. Anita Horton joined MI as Resource Mobilization Officer in March 2004.
- Mr. Apai Prakobpol, began working with MI as Administration Manager in May 2004.





## MI News and Events

The MI Steering Committee met twice during the first half of this year. The first meeting was held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok on 15 March 2004. The second time the Steering Committee met at The Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2004, to follow up on the Strategic Management Planning sessions held the preceding two days and to make preparations for the June Council Meeting. This meeting was also attended for the first time by Mr. Piamsak Milintachinda, the newly appointed Director General of the Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC) of Thailand.



In June 2004, Ministers of the six GMS Nations signed a cooperative agreement to establish MI as a regional institution. As part of the process of transforming the Mekong Institute to fulfil its new charter as a GMS institution, MI has held 4 workshop sessions in order to develop the Mekong Institute Strategic Management Plan, 2005-2010. Ms. Anita Horton joined MI in March 2004 to assist in the development of strategic management plans, products and services that would accomplish the objectives set forth in the MI GMS Charter. A preliminary strategic planning workshop was held at MI in March, where all the MI staff came together to discuss MI's current situation, weaknesses and strengths, how the organization could be strengthened internally and to brainstorm about the things MI might do in the future. Then, on 8-9 April 2004, His Excellency Mr. Pradap Pibulsonggram, Director General DTEC, served as the Chair of a second assessment and brainstorming session of people from outside MI, who were very familiar with MI, and MI management. The third session of the Strategic Management Planning process brought together representatives of the MI Charter stakeholders from each the GMS governments signatory to the Charter, MI management and regional development funding partners. This two-day workshop was held at the Sofitel Hotel in Khon Kaen, Thailand. Mr. Piamsak Milintachinda served as the Chair. The outcome from these meetings was presented to the MI Steering Committee meeting in May, where it was reviewed and recommended to the Council. In June 2004 The Mekong Institute Council approved the Strategic Management Plan 2005-2010 for implementation. This will bring many exciting challenges for MI, as the Institute works to more effectively serve the needs of the GMS countries.



The GMS country Cooperating Agency Representative (CA's) held a meeting at MI on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2004. The representatives from each GMS country came together to share experience, ideas and discuss ways to improve the recruiting, selection and preparation of participants in MI learning programs. This was an important time of communication, gaining understanding of the needs of the CA's, and discussing how to improve the process for selecting participants.

## Summary of Alumni Questionnaire Survey

We sent a questionnaire to our Alumni in April 2004 to get their ideas on life after MI. These are summaries of the questionnaire from the alumni:

*- Most alumni contact their classmates often. They usually contact each other via e-mail and telephone.*

*- The benefits they got from their MI course are :*

- Skills and Knowledge
- Improved English
- Relationships, Friendship
- Opportunity for Higher Education Studies
- International Travel
- Promotion, Better Jobs
- Higher Salary

*- All recommended MI to their friends and co-workers because:*

*- The course subjects are very interesting and useful.*  
*- MI is a good organization which helps us not only to gain knowledge, but also to build up good relationships among GMS country members.*

*- MI is a good institute. All courses provided are very useful. MI selects good presenters with diversified knowledge and good services.*

- Feel increased confidence after attending a MI course.
- MI is useful.

*- Some activities they would like to do as MI alumni :*

*- Seminar and information or experience sharing*  
*- Join some work teams for investigating or training and community activities serving local people.*

*- Participate in seminars, workshops and training courses.*

*Join as a freelance staff or volunteer in some interesting activities.*

- Read MI documents, lecture notes, etc., on the MI website.
- English language courses.
- Meet MI staff or alumni in their own countries and join

*activities.*

*- Social evening or sight seeing.*

The surveyed alumni would like to have more contact with each other. We will therefore start to set up MI Alumni Chapters in each country in October and November. For more information contact : mekong@kku.ac.th

## MI Core Courses September 2004 – December 2005

**6 September - 1 October 2004**

Tourism: A Regional Approach for Economic Cooperation  
Strategy Block and East-West Corridor Countries

**1 – 12 November 2004**

Participation in Government and Civil Society – Module 2

**29 November - 24 December 2004**

MI Project Management for GMS Poverty Interventions

**10 January – 18 February 2005**

MI Leadership (Competitive Enterprises)

**21 February – 18 March 2005**

MI Tourism: A Regional Approach to Development

**25 April – 20 May 2005**

MI Rural Development

**23 May – 1 July 2005**

MI Project Management (Infrastructure)

**1 – 26 August 2005**

MI Leadership (Public Sector Reform)

**5 – 30 September 2005**

MI Tourism: A Regional Approach to Development

**3 – 28 October 2005**

MI Rural Development

**31 October – 25 November 2005**

MI Project Management (Energy)

**28 November – 23 December 2005**

MI Leadership (Competitive Enterprises)

## Alumni News

From the recent e-mail survey, the MI will be establishing MI Alumni Chapters in each GMS country! Major alumni meetings are being planned in each country for October and November 2004. Make sure we have **your email address** so we can keep you informed. (please send news to: mekong@kku.ac.th)

### A1

Dr. Youk Ngoy has recently been appointed as Rector of the Royal University of Law and Economics, Cambodia.

### A3

Ms. Wang Yiqian (Hester) recently completed her Master degree in Agriculture Economics from Louisiana State University, USA. She and her husband have moved to Dallas, Texas. Her husband works for an IT firm in Dallas.

### A4

Mr. Hla Tun attended study tour to Seoul, Korea from December 11 to 15, 2003.

### A6

Ms. Dinh Lan Anh recently completed her Master degree in Geography Information Systems from Queensland University, Brisbane, Australia. She is now working for the Ministry of Environment in Vietnam.

### B6

Ms. Suchada Wattana is studying for a PhD in Political Science at Thammasart University, Thailand.

### B7

Mr. Pham Van Thanh has been promoted to the position of Manager of the Corporate Affairs and Marketing Division, Petrolimex Information Technology, Automation and Telecommunication Joint Stock Company.

### B11

Mr. Prak Nguonhong completed his English language study in Wellington, New Zealand. He returned to Cambodia in July 2004.

Ms. Lu Caizhen (Karen) started her PhD in Development Economics in the Netherlands under a full Netherlands scholarship.

Ms. Parinda Nirothsamabut is currently studying for a Master's degree on the Economy in Korea, sponsored by the Korea International Cooperation Agency.

Mr. Hong Tao is studying for a MBA at the Asian Institute of Management, Manila, the Philippines.

### Eliminating Poverty in GMS

Ms. Jinangoon Rojananan went to Australia recently to study Clusters Development and Logistics Systems. Then she spent a week in Scandinavia countries studying about Knowledge Management and Development.

Mr. Viengxay Viravong will be completing his Master degree in Health Economics from Chulalongkorn University in September 2004.

Mr. Hu Qiang got married a few months ago.  
 Ms. Ravy Sorn will be getting married end of this year.

### JICA Course

Mr. Lao Nguen Eng is studying English in New Zealand for six months sponsored by New Zealand government.

### JICA 2001 (1) Economics

Mr. Ker Bopha completed his study in International Development from International University of Japan. He is presently living in Cambodia.

### Leadership for Competitive Enterprise System in the GMS

Ms. Tan Yun led a group of trade delegates from China to India this month.

### Policy Interventions for GMS Poverty Reduction

Mr. Hang Suvidya spent a month in Wellington, New Zealand for a course sponsored by New Zealand Government.

### Private Sector Participants in GMS Growth and Development

Mr. Nguyen Van Lieu has been awarded a full Japanese Government scholarship to study for his Master degree in Economics in Japan this year (2004).

### Towards Eliminating Poverty in GMS

Ms. Pei Yan Hui is studying German language in Germany and will start her Master degree next year.

### Trade Policy 2000

Ms. Sisavanh Didaravong is studying Pure Economics and International Studies at Kobe University, Japan.

### Trade Policy 2001

Mr. Lay Chreav completed his MBA study at the Thai Chamber of Commerce University. He is currently working in the Foreign Trade Department, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia.

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual authors and only reflect those of the Mekong Institute Foundation. Mekong Connection is a publication prepared by the Mekong Institute Foundation with the purpose of promoting understanding and cooperation among the Greater Mekong Subregion Countries. For further information, please contact the Mekong Institute foundation. Tel: 66-4320-2411-2 Fax : 66-4334-3131 E-mail : mekong@kku.ac.th Website : www.mekonginstitute.org