

Preface

Marking nearly ten years of the Greater Mekong Subregion economic cooperation program (GMS Program), ministers from the six participating countries¹ have called for formulation of a strategic framework for the next ten years of economic cooperation. The first ten years have resulted in many important achievements, particularly in infrastructure provision. Now a new strategy for subregional economic cooperation is needed to respond to the changing global and regional context and apply the key lessons learned since the start of the GMS initiative.

The GMS countries recognize subregional cooperation as an important element in promoting economic growth and a better life for all. This recognition is integral to Asian Development Bank's (ADB's) Charter, prompting ADB to take on a catalytic role in initiating and building the GMS Program. By working together and sharing resources in mutually advantageous ways, participating countries can reduce poverty and ensure sustainable development in the subregion. For the program to succeed it is necessary that GMS countries identify highly practical projects and initiatives of mutual benefit.

Formulating a renewed strategic framework involved an extensive consultative and review process with stakeholders. These included the GMS

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¹ Cambodia, People's Republic of China/Yunnan Province, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.

The framework must balance between need for further economic cooperation, global and regional trends, and the limits of public resources.

governments, the private sector, the donor community, and civil society. The process presented many challenges and opportunities, adding to the potential scope and depth of the program. Reflecting the human and economic toll of recurrent flooding, several GMS countries believe that water resource management should be added. All stakeholders agree that more can and should be done collaboratively to protect the environment and the economic base of rural people. This view also applies to human resource development and labor market facilitation. Other interests and concerns (e.g., drug control, HIV/AIDS, agriculture) would further expand the GMS Program.

The strategic framework offers a renewed approach for the GMS Program for the next ten years. Necessarily, a strategic framework for subregional economic cooperation must be focused in order to ensure that limited technical and financial resources are used effectively in meeting priority needs. It must balance between the considerable scope of and need for further economic cooperation, given regional and global trends and the limits of public and private resources to support this cooperation.

The preparation of the strategic framework was facilitated by Toru Tatara, Head GMS Unit, Mekong Department, ADB, with the assistance of David Husband, Senior Advisor of the GMS Program. The strategic framework was endorsed by the GMS Ministers during the Tenth GMS Ministerial Conference.



RAJAT M. NAG
 Director General
 Mekong Department
 Asian Development Bank