

Implementing the Strategic Framework

Making It Happen

The strategic thrusts and operational priorities of the GMS Program will be implemented through the sector forums, working groups, and the strengthened national secretariats. The critical measures for implementation are as follows:

Developing a Rolling Operational Program

To achieve its desired outcomes, the ten-year strategic framework for the GMS Program will require a highly focused set of activities. The most essential steps are: (i) to identify priority subregional projects that support the strategic thrusts; and (ii) prepare a rolling investment and TA program for implementing these projects. A *comprehensive development matrix* will be developed to serve as a basic document for planning and programming of subregional projects. This will include projects previously endorsed by the GMS working groups and forums.

Priority

subregional

projects that

support the

Program's

strategic

thrusts will be

identified.

Multisector and large-scale, the flagship programs represent major advances in regional cooperation.

To further focus the Program, **'flagship'** programs have been identified. These are multisector, large-scale initiatives representing major advances in regional cooperation. Eleven flagship programs⁴ are listed below, the components of which are detailed in Appendix 2.

- North-South Economic Corridor**
- East-West Economic Corridor**
- Southern Economic Corridor**
- Telecommunications Backbone**
- Regional Power Interconnection and Trading Arrangements**
- Facilitating Cross-Border Trade and Investment**
- Enhancing Private Sector Participation and Competitiveness**
- Developing Human Resources and Skills Competencies**
- Strategic Environment Framework**
- Flood Control and Water Resource Management**
- GMS Tourism Development**

Following the endorsement by the GMS Ministerial Conference of the ten-year GMS Strategic Framework, GMS working groups and forums will start discussions to prepare detailed implementation plans for the flagship programs. These plans will assign the primary responsibilities for project implementation, and identify the respective roles of individual GMS governments, ADB, other development partners, NGOs, and the private sector.

⁴ The Eleventh GMS Ministerial Conference held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 23-25 September 2002 endorsed the inclusion of GMS Tourism Development as the eleventh flagship program.

Mobilizing Resources

The implementation of the ten-year strategy will also require a concerted effort among the GMS countries in mobilizing resources. The GMS governments must ensure that the national components of flagship programs get priority in their public investment programs, whether the funds come from domestic sources or development assistance. GMS governments should also provide counterpart funds in support of investment and technical assistance (TA), in keeping with their commitment to the goals and priority projects of the GMS Program.

Given the dwindling resources for TA grants, the GMS could establish a financing mechanism that will give grants to project preparation (feasibility studies) and capacity building projects. ADB, in its role as catalyst and supporter of the GMS Program, will assist in financing as well as mobilizing resources for selected priority projects. Cofinancing arrangements with bilateral and multilateral donors will also be strengthened through partnership arrangements and other mechanisms.

*GMS
governments
must ensure
that flagship
programs get
priority in
each
government's
public
investment
program.*

Building Strategic Alliances and Partnerships

The scarcity of ODA grant funds and the growing number of economic cooperation initiatives for the subregion all the more call for better coordination among development partners. Economic cooperation initiatives for the GMS include the ASEAN Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC), the Comprehensive Program for Indochina Development (Japan), and the Mekong River Commission. Partner organizations that have been actively involved in the GMS Program include: the World Bank (energy, transport and environment); United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia

GMS Program initiatives play an important role in facilitating economic integration and narrowing the development gap. and the Pacific (ESCAP) (trade, investment and tourism); UNDCP (drug prevention and control); United Nations Environment Programme (environment); and European Union (environment, human development and governance). Bilateral development agencies of Japan, Australia, Nordic countries, Germany, France and United Kingdom (UK), among others, continue to be strategic partners in the GMS Program.

The relationship between the GMS Program and ASEAN is of special importance, as five of the six GMS countries are also members of ASEAN. During the 34th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi (July 2001), foreign ministers called for the narrowing of the development gap between its original and new members in order to facilitate ASEAN economic integration. GMS Program initiatives play an important role in this regard. Close coordination with ASEAN, especially in planning and implementing transport, energy, trade and drug control initiatives, is vital.

To resolve the “Mekong congestion,” the Sixth Ministerial Conference in August 1996 concluded that ADB should coordinate economic cooperation initiatives involving the subregion. The Tenth Ministerial Conference reaffirmed ADB’s lead coordinating role. During the consultations on the strategic framework, member countries suggested the preparation of a *comprehensive development matrix* to help coordination. This would highlight the priorities for regional cooperation, as well as the current initiatives of governments and donors. ADB will consult with donors on the development matrix. Donor consultation meetings will also explore possible modalities of assistance for GMS priority projects, including the possible establishment of a GMS development facility.

Strengthening Capacities and Institutions

The implementation of the strategic framework entails complex and comprehensive tasks. Some of these may involve new modalities of cooperation. The institutional framework for the program will thus need to be strengthened. This can be achieved through: (i) an expanded role for the GMS Senior Officials Meeting to address cross-sector linkages and economic corridor initiatives; (ii) establishment of sector secretariats to involve member countries more in the management of GMS working groups and forums; and (iii) establishment of national GMS secretariats to serve as focal points for all GMS-related activities. Technical assistance will help GMS countries to respond to these expanded responsibilities.

The member countries' ownership of the GMS Program in the next ten years will be strengthened. Ownership by member countries has been a long-standing principle of the GMS Program, but the GMS Summit of Leaders, scheduled for November 2002, will strengthen it further. Strong ownership is essential for effective and efficient implementation of priority subregional projects.

Strong ownership of the Program and genuine participation by all stakeholders are important in ensuring success.

Broadening the Scope of Participation

Genuine participation by all stakeholders — not just government but civil society, NGOs, the private sector, academe and the donor community as well — is needed in the management and coordination of the Program. This means stakeholders are not just consulted, but involved as joint partners in the development and implementation of policies, strategies and projects. GMS sector forums and working groups will henceforth invite greater participation from key stakeholders. Because of this, the structure and process of the working groups/fo-

Member countries should agree on and convey to key stakeholders their vision and goals for subregional economic cooperation.

rums, senior officials' meetings (SOM), and the Ministerial conference will have to be improved.

Public Relations

Improved public relations is important to the successful implementation of the GMS strategic framework. Better understanding of the vision, goals and strategic thrusts of the GMS Program is vital.

Information dissemination

As noted earlier, member countries should agree upon and convey to key stakeholders their vision and goals for subregional economic cooperation. Public relations tools need to be developed for this purpose. These may include, among others: (i) introductory brochures; (ii) sector studies that focus on investment opportunities; (iii) press kits and press releases; and (iv) project profiles. The public relations strategy should also include information exchanges with journalists, potential investors and development agencies.

Community relations

To support broader participation, public relations must increase community participation. Communities affected by development projects should be fully involved in all stages of planning, design and implementation. This will require greater information sharing with community members. Having project summaries in the local language, for one, would be very helpful.

Monitoring and Evaluating Performance

Projects under the GMS Program complement national projects. As such, their exact contribution to development objectives (e.g., poverty reduc-

tion) is very difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, broad indicators should be identified for assessing progress, however generally, in achieving the program's vision and goals.

Monitoring and evaluation at the project level is conventional and straightforward. However, with regional cooperation projects, it is difficult to measure cross-border benefits and costs and their distribution among participating countries. This requires new capacities and skills for project appraisal and evaluation.

The GMS Ministerial Conference, as the highest decision-making body of the GMS Program, should ensure that program priorities are adjusted in line with developing needs. GMS working groups and forums must monitor project implementation and resolve issues that hamper implementation – especially those regarding flagship programs.

- specific product categories (including volume and value traded, tariff and non-tariff measures, and factor costs of production), industrial facilities (e.g., export processing zones), investment incentives, business-related services (e.g., banking, insurance, shipping and travel), and existing and potential business opportunities;
- construction of data bases for trade and market access conditions, data base management, design and implementation of an Internet-based searchable data base application; and
- training components for systems development.

Broad indicators will be identified for assessing progress and evaluating performance.