

**Greater Mekong Subregion  
Ninth Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF-9)  
Bangkok, Thailand, 2-3 June 2009**

**Summary of Proceedings**

**Introduction**

1. The Ninth Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF-9) held in Bangkok, Thailand, was co-organized by the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT), Thailand and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The STCF-9 meeting's objectives were: (i) to agree on the GMS strategy and program for capacity building in telecommunications and information communication technology (ICT) development, for endorsing to the 15<sup>th</sup> GMS Ministerial Conference in Petchburi, Thailand in June 2009; and (ii) to discuss the progress of cooperation in telecommunications and Information Superhighway Network (ISN) development, for updating the sector's strategies and priority projects in the Vientiane Plan of Action, 2008- 2015. Attached, as Appendix 1, is the Agenda and Program of the Meeting.

2. The participants included delegations 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 Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. Representatives from the Asia Pacific Telecommunity (APT), International Telecommunication Union (ITU), Korean Agency for Digital Opportunity and Promotion (KADO), and ADB also participated in the meeting. The list of participants is attached as Appendix 2. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Thaneerat Siripachana, Deputy Permanent Secretary, MICT, Thailand, and Mr. Anthony Jude, Director, Energy and Water Division (SEEW), Southeast Asia Department, ADB.

**Session I- Opening Session**

3. Mr. Thaneerat Siriphachana welcomed the participants from the GMS countries and the international organizations. He informed them of the Thailand Government's emphasis on the development of the telecoms network nationwide and the use of information communication technology (ICT) for more effective government service delivery and increased competitiveness. He said that the STCF-9 meeting would focus on the adoption of a more comprehensive framework for capacity building in the development of the GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN). He looked forward to meaningful discussions during the meeting, and that the meeting's productive outcomes will provide practical suggestions for moving forward with GMS telecoms/ ICT capacity development.

4. Mr. Anthony Jude welcomed the participants from the GMS countries and the development partner community and thanked the MICT for the gracious hospitality and excellent meeting arrangements. He briefed that the STCF-9 meeting would discuss the capacity building program for the telecoms sector for endorsing to the 15<sup>th</sup> GMS Ministerial Meeting, and noted that the report prepared by consultants (financed by the Korean Government), would serve as reference for the discussions. The report was based on an analysis of each GMS country's ICT/ telecoms status and training requirements, as derived from consultations with policy/ regulatory bodies and enterprise operators in the sector. He stressed the critical importance of enhancing capacities for telecoms operations, maintenance and in keeping up with technological

advances, ensuring the development of an efficient telecoms network needed for development and poverty reduction in the GMS. He added that development partners need to define their niche in supporting GMS telecoms development, and listed the various areas where assistance of development partners is strongly needed, such as in establishing suitable policy/ regulatory frameworks and promoting ICT in rural and remote areas. He concluded by stressing that deliberations of the STCF-9 meeting would contribute much towards building a modern, interconnected GMS telecoms network, key to realizing equitable and pro-poor growth in the subregion.

## **Session II- The Training Needs Assessment (TNA) for GMS Telecommunications and ICT Development** (Presentation is Appendix 3)

### **Key National and GMS-wide requirements for Capacity Building**

5. Mr. Sungham Choi, Executive Manager, International Cooperation Division, KADO, gave an introduction to KADO and Korea's approach for bridging the digital divide. He discussed KADO's vision and goals and overall strategies to close the digital divide, and presented the Korean case for information technology (IT) training. He said Korea's effort to close the global digital divide involves cooperation with various international organizations and developing countries, covering information access centers (IACs), digital opportunity forum, Korea internet volunteers (KIV) and Korea IT Learning Program (KoIL). He provided a background on the KoIL and its worldwide participants' network. He showed the coverage of the IAC, in terms of building internet education and training centers for developing countries, and of the KIV, in terms of sending IT volunteers to various developing country organizations.

6. Mr. Choi gave an overview of the proposed ADB-KADO GMS project in telecommunications in 2009, whose goals include: (i) strengthening GMS capacity building in telecoms supporting ISN, and (ii) sharing best practices and knowhow for developing telecoms. He gave the main IT indicators in GMS countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam or CLMV) and KADO's contribution in terms of human network building in these countries. He discussed the KADO training approach to the CLMV countries and components of the development program (people attending, time or period, place, content, evaluation and sustainability). He informed on the consultations held to determine training demand in the CLMV countries from 21-18 February 2009, and the findings in terms of the digital gap between the GMS countries. Mr. Choi proceeded with a discussion of the ICT status and the policy/ regulatory framework in each CLMV country and summarized the common findings in terms of constraints to national ICT development.

7. **Discussions.** Mr. Jude inquired about the KADO program's possible overlaps with those of APT and ITU. Mr. Choi explained that some KADO programs are implemented in partnership with APT and ASEAN, such as on spectrum management and e-government. Some KADO training programs have been customized for GMS countries. On volunteers, Mr. Choi explained that volunteers based in NGOs were used to provide basic ICT training in rural areas. Mr. Jude asked about the reasons why Lao PDR registered higher IT indicators compared to Cambodia and Myanmar. The Lao PDR representative explained that various ICT programs were being implemented by Lao PDR. Mr. Choi added that Lao PDR has a good policy and strategy for building ICT infrastructure, and is now focusing on expanding the coverage in rural areas.

8. Mr. Jude asked about the status of Cambodia's proposed telecoms law. The Cambodian representative briefed that the law was in the National Assembly for deliberations and efforts are being made for approval of the law as soon as possible. On Viet Nam's Computer Emergency Rescue Team, representative from Viet Nam explained that this concerns the re-organization of Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) functions between the agencies. Viet Nam also informed that more updated IT figures are available. Mr. Jude enjoined the country representatives to provide Mr. Choi with updated figures if any, on their country's IT status, for reflecting in the report. Myanmar representative inquired about the constraints in implementing KADO programs in Myanmar, and Mr. Choi explained that more could be done to facilitate and coordinate clearances between the Governments of Korea and Myanmar. Cambodian representative fully supported the training for productivity and welfare and noted that Cambodia's emphasis for ICT training would be on the young and the poor. Thailand representative offered training facilities in Bangkok as possible venue for future KADO programs. Mr. Choi informed of KADO's collaboration with Thai agencies and said KADO will consider Thailand's offer to host some programs.

### **Session III- Presentation of the Proposed Capacity Building Program**

#### **Overview of Training Strategies and Priority Projects Consistent with TNA Findings**

9. Mr. Choi presented the proposed GMS Telecommunication Capacity Building Program and gave its strategies and objectives, training target group (high level officials, managing level and engineers) and 2009 training program structure (organizers, training programs and training selection and invitation process). He provided sample activities of a typical program and presented the draft list of proposed programs for 2009. Lastly he discussed the proposed online and offline efforts to sustain the gains from the training program.

10. **Discussions.** Myanmar's representative suggested that the policy course for managers and ICT technology course for engineers should consider the skills levels and experience of the participants. Thai representative stressed the importance of the policy course for managers in efforts to attain technology convergence. Viet Nam representative noted the importance of a rural ICT communications course in the country's development efforts. Cambodian representative requested clarification as to which agency in Cambodia is being eyed to participate in the proposed courses. Mr. Choi clarified that the allotted slots per country did not consider the agency representation. Mr. Jude suggested that the sample program be developed to provide more details on the coverage of the various seminars. On the time frame, especially of high level courses, Mr. Jude expressed the concern that some senior level officials could not be away from work for two weeks or more. The meeting discussed the feasible durations for courses considering the seniority levels of the prospective participants. The ITU representative informed of ITU's capacity building activities in its centers of excellence and expressed interest in collaborating with KADO for the GMS training program. The Thai representative pointed out the possible overlaps with ASEAN activities in the proposed schedule of KADO courses.

### **Session IV- Country Updates on Telecommunications and ISN Development** (Presentations in Appendix 4)

#### **Cambodia**

11. H.E. Ty John, Undersecretary of State, Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MPTC), and Mr. Tol Gnak, Director, Department of Telecom Cambodia, MPTC, provided the current status of telecommunications in Cambodia, which covered the overview of the MPTC organization, the status of telecoms policy and regulatory reform, telecoms network hierarchy, and fixed/ mobile subscriber and internet statistics (2004-2009). On the status of the GMS ISN project, he provided a summary history of the Cambodia section of the ISN, including the start of the Cambodia ISN section 1 in January 2008, and the ISN section 2 in March 2008. He said capacity building has been a significant component of the ISN project in Cambodia. He informed that a ceremony is being planned in June 2009 to inaugurate the completion of the GMS ISN Cambodia section. He informed of the progress of Cambodia's cross-border interconnections to neighboring countries- Thailand, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam. Cambodia representative provided updated figures on KADO's presentation.

12. **Comments.** Mr. Butiong (ADB) asked whether it is possible to take advantage of the ISN links to facilitate the IT connections of the checkpoints under the Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA). The Cambodian representative said that the optic fiber cables (OFCs) installed under the ISN provide the backbone that could support many ICT applications, including for the CBTA. Mr. Jude asked about the progress of the draft of the telecommunications law and universal service obligation (USO)/ universal service facility (USF), and the Cambodian representative explained that the approval of the telecommunications law was delayed, and that the USO/USF sub-decree draft is under review. Mr. Jude inquired about the reason for the delay in the implementation of the JBIC project, and the Cambodian representative explained that the JBIC project was delayed due to the delay in the approval of the telecommunications law, such that the Telecommunications Regulator of Cambodia (TRC) could not set up the project on time. Mr. Jude asked about the reason for the volatility in the number of fixed line subscribers, and the Cambodia representative replied that this was attributable to the market reactions to the rapid growth in mobile subscribers.

## **PRC**

13. Ms. Li Yuan. Official from Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) gave an overview of telecoms development in PRC, showing among others the penetration rate of telecoms services and 3G licenses issued in 2009. She informed of the good feedback on the PRC-sponsored telecoms training program for GMS officials, which covered: (i) technology construction, operation, and management of fixed and mobile lines, (ii) rural communications networking technologies and (iii) operation and maintenance of OFC networks.

14. Mr. Jiang Hua, Senior Engineer, China Academy of Telecom Research (CATR) gave the progress of GMS ISN construction in PRC. He noted that the overall GMS ISN Phase 1 OFC network was completed in March 2008 and inaugurated at the Third GMS Summit in Vientiane. He added that the transmission system (point-to-point) completed in 2006 was upgraded in recent years (PRC-Myanmar, PRC-Lao PDR, and PRC-Viet Nam). He gave the future plans on ISN phase 2 transmission networks, consisting of diversity cable connections. He discussed the considerations for future GMS ISN development comprising: (i) applications and services development; (ii) further development of operation and maintenance mechanism and (iii) further GMS ISN construction.

15. **Comments.** The Lao PDR representative noted that the site survey for PRC-Lao PDR diversity cable project was done by March 2009. Myanmar representative noted different vendor

equipment between GMS countries, and challenges in undertaking point-to-point connections for synchronization. All GMS countries need to plan well for future interface systems. Thailand representative inquired about the status of direct PRC-Thailand internet connection capacity expansion which is planned to finish in phase 1. The KADO representative inquired about the various applications that are envisioned for the GMS ISN facility. The PRC representative replied that the direct PRC-Thailand internet is not yet implemented and video conferencing and e-government services are among the uses being planned for the ISN. Mr. Jude noted that GMS governments could look into enhancing applications between and among them, such as in the use of ICT for CBTA operations, agriculture pricing, health and education.

## **Lao PDR**

16. Mr. Chaleun Sibounheuang, Deputy Director, National Authority of Posts and Telecommunications (NAPT) presented the country's telecoms profile and discussed the NAPT's organization and its role in administering the sector. He explained the telecoms policies' objectives and the regulatory structure based on the 2001 Telecommunications Law. He enumerated the various Lao telecoms operators and the subscriber base for fixed, mobile and internet lines, and showed the cross-border international connection network of Enterprise Telecoms Lao (ETL). He also discussed the status of ICT in Lao PDR, and government's expectations of ICT's role in socio-economic development, and promoting stability and security. He presented the nine priority activities in the promotion of ICT in Lao PDR, which includes HRD, research and development, application, infrastructure development, enterprise development, legislation, vision-setting, use of ICT for enhancing living conditions, and language standardization. He said that HRD in the field of ICT would cover the inclusion of ICT in the education curriculum and the promotion of knowledge transfer, and stressed that Lao PDR welcomes support for ICT from advanced countries.

17. **Comments.** Mr. Jude asked about how and in what form ICT is being delivered to ethnic minorities. Lao PDR representative said telephone access is being expanded into remote ethnic minority areas. Minorities are also being trained in basic computer literacy. Mr. Jude also asked about the rationale for research and development for ICT, considering Lao PDR's small market. Lao PDR representative clarified that R & D in this sense is limited to research on enhancing applications in the Lao context.

## **Myanmar**

18. U Nyan Win, Deputy General Manager, Myanmar Posts and Telecommunications (MPT), gave a background of the country's ICT infrastructure and telecoms policy and the role of the Ministry of Communications, Posts and Telegraphs (MCPT) in ICT development implementation. He showed Myanmar's exchange status and links for international communications and discussed Myanmar's telecoms and ICT development activities, including the satellite terminal rural communications system configuration. He explained the scope of GMS works for Myanmar covering mobile communications, auto telephone, long distance communications (microwave and OFC links), and information technology (IT). He gave the progress of the different aspects of the GMS ISN project in Myanmar for both OFC and microwave technology. He concluded that the Myanmar Government strongly desires to reduce the digital divide and to establish connectivity nationwide, and that knowledge sharing would be useful given the similar conditions among GMS members. Regarding ICT capacity building, he

explained the need for more capacity building, and that more participation at various levels of training programs by any agency or organization would be appreciated.

## **Thailand**

19. Mr. Aniruth Hiranraks, Vice President, Network Engineering Department, CAT Telecom Public Company Limited, presented the progress of Thailand's GMS ISN project and gave the history, timeline and scope of implementation (Phases 1 and 2) of the project. He showed the Thai budget for the GMS ISN project for 2008-2009, and discussed the cross-border connections included in the GMS ISN Phase 1 (Thai-Myanmar, Thai-Lao PDR, and Thai-Cambodia). He elaborated on the future plans which include finalization of transit pricing, Phase 2 feasibility study, finalization of cross-border cut-off date, multilateral-government support in policy and ICT promotion, and study extension to ASEAN-China Information Superhighway (IS). He noted that Thailand transmission infrastructure is ready for GMS- ISN extension to ASEAN-China IS.

20. **Comments.** The Cambodian representative noted that there are differences in pricing between countries which complicate interconnection negotiations, and asked whether there is a strategy for dealing with such pricing issues. The Thai representative said that bilateral discussions would be guided by the market in setting prices.

21. Ms. Sudaporn Vimolseth, Vice President, TOT Academy, TOT Public Company Limited presented the TOT training program's course objectives, scope and details. She presented the public training courses that TOT may arrange upon demand from GMS countries, and future areas of cooperation (HRD in ICT, ICT skill certified program, ICT skill competition, etc.). She presented the mission, experiences and facilities of the Professional Telecommunications Academy and gave contact information of TOT.

## **Viet Nam**

22. Mr. Le The Vinh of the International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Information and Communications, showed the current telecoms market in Viet Nam, including for fixed, mobile and internet users. He noted that the draft Telecommunications law has been submitted to the National Assembly for approval in 2009; this law will provide for, among others, promotion of competition with government regulating universal services, telecom fees set equivalent to those of neighbors, and transparent licensing. He briefed on the implementation of the Viet Nam section of the GMS ISN.

23. **Comments.** Myanmar representative asked to be clarified about the internet bandwidth in Viet Nam and Mr. Vinh showed the bandwidth for internet to be about 3.2 Gbps,

## **Session V- Brainstorming Discussion on the GMS Capacity Building Strategy and Program**

24. Mr. Choi presented the revised draft of the 2009 proposed training programs (Appendix 5) showing the course titles, venues, dates and trainees. He provided the five modules for the Telecoms Policy Course (includes introduction, Korean privatization experiences, case studies on regulatory policies, prospects of 4G technologies and universal service obligation (USO). The new ICT Course will have six modules (IP-based technology 1 to 3, mobile internet WiBro,

digital multimedia broadcasting service, and 4G). The National ICT Development course would have three modules (Korea informatization policy, information security and issues, and convergence technology).

25. **Discussions.** The APT representative inquired about the basis for the courses proposed, especially considering that the CLMV countries require higher priority to policy/regulatory and institutional reform over readiness for advanced technologies such as 4G. Mr. Choi noted that the proposed courses resulted from the TNA undertaken during GMS country consultations. The ITU and APT representatives noted that many of the proposed courses cover the same areas that are in the ITU and APT training programs and suggested coordination in the conduct of the said courses to optimize the use of training resources. Mr. Jude suggested that the GMS countries provide feedback on the priority areas based on their needs, which would be used to revise the course design and module composition. ITU and APT representatives announced that they will be sending information on their training courses and schedules to the GMS representatives shortly. KADO and TOT Academy will coordinate holding of one workshop in 2009.

## **Session VI- The Updated Vientiane Plan of Action for Telecommunications**

26. Mr. Jude provided a summary of the previous sessions. KADO was requested to submit the detailed program for the modules **by about 17 June 2009**, which will be disseminated to the countries for comment **by the end of June 2009**. He noted the need for harmonization at the border crossing points, but harmonization efforts could be used across a broader scale, such as for health, education and agriculture applications.

27. He presented the revised Vientiane Plan of Action (VPOA) and gave a background of the priority projects listed in the VPOA for the telecoms sector. He noted the recent changes in the status of the entries for the listed projects. He requested the GMS countries to regularly provide ADB with updates on the GMS ISN development, and noted the critical role of Cambodia, which will shortly take over as Chair of the ISN Steering Group, in making this happen. It was noted that the ISN Implementing Group will hold its meeting in Phnom Penh at the end of June 2009. He asked the participants to review the VPOA closely and provide comments and updates on the entries, particularly with respect to development and financing new projects.

28. **Discussions.** Representative of APT informed of the inter-agency meeting, scheduled on 10 June 2009, involving APT, ITU and ESCAP to discuss the program of assistance for the sector. The feedback from this meeting could input into the proposed KADO program. It was agreed therefore to move the submission of the KADO revised program by a week, from 10 June to around 17 June 2009, to incorporate the results of this meeting. Mr. Jude stressed that the entries in the VPOA were derived from the study of an ADB-financed staff consultant on the needed program of GMS cooperation to develop the telecoms/ ICT sector.

29. Mr. Ashish Narayan, Advisor, ITU, presented the history and strategic focus of the ITU, and discussed its various initiatives covering among others, emergency communication, global cyber security, etc. He explained the ITU's operational programmes, its special initiatives, the Asia-Pacific Regional Initiatives (APRIs), and their delivery mechanisms. He discussed the ITU APRIs (2007-2010) and their relationship with the ITU's global development programmes. He showed the Asia-Pacific events for 2009, including their timing and venues. He gave examples

of direct country assistance, with Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand receiving specific technical assistance. He presented the ITU Asia-Pacific Centres of Excellence (CoE), their locations, their specific areas of expertise, their programs for 2009, and existing/ proposed partnerships for the CoE network.

30. **Discussions.** Mr. Jude explained that the GMS countries have not requested ADB for assistance to finance telecoms initiatives, and cited this as the main reason for ADB's gradual disengagement from the sector. He said there is a need for the countries to determine their strategy for the sector, and to define the nature of their desired partnerships with ADB and other development partners. He reiterated the need for the countries to closely review the VPOA and the proposed training program, and provide feedback to help determine the way forward for the sector.

### **Session VIII- Consideration and Adoption of Summary of Proceedings/ Closing Session**

31. Mr. Jude announced the distribution of the draft summary of proceedings for review by the body. The STCF-9 participants reviewed the draft summary of proceedings and after incorporating the suggested changes, the body therefore approved the minutes of the STCF-9 meeting.

32. Cambodia agreed to host the next STCF meeting subject to confirmation of the timing of the meeting in 2010.

### ***Closing Remarks.***

33. Mr. Jude noted the meeting's productive discussions and stressed the need to reflect on how to complement the training programs for the sector. He informed that funds could be tapped for training in telecoms and ICT and the GMS representatives are requested to look at how to maximize the benefits from training assistance. He requested the GMS representatives to provide indications of their priority programs and their ideas on how ADB could be involved in GMS telecoms and ISN development cooperation. Prospective areas of support by development partners include (i) training in operation and maintenance, (ii) transit pricing, and (iii) the use of ISN backbone for ICT sector applications. He thanked the MICT of Thailand for excellent support in hosting the meeting.