



The Workshop on Upland Cultivation in the GMS to be Held at MI in June 2007

Mekong Institute (MI) will host the workshop on "Upland Cultivation in the Context of Increasing Economic Integration in Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS)" in June this year.

As the GMS, which comprises the six countries; Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and, Yunnan and Guangxi provinces of China, is home to over 250 million people with a large majority residing in the rural areas.

In spite of being one of the fastest growing economies, rural livelihood system in the region is essentially based on subsistence agriculture. Farming system in the upland areas (the hills and the mountains) of the GMS is characterized by shifting cultivation of paddy and field crops for ages.

Human population pressure and changing social and economic contexts have been the major driving forces in the farming systems transformation in the



Participants from the six GMS countries are seen attending a learning course which was held recently at the Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen, Thailand

region. Intensification of farming system and introduction of cash crops in the upland farming systems are the foremost responses to increasing pollution pressure and increasing market access.

In recent years, promotion of export-oriented crops has been perceived as the key to economic integration and growth of the GMS. Consequently, substance agriculture-based rural livelihood systems in the upland areas of the GMS are rapidly undergoing transformation towards market-based intensive agriculture.

There is a growing awareness about the need for pursuing the impact of farming system transformation (as influenced by increasing economic integration) on the rural livelihood systems in the upland areas of the GMS. It is within this context that MI is organizing a Workshop entitled 'Upland Cultivation in the Context of Increasing Economic Integration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region' from June 20 to 22, 2007 in its premises in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

The workshop, taking into account the social, economic, and ecological aspects, will focus on emerging issues of rapidly transforming upland systems of the GMS. The themes of the workshop will include:

- Agro-ecosystem Dynamics of Upland / Shifting Cultivation Systems
- Increasing Economic Integration and Rural Livelihood Changes in the Uplands of GMS
- Impact of Economic Corridors Development in the Upland

Farming Systems of the GMS
- Future of Upland Farming System in the GMS region

Delegates of the workshop will include representatives from a wide range of educational, research, and policy institutes with active interest in the emerging issues of upland cultivation in the GMS. A total of around 40 delegates are expected in the workshop. Invited resource persons with long research and development experiences in the GMS will provide regional perspectives on the issues to be dealt with. Country paper presentations, focusing on national policy and priorities, will be made by participants representing GMS countries. The papers presented in the workshop will be published as workshop proceedings, after editing.

Open Call for Papers

This article serves as Open Call for Papers on the five workshop themes mentioned above. Potential contributors are requested to indicate their interest by completing the attached form and to send the necessary papers at the earliest by May 18, 2007. Notification of the acceptance of the paper and invitation to the workshop will be sent by the end of May 2007.

MI will be pleased to provide full support (workshop fee, travel, accommodation including breakfast, and lunch) to 4 - 6 participants from each country. Preference will be given to authors of workshop papers and the invited speakers.

For more information, please contact:

Dr Jharendu Pant
Tel. + 66 (0) 43 202441/2
Ext. 127
Email: jharendu@mekonginstitute.org

Mr Bhoj Raj Khanal
Tel. + 66 (0) 43 202411/2
Ext. 401
Email: bhoj@mekonginstitute.org

Ms Trinh Thi Khan Chi
Tel. + 66 (0) 43 202411/2
Ext. 104
Email: chi@mekonginstitute.org

MI Steering Committee Meeting



Chairman of The Mekong Institute Steering Committee (MISC), Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, (seated center), presiding over the Annual MISC Meeting 2007 at Conference Room 2, on the 4th floor of the Mekong Institute (MI) Building. And with him, are Steering Committee members and MI management, held on March 23, 2007.

Editor Talks

2007 MI in new look

Welcome to the January - March 2007 issue of Mekong Connection. This has been a transitional period for MI in terms of policy and implementation framework, as well as practices and procedures after the coming of the new MI Director, Dr. Suchat Katima. This opportunity has given MI some time to think about moving forward and achieving the strategic plan of 2005-2010. This shows that MI still has a long way to go in completing its goals, but nevertheless it has been an exciting time for those involved, and we are seeing good signs from the recent development.

As usual, this issue presents the overall picture of MI's activities during January - March 2007 and the upcoming events which will occur in the next few months. The picture of the Steering Committee Meeting and the relationship with development partners are reported in this issue. Also highlighted inside this issue, you will find the strategic direction framework of 2007-2010, which has been initiated by the new MI Director.

As for the news relating to the GMS schemes, there are various issues presented. These include the Agreement of Investment Protection and Promotion between Thailand and Myanmar, roles of Universities in the GMS countries in Regional Development, and so much more.

You may have already observed that this issue may look different from the past issues. This is because the communications team is under the new super- vision of recently appointed MI Director, Dr. Suchat Katima and Administration Director, Mr. Pakpoom Teranantana, as well as two new staff interns.

Lastly, we really hope that all of you as regular readers will enjoy reading our first issuance of this year's newsletter. If you have any comments, questions or suggestions, you would like to make, please do not hesitate to contact us for further clarifications or send us by emailing to:

phitsanu@mekonginstitute.org

The Editor

Special Report

The Mekong Institute Business Plan of 2007 – 2010 has been initiated by the new MI Director, Dr. Suchat Katima, in line with the MI Strategic Plan of 2005 – 2010, which has been to transform the role of MI from a development assistance project into a financially self-sustaining GMS governed institution that excels in capacity development for regional cooperation. The business plan is therefore formulated to move the MI forward in four balanced perspectives, simultaneously: developing and promoting MI core products that meet the clients' and stakeholders' needs; launching proactive market strategies and forming strategic alliance with regional partners to generate adequate income; creating multi-national learning organization; and imbedding "Facilitation" as MI core competency.

The framework of strategic direction (2007 – 2010)

Related story on page **3**

News and Information on GMS Scheme

- ✧ **Agreement on Investment Protection and Promotion between Thailand and Myanmar**
In March 2007, the Cabinet agreed to the draft agreement on investment protection and promotion between Thailand and Myanmar as proposed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. The main content of the draft agreement focused on the promotion and facilitation of mutual investment in each country. It is expected that after signing the said agreement, it would help forge ties and promote trade and investment between the two countries.
- ✧ **Roles of Universities in the GMS Countries in Regional Development** Recently, Mr. Suvit Khunkitti as the Chair of Loei Rajabhat University Council delivered the keynote address on Roles of Universities in the GMS Countries on Regional Development at the International Seminar on Strategies for the Collaborative Research among the GMS Countries. He believed that the role of universities in supporting development in the GMS countries was increasing vital. The support of the universities would help enhance the quality of knowledge relating to development issues and promote regional development cooperation. In this way, the universities may create linkages and networking within and among academic and research institutions in the GMS, through multi-disciplinary research and development. Greater Mekong Sub-region Academic and Research Network (GMSARN) has been an existence of research network in support for the sustainable development in the GMS.
- ✧ **Thailand as a Transport hub for the Greater Mekong Subregion** Dr. Porametee Vimolsiri, Senior Executive Advisor of the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Board, said that Thailand has been the strategic location of the Mekong Subregion. This can be seen through the modal shift of transport from roads to rails, waterways & double-track rail, water channel dredging, coastal shipping development, and pipeline system. At the same time, the airport development has been made as a gateway to the GMS. In this way, the transport hub of Thailand would help expedite economic activities along major GMS corridors.
- ✧ **Economic Cooperation in the Mekong Subregion** This topic was one of those were recently presented by the Office of National Economic and Social Development Board to the Swedish Business Delegation. In the content of the presentation, it illustrated the role of the NESDB as the national coordinator in supporting GMS Sub-regional cooperation and development and promoting economic cooperation with neighboring countries. Besides it explored the possible opportunities for trade, investment & business in GMS and ACMECS through economic gateway.
- ✧ **Cooperation on Human Capital Development in the GMS** According to the NESDB's presentation during the Seminar on Cooperation on Human Capital Development in the GMS held on 23 March 2007 in Khon Kaen Province, it presented the cooperation on human capital development in the GMS during the past ten years was focused on training in particular sectors of public health, education, and labor. This training has been made through training institutions like Chulalongkorn University, International Institute for Trade and Development, and Mekong Institute. The suggestions on implementing future cooperation on human capital development in the GMS included the human – centered based research (like labor migration, highland agricultural development, transboundary communicable diseases, contract farming, natural resources and environment) through horizontal cooperation, the linkages among GMS research networks and education institutes, the training in GMS priority sectors, the exchange of expertise at all levels.
- ✧ **Savannakhet Airport Joint Utilization** According to the principle of joint utilization from Savannakhet Airport located at Kaisorn Promwiharn City, Savannakhet, Lao PDR, Thailand can substitute a commercial airport in Mudahan Province with Savannakhet Airport as the domestic airport. Such utilization would benefit to both sides in terms of passenger handling, passenger demand, additional investment for airport utilization, and airport links with the neighboring countries.
- ✧ **North-South Economic Corridor Bridge** The North-South Economic Corridor Bridge Project is under the development of North-South Economic Corridor in order to link the economic corridors among Thailand, Lao PDR, and PR China, with the technical support of ADB. All the parties are willing to provide the financial support for the project. It is expected that the construction of the project would be completed in March 2008.

Mekong Institute Business Plan for 2007 - 2010 has been implemented

Anchored on the MI competitive advantages as GMS governed organization devoted to capacity development and regional cooperation, all efforts must be focused on continuing development and promotion of

Guided by the Charter, the Mekong Institute (MI) is implementing the MI Strategic Plan 2005 - 2010 to transform the Institute from a development assistance project into a financially self-sustaining GMS governed institution that excels in capacity development for regional cooperation. In the last two years, several milestones have been achieved. These were evidenced by the significant improvement of MI Professional Development Series, the establishment of GMS-focused research network, the initiation of regional policy formulation dialogues and the cooperation with GMS Business Forum on private sector initiatives.

The MI is a living organism that has to grow or be marginalized in this GMS arena. The remaining three years are crucial to the MI in the future. To achieve improved capacity for regional cooperation and transform the MI from an assistance program to a sustainable knowledge services provider, the MI has to be known in this region as the center of excellence in delivering high quality, relevant human resource development programs, researches, and policy advices in current hot issues like transnational and regional project management, socio-economic impacts of economic corridors, and regional cooperation and integration both in public and private sectors.

This business plan is therefore to formulate to move the MI forward in four balanced perspectives, simultaneously: developing and promoting the MI core products that meet the clients and stakeholders needs; launching proactive market strategies and forming strategic alliance with regional partners to generate adequate income; creating multi-national learning organization; and imbedding "Facilitation" as the MI Core Competency.

Strategic Direction

1. Synergizing the MI Core Programs and Services

At present, there are three MI Programs which are Learning Program (the provision of standard Professional Development Series (PDS and Custom Courses), Research Program (training and research grants to researchers and scholars in the GMS countries), and Policy Formulation Program (Policy Makers Senior Consultation Series)

With this new direction, all three components will be merged to become one the MI Learning & Development Program. All sources will be pooled to create synergy and fundamental strength. All three components will be working toward a common goal: to become the center of excellence in providing human resource development programs, researches, and policy advice in transnational/regional project management, socio-economic impacts of economic corridors, and regional cooperation and integration.

2. Building up the MI's competitive advantage

1.) Developing and Maintaining the MI Core Products

Commenced as an Assistance Program, the MI core products in the past were provided to assist public institutions of emerging GMS countries like Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar to cope with the economy in transition. Courses like Leadership in Competitive Enterprise, Good Governance and Public Reform, Project Management were well received during the 90's. However, with the rapid and well adopted free market principles in the GMS and the wave of regionalism and transnational trade and communication, the MI core products and services have to be changed accordingly. To become a self-sustaining institution, during this fast regional development stage, the MI has to position itself as the "best" in delivering the MI "core products & services" which meet the current and future needs of MI stakeholders.

new/emerging the MI Core Products. To do this, MI has to narrow down its areas on intervention from 17 priority areas to four core socio-economic areas.

Extensive pool of researches, studies, policies, agreements, etc. will be made available to clients and development partners. Different learning packages on the above areas will be in place for different clients. The MI will make strategic alliances with key regional players in designing and organizing training courses, participatory workshops, consultative meetings, policy dialogues and regional forums on the core socio-economic areas.

2.) Facilitation as the MI Core Competency

Within the MI, the development of facilitation to this point has, for the most part, been a development of facilitation abilities and skills in individuals. At this point, it must be progressive from individual skill development to a focus one on developing facilitation as core competency of the whole institute. Facilitation is in fact, a capability central to the direction of the business and critical to the services delivered to the client. All of MI's services must be delivered through a facilitative approach. In order for facilitation to be developed as a core competency for the organization, certain organizational needs must be met in order to support this delivery system, i.e.

3. Strategic alliance and partnership with training and development institutions in the region and beyond

The MI will actively forge strategic alliances with other training and development institutions in the region as well as potential partners. By working with strategic alliances, more resources can be mobilized to timely response to the needs of the customers. At the same time, these joint projects and researches provide very good opportunities for the MI's staff to work and exchange experiences with other professionals in the region.

The MI has already established working relationship with the ADB assisted GMS Business Forum in implementing Private Sector Initiatives. It has been planned that in the next three years, the MI will co-implement capacity building program on trade and logistics for members of National Chamber of Commerce of the six GMS countries together with the GMS Business Forum. A series of training programs include regional cooperation, transnational trade policies and systems, logistics, and regional integration.

4. Marketing the MI products and services

To become a customer-driven and financially sustainable regional capacity development institution, the MI has to employ more proactive marketing strategies. As an autonomous organization, the MI, now, has to compete in dynamic, turbulent, and uncertain environments. Therefore, it must act, react and change more quickly. Some proactive marketing strategies to be employed include:

1. Marketing each the MI core course as a total package not by a scholarship/seat.
2. Establishing integrated relationships with regional and national development institutions
3. Promoting the brand image of MI widely
4. Producing quality promotion materials and PR activities.

5. Institutional Development

Started as an Assistance Program, the MI has yet put in place human resource management and organizational operation systems that meet its regional status. Simultaneously with the improvement of MI Program and Services, the following policies and standard operating procedures will be developed and operationalized in the next three years.

1. Operational Agreement in each GMS country to operationalize the MI Charter signed in 2003. The MI is in the process

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Mekong Institute Business Plan for 2007 - 2010 has been implemented

of obtaining international status in Thailand. This process is expected to be completed in June 2007. Upon receiving the international status, the MI will proceed on formulating operational agreement with each of the GMS countries to facilitate the MI activities in each country, e.g.

2. Human Resource Management Policies covering employment and performance management of the MI staff

3. Administrative Policies covering the management of the MI assets, finance, procurement, and general administrative regulations.

6. Learning and Growth

To become a regional capacity development leader, the MI must build up its human resources, information-based technology and organizational capacity to carry out its core products and services. In addition to the MI ongoing internal human resource development activities, in the next three years, more GMS staff will be recruited to create a more GMS working environment.

This can be done through the recruitment of qualified professionals from other GMS countries to fill vacant or newly created positions, secondment of young civil servants from GMS related institutions in each GMS country and the MI proposals to seek funds to support the "**Young Mekong Professionals**" Development Program.

Previewing the Upcoming Events

April 8- 9, 2007 Round Table Discussion on MIRAC Research Consortium 2006 - 2007

A Discussion will be held at the Mekong Institute Conference Room to present the research results of Mekong Institute Research Advisory Committee (MIRAC) research consortium 2006-07. A total of 41 delegates are expected to participate in are from the GMS countries, Mekong Institute and some will be from outside GMS in the round table.

The objectives of the round table are: to give opportunity to the researcher to present research findings in a forum; to validate research findings with GMS stakeholders; to get feedback to revise the research reports to make it publishable; and to discuss the opportunity to contribute research outputs to other MI programs.

Two themes will be chosen for the round table discussion based on the MIRAC Research Consortium 2006-07. "Tourism" is the research theme for Myanmar and other five countries of the GMS choose "Economic Corridors of the GMS" for their research studies. The following will be the MIRAC research papers presented in the Round Table. Altogether four invited papers and six MIRAC research papers will be presented and discussed in the round table.

April 10 - 11, 2007

The Second Meeting of the Mekong Institute Research Advisory Committee (MIRAC) Meeting

After completing 'MI Research Consortium 2006-07' in March 2007, MI Research Department will hold a second MIRAC meeting in April 2007 together with round-table discussion to validate and disseminate research findings. The MIRAC meeting will also decide the MI Small Research Grant winners for the six GMS - country researchers. MIRAC members from six GMS countries, three international advisors, MI staff together with the stakeholders of the research fields from the GMS, will participate in the meeting.

The meeting will be held at Mekong Institute Conference Room and is expected to be attended by all MIRAC members, six from GMS country members, three international research advisors and Academic Director and Research Manager of the Mekong Institute.

In the opening of the meeting MI Director, Dr. Suchat Katima will present MI Strategic Direction for three year (2007-2010) to the MIRAC members. During his presentation, Dr. Suchat will also stress the need to synergize the three components (Research, Training and Policy Formulation Program) of MI.

The following proposals are selected for the MI Small Research Grant Program for Year 2007 with financial support from NZAID in the Second MIRAC meeting. The proposals are selected for the grant based on proposal content, emerging issues of the GMS and closely related to MI learning programs and policy formulation meetings.

April 23 - May 11, 2007

Project Monitoring and Evaluation (in partnership with TICA)

This learning program is based on the understanding that evaluation means different things to different people and takes place in different contexts. However, it does not accept that effective evaluation merely states that a project is 'successful' or 'unsuccessful' without considering the impact to project stakeholders. Rather, it is a tool that not only measures, but also contributes to, the success of a project. This proposed curriculum therefore focuses on participatory elements of formative and summative project evaluation.

To enhance the understanding and capacity of participants in project planning and the use of monitoring and evaluation tools, in order to assess how well a project has been achieved, the course emphasizes interdependent capacity to improve knowledge about concepts of project planning and evaluation tools used in development projects, enhance skills to implement evaluation tools for development projects, improve knowledge on how to prepare an evaluation report, and to promote communication, understanding, trust and cooperation among participants

May 21 -June 1, 2007

Assessing Sustainable Development in the GMS (In partnership with the Asia-Pacific Network for Global Change Research (APN) - CaPaBLE)

This project trains young researchers and professionals on methods and tools for analyzing issues related to global change, in an integrated and participatory way. The activities include (1) an intensive training course, (2) policy dialogue (participatory support for problem structuring and awareness-raising), and (3) dissemination (transfer of scientific knowledge to the policy sector and the general public). Training is conducted by internationally renowned experts in the fields of integrated analysis, participatory research and sustainability research.

Participants will be trained to engage in global change research by applying practical, problem-oriented and policy-relevant approaches. The issues dealt with in the project are concerned with aspects of global change, including land use and land cover change, food and water security and agricultural practices. There is an emphasis on the socio-economic drivers of global change and on intervention in social systems for sustainable development. Participants will be able to conduct and do sustainability research independently and identify the relevant national sustainability issues while suggesting research strategies to tackle these issues.

June 19 - 27, 2007

Combating Human Trafficking (in partnership with UNIAP)

The course is designed for those already employed with ministries or agencies responsible in whole or in part of counter trafficking measures. However, the course also recognizes the relatively recent emergence of human trafficking as a priority for governments and civil society. It therefore does not exclude those with little or no counter-trafficking experience, being designed as an entry-level or 'gateway' program for those ministries or agencies needed to improve policy and practice in the area. Prior to acceptance on the course, prospective participants will need to complete a letter of application, approved and signed by their line managers. Their line managers should also undertake assessment and support of each participant with a 'Learning Implementation Plan' developed during the course and implemented upon return to their workplace. Prior to arrival participants will also need to provide or prepare an initial assessment of human trafficking in their own countries.

This projective is to provide a thorough grounding in the subject of human trafficking in order to equip participants with the knowledge, it requires the understanding and skills to influence and enhance policy and practice in countering human trafficking in the GMS

The course will be participative and adopt learner-centered approaches in order to achieve its course objectives. Modules will normally be delivered by a Trainer and Subject Trainer, suited to the particular module. The Trainer will take responsibility for the coordination of the learning process, the assessment of the learning and the evaluation of the program, while each Subject Trainer will be responsible for the content of their respective modules.

This course is intended to be delivered by those with expertise in training and knowledge of human trafficking, or a combination of both, within the delivery team. Module descriptions and training plans therefore assume prior knowledge and expertise in a range of training delivery methods and modes within the team, and do not offer a step-by-step approach to methods such as small group work, case studies and role plays for example (although an overview of each method will be included in the glossary).

The course is initially aimed at mid-level government officials with English proficiency and educated to degree level, and in the GMS. This may later be extended to other relevant target groups and levels.

Alumni Activity in Kunming, South China

The picture below shows the beauty of Kunming City and also portrays the Chinese alumni social gathering. The event was recently organized by MI during the trip to Kunming.



Alumni social gathering event at Kunming, Yunnan Province of China, on March 15, 2007.



MI staff enjoying tea party at alumni event



The Kunming City



MI staff paying a visit and holding a meeting with YNPG for future cooperation on March 16, 2007



MI staff participated in the launching ceremony of tourism season of the Yunnan Province



MI staff with the Coordination Agent (CA), Yunnan Province of China on March 15, 2007.

EC impacts make Mekong Institute want Policy Dialogue!

Mekong Institute will organize a policy dialogue on Regional Support to Address Social Impacts of Infrastructure Corridors in Khon Kaen from June 14 to 16, 2007.

The implementation of Economic Corridors has developed significant changes in many sector developments in the GMS countries, such as providing countries with a more open economy, improvement on cross-border trade, and development of transportation infrastructures. Corridor-related projects particularly road infrastructure however have proved to provide negative impacts on many areas in the GMS countries. At the regional meeting on "Social and Environmental Impacts



of Economic Corridors" held at the Mekong Institute on September 18-20, 2006, the main conclusion was that information related to the impacts of economic corridors are still lacking. This was due to the lack of research especially in

areas such as the Southern Economic Corridors, where there are still ongoing developments.

Based on the result of the regional meeting, MI has conducted a research study on Economic Corridors

in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Yunnan Province of China, which are all part of the GMS. The research aimed to examine the importance of economic corridors to different stakeholders as well as identification of impacts from infrastructure projects. The preliminary findings of the research indicated that there is a wide range of issues that need to be taken into serious consideration by concerned policy makers. One example would be the integration of local communities in economic corridor development, their understanding of the meaning of economic corridor, and their entire

Performance of MI activities

During January – March 2007, four learning programs were delivered to the personnel from the GMS member countries. Total of 81 participants participated in three Professional Development Series and one Custom Course.

Training Activities	Partners	Time Period	Venue	No. of Participants
Managing Health Systems in the GMS	MI/NZAID	8 Jan - 2 Feb 2007	MI Facility	13
Combating Human Trafficking in the GMS	UNIAP	15 - 26 Jan 2007	MI Facility	30
Education Decentralization in the context of Public Sector Management Reform	UNESCO	12 Feb -2 Mar 2007	MI Facility	14
Project Feasibility and Design	ADB-PPP	12 - 23 Mar 2007	MI Facility	24

Fostering Relationships with Development Partners

MI interacts with institutional donors to strengthen relations and explore opportunities for joint cooperation in organizing capacity development activities for the people of the GMS member countries. It is anticipated that the building of strong relationships with development partners is an important step in gaining

their confidence and becoming a “partner of choice” who they would want to work with and fund in the future.

During January – March 2007, MI entered into the discussion with development partners regarding the future possible cooperation.

Development Partners	Summary of Discussion
UNESCO	Both sides agreed to cooperate on the development and implement on the training program on education sector in the next two years (2008 and 2009).
GMS Business Forum	Both of them will jointly organize a series of events relating to regional cooperation and integration for the members of the GMS National Chambers of Commerce in the next three years.
ILO	They agreed to develop the training course on transborder issues for the government agencies and private enterprises
ADB	Both of them agreed in principle to cooperate in organizing the training programs for junior level officers.
NZAID	NZAID expressed its willingness to continue support to MI in the next fiscal year (2007 - 2008).
TICA	TICA agreed in principle to support the increasing number of training courses next year.

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participation particularly for those who are directly affected by the projects.

With the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, MI is planning to organize a follow up policy dialogue to share and discuss findings related to economic corridors with the objective of promoting the regional policy dialogue. Mekong Institute also aims to promote a better understanding among the GMS governments about progress of infrastructure corridors and their impacts.

This will be an initial step to generate discussions on ways to allow stimulation of supportive policy and regulatory process to address the social impacts resulting from infrastructure corridors. The policy dialogue will provide a forum for GMS governments and concerned stakeholders to discuss specifically the ideas to strengthen policy support at different phases of Economic Corridor Development.

At the same time, wide range aspects of the research will complement to the lack of information concluded at the regional meeting on Social and

EC impacts make Mekong Institute want Policy Dialogue!

Environmental Impacts of Economic Corridors. It will also aid to the anticipation of possible changes in trends of social impacts that will occur when the entire road infrastructure is completed.

The meeting program will last for two and a half day days and will be organized at the Mekong Institute with the participation of many stakeholders including GMS government representatives, NGOs, academic institutions and public sectors.

For more information please contact

Ms. Keoamphone Souvannaphoum

Program Coordinator
Regional Policy Formulation Program

e-mail :
keoamphone@mekonginstitute.org

Ms. La Thi Nga
Program Assistant

Regional policy Formulation Program

e-mail :
nga@mekonginstitute.org

MI activities in pictures

UNESCO, MI Learning Course Gets Underway in Khon Kaen, Thailand



Ms. Dominique-Christine Altner, Chief of Education Policy and Reform Unit, UNESCO Bangkok, presided over the opening ceremony of the learning program on "Education Decentralization in the Context of Public Sector Management Reform", at the MI conference room. The course was jointly organized by UNESCO Bangkok and Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen, Thailand from February 12 – March 2, 2007.

Project Feasibility and Design



The Graduation Ceremony and closing day for the learning program entitled "Project Feasibility and Design" was sponsored by Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management and organized by Mekong Institute from March 12 - 23, 2007. Pictured above, are 24 participants from the GMS countries on March 23, attending the closing ceremony which was presided over by the Chairman of the Mekong Institute Steering Committee, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, whom is seated 4th from right.

Education Decentralization in the Context of Public Sector Management Reform



MI Director Dr. Suchat Katima, (seated center), presided over the closing ceremony of the four - week learning course entitled, "Education Decentralization in the Context of Public Sector Management Reform", which was jointly organized by UNESCO and MI in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The course was held for 14 participants from the six GMS countries from February 12 - March 2, 2007.

Mekong Institute Foundation Committee Meeting,



H.E. Dr. Tej Bunnag, (seated 2nd from the left), Advisor to the Office of His Majesty's Principal Private Secretary and Mekong Institute (MI) Foundation Committee Chairman on March 23, 2007 chaired the MI Annual Foundation Committee Meeting held at the MI Facility, Khon Kaen University. With him, are Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, seated 2nd from right, Chairman of The Mekong Institute Steering Committee (MISC), Dr. Suchat Katima, standing 2nd from right, the MI Director, and the foundation committee members.

Opening Ceremony for 'Project Feasibility and Design Course' held at MI



Here, with MI Director, Dr. Suchat, (seated center), are: Ms Sukhdeep Brar, seated third from left, Senior Education Specialist, Southeast Asia Regional Development, ADB; Dr Do Kim Chung, seated 2nd from left, Dr Kenneth Smith, the Lead Faculty Members, and Dr Jharendu Pant, MI Program Manager, standing 2nd from left, back row. MI Director, Dr. Suchat Katima, presided over the opening ceremony of the two - week learning program entitled "Project Feasibility and Design", which was sponsored by the GMS- Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management, and organized by MI from March 12-23, 2007 at the Conference Room I of Mekong Institute, Khon Kaen, Thailand.

Visiting a Buddhist Temple and Ubolrat Dam



18 participants and presenters who attended the learning course entitled "Education Decentralization in the Context of Public Sector Management Reform" spent their leisure time visiting Wat Phra Baht Phuparnkham, a Buddhist temple situated on top of a hill in Ubolrat District, Khon Kaen Province on February 21, 2007.

GMS NEWS



The Present Kunming City

China develops more substitute crops for opium poppy in bordering countries

KUNMING, Feb. 18 — The local Chinese authorities claimed that Southwest China's Yunnan Province had helped neighboring countries plant nearly one million mu (66,667 hectares) of cash-bearing crops as substitutes for opium poppy by the end of 2006.

An area of 284,000 mu (18,933 hectares) in the northern parts of Myanmar and Laos was planted with rubber, tea and other cash crops in 2006 at a cost of nearly 180 million yuan (22.5 million U.S. dollars), said Liu Ping, Director of the Yunnan Provincial Drug Control Committee and Vice Governor of the province.

Bordering Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, Yunnan faces a major

problem with drug trafficking from the "Golden Triangle," a notorious drug-producing area along the Mekong River delta, including Myanmar and Laos.

China has helped neighboring countries to grow alternative cash crops to relieve their dependence on growing poppy. Last year, the drug-control authorities of Yunnan and neighboring countries, such as Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam, jointly destroyed 185 mu (12.3 hectares) of opium poppy, according to Dr. Liu, director of the Yunnan provincial drug control committee.

They also cracked 18 drug-related cases, seized 52 suspects and 953.6 kg of drugs, Liu said. (Xinhua)

Bird Flu Strikes Poultry in Northeast Mekong River

BANGKOK, March 19 — Nearly 30 poultries in Thailand's northeastern province of Mukdahan along the Mekong River died of avian flu, according to the Department of Livestock Development.

Poultry, including native chickens, Muscovy ducks, and turkeys were found dead at the occupational training centre in Mukdahan municipality near the Thai-Lao friendship bridge, according to Nirandorn Ungtrakulsuk, director of the provincial bureau of disease control and veterinary services.

Mr. Nirandorn said that lab test results confirmed on Sunday that the dead poultry were infected with the H5N1 virus, which is a specific kind of bird flu virus.

Mr. Nirandorn also indicated that, following this incident, the Mukdahan official, and provincial

animal husbandry officials culled 173 poultry in the area on March 15. The province has banned any movement of poultry in the radius of 10 kilometres and has imposed strict measures to control moving poultry across the border.

All areas in the province have been checked to prevent any outbreak of bird flu. Although there has been no reported human infection so far, the Public Health Ministry has stepped up surveillance to prevent bird flu infections to people in the province.

Director-General Pirom Srichan of the Livestock Development Department said the situation is not worrisome because it's still under control in line with the bird flu surveillance measures implemented by the department since January. (TNA)

Mekong Region consuls confer on trade, tourism in Chiang Rai

CHIANG RAI, March 8 — China-based consuls general of six greater Mekong region countries convened in Thailand's northernmost province of Chiang Rai to find solution to commercial problems and measures to serve commercial and tourism expansion between the countries.

Based in Kunming of China's central Yunnan province, the consuls general and other public officials and private business representatives were from Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Led by Chiang Rai Deputy Governor Vorachai Uttamachai, the Thai delegation included officials from the Customs Department, the Ministry of Transport and representatives from the private sectors.

The Chinese delegation was led by Jin Chen, Foreign Relations Director of the Yunnan provincial Economics Affairs Division.

A central agenda item was the problem of transporting freight

along the Mekong River from Chiang Rai's Chiang Saen District to Jinghong in Xishuangbanna of Yunnan during the dry season, starting this month.

Thailand and China agreed that it is necessary to accelerate the construction of a bridge connecting Chiang Khong District of Chiang Rai and Huayxai of Laos. Once completed, the new bridge will facilitate the cargo transport between Thailand and China, especially during the dry season when the water level in the Mekong River cannot support larger freight carriers.

Moreover, the new bridge will promote more tourism among the participating countries. Thai and Chinese officials will inspect the bridge construction site as well as road construction sites on Friday. After that, the Chinese delegation together with consuls of the six countries will proceed with their itinerary to Laos. (TNA)

Laos, IOM sign counter trafficking pact

VIENTIANE, Feb 28 — Geneva-based International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Lao PDR Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) and the Lao Women's Union (LWU) on Tuesday signed an agreement relating to the return and reintegration of Lao trafficking victims and other vulnerable Lao migrants trafficked within the Mekong Region.

Lao women and children are mainly trafficked to Thailand, where they are often exploited as forced labour in sweatshops, factories and as domestic workers. Since 2001, IOM and the Lao MSLW have worked together under a regional project to return and reintegrate 807 such victims.

IOM has also worked with the MSLW to establish a transit centre for returnees and build capacity in the Lao PDR in areas including integration assistance to returnees, in partnership with the LWU.

Tuesday's agreement — a formal Memorandum of Understanding — is expected to facilitate and strengthen the

implementation of joint activities between the migration agency, the ministry and the women's union in return and reintegration assistance for trafficked and other vulnerable Lao women and children in line with Lao PDR government policy.

Cooperation is expected to focus on three areas, including travel funding for the Lao government and other agencies to send back and helping to reintegrate the trafficked and other vulnerable Lao women and children.

The IOM will also help in staff development and training for the Lao Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and the Lao Women's Union staff specifically to respond and deal with key challenges related to trafficking reintegration assistance, and building national and provincial victim referral networks.

The agreement also covers research activities relating to practical return and reintegration concerns of trafficked and other vulnerable migrant women and children and their communities. (IOM/TNA)