

SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS

Greater Mekong Subregion Seventh Meeting of the Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-7) Hanoi, Viet Nam 17-18 May 2006

Introduction

1. The Seventh Meeting of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-7) was held in Hanoi, Viet Nam on 17-18 May 2006. The Ministry of Education and Training of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam hosted the meeting in cooperation with the Asian Development Bank (ADB).
2. The theme of WGHRD-7 was *“Connectivity and HRD”*. The overall objective of the meeting was to further promote GMS cooperation in HRD. The specific objectives were: (i) to review current GMS regional and country level initiatives in health, education, and labor; (ii) identify emerging subregional challenges and issues in HRD; (iii) discuss and identify new topics for subregional cooperation; and (iv) make relevant recommendations to higher authorities in the GMS.
3. The meeting was held in plenary and break-out sessions and consisted of the following sessions: opening session; plenary session covering connectivity and HRD, country statements, and special presentations on selected cross-cutting HRD issues; simultaneous break-out group sessions on health, education, and labor and migration; plenary session for presentation of break-out group reports and expansion of research networks; and closing session. The Agenda/Program of the meeting is attached as Appendix 1.
4. The participants included government representatives from the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Union of Myanmar, the Royal Thai Government, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Also present were representatives of multilateral and bilateral organizations, as well as regional academic and research institutions. The list of participants is attached as Appendix 2.
5. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Nguyen Duc Toan, Senior Expert, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Education and Training, Viet Nam, and Ms. Shireen Lateef, Director, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB. Ms. Lateef was assisted by Mr. Myo Thant, Principal Economist Regional Cooperation, Social Sectors Division, Central and West Asia Regional Department, ADB.

Opening Session

6. H.E. Dr. Tran Van Nhung, Vice-Minister of Education and Training, extended on behalf of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, his warm welcome to all the participants. He noted the achievements under the GMS Program in various sectors. He stressed the need to work out specific cross-cutting policies and measures in order to improve the quality of human resource to ensure the prosperity of the GMS countries.

He emphasized the need for collective efforts and in investing in human resource to address the many challenges in the region. He was pleased to note that many bilateral and multilateral agencies and donors had shown their commitment and interest in supporting the GMS countries by coming to the meeting. He said that Hanoi University, established in 1906, has just observed its 100th anniversary celebration. He expressed his thanks to ADB for co-organizing the meeting with Viet Nam and invited the participants to visit cultural sites in Hanoi. Finally, he wished everyone a fruitful and successful meeting. A copy of his welcome remarks appears as [Appendix 3](#).

7. Ms. Shireen Lateef, Director, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB, welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of ADB and expressed her thanks to the Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam for hosting the meeting. She mentioned the recent realignment of regional departments in the ADB to more effectively implement the Medium Term Strategy for 2006-2010 that will mainstream regional cooperation and integration as one of ADB's key instruments in pursuing its goal of poverty reduction in the developing member countries. She recalled the broad guidance given by the 2nd GMS Summit held in Kunming, PRC in July 2005, particularly on the strengthening of social infrastructure in the subregion including human and institutional capacity building, education and training, community-based actions, and health programs. She highlighted the theme of WGHRD-7 in the context of the expectations for the meeting to closely examine the emerging issues and challenges attendant to increasing connectivity in the subregion, identify new topics for subregional cooperation, and come up with substantive recommendations to higher authorities in the GMS on how to further accelerate and expand subregional cooperation in HRD. A copy of her opening remarks appears as [Appendix 4](#).

Session 1

Connectivity and HRD: Issues and Implications

8. Mr. Myo Thant, Principal Economist Regional Cooperation, Social Sectors Division, Central and West Asia Regional Department, ADB, discussed increasing connectivity in the subregion; the intermediate benefits of connectivity as well as the challenges to HRD; achievements since WGHRD-6; significant developments in the GMS Program; HRD issues in the other priority sectors of GMS cooperation such as agriculture, tourism, transport, and environment; and expectations for WGHRD-7. He also discussed the many challenges to HRD arising from increasing regional cooperation and connectivity and how regional cooperation could contribute meaningfully towards meeting these challenges which include (i) emergence of a new political and economic environment; (ii) the need for complementary initiatives to improve competitiveness of labor and efficiency in the movement of labor; (iii) the need to address negative externalities; (iv) the need to efficiently manage the process of change; and (v) the need to provide equitable opportunities for participating in regional cooperation. He stressed that national policies were key but that regional cooperation had a major role to play. Regional cooperation in HRD was facilitated by the existence of strong political will, flexible policies, and the interest of many development partners. Mr. Thant's presentation appears as [Appendix 5](#).

Country Statements

9. Representatives from each of the six GMS countries expressed on behalf of their respective delegations, their thanks to the Government of Viet Nam and ADB for hosting and organizing the meeting. The representatives presented their respective Country Statements in alphabetical order. Their presentations are summarized below. Full copies of the country statements are in [Appendix 6](#).

Cambodia

10. Mr. Leng Tong, Director of Labor Health Department, Ministry of Labor and Vocational Training, Kingdom of Cambodia, presented the country's socio-economic indicators and the overarching strategies and policies covering the education, labor and health sectors. He discussed the priority issues, challenges, and areas of work under each sub-sector, and presented recommendations on possible GMS initiatives concerning education in cross-border areas, GMS regional labor skills standards, GMS regional open university and distance learning, joint GMS education policy and operational research initiatives.

PRC

11. Mr. Wu Guoqi, Deputy Director, IFI Division III, International Department, Ministry of Finance, PRC, stressed the strong political support given by the 2nd GMS Summit to the expansion and deepening of subregional cooperation in HRD. He mentioned PRC's efforts in promoting cooperation in health and in supporting the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management Phase 2 to which a US\$500,000 contribution from the PRC Fund has been allocated. He discussed strategic and policy issues and challenges in HRD and stressed the need for GMS countries to designate a national focal point for HRD. He also shared ideas on new directions and priorities in health (institutionalization of the GMS Forum on CDC, development of a GMS 5-year action plan for health, and cooperation in traditional medicine), education (GMS distant-learning program, GMS scholarship program, and PPP institutional network), and labor (GMS labor sector program, exchanges in employment promotion and social security, and protection of economic migrants). PRC also extended offers of assistance to the other GMS countries through the expansion of the PRC-Myanmar communicable diseases control training program, financial support to PPP and participation of Chinese academic institutions in PPP's expanded academic institutions network, and provision of training to GMS labor officials. PRC identified the following issues for higher authorities in the GMS to consider: coverage of HRD, focus of initiatives in each sub-sector, and overlap with other regional programs.

Lao PDR

12. Mr. Sisamone Sithirajvongsa, Deputy Director-General, Department of Planning and International Cooperation, Ministry of Education, Lao PDR, made the first presentation for Lao PDR. He discussed the national policy on HRD, past achievements, major programs and projects being pursued to serve national and global agendas, recommendations for GMS HRD-related activities, and challenges concerning education and cross-cutting concerns including HIV/AIDS prevention, gender equality, human trafficking and labor migration.

13. Mr. Phouthone Vangkonevilay, Deputy Director of Health, Personnel Department, Ministry of Health, Lao PDR made the second presentation, focusing on the health sector. He discussed the progress of GMS activities and health status as of 2006, the weakness and challenges including severe shortage of rural health workers and low quality of services, inadequate health information, and shortage of field epidemiologists for public health emergencies. He outlined the strategic directions up to the year 2010, namely (i) control and reduction of communicable diseases including HIV/AIDS, SARS, and avian flu; (ii) the strengthening of community participation and sector-wide coordination approach in health activities; and (iii) human resources training on management and technical aspects for all levels, especially in district and health centers. For future areas of cooperation, he identified communicable diseases control, training and institutional networking in the GMS, information networking and sharing, and operational research.

Myanmar

14. Mr. U Win, Rector, University of East Yangon, Ministry of Education, Myanmar, highlighted the priority given by Myanmar to HRD and described the different strategic approaches adopted to meet the challenges since the mid-1990s and particularly under the 30-year Long-Term Education Development Plan. He discussed the country's national and international cooperation programs to strengthen and enhance the quality of and access to education in Myanmar. He suggested strategies for collaboration in the subregion, including the transfer of credits among Asian universities, exchange of students and scholars, collaborative research programs, exchange of academic materials and information, signing of MOUs/MOAs among ministries, and the establishment of a funding system for exchange of students and scholars for collaborative research.

Thailand

15. Mr. Apichart Phetcharatana, Deputy Director General, Thailand International Cooperation Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand, stated that the Royal Thai Government considers the sharing of knowledge, experience and best practices to be a means of achieving closer cooperation, strengthening development cooperation among developing countries, and laying down the firm foundation for sustainable development. He mentioned various training courses (on skills standards, social security system, productivity for the workforce, and logistics) that Thailand is organizing or prepared to organize. He recalled three proposals on labor discussed at WGHRD-6 that have not yet been implemented, namely, (i) training on working environment assessment for labor inspectors in the GMS; (ii) training on labor standards; and (iii) regional conference on labor and labor mobility in the GMS. He mentioned that a new proposal on training on logistics would be discussed during the break-out group session. He said that in education, Thailand is providing technical cooperation to other GMS countries in the fields of vocational education and career development. In health, Thailand has offered training courses and study visits for health staff from GMS countries in the areas of primary health care, medical and nursing services, surveillance, HIV/AIDS prevention and control, laboratory quality improvement, and emergency medical services. He proposed the following areas where partnerships with interested parties could be pursued: HIV/AIDS prevention and control, general communicable diseases prevention and control, non-communicable diseases prevention and control, road traffic accident, health care development system, and policy and planning on human resource for health.

Viet Nam

16. In his country statement, Mr. Nguyen Duc Toan referred to the generous support received by Viet Nam from ADB for HRD initiatives and the potential additional resources to support GMS activities from other development partners. He stressed the importance of raising public awareness among the GMS population about GMS cooperation and its importance and benefits. He stressed that the working group should be able to determine what could realistically be implemented by way of regional cooperation.

Discussions

17. In the ensuing discussions, the participants identified other issues that the Working Group could examine including the role of the private sector in HRD; information systems, operational research and their application for better efficiency; initiatives to address labor concerns such as skills development, social security and labor protection; the strengthening of partnerships and networking; and educational reforms. Participants also stressed the need for the Working Group to identify the mutual areas of cooperation and partnerships in order to address the many issues and challenges in the HRD sector.

Session 3 *Cross-cutting HRD Issues in the GMS*

Phnom Penh Plan Phase II

18. Ms. Sukhdeep Brar, Senior Education Specialist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB, presented a status report on the Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management (PPP) Phase II. She discussed the 2005 achievements under the PPP's various components including the learning programs, fellowship program, learning resource center, journal and newsletter, website, research network, advisory board, core faculty, and alumni program. She also discussed the new PPP activities lined up for 2006 including new learning programs, research program, Distinguished Speakers Series, Development Management Dialogue, alumni gatherings in GMS countries, and impact assessment. She outlined the financing contributions to PPP amounting to US\$ 5,073,000 from ADB, New Zealand, PRC, and France.

International Organization for Migration Presentation

19. Mr. Federico Soda, IOM, made a presentation on Migration in the GMS – Causes and Challenges. He noted that intra-regional migration was increasing and would continue to increase as countries in the GMS became increasingly interlinked. He discussed a number of key regional issues including negative implications of unregulated migration, potential benefits from regional collaboration, challenge of maintaining migration benefits for both sending and receiving countries, protection and well-being of migrants, socio-economic implications of migration, remittances, need for timely information on migration trends, importance of bilateral and multi-lateral dialogue and cooperation under existing frameworks such as the COMMIT and Bali process - particularly in dealing with counter-trafficking and smuggling, and the need for regional dialogue and cooperation involving all key stakeholders. He also discussed ongoing

initiatives of IOM in terms of support to governments in the implementation of Memoranda of Understanding, advocacy on migration issues, capacity building activities, and regional activities to improve labor migration process.

Standardization of Skills Competencies in the GMS

20. Ms. Sukhdeep Brar, ADB presented a concept paper on Standardization of Skills Competencies in the GMS. The paper proposed the establishment of an accreditation mechanism within the GMS that would facilitate the acquisition of standardized and recognized skills and the movement of skilled labor across borders and also support employment and minimize exploitation of labor. The contemplated initiative would contribute to labor market flexibility, the development of integrated production, and the strengthening of regional training institutions. She emphasized the need for the collaboration and support of development partners in moving forward the proposed initiative. The concept would be further discussed by the break-out group session.

GMS HIV/AIDS Strategy

21. Ms. Lisa Studdert, Health Specialist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB, presented a conceptual framework towards defining the strategic directions and opportunities for a GMS HIV/AIDS Strategy. She discussed the link between the spread of HIV/AIDS and increasing connectivity as shown in a number of studies. She also discussed the differing situation among the GMS countries that provide both opportunities and challenges for addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the costs of HIV/AIDS on human resource development in terms of illness, death, lost productivity, etc. She stressed that increasing connectivity could exacerbate the HIV/AIDS epidemic and undermine human resource development, hence the need for a strategic approach to addressing the epidemic in the subregion. She presented proposed strategic options including HIV/AIDS prevention in association with infrastructure projects, the strengthening of national and regional surveillance, capacity building for implementing national strategies, action plans and donor coordination, and knowledge development.

Discussion

22. The meeting exchanged views on the benefits and impacts of the PPP program, the inclusion of senior policy advocates as well as more junior level officials as target participants, the issue of using the English language as a unifying language to deliver the learning programs and the PPP publications and learning materials for the benefit of the participants, as well as the selection of institutional partners to further benefit the learning programs. The participants also exchanged views on the need for continuing discussions to address issues and challenges relating to labor migration, skills development, standardization of skills, issue of mutual recognition of skills and competency standards and competing interests, the protection of migrant workers to prevent exploitation and abuse, among others. Views were also exchanged on possible concrete actions that could be taken in HIV/AIDS prevention, including capacity building and use of IEC materials. In response to a question about examples of regional cooperation in HIV, a 1998 ADB technical assistance project which identified 18 regional projects that were subsequently endorsed by the GMS WGHRD was noted.

World Bank's Labor Migration Program in the GMS

23. Ms. Carmen De Paz Nieves, Social Protection Specialist, World Bank, presented the Bank's Labor Migration Program in the GMS. She discussed trends in labor migration worldwide and in the GMS. She noted that labor migration flows in the subregion reflected an incipient labor market. She also noted certain features of labor migration specific to the GMS including undocumented migration, informal channeling of remittances, internal displacement and refugees, and the close link between domestic and cross-border migration. She mentioned that the World Bank Program on Labor Migration in the GMS aims to improve knowledge on labor migration issues in the subregion with a focus on socio-economic impact on sending and receiving countries; raise awareness of decision makers on the impact of labor migration on poverty reduction; and strengthen the capacity of governments and development partners. Its expected outputs include literature review and new analysis and information. The Program is examining a number of issues focusing on Thailand (as receiving country), Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam (as sending countries), including demographics of migrants, migration process, living and working conditions of migrants, evolution of policies, impact of migration on migrants and families and sending and receiving countries. Ms. De Paz Nieves also discussed the benefits and costs of migration, the knowledge gaps, and the next steps of the program.

Regional Response and Initiatives on Avian Flu

24. Mr. Vincent de Wit, Principal Health Specialist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB, discussed the trend of emerging and re-emerging diseases worldwide (most of which are zoonotic in origin) and the phasing of human epidemics. In the case of AI, the world is currently at phase 3. He described the cumulative cases of human AI now reaching 208 cases with 115 deaths. He discussed the socio-economic costs of AI, the public health costs, and indirect costs in terms of opportunity costs. He stated that there were also benefits in terms of the AI epidemic serving as a wake up call not only to prevent AI pandemic but also other emerging diseases. He discussed 3 main challenges: prevent the development of a virus that could cause a human pandemic; plan and prepare for a pandemic; and contain cost of current and future epidemics. He stressed the need for sustained government commitment, improvement of national plans, acceleration of surveillance and response, focus on prevention, speed up community preparedness, and increase response capacity. He emphasized regional cooperation in health and the greater benefits from it compared to independent actions. He noted the high political commitment not just in the GMS but also in Asia and the Pacific and the many existing regional responses and activities for AI. He discussed ADB's response in the context of current and proposed funding initiatives to address AI. He stressed that while regional cooperation was critical, better coordination of regional responses for AI control was also required.

Discussion

25. With regard to labor and migration, suggestions were raised on the need to examine not only the economic aspects but also the socio-cultural and even the political governance aspects and to ensure that new knowledge generated feed into policy making and decisions. A question was raised on how the World Bank study would be used to address the enormous rent-seeking opportunities in this area.

26. With regard to AI, the meeting noted that even as the human health aspects are being addressed, simultaneously, the Agriculture Working Group is handling the livestock aspect of AI prevention and control. A comment on the importance of the new International Health Regulations (2005) in the context of increasing GMS connectivity was made.

27. Copies of the presentations under this Session appear in Appendix 7.

Session 4

ILO and Human Resources Development in the GMS

28. Ms. Anne Richmond, Skills Development Specialist, International Labor Organization (ILO), discussed ILO's major activities in the GMS in the areas of prevention of trafficking and child labor interventions and employment promotion and skills training. She mentioned ILO's program on trafficking in children and women involving integrated work through direct interventions and policy advice. She discussed ILO's perspective regarding migration and stated that ILO is concerned about migration being treated as a commercial, trade activity rather than integrated into effective national pro-poor and sustainable development and labor policies. She outlined ILO's responses consisting of support to countries in the development and implementation of immigration and admission policies; capacity building of governments, workers and employers to implement MOUs on employment and trafficking; research on labor market data for informed policy choices; and technical assistance to individual countries. She also discussed ILO's past and recent work in cooperation with partners such as ADB and UNESCO. She noted the perceived lack of coordination between national ministries of education and labor concerning labor and skills development issues. She discussed International Labor Standards as well as a score sheet of which countries have ratified the 8 fundamental conventions. She said that ILO assists countries in the process of ratifying or reporting on a convention, and gives policy advice on content of legislation.

Discussion

27. The meeting noted the strong commitment of countries in the region to address child labor as well as the existence of a regional framework under ASEAN + 3 to address child labor.

Crosscutting Social Concerns of Connectivity

28. Ms. Anupma Jain, Social Sector Specialist, Social Sectors Division, Southeast Asia Regional Department, ADB, stated that over the past 10-12 years, there have been clear gains for the GMS countries in trade, investment, and economic growth; however, improvements in social indicators seem to have lagged. She discussed negative externalities of connectivity, including transmission of communicable diseases, increased supply of uneducated and unskilled labor, illegal movement of people and goods, loss of traditional subsistence economies for cash economy, changes in livelihoods, and environment degradation. These negative externalities are linked to displacement and breakdown of the community and to increased risk to impoverishment and marginalization. Ms. Jain emphasized the need to achieve equity, especially for the

poor, women, children, and small ethnic groups at risk of marginalization. She discussed the outputs delivered by SEAMEO and UNESCO under ADB-funded RETA 6083 ICT and HIV/AIDS Preventive Education in the Crossborder Areas in the GMS (training curricula, teaching materials in local languages, radio dramas, clearinghouse facility on preventive HIV/AIDS education, geographic information system exercise in Thailand, among others). She also discussed the on-going ADB-funded RETA 6247 HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Reduction among Ethnic Minority Groups through Communication Strategies. She stressed that negative externalities, if unchecked, could displace the community and increase the risk of impoverishment and marginalization.

Discussion

29. The meeting noted that under an on-going ADB-funded technical assistance (RETA 6171) on Reviewing Poverty Impact of Regional Economic Integration in the GMS that is examining the impact of connectivity on border communities, initial findings show clear indications of increasing drug use among young children. The meeting also noted that a new GMS Tourism Sector Strategy is helping to mitigate women's vulnerability due to increasing tourism in the region.

30. Copies of the presentations under this session appear in [Appendix 8](#)

Session 5

Simultaneous Break-out Group Sessions on Health, Education, and Labor

31. This session featured break-out group discussions under the Health, Education and Labor sectors. Mr. Thant briefed the participants regarding the rationale, objectives, and guidelines for the simultaneous breakout sessions as appearing in [Appendix 9](#). The breakout groups were also requested to validate and update the GMS Development Matrix for HRD, including the Indicative Assistance Pipeline for HRD for 2006-2009 appearing in [Appendix 10](#).

32. Additional reference materials provided to the 3 break-out groups appear in [Appendix 11](#).

Session 6

Report of Break-out Groups:

A. Health

33. The Health Group recommended the following priorities:

- CDC (dengue, malaria, HIV/AIDS, diarrheal diseases, etc.)
- HRD/Health Systems Development including provincial and district capacity (planning, training, management), policy/financing, regional HRD
- Focus on Border Areas
- HIV/AIDS as a special focus within CDC.

34. The Group identified the following challenges for regional cooperation in health:

- Ensure political support
- More work needed to develop proposals before they could be submitted to higher levels
- Health cooperation to be placed in the context of national policies, strategies and plans
- Ensure complementarity with other regional activities and focus on what GMS can do best
- Prepare regional strategy for cooperation e.g., on HIV/AIDS, CDC in border areas
- Examine opportunity costs and focus on results
- Provide equipment for border provinces
- Staff capacity requirements, focal points
- Know-how to prepare work
- Assess what health workers can contribute and how they can be involved in planning
- Financing requirements with support of cofinanciers.

35. With regard to the process for developing regional cooperation, the Health Group outlined the following:

- There are many coordinating bodies but a mechanism for working together is still needed
- Designation of focal point in each country, task force to prepare work
- Electronic networking
- Need for health forum for coordination of regional partnership and as a regular forum for exchanging ideas/coordination
- Phased plan – from CDC to health systems development
- Activities should be within context of national policies/strategies
- Development of broad strategies for collaboration as starting point.

36. The Health Group recommended that the concept of a health forum be pursued, with CDC as the initial focus and later moving on to health system development. The health forum could discuss priority areas of cooperation such as CDC, HIV/AIDS, capacity building, and cross-border health strategy. The Group noted that the Guilin workshop on CDC in August 2005 was considered as the initial activity under the health forum and that while the forum could include similar meetings, it could also include other modalities such as electronic networking. It was also noted that the health forum could tackle topics such as CDC, capacity building, exchange of information and staff, cross-border issues, and exchange of ideas on how to do cooperation better.

B. Education

37. The Education Group recommended the following priority areas:

- Education management: quality of teachers training, sharing of experiences in school management, education management information system
- Ethnic minority issues: access to education for ethnic minority groups, equity in education
- E-learning platform and management

- Scholarships/language studies and cultural exchange; KUST offer to provide training to GMS countries with funding support from donors; language studies.

38. The Education Group recommended the designation of lead coordinator/focal person and a sector coordinator for each country for education who would coordinate with the other national ministries and with counterparts in the other GMS countries, and who would provide continuity to discussions in future WGHRD meetings.

C. Labor

39. The Labor Group identified the following needs, issues and problems:

- Skills training and skills recognition
- Security of migrant workers (international and internal); working conditions, awareness, social security
- Labor market information

40. The Labor Group made the following recommendations:

- Workshop on 4-6 December 2006, with one day added to discuss security issues of migrant workers; participants from GMS countries, development partners and other stakeholders
- Improving mechanisms for sharing information. ADB to coordinate posting of information/links on labor and migration issues from other development partners and country-specific information. ILO, IOM and WB to share link/report/information on existing conditions, legal instruments background policy paper by end 2006. Governments to share links/information as they become available.

41. The Labor Group also recommended the following priority topics for the attention of Senior GMS Officials/Ministerial Meeting:

- skills training and skills recognition
- security of migrant workers (international and internal), including social security, status of migrant workers including protection from exploitation, occupational health and safety.

42. Thailand informed the Meeting that under Phase 2 of the project ASEAN Skills Recognition System initiated by the ASEAN Labour Ministers and funded by AusAID, CLMV countries were invited to attend a Seminar on Enhancing Skills Recognition System to be held on 7-8 June 2006 in Thailand. It was also mentioned that Thailand and ILO were organizing and sponsoring the participation of GMS countries in a Seminar on Skills Recognition System for the GMS countries in Songkha Province on 19-23 June 2006.

43. Ms. Lateef discussed ADB's WGHRD Indicative Assistance Pipeline for 2006-2007 (copy appears in [Appendix 12](#)). She clarified and emphasized that the projects listed are tentative in terms of approvals both on the part of ADB, the working group, and the GMS countries and that the concepts for these projects are still to be developed and that the list contains ideas of projects that the Working group may want to pursue.

44. With regard to the inclusion of labor-related concerns in the pipeline, it was noted that a contemplated umbrella RETA for WGHRD has tentatively included standardization of skills competencies and that other priority topics identified by the working group could be added to the list. It was also noted that other donors and development partner could consider indicating prospective partnerships in pushing the working group's agenda forward.

45. It was noted that there is a lot of work going on already that the working group could support without venturing into entirely new projects. The meeting also noted the desirability of having a development matrix for labor to provide information on ongoing activities of related agencies such as IOM, ILO, WB, etc. and which could be posted in the website.

46. Mr. Thant emphasized the urgency of addressing labor issues in light of rapid developments in the GMS economic corridors and the long lead time needed for multi-country agreements. He suggested that the GMS Ministerial Meeting and the Summit could perhaps underscore the urgency and facilitate action to move things forward.

47. Ms. Lateef requested the development partners to provide additional inputs/information for integration into the GMS development matrix in order to provide a better and more comprehensive picture of what is happening under health, education, and labor in the region. Inputs could be sent by e-mail to Ms. Flor Melendez, E-mail: fmelendez@adb.org. The updated matrix will later be circulated for further validation and updating.

Session 7

Expansion of Research Networks

48. Prof. Vilas Wuvongse, Vice President-External Relations, Asian Institute of Technology, briefed the meeting about GMSARN, a regional network of 11 universities from the 6 GMS countries. Established in 2001, GMSARN aims to enhance the roles and functions of academic institutions in the GMS for project evaluation and development planning, joint multi-disciplinary research with member institutions, scientific formulation and resolution of complex cross-border problems, and information dissemination and intellectual assets. Its focus areas are environmental management, infrastructure planning and management, ICT development, and small and medium scale enterprises development. Prof. Vilas briefed the meeting about the HRD and research initiatives of the network, including that with the Research Institute on Contemporary Southeast Asia (IRASEC). He said that GMSARN could serve the following roles for GMS: think-tank network, network of resource persons, network of knowledge and expertise, and network of problem solvers. He looked forward to working closely with interested GMS institutions.

49. Mr. Ramon Cavada Sevilla, Acting Director, Mekong Institute, briefed the meeting about the Mekong Institute's Research Advisory Committee (MIRAC) and recommended social science-oriented, topics for research or learning activities. He provided a list of preliminary research agenda topics recommended by MIRAC. He mentioned the 1 million baht contribution from the Thai Government. Lao PDR, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam and Yunnan Province will focus on economic corridors of

the GMS, while Myanmar will focus on tourism sector as research theme. MI will be launching a journal by end of 2006.

50. Mr. Alan Feinstein, Associate Director, Southeast Asia Regional Program Rockefeller Foundation, briefed the meeting about their program on Learning Across Boundaries in the GMS that is looking into the negative side of connectivity and of development (infrastructure, roads, globalization, opening up of borders). He emphasized the need to better understand both the benefits and the costs of connectivity. He briefed the meeting about their knowledge building program and currently funded research on migration, effects of improved connectivity infrastructure, on cross-border economies, on social challenges, impact on ethnic minorities, and tourism. The Foundation also has a number of publications and resource materials on their various research projects. The Foundation also provides support for dissemination of research by scholars in the GMS and for institution building.

51. Prof. Gang Deng, KUST, made a presentation on an Initiative of the Kunming Training Base for HRD in GMS Countries, initially proposed at WGHRD-5 in 2005. He recalled President Hu Jintao's announcement at the UN in September 2005 regarding PRC's goal to train 30,000 people from major developing countries in the next 3 years. He described the capacity of KUST as the largest university in Yunnan Province with extensive subjects in technologies, management, and economics needed by the GMS countries. KUST has hosted a number of PPP learning programs as well as special programs for Myanmar and Lao PDR. He explained the rationale for the proposed training base, with KUST as principal coordinator, its budget – with support forthcoming from both central and provincial government, international organizations, and from KUST. Channels of training programs could be those requested by the PRC government, training programs requested by international organizations (such as PPP), and independent, demand-oriented programs.

52. Copies of presentations in this session appear in Appendix 13.

WGHRD-7 Inputs into (i) 14th GMS Ministerial Meeting; (ii) 3rd GMS Summit (2008)

53. The meeting agreed on the following points:

- updated development matrix, with long-unacted (3 years) items deleted from the list;
- designation of focal points for WGHRD for each country
- designation of focal points for health, education and labor for each country
- coordinating mechanism and network to provide regular contact among designated focal persons and coordinators
- future WGHRD meetings to give more time for breakout sessions
- ADB to consider added role of making suggestions to the working group as long as suggestions are not imposed upon the countries
- highlight urgency of labor issues in light of imminent connectivity in the subregion.

Date and Venue of WGHRD-8

54. The Meeting welcomed Cambodia's offer to host WGHRD-8 in 2007. Details regarding the date and venue will be communicated later.

Closing Session

55. The GMS countries expressed their sincere appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam for the warm hospitality and kind arrangements for the meeting, to ADB for providing assistance in organizing the meeting, and to the development partners for their active participation.

56. In his closing remarks, Mr. Nguyen Duc Toan expressed his gratitude and appreciation to all the participants and wished everyone a pleasant journey home.

57. In his closing remarks, Mr. Ayumi Konishi, Country Director, Vietnam Resident Mission, ADB, congratulated all the participants for having shared their insights and experience in the meeting to support the further development of subregional cooperation in HRD. He stated that HRD will continue to be a priority sector under the GMS economic cooperation program and that ADB will continue to provide assistance in this area through national and subregional channels. He looked forward to further cooperation with the development partners who attended the meeting. Lastly, he expressed his thanks to the Government of Viet Nam for its warm hospitality and efficiency in organizing the meeting. A copy of his closing remarks appears as Appendix 14.

58. Ms. Lateef expressed her thanks to all the participants for their active participation and to the secretariat staff for their support.