



The Mekong Institute

The Mekong Institute is a unique facility providing specialised training for key public and private sector personnel in the fields of economic and administrative reform. Located on the campus of Khon Kaen University in Northeast Thailand, it serves countries in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) of Asia: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and the Yunnan Province of China.

With a population of over 300 million, the GMS is an area of significant economic potential. As the countries of the region move toward more open economies and greater regional integration, the demand for human resource development is increasing, particularly in the areas of economic management and public administration.



▲ Prior to the completion of the MI building, the MI office was located in the KKU Radio Station Office Block.

The Institute aims to assist these countries in their transition from command to market economies by developing key management skills in the region. It has been established with assistance from the governments of New Zealand and Thailand. The New Zealand funding is provided from the NZODA (New Zealand Overseas Development Assistance) programme.

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All participating countries have had a strong say in the policy and management of the Institute and its curriculum, through representation on the Institute Council, Project Coordinating Committee and Board of Studies.

Recent political objectives of the countries comprising the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (GMS) include the strengthening of political and economic collaboration to achieve sustainable development of the Mekong River Watershed which they share between them. All have moved to implement policies designed to shift their economies towards a more open market orientation.





The Establishment of the Mekong Institute

The concept of a regionally located institution which would provide training for middle- and senior-level officials and managers from throughout the region in the processes of transition economics and in the processes of management of such changes, was likely to have wide appeal within the region. Such a concept was proposed by Khon Kaen University (KKU), an institution already providing tertiary level training to students from many neighbouring GMS countries.

During a visit in 1994 to KKU, which had during the past three decades developed strong associations with New Zealand, the then Prime Minister of New Zealand approved New Zealand's support for an Institute for Economic Development and Cooperation for the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (IEDC-GMS). This institute, later to be referred to as the Mekong Institute (MI), was envisaged as fostering training in economic transformation and in management of the far reaching changes which would ensue. New Zealand itself had passed through two decades of fundamental economic change from a highly interventionist economy to a relatively free economic model and was thus in a good position to offer practical advice and expertise. The concept also fitted with NZODA's Asia regional policy objectives, where a single larger project focusing on objectives likely to provide benefits for all GMS countries in their movement towards a more free market alignment was seen as a means of concentrating development resources. The project resulted in the construction and equipping of an institute with 30 residential places and a well-resourced educational facility capable of supporting training courses with a focus on economics and development. Courses funded by the New Zealand and Thai Governments concentrate on providing an understanding of processes involved in the transformation from an interventionist, command economic system to an open, free market system. Implementation of transformation processes brings urgent need for management of ensuing change. The Institute's teaching role thus focuses on macro and sectoral transition economics processes and on the management of the changes such processes bring.



The Goal

The project goal of Mekong Institute is defined as: To assist the Governments of the GMS to promote sustainable socio-economic development and regional cooperation through the development of a training institute for senior and middle-level government and private sector personnel.

There are four objectives:

- To establish an effective training and research institute specialising in sustainable development, transition economics and management of reform at KKU, Thailand.
- To prepare and support senior and middle-level men and women in government and the private sector for course delivery in the English language.
- To carry out training which will be appropriate to prepare senior and middle-level men and women in government and the private sector in planning, management and implementation of sustainable development and transition economics.
- To contribute to regional cooperation through training and research at the Institute.

Additionally, the project seeks to institutionalise appropriate management structures and systems at the Institute and to develop the necessary human resources, which will promote sustainability of the Institute beyond the period of NZODA support.

The project design is cognisant of the need to incorporate gender and development and environment issues throughout the project as the primary objectives above are addressed. It is envisaged that the Institute will encourage greater participation of women at higher levels of decision and policy making within the GMS by the incorporation of sound gender and development components within all MI courses.



▲ At the Beehive, Institute Director, Dr. Vanchai Vatanasapt making a courtesy call on the Prime Minister of New Zealand, Right Honorable James B. Bolger in Wellington, capital of New Zealand, in Mr. Bolger's Beehive Office.



▲ Mekong Institute Council Meeting, held at Mekong Institute on July 22, 1998. Dr. Amnuay Viravan, H.E. Dr. Adrian Macey and distinguished members joined the meeting. ▼





Progress Made

New Zealand and Thai Government sponsored courses

The Governments of New Zealand and Thailand are committed to sponsoring two types of courses at Mekong Institute: a three-week course (A-type) for senior managers, and a 10-week course (B-type) for middle level personnel. In a full year it is expected that 3 A-type courses and 2 B-type courses will be held.

These courses are each for a total of 30 participants, from the 6 countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Cambodia, Vietnam, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand and Yunnan (a province of China).

The courses are conducted in English, and each training course includes English Language training. This is provided to potential MI course participants, prior to the start of an MI course, at outreach centres in each country (except Thailand) and during the courses at the institute itself.

All MI courses are provided in a flexible format to meet the needs of participants. This format includes case studies, guest speakers, seminars, field visits and lectures. The cross-cutting issues of gender and environment are integrated into all courses.

Courses sponsored by other donors

In addition to the courses sponsored by the governments of New Zealand and Thailand, the Mekong Institute is able to organise and host courses funded by other donors. These courses are planned with, and designed to meet, the needs and requirements of donors.

Chronology of courses in the review period

The first course held at the Mekong Institute, Course A1, began on 24 February 1997. Within the period under review the following courses have been held:

Course A1	24 February - 14 March 1997
Course B1	19 May - 26 July 1997
Lao PDR UNDP Training Course	11 - 29 August 1997
Course B2	8 September - 14 November 1997



▲ Dr. Amnuay Viravan, the Chairman of the Mekong Institute Council gave a talk to participants on the course B3.



Kunming Workshop on PS/SOE Reform	19 - 24 January 1998
ASEAN Ecotourism Workshops	17 - 24 February 1998
Course A2	2 - 20 March 1998
Course A3	23 March - 10 April 1998
Course A4	17 April - 15 May 1998
Course B3	18 May - 24 July 1998

- Course A1, A2, A3 and A4 all had the general theme "Economies in Transition". Each course had a common module for the first 1.5 weeks, "Markets and Markets in Transition", and then the second half of the course focused on Trade or Public Sector Reform.

- Course B1, B2 and B3 each had 4 modules: Markets and Markets in Transition, the Social and Environmental Impacts of Development, Trade and Public Sector Reform.

- The Lao PDR UNDP training course was designed to help prepare Lao PDR Government officials for participation in ASEAN. It was funded by UNDP.

- Two workshops on Public Sector and State-owned Enterprise Reform were held in Kunming. They were partially funded by the New Zealand Government with the cooperation of the Yunnan Research & Coordination Office for Lancang Mekong River Sub-regional Cooperation.

- The ASEAN Ecotourism Workshops were for people from ASEAN countries working in the tourism sector. The New Zealand Government funded these two workshops.

- The ADB-funded course on "Project Accounting" was for officials from Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam.



Finances

Support for the Institute's establishment is provided under the NZODA Asia Regional Programme. A total of \$NZ 18 million has been committed to the project over a five year period. Building and equipment costs, and a substantial part of operational expenses over the five-year life of the project are provided. As the language of instruction is English, New Zealand also provides for the support, and costs, of pre-course "outreach" English Language Training (ELT) for prospective participants in their own countries, and ELT during economics and management courses provided at the Institute.

Additional and substantial support is being provided via Thailand's Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (DTEC). Fellowship support is provided to augment the 75 fellowships per year provided via NZODA. DTEC also provides its regular privileges and immunities to foreign experts and its customary exemptions from duties and taxes for qualifying equipment purchased and imported for the project.

The Institute is aiming to become fully sustainable as a regional institution and, to this end, the active participation of regional Government partners is being sought. The involvement of regional business interests is also solicited for the sponsorship of courses and operational costs.

Through the development of a well-equipped information centre and information management system, the Institute anticipates providing leadership within the region in the management and dissemination of information on transitional economics. The Institute will network with institutions in all member countries to achieve its information leadership role.

The Mekong Institute has limited funding available for contestable research, whereby qualifying research proposals from member countries can bid to receive funding assistance. The Institute's research has a regional focus on the economics of transition and, where possible, involves cooperation between GMS countries. Through the several anticipated programmes of teaching, information provision and research, the Institute aspires to establish a reputation for quality and credibility as a key institution in the economic progress of the GMS.



Governing Bodies

Institute Council

An Institute Council has been established to oversee policy, budget allocations and work plans. The Council consists of a high level official from each member country. Additional members during the period of assistance are representatives of NZODA, DTEC and the Management Services Consultant. In recognition of the IEDC-GMS being a KKU institution, the President of KKU, or his representative, is also a member. There are also two Council members representing the business community.

The current members at 1 April 1999, are:

1. Dr. Amnuay Viravan

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Chairman of the Advisory Board/
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3. H.E. Ou Orhat

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9. Dr. Prinya Chindapasirt

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10. Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee

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12. Mr. Gordon Parkinson

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13. Prof. Dr. Vanchai Vatanasapt

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Project Coordinating Committee

During the period of assistance from NZODA, project operations and Institute development were coordinated by a Project Coordinating Committee (PCC) with representation from the Institute, KKU, DTEC, NZODA, the MSC and participating countries. The role of the PCC was to provide coordination of the inputs of all interested parties in the operational management of the assistance project for the support and development of the Institute.

The members, from inception until 30 June 1998 were:

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4. Madam You Ay

Country Representative from Cambodia
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2. Mr. Richard Graves

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7. Ms. Suchada Thaibunthao

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10. Dr. Winit Chinsuwan

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11. Mr. Jeff Howe

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New Zealand Consultative Committee

As this is the largest project in the NZODA programme, a Consultative Committee has been established to advise MFAT on project implementation and to provide input on a range of project issues.

The members, from inception until 30 June 1998 were :

1. Mr. Gordon Parkinson

Chairman

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2. Mr. Philip Gibson

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