

MEKONG INSTITUTE STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING NO. 2/2019

December 17, 2019; 9:00 am to 12:30 pm

Muong Thanh Grand Hotel, Da Nang, Vietnam

The second Steering Committee meeting for 2019 was called to order at 9:05 am. Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, MI Executive Director, welcomed members of the Steering Committee. He then turned the floor to Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of the MI Steering Committee for the “Welcome Remarks.”

ITEM 1: WELCOME REMARKS

1. Dr. Narongchai stated he was pleased to see all the members and representatives from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. He thanked MPI Vietnam for hosting the activity in Da Nang and the MI Secretariat for arranging the logistical and technical details.
2. Dr. Narongchai explained that the second Steering Committee meeting will present MI’s operational and programmatic performance and updated activities from July to December 2019, as well as the organization’s plans for 2019.
3. To be environmentally friendly, Dr. Narongchai proposed that in the next Governing Board meeting, the MI Secretariat will provide printed copies of the reports on the day of the meeting, if necessary, while forwarding PDF copies beforehand for the advance reading of Steering Committee and Council members.
4. With expressed hope for a productive and meaningful discussion, Dr. Narongchai formally declared the second MI Steering Committee meeting for 2019 open.

ITEM 2: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

5. Dr. Narongchai invited the members of the Steering Committee to review the agenda. He requested for comments and suggestions to be raised before proceeding with the meeting.

No comments or requests for changes were raised. The meeting agenda was adopted as proposed.

ITEM 3: BUSINESS ARRANGEMENTS

6. Dr. Watcharas announced that after the Steering Committee meeting at 12:30 pm, members will be invited to lunch at Cam Le. He also informed members interested to join the excursion tour in Hoi An to convene at the lobby by 1:50 pm for their prompt departure at 2:00 pm. Members will return to Da Nang at 6 pm and will proceed directly to the dinner reception dinner from 7 pm to 9 pm. Finally, Dr. Watcharas reminded members that the Meeting on the Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting will begin at 8:30 am on December 18, 2019.

ITEM 4: REVIEW KEY POINTS OF THE MINUTES OF THE MI STEERING COMMITTEE NUMBER 1/2019

7. Dr. Narongchai requested for the Steering Committee members to review the minutes of the 1/2019 Steering Committee meeting held in Khon Kaen, Thailand. He added that the minutes was informally adopted on July 22, 2019 and will require formal approval today.

No comments were raised. The Steering Committee approved and adopted the minutes of the July 22, 2019 Steering Committee Meeting.

ITEM 5: MATTERS FOR ACKNOWLEDGMENT

5.1 MI Operations Report from July to December 2019

8. Dr. Watcharas presented the impacts of 13 long-term projects, seven short-term projects and five customized trainings in 2019. He then enumerated milestones of the MI-PROSAFE (Promoting Safe

Food for Everyone) project supported by the New Zealand Aid Programme, the five projects under the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund, the RLED-EWED project supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and two activities under the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund.

9. Overall, he underscored that MI's long-term projects met sustainability objectives, as continued knowledge transfer of MI participants from the CCLMTV were and still continue to be implemented, long after the completion of MI trainings.
10. Dr. Narongchai opened the floor for discussion, requesting the Steering Committee members to comment on MI's development impacts in their respective home countries.
11. Mr. Than Aung Kyaw of Myanmar thanked MI's contributions in human resource development, capacity-building, and institutional strengthening. He explained that Myanmar, which is currently at a political and economic transition, has made peace- and trust-building one of its priority agenda. As such, he extended his gratitude to MI for its work in facilitating cross-border trade and movement, as well as its contributions to improving economic opportunities under RLED-EWEC. He said these support national peace-building, particularly among farmers, business associations, community groups and other stakeholders in remote ethnic and minority areas of the country.
12. Mr. Than Aung Kyaw prompted MI to continue its work on knowledge sharing, monitoring of project implementation and human resource development, as these are aligned with Myanmar's national agenda. Moreover, he directed the need for more capacity building investments for his people, citing e-commerce and agricultural commercialization as examples.
13. Dr. Narongchai commended Mr. Than Aung Kyaw for his country's focused agenda on national reconciliation. He then called on MI to explore with Myanmar other potential avenues of support that will not only enhance regional cooperation among the GMS countries but foster stronger social cohesion among ethnic and minority groups in Myanmar.
14. Ms. Sayan Kongkoe of Thailand sought clarification on the selection of participants in localized trainings, as well as the source of financial support provided to organizers in the conduct of such trainings under the PROSAFE project. She queried whether the transfer of knowledge was confined within MI participants' agencies or extended to outside offices to diversify beneficiary reach.
15. Dr. Watcharas explained that to instill ownership, localized trainings on food safety are led by MI alumni, who organized and selected the participants themselves. Dr. Watcharas cited that MI alumni from Cambodia's Ministry of Commerce trained participants from their agency, but also included officials from the ministries of agriculture and public health, as well as university representatives whose work were related to food safety.
16. Ms. Dalylack Keobanhthith of Lao PDR commended MI on its accomplishments in 2019. She asked MI of any challenges it encountered in project implementation so Lao PDR can better support MI in 2020.
17. Dr. Watcharas thanked Ms. Dalylack in assisting MI in its many project implementation. He added that MI faced and continue to address multiple challenges. Using RLED-EWEC as an example, Dr. Watcharas explained that MI—being new in community development—had difficulties in the initial phase of gaining the trust of local government representatives, farmers and other local stakeholders in the provincial areas of Vietnam, Myanmar and Lao PDR. He observed that should a similar project under the same timeline be offered to MI in the future, Dr. Watcharas proposed to conduct these in the same project areas to capitalize on gains achieved under the project's six-year run, rather than work in new communities which will require MI to start from zero.
18. In line with Ms. Dalylack's query, Ms. Sayan commended MI on the RLED-EWEC's project outcomes and inquired how these can be established into practice after the project has closed.

19. Dr. Watcharas explained that prior to the end of RLEC-EWEC, MI held meetings with stakeholders in the three countries to discuss ways forward in sustaining project gains. He cited that in Lao PDR, farmer groups and micro finance companies remain partners, while the owners of the Vanida Rice-Mill—the first to gain Good Agricultural Practice certification in the country—continue to provide trainings to other rice mill owners on how to secure GAP certification.
20. He further expounded that sustainability rests on political will. In Lao PDR, the strong support of the Vice Governor in Savannakhet resulted to the closure of two border checkpoints in Baan Dongsavanh and Baan Sala Kaibang. These remain closed to this day.
21. Mr. Geng Cong of China inquired if MI would consider decreasing the program period of MIYSP to attract more applicants from GMS countries.
22. Dr. Watcharas acknowledged that the six-month timeframe hindered the application process particularly among young professionals working in government agencies. He agreed to decrease the MISYP timeline from six to three months in 2020.
23. Mr. Try Socheat of Cambodia and Mr. Duong Hung Cuong of Vietnam sought clarification on the absence of Cambodian and Vietnamese representatives from the second batch of MISYP.
24. Dr. Watcharas explained that the program requires a minimum of one representative from the CCLMTV. He added that in the 2018 run, Cambodia and Vietnam were represented. Ms. Jian Wang, MI program coordinator, explained that in 2019 two representatives each from the two countries were interviewed and accepted. However, due to personal, health and work-related concerns, all four deferred from the program.
25. Before closing the discussion on “Long-Term Projects,” Dr. Narongchai observed that MI’s detailed per project reporting can confuse Steering Committee members on the overall impacts and contributions of MI to the region.
26. He proposed for MI to present its bi-annual progress and milestones sectorally according to the three main themes of agricultural commercialization; trade investment and facilitation and innovation technology and communications. The macro-scale reporting grounded on defined performance metrics or expected outcomes will provide a streamlined picture of MI’s overall contributions to the GMS. He added that it will also present Steering Committee members a clearer scope on areas requiring further guidance and facilitation.
27. Dr. Watcharas then proceeded to detail the impacts of the seven short-term projects and five customized trainings in 2019. He highlighted the popularity of the communications training, which focused on enhancing English writing, speaking and listening proficiencies for effective development. On its fourth run, Dr. Watcharas shared that the project opened discussions between MI and Mahidol University to continue the capacity-building program to promote stronger regional cooperation and integration in the GMS.
28. Dr. Narongchai observed that these projects reflected the flexibility and adaptability of MI in responding to the evolving capacity-buildings needs of development partners. He added that MI should consider more capacity building activities in digitization, innovation and technology as these are the priority development trends in the region.
29. Being as there were no queries or comments, Dr. Narongchai thanked Dr. Watcharas for his presentation before opening the floor to Mr. Rithy Buth, Finance and Operations officer, to present MI’s Administration and Finance reports.

The Steering Committee acknowledged MI’s Operations Report from July to December 2019.

5.1.2 Administration and Finance Reports

31. Under Administration and Finance, Mr. Rithy reported that in 2019 MI was comprised of 53 staff from 12 countries.
32. He then discussed that from January to November 2019, MI received USD 3,722,797, spent USD 3,595,743 and earned USD 127,054 as of November 31, 2019. Mr. Rithy estimated that by December 31, 2019, MI expects USD 4,059,123 in revenue, while spending USD 3,954,681. By December 2019, Mr. Rithy reported that 74 percent of the expenses will be spent on program delivery, while 26 percent will account for operational expenses. Finally, he projected MI will earn USD104,443 by December 31, 2019.
33. Mr. Rithy then presented that out of the 17 funding sources of MI, the top 10 donors/partners for 2019 were (i) MLCSF, (ii) SDC, (iii) NZAP), (iv) PR China, (v) TICA, (vi) MKCF, (vii) FAO YN, (viii) TBL, (ix) TCEB, and (x) MAFIC Cambodia.
34. In terms of the financial performance of MI's three departments, Mr. Rithy projected that TIF will achieve 75 percent of its targeted revenue, EWEC 97 percent, ADC 107 percent and ITC 107 percent by December 31, 2019.
35. Dr. Narongchai described MI staffing as well-balanced and diversified. He added that MI's financial performance was an improvement from 2018. He explained that while MI is not a profit-making institution, he emphasized that need for MI to generate more savings to attract and maintain qualified staff.
36. He added that MI's target for surplus savings must be five percent. He underscored that while MI has an equity of USD 2 million, the amount is not enough to ensure the organization's MI's long-term survival. He noted that MI must strengthen its project management efficiency as he observed MI reported USD 5.5. million in unearned income for 2019.
37. Ms. Sayan, who has noted the recurring issue of unearned income in the last three years, queried if the amount is returned to donors or kept in the bank. She also explored how MI can expedite project implementation to protect earnings.
38. Dr. Narongchai explained donors download advance payment to MI but the full payment is not realized until MI completes designated activities. Given the truncated fund release and implementation challenges, he proposed for MI to redesign its budgeting plan, so the institution can meet targeted surplus earnings.
39. Ms. Sayan reminded the members of the Steering Committee's agreement in 2/2018 to take into task financially underperforming MI departments.
40. Dr. Watcharas explained that while TIF completed only 75 percent of its revenue target, it is still the largest revenue generating department in MI. He added that other departments are financially performing well, with ITC expediting project activities in the last quarter of 2019 to secure earnings. However, each department head must meet the KPI set.
41. Dr. Narongchai shared that it was unfortunate that USD 22,503 will be returned to SDC when RLED-EWEC closed in October 2019. Overall, he described MI's financial performance as "still good" and improving, considering unforeseen challenges (e.g., depreciation of assets).

5.2 Relationship with Development Partners

42. Dr. Watcharas reported that MI formalized commitments with nine development partners for 2020. Of note, he reported the TICA approved a long-term project for 2020 to 2022. Dr. Watcharas also disclosed initial talks with ADB to formulate the regional strategic plan for 2030. MI will be contributing its services under the knowledge-sharing mechanism.

43. Dr. Narongchai observed that out of the nine development partners, six are with existing development partners and three with new institutions.

The Steering Committee acknowledged the report on the Relationship with Development Partners.

5.3 Review of MI Steering Committee and Council Meeting 1/2019 Recommendations

44. Continuing with the report, Dr. Watcharas detailed that most of the 13 recommendations are being carried out. Dr. Watcharas added that Steering Committee members' recommendations to align the MI Strategic Plan with other regional frameworks and involve development partners in the formulation of the Plan will be enforced in the first quarter of 2020 when the consultant fully comes on board.

The Steering Committee acknowledged the Review of the Steering Committee and Council Meeting 1/2019 Recommendations.

5.4 Report on the Minutes of the Quarterly Executive Meeting 3/2019

45. To strengthen MI's operation and financial efficiency, Dr. Watcharas reported that he and MI senior management meet with Dr. Narongchai on a quarterly basis.
46. Dr. Narongchai enjoined the Steering Committee members to read the minutes in detail to discern the close monitoring of program and financial activities. He added that the quarterly monitoring contributed to managing positive results, as evidenced by MI's stronger financial performance in 2019.

The Steering Committee acknowledged the report on the Quarterly Executive Meeting 1/2019.

5.5. Annual Progress of Key Performance Indicators of MI for 2019

47. For 2019, Dr. Watcharas reported that MI exceeded all of its target for 12 indicators under HCB, In the BEE level, MI surpassed its targets only for the indicator "number of collaborative agreements." MI partially achieved the other three BEE indicators' targets. Under number of policy papers developed, one was completed as of September 2019, with two more due for completion by the end of 2019.
48. Overall, Dr. Watcharas reported 112 capacity building events completed. These benefitted 3,270 direct participants and 9,031 indirect participants across the CCLMTV and other countries.
49. Dr. Narongchai and Ms. Sayan queried on the methods used to generate the numbers presented, as well as the tools used to triangulate the accuracy of the data.
50. Dr. Watcharas explained that MI conducted surveys and interviews during and after MI activities.
51. Dr. Narongchai then called on other Steering Committee members for their comments on MI's 2019 performance. As there were none, the discussion was closed. Mr. Watcharas called on Mr. Rithy to present the progress of the MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025 formulation.

The Steering Committee reviewed and acknowledged the report on Annual Progress of Key Performance Indicators of MI for 2019.

5.6 Progress on the Formulation of the MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025

52. Mr. Rithy reported that Mr. Koen W. Toonen, a Dutch national based in Vietnam, was hired to formulate the 2021-2025 strategic plan. He then presented December 20, 2019 to May 30, 2020 as the work timeline before stating that the final draft will be presented to members of the Steering Committee and Council for review during the first Governing Board meeting in 2020.

53. Dr. Watcharas added that the consultant will submit the inception and draft reports prior to the May 2020 deadline. These initial documents will be circulated to Steering Committee members and development partners for inputs and recommendations. Moreover, MI will report each step to the Steering Committee members. In March 2020, MI will present the initial draft to development partners in Bangkok for additional comments, as well.
54. Dr. Narongchai and Mr. Cuong described the early involvement of Steering Committee members and development partners as “good steps.” Mr. Cuong then emphasized that the Strategic Plan must be aligned with other regional and country strategic plans to ensure that MI’s plan address the priority objectives and agenda of GMS member countries.
55. Ms. Sayan noted that the five-month Strategic Plan formulation timeline was too short, calling it “quite rushed.” She inquired whether the consultant has agreed and committed to the timeline.
56. Mr. Rithy explained that the timeline was discussed at the previous Steering Committee meeting. He added that the consultant will not be working from scratch as the MI midterm evaluation report will be used as initial resource. Mr. Rithy further expounded that during the rigorous screening process, the consultant, who has deep understanding of SGDs and the GMS’ regional development framework—agreed to the timeline.
57. Dr. Watcharas said that the consultant will not be working alone but will be supported by a team in completing the final evaluation and strategic plan. Dr. Narongchai agreed that the formulation of the report was “not too difficult” and can be achieved.

The Steering Committee reviewed and acknowledged the report on the Progress on the Formulation of the MI Strategic Plan.

5.7 Progress on the Recruitment of the New MI Executive Director

58. Dr. Watcharas reported that his term as MI Executive Director will end on July 31, 2020. He requested Steering Committee members to identify the three-member committee who will recruit the new MI Executive Director, so the MI team can begin facilitating the recruitment process in the second week of January 2020. The recruitment is expected to be completed on May 31, 2020.
59. Dr. Narongchai reminded the Steering Committee members that in the last Council meeting, the members approved the formation of the committee. He added that three names will need to be submitted at the December 18, 2019 Council meeting. He explained that the list should comprise a representative from Vietnam and Thailand and one GMS expert.
60. Mr. Cuong stated that Ms. Nguyen Yen Hai will serve as Vietnam’s representative. Ms. Sayan disclosed that Director General Pattarat Hongtong will represent Thailand. Dr. Narongchai named Dr. Jean Pierre A. Verbiest, MI Honorary Advisor, as the third representative. Furthermore, Dr. Narongchai added that he and Dr. Watcharas will serve as resource persons for the committee.
61. Mr. Rithy informed the Steering Committee members that the budget for the recruitment exercise is THB 300,000. This covers advertisement fees, including travel and lodging costs of the three-member committee during the interview process.
62. Dr. Narongchai clarified that the THB 300,000 is merely the budget ceiling. He added that while the recruitment committee will shortlist the strongest candidates, the Council bears the sole task of appointing the MI Executive Director.
63. Mr. Geng Cong requested a copy of the selection criteria and the required qualifications for the position.

The Steering Committee reviewed and acknowledged the report on the Progress on the Recruitment of the New MI Executive Director.

ITEM 6: MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 MI Operational Plan and Budget 2020

64. In 2020, Dr. Watcharas reported that MI will implement 22 projects. These cover 13 long-term projects, seven short-term projects and two customized trainings. In the area of capacity building, these projects will entail the roll out of 49 capacity-building events, which is anticipated to benefit 1,157 direct participants and 2,020 indirect participants. MI also commits to produce 10 researches, four policy papers, four collaborating agreements and four policy changes. It also plans to establish four partnerships and develop 25 new proposals, among others.
65. Dr. Watcharas explained that the 2020 performance indicator numbers are lower than 2019 due to the end of the RLED-EWEC project. He then called on Mr. Rithy to present MI's projected 2020 budget.
66. Mr. Rithy reported that for 2020, MI expects USD 3,593,243 in revenue, USD3,470,358 in expenses, and USD122,885 in earnings. He explained that the projected 2020 revenue of USD3,593,243 is relatively lower than the 2019 projected revenue of USD 465,880.
67. Mr. Rithy added that to strengthen MI's financial efficiency, MI will adapt a six-point budget guideline. These cover the (i) review and revision of long-term projects' budgets to ensure that professional fees cover MI staff salaries, (ii) increase MI management fee or charge service fees for staff directly working on projects, (iii) internal re-allocation of staff, (iv) minimization of operational expenses, (v) management and monitoring of expenditures charged to donors.
68. Dr. Watcharas said that all development partners financially committed to implement all 22 projects for 2020. He further explained that due to the decrease of revenue, MI will minimize expenditure and operation costs.
69. Ms. Sayan sought clarification on how MI will increase management fees.
70. Dr. Watcharas explained that MI will increase the standard 10 percent management fee from 10 to 15 percent, depending on negotiations with development partners. He added that the increase will augment MI income. Further, Dr. Watcharas stated that MI previously underestimated the professional fees of staff members. Thus, it will apply a 20 percent professional fee to donors. The increase, he said, will establish realistic operational budgeting and will generate revenue for MI.
71. Ms. Sayan explained that government offices such as TICA work on established management fee rates with implementing agencies. She underscored that MI's proposed management fee increase of 10 to 15 percent and professional fee of 20 percent must be formalized in writing so that TICA will be able to consider supporting each project.
72. Dr. Watcharas disclosed that the Council approved the 10 percent management fee years before as a baseline, which gives MI room to increase the rate. He declared that the 10 to 15 percent proposed management fee is contingent upon negotiations with development partners, while MI's 20 percent professional fee is an internal MI agreement.
73. Mr. Rithy seconded Dr. Watcharas statement, adding that the MI financial policy will be updated to bear these two additional changes.
74. In the area of GMS countries' contributions to MI, Mr. Than Aung Kyaw stated that Myanmar will increase its contributions to USD 20,000 by 2020.
75. Returning to the discussion on the 2020 Operational Plan, Dr. Narongchai advised MI to apply digitization, innovation and technology—priority development trends—in the areas of agriculture, trade, and communications.

76. He added that MI should explore ways forward in decreasing its operating expenses of USD 1,088,138, to be able to meet the targeted five percent annual savings. Citing the approximate 2020 staff salary budget of USD 687,958, Dr. Narongchai advised that MI regulate salary increases to no more than five percent each year. He further stated that such increases must be rooted on KPIs.
77. Mr. Geng Cong stated that the GMS is economically growing and MI salaries should be appropriately adjusted. He then requested for MI to forward its criteria for salary increases and adjustments for submission and review of representatives in China's head office.

The Steering Committee agreed to endorse the MI Operational Plan and Budget for 2019.

6.2 Vehicle Disposal and Procurement

78. Mr. Rithy reported that MI plans to sell its five cars for an estimated USD 28,000, which was the value projected by a vehicle company in Khon Kaen. From the proceeds, MI proposed to purchase a 35-seater mini bus at USD 89,000. As such, MI requests for the Steering Committee to approve fund release of USD 61,000 to cover the remaining balance.
79. Dr. Watcharas affirmed that the mini bus will strengthen MI's cost-efficiency and operations.
80. Dr. Narongchai said that this administrative concern does not require Council approval. As MI management does not have authority to decide on investments, he proposed for the Steering Committee to review and assess the vehicle disposal and procurement proposal.
81. Ms. Sayan noted that there are advantages and disadvantages to owning company vehicles. She explained that government offices such as TICA do not purchase vehicles but rather hire car rentals to save on maintenance costs, as well as the salaries of drivers.
82. Dr. Watcharas explained that MI is a training institute that conducts a minimum of three trainings each month that ranges from a week to three weeks per activity. The rental of buses at extended periods would be too costly for MI to maintain. Moreover, he added that by owning the mini-bus, MI can charge development partners for the service, thus generating additional revenue.
83. Dr. Narongchai concurred with Ms. Sayan on the merits of shared economy. As such, he proposed for MI to sell the three vans from SDC. Funds from which can be used to purchase a new vehicle or for MI savings. He stated that the possible disposal of the remaining two vans, which have been used by MI for no less than six years, and the purchase of the mini bus will be discussed in detail between himself and MI management to expedite the resolution of the matter.

The Steering Committee agreed to resolve the Vehicle Disposal and Procurement proposal between the MI Chairman of the Steering Committee and MI management. The detailed administrative matter will not be presented to the Council on December 18, 2019.

6.3 Appointment of Subcommittee for 2019 Annual Performance Evaluation of MI Executive Director

84. Dr. Narongchai proposed for the same three-member committee who will recruit the new MI Executive Director to review the 2019 performance of Dr. Watcharas. The committee will be comprised of the MI Council Chairperson, Mrs. Nguyen Yen Hai; Director General of TICA, Ms. Pattarat Hongtong; and Dr. Jean Pierre A. Verbiest, MI Honorary Advisor.

The Steering Committee agreed and endorsed the three-member Subcommittee for the 2019 Annual Performance Evaluation of the MI Executive Director.

ITEM 7: COUNTRY REPORT OF STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

85. Moving on with the meeting, Dr. Narongchai invited the members of the Steering Committee to present their reports and feedback, as well as recommendations to MI for 2020.

Cambodia: Mr. Try Socheat (in place of H.E. Mr. Chea Chantum)

86. Mr. Socheat relayed the message of H.E. Chantum, in verbatim as follows: H.E. Chantum extended his congratulations for MI's achievements in 2019. In all his years serving as the Cambodian representative in the MI Steering Committee, he saw the improvement of the institution. He added that Cambodia will increase its annual contribution to MI from USD 10,000 to USD 20,000 in 2020.
87. Furthermore, Mr. Chantum requested that MI consider including representatives from Cambodia's Coordinating Agency in any workshops or activities MI will conduct in Cambodia. He stressed that such opportunities will increase technical capacities, widen networking and multiply the transfer of technical learnings.
88. Mr. Chantum extended his appreciation for MI's work and wishes for the organization to stay "long and healthy." He ended his message by committing to continue to support and cooperate with MI for the growth and prosperity of the GMS

P.R. China: Mr. Geng Cong (in place of Mr. Li Hong)

89. Mr. Geng Cong thanked MI and the MPI of Vietnam for hosting the Steering Committee meeting in Da Nang. He then relayed the personal message of Mr. Li Hong who extended his best wishes to the Steering Committee members and MI Secretariat.
90. He described the Lancang-Mekong cooperation as important for the region. He added that he is glad MI has benefited from the LMSCF, which provided the institution opportunities to foster connectivity, strengthen cooperation and build a sense of community in the region.
91. Mr. Geng Cong added that China has partnered with MI on many programs through the years. These range from MIYSP to workshops that strengthen policies and innovation. He said MIYSP brought together scholars from different countries, engendered better understanding of regional socioeconomic needs, built professional capacities and enhanced social cohesion. He hoped that MI will consider a shorter MIYSP program period and involve more representatives from different countries to expand the program's gains within the GMS.
92. Mr. Geng Cong seconded Dr. Narongchai's statement for MI to multiply its capacity-building programs and projects on technology, and explore ways on how these can improve agriculture, trade and communications for the betterment of farmers, traders, business people, among others.

Lao PDR: Ms. Dalylack Keobanhthith

93. Ms. Dalylack also thanked MPI Vietnam and MI for hosting the Steering Committee meeting. She added that Lao PDR "values and congratulates" MI for its 2019 achievements in capacity-building, human resource development and building an enabling environment for the socio-economic development of the GMS.
94. She then underscored the critical importance of MI to align its strategic plan with the GMS Strategic Framework (2030), ACMECS Master Plan 2019-2023, and other Mekong cooperation frameworks, including strategic plans of GMS member countries.
95. She expounded that Lao PDR continues to need capacity building support in proposal writing, program management, M and E, and English language development. Ms. Dalylack also proposed to increase the number of Lao representation in MI programs, staffing and on-the-job trainings so more citizens from her country can benefit from MI's capacity-building programmes.

Myanmar: Mr. Than Aung Kyaw (In place of Ms. Moh Moh Naing)

96. Mr. Than Aung Kyaw also thanked MPI Vietnam and MI for hosting the meeting. He also seconded recommendations of other Steering Committee members in aligning MI's strategic plans with other regional and country strategic plans.
97. Moreover, he enjoined MI to provide more technical support in Myanmar during its political and economic transition so the country can better benefit from the special and deferential treatment for least developed countries under the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which will be the new impetus for regional economic integration in the near future.
98. Mr. Kyaw also requested MI to provide tailored capacity-building investments for Myanmar to enhance its labor and environmental standards, as means to increase the country's employability and employment opportunities. He added the need for technical support in achieving environmental sustainability for Myanmar to better address emerging issues from potential new free trade agreements.

Thailand: Ms. Sayan Kongkoeay

99. Ms. Sayan stated her admiration for MI's work, which goes beyond capacity-building and M and E in the GMS. She foresees MI will also establish itself as a research institution for other developing agencies in the region, securing higher revenue for the international intergovernmental institution.
100. She added that TICA supports MI through its THB 10 million annual contributions and project-based activities. In 2020, Ms. Sayan reported that TICA will partner with MI in implementing one long-term project (2020 to 2022) and two one-off activities.
101. Ms. Sayan expressed less concern for MI's financial status, based on its presentation during the meeting. She urged MI to explore project opportunities with ACMECS. Before ending, Ms. Sayan again stated her concern for the tight timeframe in the development of the MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

Vietnam: Mr. Duong Hung Cuong

102. Mr. Cuong stated that MPI Vietnam was pleased to host the Steering Committee in Da Nang and work with MI during the meeting preparations.
103. As with other Steering Committee members, he emphasized that MI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 must be aligned with regional frameworks. He also expressed hopes that the sustainability of MI programs and projects will continue with the appointment of the new executive director in 2020.
104. He then congratulated MI's performance in the last six months of 2019. He also recommended closer relations between MI and MPI Vietnam to ensure efficiency in coordination of activities with the head office.

ITEM 8: DATE AND VENUE OF THE NEXT MEETING

105. With information from Dr. Watcharas, Dr. Narongchai informed the Steering Committee members that the first 2020 Governing Board meeting will be held in Khon Kaen, Thailand in the third week of July. The final dates, including the specific location, will be finalized with Council members on December 18, 2019.

ITEM 9: OTHER MATTERS

106. No other matters were raised or discussed. The meeting was adjourned at 1:05 pm.

Annex 1. 2/2019 Steering Committee Meeting Participants

| STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS | | |
|---|---|--|
| GOVERNMENT/ORGANIZATION/INSTITUTION | OFFICIAL AND POSITION | OFFICE |
| Steering Committee Chairman | Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee Chairman | MFC Asset Management PLC Bangkok, Thailand |
| Representative of the Royal Government of Cambodia | <i>In place of H.E. Mr. Chea Chantum</i> Mr. Try Socheat Deputy Director of Department | General Secretariat for Population and Development Ministry of Planning Phnom Penh, Cambodia |
| Representative of the Government of the People's Republic of China | <i>In place of Mr. Li Hong</i> Mr. Geng Cong Assistant to the Permanent Representative | Permanent Mission of China to UNESCAP Embassy of P. R. China Bangkok, Thailand |
| Representative of the Government of Lao PDR | Ms. Dalylack Keobanhthith Deputy Director General | Department of Economic Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vientiane, Lao PDR |
| Representative of the Government of the Republic of Myanmar | <i>In place of Ms. Moh Moh Naing</i> Mr. Than Aung Kyaw Director General | Foreign Economic Relations Department Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar |
| Representative of the Royal Thai Government | Ms. Sayan Kongkoeay Director of Thai Cooperation Branch I | Thailand International Cooperation Agency Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bangkok, Thailand |
| Representative of the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam | Mr. Duong Hung Cuong Director | International Financial Institutions Division Foreign Economic Relations Department Ministry of Planning and Investment Hanoi, Vietnam |
| Mekong Institute | Dr. Watcharas Leelawath Executive Director | Mekong Institute Khon Kaen, Thailand |
| OBSERVERS | | |
| Government of Lao PDR | Mr. Bomba Phapmexay Desk Officer | Economic Affairs Department Ministry of Foreign Affairs Vientiane, Lao PDR |
| Government of the Republic of Myanmar | Ms. Tin Theint Theint Thaw Assistant Director | Foreign Economic Relations Department Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar |
| Royal Thai Government | Ms. Sukarawan Khumrunroj First Secretary | Thai Cooperation Branch I Thailand International Cooperation Agency Ministry of Foreign Affairs Bangkok, Thailand |
| Mekong Institute | Mr. Rithy Buth Director | Finance and Operations Department Khon Kaen, Thailand |
| MEETING SECRETARIAT | | |
| Mekong Institute | Ms. Pornwilai Pumira External Relations Manager | Office of the Executive Director |
| | Ms. Wang Jian Program Coordinator | Innovation and Technological Connectivity Department |
| | Ms. Soraya Ututalum Communications Coordinator | Communications and Knowledge Management Department |
| | Mr. Le Ngoc Quang Knowledge Management Officer | Communications and Knowledge Management Department |

