



Building Connections for a Stronger GMS Community



Ms. Phonphilom Douangmalalay

was one of 12 GMS nationals who completed MI's Young Scholars Program (MIYSP). As a hardworking and dedicated political coordinator at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Lao PDR, she has consistently applied MI's lessons in program management, networking, and advocacy in her line of work.

Get to know how she is faring three years after completing her six-month assignment at the MI Headquarters.

Do you think programs such as MIYSP are useful to regional cooperation? If so, why and how?

In this globalized era, where cooperation is necessary to bring about socioeconomic development, investments must continue to be made to strengthen our sense of community in the GMS. MIYSP is one of these tools. It provides young people like me a chance to learn about the inner workings of development work and how to build mutual understanding. This is so we can address challenges and be more responsive to the needs of people at the national and regional levels for our common progress.

How did the MI Young Scholars Program help you in your line of work?

The value of the program is its on-the-job training approach. MI officers gave us direct experience in the protocol of engaging with partners, developing project proposals, managing projects, and building relations to build a wide-ranging GMS network. To this day, I apply these learnings to my work. It has made me more flexible, adaptive, and proactive in finding solutions to challenges.

I also continue to engage with my fellow MI Young Scholars from Cambodia, P.R. China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. This connection opens avenues for more learning and better access to opportunities.



What do you think were the most useful components about the program?

Other than capacity building, MI showed us the power of soft development. In bringing together a broad range of people across all sectors, MI officers showed us that forums, study visits, and other types of dialogues can build solutions and roll out initiatives. These inclusive engagements can enhance the well-being of people in a holistic and responsive manner.

In addition, by pooling young GMS nationals and making us work together, the Program helped us better understand that "win-win cooperation" will bring progress in the region.

What other areas of support do you think are needed to further regional cooperation?

Programs like MIYSP should continue so more people can be trained to contribute to regional integration and cooperation. Sessions on digital technology and transformation such as internet of things, information and communication technology standardization, Artificial Intelligence would also be useful, so the GMS can catch up with global trends.

Finally, with the benefits I and other GMS nationals gained, MI should consider designing a similar program for university students, particularly those from Lao PDR, because they are the future of our region.■