



“From Troubled Waters to the Mighty River”

In 15 years, MI has built a solid reputation as a pre-eminent GMS-based learning institute servicing the human resource development (HRD) needs of a sub-region once ravaged by dire economic want and conflict. Throughout these years, MI has been intrinsically involved in a dynamic process which has seen Southeast Asia and the GMS countries rise to become one of the world’s most-watched growth areas. Throughout the growth process, MI has continuously adapted to meet the needs of a region undergoing rapid changes. Institutionally, MI has evolved from a small development assistance program into a GMS inter-governmental organization (IGO).



MI Council Members gather at the 15th Anniversary Celebration in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 27 June.

Twenty years after the GMS Economic Cooperation Program laid the grounds for sub-regional connectivity and competitiveness through massive infrastructure projects, GMS leaders sounded the call to build on the gains of physical connectivity to further accelerate economic development and integration. Cooperation and integration perspectives have transcended

sub-regional borders and now seek to bond more closely with regional ASEAN neighbors.

Addressing stakeholders at the MI 15th Anniversary Celebration in June 2012, Steering Committee Chairman, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee aptly described the GMS journey as one, “From troubled waters to the mighty [Mekong] river.” *(more on p. 3)*

Realizing Myanmar’s Economic Potential

Article based on ‘ADB Myanmar Country Paper: ASEAN 2030: Growing Together For Economic Prosperity’ by Jean Pierre A. Verbiest and Tin Htoo Naing (27 November 2011), and presentation to MI staff on 27 August 2012. All quotes and information, except where denoted, have been taken from this paper and presentation.

If economically less-developed ASEAN nations face the greatest challenges in preparing for AEC integration, then Myanmar faces the greatest challenge of all.

Longstanding macroeconomic instability fuelled by weak political and economic institutions and decades of fiscal and monetary policy mismanagement have combined to make it the poorest country in Asia. Myanmar lags behind its ASEAN neighbors in almost all key political, social and economic development indicators. Stalled economic and social development has been exacerbated by international sanctions which, until recently, left it politically and economically isolated from the international community and almost completely void of foreign direct investment (FDI). However, recent political developments and a wave of liberalization

appears to have opened the door for the country’s economic reawakening.

In 2012, new government rhetoric on economic transformation into a transparent, market-economy based model has been backed up with the beginnings of true reform. For the first time in decades, there is good reason to hope that the real economic and social development which Myanmar’s people and supporters desperately seek is just around the corner.



Photo by: Phongchai Moon-saan

Myanmar has always possessed immense economic potential. The nation of some 60 million has all the elements required for economic growth; abundant natural resources including gas, oil, minerals, timber and fisheries, a potentially lucrative agricultural sector, and a highly advantageous strategic location directly connecting East, Southeast and South Asia. Dr. Jean Pierre Verbiest, Principal Advisor... *(more on p. 5)*

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MEKONG CONNECTION 15th Anniversary Issue

MI MILESTONES

The inception of the Mekong Institute (MI) can be traced back to the former-New Zealand Prime Minister James Bolger's visit to Khon Kaen University in 1994. The visit led to the signing of an MOU between the New Zealand and Thailand governments in 1995 establishing MI as a development assistance project focusing primarily on the transition of GMS nations into the market-economy with other themes including public sector reform, trade policy, and tourism.

The signing of the MI Charter in 2003 transformed MI into a self-sustaining, regionally-governed training and research hub owned and operated by the six GMS governments. MI's focus shifted to cross-border issues, tackling subjects like rural development, good governance, and trade and investment facilitation.

In 2009, His Majesty the King of Thailand signed the 'Bill for the Protection of the Operation of the Mekong Institute', transforming MI into a recognized Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) under Thai Law. MI's portfolio continued to expand, encompassing policy dialogue, research, structured learning visits, consultancy services, and multi-year projects.

In 2010, MI's programs shifted with the changing regional and global economic environment to focus on AEC integration. Today, MI's courses, projects, and research continue to prioritize HRD as the key to narrowing the development gap between the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam) and the more economically developed ASEAN nations in order to bring about more equitable, sustainable economic growth in through the AEC.



25 December, 1995: Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn laid the foundation stone of the MI residential training facility in Khon Kaen.



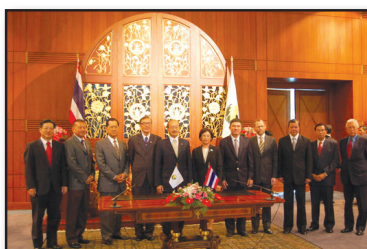
20 December, 1996: The first Mekong Institute Council Meeting chaired by Prof. Dr. Amnuay Viravan.



14 March, 1997: NZ Ambassador, Dr. Adrian Macey, officially opened the MI residential training facility, and closed MI's first A1 training course on 'Economies in Transition'.



18 June, 2003: the Mekong Institute Charter was signed by the six GMS countries, establishing MI as a GMS training institute.



17 July, 2007: the Thai Government formally approved the 'MI Headquarters Agreement' to recognize MI as an IGO under local law.



1 July, 2009: The MI Stakeholders' Consultative Meeting was held in Khon Kaen.



18 November, 2010: Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, ASEAN Secretary-General visited MI.



12-13 July, 2011: The inaugural Mekong Forum, organized by MI, was held in Khon Kaen.



2 February, 2012: The first batch of MINZAS Scholars (with NZ Ambassador, H.E. Bede Corry, and MI Director Dr. Su-chat Katima), receive research grants at the New Zealand Embassy, Bangkok.



27 June, 2012: MI celebrated its 15th Anniversary in a special commemorative event in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The 15th Anniversary Celebration In Photographs

15TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION IN PHNOM PENH, CAMBODIA



WINNERS FROM THE 15TH ANNIVERSARY GMS PHOTO CONTEST



Mr. Piya Palapunya 'Self Reliance', Mr. Eakarín Eakartchariyawong 'The Livelihood', Mr. Sakesan Wangchaisuk 'Tea Plucking', Mr. Nguyen Dinh Lac 'To the Market'

“From Troubled Waters (cont..)

Today, the sub-region finds itself pulled along by new currents of change sweeping through the GMS as it vies for its niche on the global stage. National goals are increasingly aligned to the regional agenda framed within the vision of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). Transnational and national interactions between public and private actors are now visibly permeated by a heightened appreciation of the importance of regional cooperation and integration for equitable and sustainable development.

The challenges posed by AEC 2015 highlight the need for new approaches towards economic development. New policies, regulatory frameworks, and infrastructure projects to facilitate regional integration as part of a wider process of integration within ASEAN are underway, particularly in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

HRD which imparts the essential skills, knowledge and approaches necessary in the new regional and global context thus remains a top priority at all levels and in all sectors, from government officials and policy-makers to private enterprise leaders to rural and urban producers and traders.

Policy-makers must sharpen their awareness of troublesome barriers hampering private sector organizations and craft appropriate regulatory frameworks to facilitate smoother integration into regional and global value chains. Governments must become more adept at defining strategies and systems standards that will ease the flow of goods and services. The skill-sets of the labor force in GMS countries must be upgraded and re-engineered to enhance employability and productivity required by new job markets and working systems. Private sector leaders must become fluent in the currency of transnational and global trade and the utilization of the provisions of free trade-agreements. More coherent adaptation into regional and global value chains will require greater communication and collaboration between the private and public sectors.

MI's path remains inextricably tied to this broader regional and global vision of the future. A native to the GMS, MI should actively engage and participate in what Dr. Narongchai terms, "Asian economic dynamism". Program outlooks must expand beyond the sub-region and harness innovative modalities while simultaneously prioritizing the closing of development disparities. By remaining focused on this vision of the future, MI can continue to surge with the mighty river into a vast ocean of possibilities.



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Photo by: Mr. Methee Makornkun

EDITORIAL



While MI's stakeholders look back on the institute's growth, development, and contribution to HRD development and integration in the GMS over the past 15 years with a great sense of pride and achievement, we cannot – and should not – rest on past achievements. It is my firm belief that MI possesses the capability to evolve into a GMS-based knowledge-center for economic cooperation and integration in the next ten years.

This does not mean that MI's focus or services will change entirely. We will continue to maintain and preserve our traditional identity as an HRD and capacity building institution offering training services, learning visits, and non-political dialogue forums to public and private stakeholders. By focusing on improving our research capabilities, MI will be able to contribute more actively to national and regional policy formation as a regional think-tank of sorts.

Unquestionably, MI has the tools to fulfill this goal. We are owned and operated by the nations of the GMS and are staffed predominantly by talented natives from all six countries. MI possesses advantages many other institutions simply do not – an intimate understanding of the native cultures, languages, customs and sensitive issues in the region. In addition, our status as an IGO owned and operated by the six GMS nations, means that we have unprecedented access to vast networks of public and private-sector leaders. MI can thus connect and engage at every-level of society (from grass roots to upper-government), and has the knowledge, skills, and capabilities to contribute to policy dialogue from multiple local, regional, and international perspectives.

After 15 years, MI has truly matured as an entity run by the region, for the region, and we must capitalize on this unique position. When people think of the issues under our thematic areas, MI should automatically spring to mind as a preeminent authority. This is the long-term vision for MI and it is a vision which is slowly, but surely, taking shape.

Dr. Suchat Katima
MI Director

Facilitating Public-Private Partnerships: SLV on Transnational Cabbage Value Chains for Local Economic Growth

To remain competitive in the more dynamic, free-flowing ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) marketplace, local and provincial agricultural producers, private business operators, traders and policy makers will need to develop new, regionally and globally relevant economic perspectives and understandings. The removal of policy barriers to transnational trade, streamlining of border-crossing rules and regulations, formulation of more efficient marketing strategies, and the promotion of best post-harvest practices, will greatly assist agricultural industries and organizations in the CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao, Myanmar, and Vietnam) in accessing new regional and global markets.

MI's recent Structured Learning Visit (SLV), 'Cross-Border Value Chains of Cabbage from Lao PDR to Thailand', (27-31 August) - sponsored by the New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade Aid Programme, and part of the joint three-year project with MI, 'Capacity Development Program for Integrating CLMV Economies into AEC' - represents MI's increased focus on addressing these aforementioned issues, with an emphasis on promoting increased engagement and cooperation between public-private sector organizations.

Building on the July 2011 MI research project, 'Cross Border Trade of Cabbage from the Bolaven Plateau, Lao PDR', the SLV brought together a total of 18 local Lao farmers and agricultural producers, private logistics operators, traders, provincial border officials, and national policy-makers from Ministry of Planning and Investment (Lao PDR), involved in agricultural value chains from the fields of Nang Tao, and Chong Mek, Champasak (Lao PDR), to markets in Nakorn Ratchasima and Bangkok (Thailand).

During the SLV, participants took part in discussion and information-sharing sessions on key cross-border value chain concepts and transnational agricultural trade policies and procedures. New knowledge gained during the sessions was consolidated through field visits to key-sites along the value chain including farms, border crossing points, and markets. At each site, participants engaged directly with new networks, witnessing first-hand the practical problems and constraints facing the full-spectrum of stakeholders.

Upon conclusion of the SLV, participants commented unanimously that exposure to new networks and the heightened understanding of the various roles and processes entailed in the value chain allowed them to better conceptualize the issues, barriers, and constraints to future growth. *(more on page 5)*



Photo by: Mr. Pollit Thitiyarithinun

Facilitating Private-Public (cont...)

During plenary discussion sessions in Bangkok, participants demonstrated their newer, more holistic understandings, by articulating policy recommendations on agricultural production, trade and investment, marketing, and post-harvest technology.

By facilitating increased connections between key-actors and organizations on both sides of the public-private divide, and providing knowledge-sharing sessions on best practices to farmers, logistics operators, and border officials, it is hoped that

value chains will become an increasingly important instrument of local economic development leading into AEC. Increased network connections and the ability to conceptualize the wider impact of policy decisions by relevant authorities will be a major factor in helping local industries and business operators to maximize new opportunities for growth and prosperity in the post-2015 AEC economic environment.

Realizing Myanmar's Economic Potential (cont...)

to the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) asserts that if Myanmar's market-economy transition is managed correctly, it could stand to benefit more than any other GMS nation from the more dynamic and competitive marketplace provided by the AEC. Within 20 years, he asserts, Myanmar could become a kind of "super-Vietnam", with a per capita income of around 4,800 USD. If this projection is accurate, Myanmar would become a middle income emerging economy by 2030.

In order to realize Myanmar's immense economic potential, however, major changes are needed to address its longstanding macroeconomic instability which lies at the core of its development woes. This will require major reforms to fiscal/budget, monetary, exchange rate policies, and structural reform to the major political and economic policy-making institutions such as the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank.

Early signs appear positive. In April 2012, the government moved to unify the exchange rate - an important and long-awaited reform long-targeted by economists and regional economic development experts such as Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee as the single biggest issue stalling the country's economic development.

The unification of the exchange rate will go a long way to providing a more conducive environment for private sector growth and FDI, but such changes must be done carefully and as part of a wider campaign of reform establishing the proper rules and regulations needed to operate and maintain a functioning market economy. With such rules and regulations in place, Myanmar will be able to entice foreign investors and businesses to invest in the country's many potentially lucrative industries. This will be essential in kick-starting the country's economic growth.

The real question surrounding the realization of Myanmar's economic potential, is whether or not it possesses the institutional capability to effectively implement the necessary reforms. Critics and scholars often compare Myanmar's economic development potential to Vietnam in the late 80s as it embarked on the process of market-reforms.

Although possessing many advantages over Vietnam in terms of higher foreign exchange reserves, natural resources, and strategic location, Myanmar's key political and economic policy-making institutions are probably weaker than Vietnam's were at the time.

Myanmar still has a core group of economic

experts in market economics and policy formulation on hand, but beyond this core group, knowledge and skills in key areas are severely lacking. The necessary reform process cannot take place without capable leaders who possess the necessary skills, knowledge, and experience to implement the required reforms. Investment in the nation's human capital through capacity building in key government institutions and ministries, as well as private sector organizations will thus be vital in realizing the nation's economic potential. The re-establishment of a quality and well-resourced education system will be an essential long-term investment in the nation's future that Myanmar must prioritize.

Although the challenges facing Myanmar are great, there is good reason for optimism. Myanmar undoubtedly has the potential to attain rapid economic growth. Although AEC integration places a huge challenge in front of a nation only beginning its journey into the market-economy, the experiences of its ASEAN neighbors offers relevant lessons about possible pitfalls and a host of regional experts and institutions - including MI - willing to help guide it down the right path, back to its rightful historical place amongst the region's leading economic powerhouses.



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SPECIAL GUESTS



20 February: H.E. Ana Maria Ramirez, Ambassador of Argentina to Thailand



31 January: Dr. Hiroyuki Tagushi and Mr. Daisuke Matsushima, experts from JICA based at NESDB



18 June: Naval officers from the Line of Officers School, Naval Education Department, Royal Thai Navy.



23 July: Indonesian Ambassador H.E. Mr. Lutfi Rauf



4 February: Dr. Giovanni Capannelli, Senior Economist and Research Fellow, ADBI and Dr. Jean Pierre Verbiest, Honorary Adviser to MI



17 July: Mr. Won Sup Park, Minister Counselor at the Korean Embassy in Thailand



23 July: H.E. Mr. Tony Lynch, New Zealand Ambassador to Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Thailand



4 May: Korean Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Lim Jae-Hong



24 July: Lecturers and researchers from Nagoya University, Japan

MI HIGHLIGHTS

Water Energy Seminar



Supported by the Government of PDR China, MI held a regional seminar on 'Water Energy Development and Environmental Protection in the GMS' on 21-23 March, at the Cambodiana Hotel in Phnom Penh. The three-day seminar, themed, 'Meeting Development Needs and Maintaining Ecological Balance', gathered institutions and individuals involved in sustainable hydropower and environmental protection in the GMS. Issues such as the lack of research and information dissemination, monitoring of environmental conditions, and the lack of standardized agreements, plans and policies among GMS countries, emerged as major issues requiring greater attention by public and private stakeholders.

MINZAS Scholarships



February 2012 marked the beginning of the inaugural Mekong Institute-New Zealand Ambassador's Scholarship project (MINZAS). The MINZAS program provides financial and technical support to promising post-graduate scholars in the GMS region undertaking research on topics related to MI's three thematic areas. Scholarship recipients participated in four-phases of the project including a structured training course (Feb), self-guided research (Mar-Jul), the MINZAS Research Roundtable Meeting (Jul), and the publication of research articles in an MI 'Working Paper Series' (scheduled for Nov). The project has received ongoing support and input from the NZ Embassy, with Ambassadors H.E Bede Cory (former) and H.E Tony Lynch (current), both attending MINZAS events to meet with recipients and discuss the importance of the ongoing MI-NZ relationship. Applications for the 2012-2013 MINZAS scholarships are currently open on MINZAS applications (see back page for more).

Forest Resource Management



MI, in collaboration with Asia-Pacific Network for Sustainable Forest Management and Rehabilitation (APFNet), Yunnan Academy of Biodiversity (YAB) and Southwest Forestry University (SWFU) organized a workshop entitled, 'The Role of Forest Resource Management in GMS'. The workshop officially opened on 11 July, in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, PR China, and brought together 25 government policy makers, academics, and staff from various NGOs involved in forest management from the six GMS countries. Participants offered insights into the current situation and challenges facing GMS economies in terms of sustainable management and the use of forest resources and watershed management. The 10-day program explored real case studies, identifying and exploring tangible solutions to the challenges facing the region.

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SME Cluster Development and Export Consortia National Workshops



Throughout August, a series of two-day national workshops, designed to enhance SME cluster development and export consortia promotion were held in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. The national workshops form part of the joint MI-New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade Aid Programme three-year project; *'Capacity Building for the Integration of CLMV Economies into ASEAN Economic Community'*. Workshops were supported by a number of local public and private-sector partners, promoting closer collaboration and cooperation between public and private stakeholders. A number of new export-consortia were formed as a direct result of the workshops. To support the program, policy research will be conducted early next year on the utilization of free Trade Agreements by SMEs. This research will help to enable small businesses to compete in the AEC marketplace.

For a full list of supporting local partners in each country, please check the national workshop reports on MI's website.

62nd Aiest Conference



In cooperation with the Faculty of Management Sciences, Khon Kaen University, MI helped co-organize the *'62nd Association of International Scientific Experts on Tourism (Aiest) Conference'*, from 27-31 August, at the Pullman Hotel, in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The Association of International Scientific Experts on Tourism (Aiest) is a global network of scientific and practical experts with a particular interest in tourism. Over 80 international scholars and young researchers participated in the 2012 conference which included speeches, breakout sessions, and excursions on pressing topics under the theme, *'Advances in Tourism Research: Perspectives of Actors, Institutions and Systems'*. MI Steering Committee Chairman, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee addressed participants at the opening ceremony where he highlighted the need for greater self-reliance with regards to economic growth in the GMS.

Youth Camp



With the support of the New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade Aid Programme, MI conducted a 29-day Youth Camp from the 2-29 July. The camp brought together 39 senior university students from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV), and five leading agri-businesses in Thailand; Betagro Group, Sriviroj Farm, Chiang Mai Fresh Milk Company, Raming Tea Company, and C.P. Group. Participating companies offered the students short internships in their respective companies, providing them with first-hand experiences of modern farming systems and the latest technological advances used in the production, processing, and marketing of agricultural commodities. Upon conclusion of the camp, participants gave presentations and formed plans to transfer their new knowledge and skills to their home countries.

ARTNeT Partnership



Sharing mutual goals and visions for the future of trade and investment in the GMS led to the signing of a formalized partnership agreement between MI and the Asia-Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade (ARTNeT) on 31 August. ARTNeT is a prestigious network which aims primarily to increase the extent and depth of trade research in order to produce more informed policies and policy dialogue. MI's Trade and Facilitation Department will benefit greatly from the partnership, granting it exposure and access to other regional partners working on common themes such as trade facilitation, trade investment, SME development, and regional economic integration.



ROK and Mekong Cooperation Prosperity Plan Proposed

On 3 May, MI hosted the, *'The Mekong-ROK Comprehensive Partnership for Mutual Prosperity'* meeting. The meeting saw a number of esteemed international speakers, including the Republic of Korea (ROK) Ambassador to Thailand, H.E. Lim Jae-Hong, make a number of recommendations regarding mutual cooperation and promoting synergy on regional assistance programs aimed at supporting inclusive, sustainable, and environmentally-responsible growth. The ROK government has approved two programs proposed during the May meeting, namely; *'Promoting Regional Agriculture Value Chains on the GMS Southern Economic Corridor'*, and the *'FREATA Certified Logistics Master'* program.

Enhancing the Utilization of ASEAN FTAs



The regional training program, *'Enhancing the Utilization of ASEAN FTAs, Trade Negotiation and Trade Policy Development'*, successfully concluded on 3 August at MI's training facility in Khon Kaen. The two-week training program constitutes one activity of the three-year, *'Capacity Development Program for Integrating CLMV Economies into AEC'* project sponsored by the New Zealand Foreign Affairs & Trade Aid Programme. Thirty-two participants from a wide range of organizations and associations, including senior-to-mid-level officials from ministries of commerce, various industry associations, chambers of commerce and industry, and associations of importers and exporters took part in the program.



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MI CALENDAR FOR SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2012

Activities	Type	Date
Midterm Review of MI Strategic Plan	Workshop	17 Sept - 2 Oct
Orientation and Basic Training Course on Management and Facilitation Skills	Workshop	8-14 Oct
Baseline Study of Local Economic Development on EWEC	Research	8-16 Oct
Action Research on SME Cluster Development and Export Consortia	Research	15 Oct- 30 Jan '13
Training on Agriculture Value Chains	Training	15-26 Oct
Structured Learning Visit on Farmer-led Community-based Enterprises	Structured Learning Visit	17-21 Oct
Regional Workshop and Structured Learning Visit on Successful Contract Farming Models and Cross-Border Trade	Structured Learning Visit	22-27 Oct
Managing Public Sector Reform	Training	22 Oct - 9 Nov
Stock-taking Research on Agricultural Productivity in CLMV with ADBI	Structured Learning Visit	5-12 Nov
GAP and Post Harvest Practices Training Synthesis and Evaluation	Workshop	7-9 Nov
Cross-border Labor Migration Management	Training	26 Nov -1 Dec
Synthesis & Evaluation Workshop for SME Cluster and Export Consortia	Workshop	28-30 Nov
Policy Consultation Workshop on Skills Supply and TVET in the GMS	Workshop	3- 4 Dec
MI Open House	Event	6 Dec
Governing Board Meetings	Meeting	7 Dec
Synthesis and Evaluation Workshop on EWEC Private Sector Development Program	Workshop	11-13 Dec



NEW ZEALAND
Embassy BANGKOK
TE AKA AORERE

MINZAS Scholarship Announcement

The Mekong Institute (MI) is announcing the availability of the Mekong Institute New Zealand Ambassador Scholarships (MINZAS) for 12 students from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand (CLMT) pursuing field- research for a Masters Degree course. The MINZAS scholarships are available starting February for the 2012-2013 academic year and provide financial and technical support for selected applicants. Three scholarships are allotted for each eligible country. Students will be selected primarily on the basis of academic achievement and potential, relevance of thesis proposal, and demonstrated potential to play an influential role in GMS cooperation and integration. Scholarships are funded through the New Zealand Embassy in Bangkok.

Scholarship includes:

- USD \$2,500 research grant (to be used to undertake field research)
- One month training on research methodology at the Mekong Institute in Khon Kaen, Thailand
- Two roundtrip airfares from home country to Thailand to participate in compulsory training and roundtable meeting.

To Apply: Candidates should send the completed application form, research proposal, and other related documents via email to sopheak@mekonginstitute.org. Application forms and additional information can be accessed at www.mekonginstitute.org/minzas

Closing date: 30 November 2012



By: Mr. Winniwat Tritongsat

Contribute to our Newsletter!

The Mekong Institute would love to publish your stories on regional issues. For information or questions, email luke@mekongintute.org.

For more of our stories, please visit our website : www.mekonginstitute.org.



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