

(as of 18 October 2005)

## ***Summary***

### **Rationale**

Developing the Greater Mekong subregion's most valuable resource – its people – is an important element of the GMS economic cooperation program. The Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD) was established in 1995 to facilitate cooperation in human resource development (HRD) among GMS countries, given the overall poor state of human development and the high incidence of poverty in the GMS. The program gives priority to key HRD issues and serves as vehicle for identifying and implementing subregional projects in human resource development. Precedence is given to HRD projects that : i) have cross-border implications; ii) provide scale economies; iii) provide opportunities for cross-country learning and sharing; and iv) with region-wide impact on public welfare. Projects overseen by the WGHRD in the past had included, among others, certification and accreditation of skilled workers, prevention of communicable diseases, particularly HIV/AIDS<sup>1</sup> and malaria, ICT and HIV/AIDS preventive education in crossborder areas in the GMS, financing needs for HIV/AIDS prevention and care, drug eradication, and health and education needs of ethnic minorities.

In 2001, the GMS Strategic Framework was endorsed during the 10<sup>th</sup> GMS Ministers' meeting in Yangon to serve as blueprint for economic cooperation among GMS countries in the next 10 years. In recognition of the key role of human resources to the success of the program, development of human resources and skills competencies was included as a distinct flagship program. Following these developments, a study was conducted to assess HRD cooperation among GMS countries and came up with an HRD cooperation framework for the GMS. The framework developed became the basis for determining priority and funding allocation for the subregion's HRD program as well as for the thrusts and design of its component projects.

### **Flagship Objectives**

Consultations with GMS countries and recent WGHRD meetings have identified the following priority HRD subsectors: health, education/capacity building, and labor. Based on these priorities, the objectives of the HRD flagship program are as follows:

#### ***General Objective***

To identify human resource issues in health, education, and labor, as they relate to cross-border activities in the subregion, and undertake studies and actions to address these issues and ultimately enhance the subregion's human resources. Regional HRD efforts will be undertaken to the extent that they complement, enhance and maximize the impacts of national HRD efforts in GMS countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome.

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### **Specific Objectives**

- a. To develop and implement cooperative arrangements for addressing human resource issues in the health, education, and labor sectors, with focus on impacts of cross-border activities (such trade, transport and tourism) on human resources, and HRD activities with cross-border implications, such as health and education services (including communicable diseases control) for ethnic minority groups in border areas;
- b. To facilitate opportunities for expanded networking arrangements among academic and research institutions/networks in the GMS to foster complementation and synergy of programs and pooling of resources towards the achievement of long-term sustainable capacity building and competitiveness in the GMS;
- c. To support transfer of knowledge and experience leading to improved skills and competence of the subregion's labor force, and contribute to improved capacity to respond to labor-related issues such as labor migration (including human trafficking), labor information exchanges, skills training and standardization, and labor standards.; and
- d. To strengthen the subregion's human resource capacity in harnessing the benefits from advances in technology, such as in biomedical sciences and information communications technology (ICT) in health, education, and labor.

### **Key Components and Priority Activities**

The following priority concerns for regional collaboration have been identified by the WGHRD: **Health:** communicable diseases control, strengthening malaria control for ethnic minorities in the GMS, pro-poor health system development including training and technology transfer for health system development, and information exchange on health sector reform. **Education:** expanded capacity building under the Phnom Penh Plan, continuing HIV/AIDS preventive education, improved access to quality basic education and vocational training, quality assurance, expanded networking arrangements in higher education and capacity building among existing academic and research institutions in the GMS. **Labor:** human trafficking, labor migration, protection for migrant workers, access of mobile population to health services, skills training and standardization, training on social security systems, work environment assessment, labor standards, and community development.

A number of projects have been developed for funding support by ADB and other Development Partners, to include a PPTA on Communicable Diseases Control, a grant loan project on Communicable Diseases Control in the GMS; supplementary funding for a Regional Workshop on Communicable Diseases Surveillance and Response; RETA for Strengthening Malaria Control Strategies for Ethnic Minorities in the GMS; RETA for Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management Phase II; RETA for HIV/AIDS Vulnerability and Risk Mitigation Among Ethnic Minorities in the GMS through Communication Strategies; and RETA for Preventing the Trafficking of Women and Children and Promoting Safe Migration in the GMS. In addition, new project concepts/proposals will be developed for the following new initiatives: GMS Labor Conference; GMS Workshop on Community Development in Cross Border Areas; Development of Skills Standards; Training of GMS Labor Officials in Labor Standards; Training of Labor Inspectors in Working Environment; Institutional Networking to improve

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quality of basic education; and Conference among networks of academic and research institutions in the GMS.

### **Linkages with Other Flagship Initiatives**

The HRD flagship initiative will have strong linkages with the other flagship initiatives of the GMS program. It complements the flagship initiative on “Enhancing Private Sector Participation and Competitiveness” by ensuring that the labor skills produced by training institutions conform to the requirements of industry in the subregion. The initiative also ties up with the corridor flagship programs as it advances a research and training agenda that addresses pressing regional cooperation and Corridor development concerns, such as customs and trade policy, and regional development administration. Once the economic corridors are complete, resulting in increased cross-border movement of people, the HRD flagship initiative will facilitate matching of labor skills to areas/industries within Corridors where they are needed through improved systems of labor market information exchanges, skills training, standards-setting and accreditation. The HRD flagship initiative will also tie up with that of the Tourism Sector which has its own HRD and capacity building requirements; moreover, with the expected increase in the number of tourist arrivals in the subregion, cross-cutting concerns pertaining to mitigating negative externalities consequent to the implementation of the Tourism Sector Strategy and increased connectivity will have to be addressed.

### **Risks**

HRD projects usually have long gestation periods, with benefits not immediately apparent or felt. High expectations at the start of the project can be replaced by disillusionment towards the end of project life. Also, the long gestation period and unclear streams of financial returns could make some governments averse to the idea of borrowing for HRD programs, even if these programs have high and enduring economic and social returns. Many of the HRD flagship components will need to be further developed in terms of general objectives, detailed scope, outputs, inputs, activities, cost estimates, implementation plan, and timetables. The regional aspects of projects need to be emphasized, particularly in the context of sharing of lessons and best practices across GMS countries.