



Mekong Institute Business Plan 2007 – 2010

As Approved by MI Steering Committee on
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Introduction

Guided by the Charter, Mekong Institute 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.

MI is a living organism that has to grow or being marginalized in this GMS arena. The remaining three years is crucial to MI future. To achieve improved capacity for regional cooperation and transform MI from an assistance program to a sustainable knowledge services provider, 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/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 formulated to move 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.

I. Synergizing MI Core Programs and Services

At present, there are three MI Programs which are related but running separately. These are: a) Learning Program which includes the provision of standard Professional Development Series and custom courses; b) Research Program which provides training and research grants to researchers and scholars in the GMS countries to conduct GMS-focused researches based on the recommendations of MI Research Advisory Committee; and c) Policy Formulation Program which organizes Policy Makers Senior Consultation Series on GMS hot issues.

With this new direction, all three components will be merged to become one MI Learning & Development Program. All resources (finance, personnel, facilities, and network) 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 advices in transnational/regional project management, socio-economic impacts of economic corridors, and regional cooperation and integration.

Research services (field researches and learning resource center), from now on, will directly focus on GMS topics that contribute to the effectiveness of the institute's learning and policy advice programs. These applied researches will generate information, insights, case studies and policy alternatives that can be adapted into materials that ensure the maximum outcome from the learning programs and events.

Policy Dialogues will focus on areas of great interest to the GMS countries of which MI has knowledge and expertise on. Each forum will be supported by applied researches, draft policy statement based on national consultations, up-to-date knowledge and innovation from the learning programs, and expert facilitation. A taskforce comprised of MI staff from different functions will be assigned to prepare and organize each policy dialogue. The taskforce will be responsible for conducting necessary stakeholder consultations, gathering information and research, and preparing briefing materials well in advance. There will be strong emphasis on output from each consultation in the form of published proceedings, journals and/or joint-declarations. Further follow up to each consultation will include continued research on contentious items and support for each country in the consideration and formulation of national policies.

Learning Programs: Instead of offering a wide-range of courses, the learning programs will focus on four thematic areas that MI has competitive advantage, i.e. transnational or regional project management, regional trade and logistics, public reform and governance, and regional cooperation. Research services and policy dialogue series will further develop MI's capacity to offer applied learning programs and make MI as a knowledge hub on the four areas.

II. Building up MI's competitive advantage

1. Developing and Maintaining MI Core Products

Commenced as Assistance Program, 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 economic transition (from centrally planned/control economy to free market enterprises.) Courses like Leadership in Competitive Enterprise, Good Governance and Public Reform, 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, MI core products and services have to be changed accordingly. To become a self-sustaining institution during this fast regional development stage, MI has to position itself as the "best" in delivering MI "core products & services" which meet the current and future needs of MI stakeholders.

Anchored on MI competitive advantage as GMS governed organization devoted to capacity development and regional cooperation, all efforts (research, policy advice, and learning programs) must be focused on continuing development and promotion of new/emerging 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:

- a. Transnational/Regional Development Project Management;
- b. Public Reform and Governance;
- c. Transboundary social and economic cooperation; and
- d. Trade, transportation and trade facilitation

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 (policy makers, middle level managers, planners, scholars). MI will make strategic alliances with key regional players (e.g. ACMECS, GMS-BF, UNESCO, ILO, IOM, GTZ, MRC and SDC) in designing and organizing training courses, participatory workshops, consultative meetings, policy dialogues and regional forums on the above areas.

2. Facilitation as MI Core Competency.

In 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, we must progress from individual skill development to a focus placed 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 service delivered to the client. All of MI's services (Learning Programs, Research, Policy Advice, Custom Courses, Facilities Rentals, Partnership and Consultations) 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.

- a. Developing structures and strategies within an organization which support a facilitative approach to their services. While technical team of MI is pursuing excellence in program design and development, all MI administrative personnel are developing their facilitation knowledge, skills and attitude. They will be trained and given accountability to manage all non-technical services to customers. In the long run, everybody in MI must acquire "Facilitation" skills and have added value to the institute.
- b. Developing different learning and servicing packages to suit different groups of customers. At present, MI courses are highly structured and each requires residential training for four weeks. It must be noted that some hot issues are better addressed in a public forum or consultative workshop than in a training course. Different training and information packages should be developed. These may include:
 - Executive Package for Decision Makers to be delivered in the form of "Consultative Meeting cum Learning" workshop or policy dialogue forum for one – three days.

- Intensive Package for Managers to be delivered in a highly participatory approach for 5-10 days.
- Advanced Package for Planners/Specialists for one- two weeks.
- Standard Package for four - six weeks.

In addition to the core programs, MI expertise and facilities will be made available to all other custom courses and events.

- c. Increase MI program and services delivery. MI is improving its residential facilities to enable it to accommodate three learning programs simultaneously, i.e., three function rooms and 38 residential accommodations. MI will forge agreement with Khoun Mor Hotel and Center for Research on Plurality in the Mekong Region of Khon Kaen University to use their facilities to accommodate more participants and events if needs arise.
- d. To compliment our residential training programs, MI will offer out-of- campus training and consultancy services to our clients in the region through to-be established sub-institutes in other GMS countries and partnership with other players in the region. This will not only expand MI services but also expose MI professional staff to professional consultancy works.

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

MI will actively forge strategic alliances with other training and development institutions in the region. Potential partners include: Australian Mekong Research Center, the Mekong Learning Initiative Network of Oxfam, ITD of Chula, MekongInfo of GTZ, SEANAFE of ICRAF, IW:LEARN of the World Bank, RECOFTC of Kasetsart, and InWEnt of Germany, Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP) of Vietnam and GMTEC of New Zealand. By working with strategic alliances, more resources can be mobilized to timely respond to the needs of the customers. At the same time, these joint projects and researches provide very good opportunities for MI's staff to work and exchange experiences with other professionals in the region. The collaboration may include:

- a. Co-organizing learning programs, forums or public events
- b. Joint researches and field activities
- c. Joint project development and implementation
- d. Structured learning exchange and resource network

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, 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.

MI has also developed a training program on “Education Decentralization in the Context of Public Sector Management Reform” together with UNESCO – Bangkok.

In the next two years, under this cooperation, UNESCO will support the program with training curriculum, materials and resource persons while MI will seek funds to support the cost of participation of approximately 40 participants per year.

IV. Establishing integrated relationships with regional and national development institutions.

Most of the development projects in GMS have allocated substantial amount of funds for capacity development of their human resources and counterparts. MI should make every effort to become their regional capacity development partners and offer to carryout their planned regional events/training courses. With the assistance of members of MI Council and Steering Committee in the GMS countries, MI management will establish integrated relationship with target organizations/projects. Some possible clients are: Mekong River Commission and the four National Mekong Committees, ADB/WB funded projects, and several international organizations assisted projects (Danida, NZAID, AUSAID, JICA, UNDP, GTZ, SIDA, SDC, EU, etc.)

At present, MI has established integrated relationship with UNIAP to run a series of regional workshop on Combating Human Trafficking in the GMS; ADB-PPP to organize a course on Project Feasibility and Design for middle and senior officials; and with Entrepreneur Development Center of India on Enhancing Entrepreneurship in the GMS countries.

V. Young GMS Facilitator Program

Human Resources Development encompasses and integrates all aspects of the basin development, such as enabling environmental, legislative, institutional, and organizational arrangements, structures, policies, processes and procedures. All of these are vital for the progress of the Mekong Institute. Since 2003, the MI has been facing increasing challenges that accompany the changing of MI status from being a development assistance program to an independent organization after the signing of the Mekong Institute Charter. The capacity of the MI's human resources to initiate, implement, and absorb change appears to be one of the most critical factors in achieving its Mission.

Facilitating regional development, cooperation and integration requires a unique set of skills which cannot be taught in school but caught through structured learning and working experience in regional settings. At present MI has 27 personnel and only seven of whom are involved in planning and coordinating learning programs. This limited capacity resulted in the delay in program implementation, deteriorating quality of learning program curricula, methodologies and contents and losing competitiveness as regional capacity building institutions.

To enable MI to provide quality human resource development services in the GMS, MI has to build it own capacity first. Simultaneously with other developments mentioned above, MI needs to focus on how to generate a group of young professionals drawn from the riparian countries, who can work on regional

development and cooperation issues in the future. Otherwise, progress will be heavily dependent on external consultants, which is detrimental to the organization in the long term.

The Mekong Institute proposes to initiate Young GMS Facilitator Program in August 2007. The project aims to provide professional advancement opportunities for twelve young professionals from Mekong countries in facilitating GMS human resource development program through a structured training program and work assignment at MI, side-by-side with experienced regional and international experts. After the intensive hand-on training program for six months, those who acquired required competencies would be employed by MI as “Junior Program Facilitators” and be assigned to work with MI mentors for further developing their skills. It is anticipated that by mid 2010, these young professionals will become professional human resource development program facilitators with extensive regional development and cooperation perspectives.