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The GMS E-news

The Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program (GMS Program) is a joint effort started in 1992 by the countries sharing the Mekong River, to pursue the accelerated development of the subregion through pragmatic, and results-oriented action. As coordinator of the GMS Program, the ADB has been providing up-to-date information on the Program to all stakeholders, including through the GMS web page (as part of the ADB's web site), various publications, and sponsored forums.

This *GMS E-News*, the latest addition to ADB's information dissemination tools, is being launched with this July 2006 issue, to provide readers on a quarterly basis, with an update on GMS activities and major developments. This being the maiden issue, we will cover developments from January to July 2006. We hope that the e-newsletter will be a useful instrument in expanding interest in and awareness of the GMS Program.

ENERGY: Focal Group to Promote Power Trade Established (Hanoi, Viet Nam, 12-13 January 2006)

The Focal Group (FG) of the Regional Power Trade Coordination Committee (RPTCC) met for the first time to establish arrangements for carrying out specific RPTCC activities and studies. The Peoples' Republic of China was appointed chair of the group for the first two years, while individual GMS countries were tasked to lead in specific priority activities: Lao PDR for developing best practices for Power Purchase Agreements; PRC for developing and maintaining a regional database on the GMS power sector; and Thailand for developing the Regional Power Master Plan. The Ministry of Industry of Viet Nam and ADB jointly organized the meeting.

AGRICULTURE: Setting New Directions for Cooperation (Hue, Viet Nam, 15-17 February 2006)

New and emerging issues and needs in agriculture cooperation were discussed during the 3rd Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Agriculture. Going by the theme "*Strengthening GMS Cross-border Collaboration in Agriculture*," among the new areas considered were cross-border trade issues related to food safety and harmonization of standards, and rural renewable energy (biomass and biofuels). The Meeting's major output was the agreement in-principle on a draft GMS Strategic Framework for Subregional Cooperation in Agriculture and the accompanying Core Agriculture Sector Program (CASP). The CASP consists of four core programs, namely: Cross-border Agricultural Trade, GMS Knowledge Network, Capacity Building in Agriculture, and Emergency Response for Agricultural Crises. A 5th program on institutional linkages is under consideration. The Meeting also agreed to hold a GMS Agriculture Ministers' Meeting in Beijing, PRC in October 2006, where a revised version of the Strategic Framework and CASP, will be considered. ADB and the Government of Viet Nam jointly organized the Meeting.

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MEKONG DEVELOPMENT FORUM (MDF): Identifying Infrastructure Investment Opportunities (Singapore, 7-8 March 2006)

Mekong Development Forums aim to enhance cooperation among GMS governments, development partners and private sector in mobilizing the needed financial and technical resources for the GMS Program. In the Singapore MDF, more than 95 companies met with representatives of GMS governments to explore opportunities for public-private partnerships in infrastructure development, particularly in energy and transport. A unique feature was the consultation between key regional commercial banks and the GMS governments on how to enhance the attractiveness of the subregion to private investors.

TRANSPORT: A New Strategy to Enhance GMS Connectivity (Vientiane, Lao PDR, 22-23 March 2006)



The Transport Sector Strategy Study (TSSS) was prepared under an ADB technical assistance project to provide the framework and blueprint for GMS transport sector cooperation and development for the next ten years. Guiding principle of the study was the emphasis of GMS Leaders (during their Second Summit in Kunming, PRC in July 2005), on the key role in economic development of a well-built, seamless, multi-modal cross-border transport system, and of fully “connecting” the GMS. The 10th Meeting

of the Subregional Transport Forum (STF) held in Vientiane in March 2006 reviewed the final report of the study, which is expected to be endorsed by a High Level Transport Officials’ provisionally scheduled for September 2006 in Beijing. The Meeting also discussed the progress of transport-related activities and developments in the GMS Program, and how the transport strategy can be translated into a plan of action that can be regularly monitored. The Ministry of Communication, Transport, Post and Construction of Lao PDR and ADB organized the Meeting.

TOURISM: New Strategy for Sustaining Growth, Promoting Equity Underway (Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, 28-30 March 2006)

Various initiatives that support the implementation of the 7 strategic programs under the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy are now underway. One of the key ongoing programs is “*Pro-Poor Tourism Development*” which promotes mainstreaming and integration of tourism in national poverty reduction efforts. Progress of the new strategy was discussed at the 17th Meeting of the GMS Tourism Working Group (TWG) held in Luang Prabang in March 2006. Unlike previous meetings, which were jointly organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and ADB, subsequent meetings will be organized by the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO). This highlights the evolution of the TWG into a mature subregional body. Nanning City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, PRC, will host the next meeting set for late October 2006. ESCAP, MTCO, and ADB jointly organized the Meeting with the Lao National Tourism Administration.

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- GMS Senior Officials' Meeting: Preparing for the Next GMS Summit

TELECOMMUNICATIONS: Advancing the Information Superhighway Network (Guilin, Peoples' Republic of China, 30-31 March 2006)

GMS countries have made steady gains in constructing the GMS Information Superhighway Network (ISN), which provides the broadband platform for voice, data and internet services in the subregion. Working groups on ISN ("*Steering Group*" and "*Implementation Group*") were established to identify, prioritize and seek financing for missing links in the network. At the 7th Meeting of the Subregional Telecommunications Forum (STCF) in Guilin, PRC, accomplishments in Information Communications Technology (ICT) development were noted; the Meeting agreed to focus more on developing sustainable rural ICT applications. It also agreed that capacity building was the best means to bridge the digital divide, using various modes for building the subregion's capacity in telecoms operations. ADB called for better coordination of assistance to the ICT sector among development partners. The Ministry of Information Industry of PRC and the ADB jointly organized the STCF-7 meeting.

MEKONG DEVELOPMENT FORUM (MDF): A Look at Infrastructure-Environment Links (Stockholm, Sweden, 3-4 April 2006)

The Stockholm MDF held in April further expanded awareness, particularly by the Nordic and other European development partners, on the widening range of investment opportunities in the GMS for the private sector. The Meeting discussed how development partners could contribute to sustaining progress in energy and transport, while addressing environmental sustainability objectives. Specific energy projects with potential private sector participation were discussed, as well as financing mechanisms and risk mitigation instruments needed to enhance commercial viability of projects.



GMS SENIOR OFFICIALS' MEETING: Taking Stock of the GMS Program, Preparing for the Next GMS Summit (Manila, 20 April 2006)

The GMS Senior Officials' Meeting held in April 2006 at the ADB Headquarters reviewed the progress since the 2nd GMS Summit in Kunming in July 2005. Significant progress was noted in all nine sectors of GMS cooperation, particularly in advancing the Cross Border Transport Agreement, establishing the economic corridors, promoting power trade, implementing the Core Environment Program, strengthening agriculture, HRD cooperation, and promoting tourism, trade and investments. The Meeting agreed on the need for a "brainstorming" meeting involving GMS officials and other stakeholders to discuss the broad future directions of the GMS and to prepare for the 3rd GMS Summit to be held in Lao PDR in 2008.

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- Human Resource Development: Addressing the Challenges of Increased GMS Connectivity
- Back-to- Back Energy Meetings: Gearing Up for Power Trade

ENVIRONMENT: Full Steam Ahead for the Core Environment Program (Bangkok, Thailand, 25-26 April 2006)

The key activities and budget to implement the Core Environment Program (CEP) in its first year were agreed at the 12th Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Environment (WGE) held in Bangkok. The Meeting's technical session, henceforth to be regular feature of future WGE meetings, also discussed the key operational arrangements to be followed by the various CEP partners. The Meeting endorsed the CEP work plans, and came up with resolutions which called for immediately implementing the Biodiversity Conservation Corridor Initiative, building capacities of national support units, accelerating the staffing of the Environment Operations Center (EOC), and creating the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) to serve as the CEP's peer review body. WGE members called for a balanced allocation of resources among the CEP components. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of Thailand and ADB jointly organized the Meeting. On April 26, the WGE members attended the inauguration of the EOC, located adjacent the ADB Resident Mission in Bangkok. The first edition of the CEP newsletter to promote exchange of ideas on the CEP came out last June 2006 and can be viewed at www.adb.org/projects/core-environment-program.

HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT: Facing Up to the Challenges of Increased Connectivity (Hanoi, Viet Nam, 17-18 May 2006)

The 7th Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-7), with the theme of "*Connectivity and HRD*", identified critical emerging subregional challenges and issues associated with increasing connectivity, and how these would provide the basis for new areas of HRD cooperation. These include externalities associated with increasing cross border migration, such as the spread of communicable diseases, human trafficking, labor migration, drug trafficking/smuggling, and gender issues. In addition to pursuing improved coordination of HRD programs, and stronger partnerships, institutional networking and information sharing, the Meeting also identified new priority areas of cooperation in health, education, and labor to be pursued by the Working Group. ADB and the Ministry of Education and Training of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam jointly organized the meeting.

BACK-TO-BACK GMS ENERGY MEETINGS: Building New Lines to Realize Power Trade (Siem Reap, Cambodia, 12-16 June 2006)

GMS power officials, meeting in Siem Reap in June 2006, agreed to step up efforts to build the various planned transmission lines needed for power trade in the subregion. These lines will enable power exports from PRC to Thailand, and from PRC to Viet Nam, and allow power trade between and among Thailand, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. Additionally, the GMS countries are building on the operating guidelines for power trade. The Planning Working Group on power trade, which met for the first time, was tasked to focus on performance standards and transmission regulation, and the training program. The 2nd Focal Group meeting also affirmed these priorities while agreeing to accelerate work on specific activities, such as preparing the GMS power master plan.

The 5th Meeting of the Regional Power Trade Coordination Committee (RPTCC) endorsed the proposed next steps to speed-up progress on ongoing and planned cross-border power lines to realize power trade. The Meeting discussed the proposed assistance by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency on

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- Preparing for the Bilateral Road Transport Agreement (Between Viet Nam and Cambodia)

facilitating sustainable, environment-friendly regional power trading, which would complement the assistance to the RPTCC being provided by the Agence Française de Développement. With World Bank support, a session was devoted to lessons from developing regional energy markets in Southeast Europe, aimed at providing insights in transitioning to more advanced stages of power trading. The Cambodian Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy and ADB organized the meetings.

Training Border Officials on the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement (Svay Rieng, Cambodia and Tay Ninh, Viet Nam, 10-13 July 2006)

A training workshop was held at Svay Rieng, Cambodia on 10-11 July and Tay Ninh, Viet Nam on 12-13 July 2006, to prepare border officials for the initial implementation of the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement, which will commence on 30 September 2006. Resource persons from ADB and the World Customs Organization facilitated the workshop.



Preparing for the Bilateral Road Transport Agreement Between Cambodia and Viet Nam (Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, 14 July 2006)



Senior officials of the National Transport Facilitation Committees of Cambodia and Viet Nam and senior border officials of Bavet and Moc Bai met to discuss and agree on the detailed guidelines and procedures for the initial implementation of the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement and the implementation of the Bilateral Road Transport Agreement between the two countries. H.E. Pham The Minh, Vice Minister of Transport of Viet Nam and H.E. Tram Iv Tek, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Public Works of

Cambodia, co-chaired the Meeting. ADB Vice President C. Lawrence Greenwood, Jr. delivered the opening statement.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- GMS Agriculture Ministers Meeting
- Regional Agriculture Training Programs

GMS Agriculture Ministers Meeting (Beijing, PRC, 16-18 October 2006)

Preparations are now underway for a GMS Agriculture Ministers' Meeting to be held on 16-18 October 2006 in Beijing, PRC. The Ministers will review the Draft Strategic Framework for GMS Cooperation in Agriculture and the accompanying Core Agriculture Sector Program for 2006-2010. They will also attend the opening of the China International Agricultural Product Fair. A GMS Agriculture Senior Officials' Meeting will precede the Ministers' Meeting. ADB is co-organizing this event with the Ministry of Agriculture of the PRC.

Regional Agriculture Training Programs

Regional training programs are being organized (some are now ongoing) in Thailand with participants from the GMS countries. The complete course schedule is as follows:

- Molecular Tools for Characterizing Genetic Diversity (3-10 July 2006)
- Bioinformatices (12-19 July 2006)
- Plant Micropropagation (4-11 September 2006)
- Safety Assessment of Genetically Modified (GM) Foods (18-29 September 2006)

FEATURE

- Phnom Penh Plan
Upcoming issue of
the Journal of
GMS Development
Studies



Upcoming Issue of the Journal of GMS Development Studies: A Look at How Community-Based Tourism Impacts on Poverty and Equity

How does community-based tourism (CBT) impact on poverty? With tourism playing a central role in the growth strategy of the GMS countries, this question has recently motivated empirical investigations on the actual economic benefits from tourism. The forthcoming July issue of the GMS Journal features five scholarly works that address this issue. As part of a research project conducted by the Social Research Institute of Chiang Mai University under the auspices of the National Research Council of Thailand and the Rockefeller Foundation, case studies of CBT in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and PRC were carried out to determine the economic impacts of tourism in selected villages. The authors challenge the conventional wisdom that CBT contributes to poverty alleviation and equity by applying quantitative measures of income distribution on survey data. The findings of the research offer important lessons in project implementation and have significant implications in the design of CBT interventions. The authors writing for specific cases are: Men Prachvuthy (Cambodia); Thavipeth Oula (Lao PDR); Akarapong Untong, Sasipen Phuangaichai, Natthida Taweelertkunthon, and Jakkree Tejawaree (Thailand); and Wen Zhang (PRC). Mingsarn Kaosa-ard, Director of the Social Research Institute at Chiang Mai University provides an overview article that investigates the returns from tourism and the ways these returns are being shared from a national perspective.

The Journal of GMS Development Studies will be available online in August 2006 at the Phnom Penh Plan website at: <http://adbweb/GMS/phnom-penh-plan/program.asp>

GMS PROJECT LINKS

- [GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement](#)
- [GMS - Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management](#)
- [GMS Core Environment Program](#)
- [GMS Biodiversity Conservation Corridors Initiative](#)

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