

## DRAFT MINUTES OF THE STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING NO. 1/2023

### KEY AGREEMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE MI COUNCIL

<b>Recommendations for Consideration by the MI Council</b>	
<p>The Steering Committee approved to endorse the following to the Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implementation Plan of Mid-term Review of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025 <i>(with necessary updates from the MI Secretariat according to the discussion)</i></li> <li>2. Revised Activity Plan of 2H, 2023</li> <li>3. Budget Revision 2023</li> <li>4. Audited Financial Report 2022</li> <li>5. Results of Executive Director Performance Evaluation 2022, and End of Term Performance Evaluation and Term of Office.</li> </ol>	
<b>Key Agreements</b>	
<p>Item 4. Adoption of Minutes of the Steering Committee Meeting No. 2/2022 and Action Progress on Recommendations from Governing Board Meeting 2/2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MI Secretariat to send meeting documents at least a week before the meeting</li> </ul>
<p>Item 5.2 Highlights and Recommendations of the MI Coordinating Agencies (CAs) Meeting 1/2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● There is a need to clarify and strengthen the role of CAs.</li> <li>● To ensure transparency and keep the SC well-informed about the roles and responsibilities of the CAs, MI Secretariat should share and furnish them with relevant correspondences involving the CAs.</li> </ul>
<p>Item 5.4 Update on the Implementation Plan of Mid-term Review of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● MI Secretariat to involve GB members in the MTR Process.</li> <li>● The findings of the MTR should be presented to the SC before presenting to the Development Partners and the Council.</li> </ul>
<p>Item 5.5 Update on the Concept Note on MI Collaborating Centers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The committee deferred further deliberations on the matter.</li> <li>● MI Secretariat to provide additional details and information before the submission of recommendations to the Council.</li> </ul>
<p>Item 5.6 Proposal on Equitable Participation of GMS Member Countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The committee deferred further discussions to another meeting to allow for in-depth exploration and thoughtful deliberation.</li> </ul>
<p>Item 6.5 Establishment of Liaison Office in Bangkok</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The Committee agreed to subject the matter to further deliberation prior to providing recommendations to the Council.</li> </ul>

**ITEM 1: WELCOME REMARKS**

1. The hybrid meeting of the Mekong Institute (MI) Steering Committee (SC), chaired by Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, commenced at 2:00 pm on July 17, 2023. The meeting took place at the MI Headquarters in Khon Kaen, Thailand. In a hybrid format, six members of the council representing GMS governments participated remotely via the Zoom platform. The MI Secretariat's Executive Director and the Senior Management Team attended the meeting in person at the MI Headquarters.
2. The Chair acknowledged that it was the first time that the SC Meeting had been scheduled days ahead of the Council Meeting. In light of this, he recommended that the timing of future meetings be adjusted to allow for sufficient preparation time before the Council Meeting.

**ITEM 2: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA**

3. The Chair enumerated the items on the agenda and asked for comments, concerns, or points of clarification from the members. There being none, the members adopted the agenda.

**ITEM 3: BUSINESS ARRANGEMENTS**

4. Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director, shared administrative announcements and reminders including instructions on how to reach out to the MI Secretariat if members encounter any technical issues, request for a group photo, and details about the time for a recess and for the adjournment.
5. Mr. Suriyan announced that there will be an upcoming Special SC Meeting on July 27, 2023, in Kunming, Yunnan Province, P. R. China. The meeting, which is scheduled after the Mekong Forum 2023 and one day prior to the Council Meeting, will primarily focus on the adoption of the meeting summary and report and the finalization of the agenda and arrangements for the Council Meeting.

**ITEM 4: ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING NO. 2/2022 AND ACTION PROGRESS ON RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GOVERNING BOARD MEETING 2/2022**

6. The Chair sought comments, concerns, or points of clarification from members regarding the two documents. There being none, the members adopted the minutes of the SC Meeting 2/2022 and acknowledged the action progress on recommendations from the Governing Board meeting.
7. Mr. Ke Yousheng from P. R. China raised a concern regarding the dissemination of meeting documents among the SC members. He noted that China only received two documents related to the meeting: the Activity Report for the first half of the year and the Revised Activity Plan. He raised the importance of providing the committee with meeting documents well ahead of the meeting date. By doing so, members would have adequate time to review the materials thoroughly and prepare their input and feedback, which would facilitate more informed and productive discussions during the meeting. To address this concern, he requested that in future meetings, all relevant meeting documents be shared with SC members sufficiently in advance.
8. The Chair acknowledged the concern of Mr. Ke and reminded the MI Secretariat to send meeting documents at least a week before the meeting.

**ITEM 5: MATTERS FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT****Item 5.1 Activity Report of 2H, 2022**

9. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present the MI Activity Report for the second half of 2022. The following are the highlights of his presentation:
10. **Program Activities.** MI's Program Activities have been progressing in line with the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and the Annual Work Plan 2023. During the first half of the year, 20 projects were implemented by the MI

program departments, reaching 939 direct participants. Among the implemented projects, eleven were long-term projects, five were short-term projects, and four were one-off activities.

11. Progress has been made in various focus areas including food safety, rice production, sustainable and smart agricultural supply chains, sustainable and smart tourism, cross-border trade, trade negotiation, cross-border paperless trade, water-energy-food nexus, and climate resilience, among others.
12. MI started to implement its activities since the beginning of the year by implementing most of the carry-forward projects from 2022 in Q1. Due to the improved COVID-19 situation, MI activities have gradually shifted to onsite events while some remained online and hybrid. As of June 30, 2023, 42% of the planned activities were implemented by programs and operations.
13. **Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL).** MI developed and rolled out a new web-based Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) system to regularly track activity progress. Also, the MI's MEL Policy, Strategy, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were revised and a workshop was organized for MI staff.
14. **Partnership and Resource Mobilization.** MI continued to enhance existing partnerships, notably by forging closer partnerships with the ASEAN Secretariat as a technical and knowledge partner as well as Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) by participating in the LMC Week in Yunnan 2023. MI also reconnected with Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. In addition, MI formalized MOUs with several partners, namely Khon Kaen University International College (KKUIC), Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA), Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), and Prince of Songkla University (PSU).
15. **Human Resources.** As of June 2023, MI employs 51 staff of 13 nationalities; among them 39% were male and 61% were female. Currently, the staff represents all six GMS countries.
16. **Finance.** MI developed a system to track and report expenses incurred by each department/unit against the approved budget, in its effort to control expenses within the approved budget. Cash flow forecasting, monitoring, and control mechanisms were also applied.
17. MI's financial performance from January to June 2023 recorded earnings of USD 156,001. As of May 31, 2023, MI's total revenue was USD 1,370,036 with the total expense amounted to USD 1,233,037. MI recorded net earnings of USD 136,999 as of May 31, 2023, and earned USD 169,467 excluding the non-cash expenses.
18. MI's current total assets amounted to USD 11,259,609 while the cash and cash equivalent amounted to USD 9,896,257. MI's other current assets were USD 296,907 with the net value of fixed assets amounting to USD 1,066,445.
19. MI's total liabilities were USD 9,194,875, including unearned revenue from GMS countries' contributions of USD 291,419. The total equity was USD 2,064,735, which shows an increase of 6.2% compared to December 31, 2022.

#### **Comments from the Steering Committee Members on Item 5.1 - Activity Report of 2H, 2022**

20. Mr. Ke acknowledged the comprehensive report by Mr. Suriyan and congratulated MI for striving to have equal gender representation in all of its capacity development events. On the other hand, he inquired about the reason behind the difficulty in attracting participants and the initiatives being done by MI to attract participants from each member state.
21. In response, Mr. Suriyan clarified that the problem is about reaching and attracting the right participants. He emphasized the need to find the appropriate stakeholders for the capacity-building activities. He enumerated the strategies of MI to recruit participants. He said that the call for applications is being promoted through

three main channels - the Coordinating Agencies, MI's website and social media platforms; and the Alumni Network.

22. Mr. Ke expressed support to reach new participants and make MI capacity-building activities even more inclusive. He also requested the MI Secretariat to recruit more staff from the member states and ensure equal representation of member states in the composition of MI.
23. Mr. Ke congratulated the SC members and the MI Secretariat for having a good revenue turnout. He said that the current revenue can already be considered a good outcome. He shared that there will be incoming donations from P. R. China that will be allocated in the second half of the year.

#### **Item 5.2 Highlights and Recommendations of the MI Coordinating Agencies Meeting 1/2023**

24. Mr. Suriyan reported to the SC that a meeting with MI Coordinating Agencies (CAs) was held on July 13, 2023. The meeting aimed to update the CAs on major upcoming activities and events, including the Mekong Forum 2023 and Governing Board (GB) Meeting that will be organized on July 27 and 28, 2023, respectively.
25. Mr. Suriyan shared with the committee that the CA members agreed to support the MI Secretariat in the Mid-Term Review (MTR) process.

#### **Comments from the Steering Committee Members on the Highlights and Recommendations of the MI Coordinating Agencies Meeting 1/2023**

26. Mr. Ke acknowledged the significance of involving the CAs in the MTR process but expressed that he does not have a thorough understanding of their specific roles and responsibilities. He emphasized the importance of gaining clarity regarding the distinction between the CAs and the Collaborating Centers.
27. Mr. Suriyan clarified that since 2016, the focus of CAs has shifted from administrative and logistics duties to providing policy coordination support. As country focal points, they are responsible for coordinating the institute's activities and play a crucial role in in-country project implementation. However, it was emphasized that the CAs do not possess decision-making authority; instead, they primarily assist MI by facilitating the coordination of various activities. Mr. Suriyan requested to take up the demarcation of roles of CAs and Collaborating Centers during the discussion on Item 5.5 of the agenda.
28. The Steering Committee took note of the need to clarify and strengthen the role of CAs and provided recommendations to the MI Secretariat. To ensure transparency and keep the SC well-informed about the roles and responsibilities of the CAs, the Chair proposed that the MI Secretariat should share and furnish them with relevant correspondences involving the CAs. In addition, Mr. Ke put forth a recommendation for the review and streamlining of the management and decision-making processes of MI.
29. The Chair emphasized that CAs are appointed by member countries and, as such, MI holds no authority over their designation. This clarification highlighted that the appointment process lies solely within the purview of the respective member countries, and MI's role is to engage and work with the appointed CAs to facilitate effective collaboration.
30. Acknowledging the significance of discussing the demarcation of roles between CAs and Collaborating Centers, the Chair agreed to reserve further deliberations on this matter for Item 5.5 of the agenda.

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**Item 5.3 Update on the Mekong Forum 2023**

31. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present the updates on the Mekong Forum 2023. The following are the highlights of his presentation:
32. The Mekong Forum 2023 will be held on July 27, 2023, in Kunming City, Yunnan Province, P. R. China under the theme “Driving Transformative Change in the GMS.” Around 300 participants are expected to attend the event onsite.
33. In addition to the plenary session, the conference will feature three thematic breakout sessions that attendees can choose to participate in. The breakout sessions are titled as follows: (1) Transforming the Agriculture Sector toward Increased Productivity, Sustainability, and Resilience; (2) Unlocking Opportunities: Reshaping Logistics and Investment through Emerging Trends and Green Practices; and (3) Transformative Pathways towards Low Carbon Development in the Energy Sector.
34. After the forum, participants have the option to join a study tour to Kunming Railway Vocation and Technical College and Kunming International Flora Auction Trading Center on July 28, 2023.
35. The meeting acknowledged the kind support from P. R. China and the People’s Government of Yunnan Province in organizing the Mekong Forum 2023.

**Comments from the SC Members on the Mekong Forum 2023**

36. Mr. Ke reechoed the invitation to all SC members to participate in the planned activities in Yunnan Province. He emphasized the significance of the event as it will mark the first time the forum is being held outside Thailand and in P. R. China.
37. The Chair shared that about 90 executives of Khon Kaen University will join the event.

**Item 5.4 Update on the Implementation Plan of Mid-term Review of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025**

38. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present updates on the Implementation Plan of Midterm Review of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Below are the highlights of his presentation:
39. To facilitate the MTR process, the organization has engaged the services of an external consultant, who will provide support from August to October 2023. The MTR will begin with an in-house workshop involving MI staff to kick off the evaluation process.
40. Data collection for the MTR will be conducted through various methods, including an online survey, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with key stakeholders. These approaches will allow for a comprehensive assessment of MI's progress, challenges, and areas for improvement.
41. The MTR's findings will be compiled and presented at the Development Partners' Meeting scheduled for December 2023. This presentation will offer stakeholders an opportunity to understand the organization's performance and progress during the first half of the Strategic Plan.
42. Based on the MTR's results and recommendations, adjustments to the second half of the MI Strategic Plan will be proposed. These proposals will then be submitted to the GB during its 2/2023 meeting for consideration and approval.

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**Comments from the SC Members on Updates on the Implementation Plan of Mid-term Review of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025**

43. Mr. Ke acknowledged and reiterated the importance of the mid-term review. He raised that the participation of GMS member states in the MTR process was not mentioned in the implementation plan. He inquired about when the findings would be shared with the SC members. He suggested including details and information about interviews with line agencies in the implementation plan. He also suggested presenting the findings to the SC before the Council.
44. Mr. Suriyan shared that the Annex of the mid-term review implementation plan details the full timeline for the activity. He clarified that the SC members will be involved as key informants in the review process.
45. The Meeting emphasized the engagement of GB members in the MTR process.

**Item 5.5 Update on the Concept Note on MI Collaborating Centers**

46. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present updates on the Concept Note on MI Collaborating Centers. Below are the highlights of his presentation:
47. The establishment of MI Collaborating Centers will be beneficial in terms of achieving technical and financial due diligence, cost-effectiveness, and effective support to program operationalization at the local level. Departments/units within a government agency, research/ training institutes, academic institutions, and chambers of commerce are identified as the potential Collaborating Centers.
48. The roles and functions of Collaborating Centers include implementing programs and activities in each GMS country as well as providing information services and advice to MI in organizing technical programs and activities. On the other hand, the MI Headquarters shall provide financial and technical supervision to Collaborating Centers according to agreed terms.

**Comments from the SC Members on Update on the Concept Note on MI Collaborating Centers**

49. Mr. Ke reiterated his concern about the work delineation between the Collaborating Centers and CAs. He expressed that he needs further clarification as to how the centers will operate. He inquired about whether the committee should make a decision about the issue.
50. In the interest of time, the Chair recommended that the committee defer further deliberations on the matter to a later time. Recognizing the importance of thoroughly discussing the subject, the Chair suggested that the MI Secretariat provide additional details and information before the submission of recommendations to the Council.

**Item 5.6 Proposal on Equitable Participation of GMS Member Countries**

51. With the invitation from the Chair, Mr. Suriyan presented the background, rationale, objectives, and proposed implementation strategies for ensuring equitable participation of GMS Member Countries.

**Comments from the SC Members on the Proposal for Equitable Participation of GMS Member Countries**

52. The Chair encouraged all members to support the idea of equitable participation within the organization.
53. P. R. China expressed strong support for this principle, emphasizing the importance of wide and equal participation from all GMS member states. Mr. Ke clarified that all of its projects are open to all member

states. They further encouraged the MI Secretariat to proactively reach out to partners to ensure that all GMS member states have the opportunity to participate in MI projects.

54. However, Mr. Ke also raised a concern that he did not receive any concept or explanatory note about the matter, implying the need for more clarity and information to facilitate discussions on the topic.
55. Mr. Suriyan explained that achieving equal participation is a complex objective that may require further discussion. He stated the establishment of a seed or buffer fund may facilitate equal participation from GMS member states. He suggested incorporating the matter into the ongoing legal review process for co-funding projects to ensure it receives adequate consideration.
56. The Chairman acknowledged the importance of diverse funding sources to achieve the goal of equal participation, and China reiterated its commitment to financing projects with equal consideration for all member states.
57. The meeting recognized the importance of fully engaging each of the GMS countries. However, considering the complexity and importance of the matter, China suggested deferring further discussions to another meeting to allow for in-depth exploration and thoughtful deliberation.

#### **Item 5.7 MI 2022 Annual Report**

58. The committee took note of the progress of the MI Annual Report 2022, which is expected to be released in Q3 of 2023

#### ***Group Photo and Refreshments Break***

59. The Chair called for a 15-minute break for a group photo and refreshments before proceeding to the next agenda item.

### **ITEM 6: MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION**

#### **Item 6.1 Revised Activity Plan of 2H, 2023**

60. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present updates on the Revised Activity Plan of 2H, 2023. Below are the highlights his presentation:
61. Key revisions to the earlier plan were presented, particularly with regard to securing additional funding for 12 projects, bringing the total from 17 to 29. These projects will focus on key regional thematic areas, including food safety, sustainable food systems, climate-smart agriculture, market access, post-harvest management, and various topics related to the agricultural and commercialization development (ADC) theme. Additionally, the trade and investment facilitation (TIF) theme will encompass sustainable and smart tourism, MSME competitiveness, cross-border digital services and e-platforms, and capacity building. The sustainable energy and environment (SEE) theme will focus on the food-energy-water nexus, green economy, energy, climate-smart technologies for agriculture and trade events, sustainable smart tourism, and regional framework synergy.
62. Regarding HR, the recruitment plan has been revised to include a total of 9 positions, comprising 7 permanent positions and 2 temporary positions. The recruitment process for the remaining period of 2023 will involve the following openings: Director (1), Manager (1), Coordinator (2), Officer (2), and Assistants (3).

63. The meeting emphasized the importance of recruiting GMS nationals and giving due consideration to countries that are underrepresented within the GMS region. This approach aims to promote inclusivity and diversity within the organization and ensures that the workforce reflects the varied backgrounds and perspectives of GMS member countries.

#### Comments from the Steering Committee Members on the Revised Activity Plan of 2H, 2023

64. Mr. Ke commended the MI Secretariat for maintaining a healthy financial status. He also mentioned P. R. China's efforts in bringing more projects to MI, indicating their commitment to supporting the organization's initiatives. Another concern raised by Mr. Ke was about MI's resource management, particularly in relation to staffing. He inquired whether MI has sufficient staff capacity to handle new projects in the post-pandemic period.
65. Mr. Suriyan responded by assuring the SC members that MI is dedicated to carefully selecting the right staff members to support its projects and initiatives effectively. To strengthen the recruitment process, the ED sought the help of the SC members in spreading the word about MI's recruitment efforts.
66. **On behalf of the Steering Committee, the Chairman approved to endorse the Revised Activity Plan of 2H, 2023 to the Council.**

#### Item 6.2 Budget Revision 2023

67. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present updates on the Budget Revision 2023. Below are the highlights of the presentation:
68. The total revenue for the period is projected to reach USD 3,922,374, indicating an 8% increase compared to the original annual budget. On the other hand, the total expenses, including non-cash expenses, amount to USD 3,835,332.
69. Before considering the non-cash expense, the estimated revenue over expenses stands at USD 87,042, which represents approximately 2.22% of the total revenue. However, when excluding the non-cash expense, the earnings amount to USD 195,740, which accounts for around 4.99% of the total revenue.
70. A total of USD 2,609,240 worth of Opportunity Funds were submitted. Out of this amount, MI was able to secure USD 960,501, accounting for approximately 37% of the total submitted funds. Furthermore, when considering the projected Opportunity Funds, which amounted to USD 700,827, MI was able to realize USD 960,501. This achievement represents an impressive 137% of the originally planned funds.
71. **On behalf of the Steering Committee, the Chair approved to endorse the Budget Revision 2023 to the Council.**

#### Item 6.3 Audited Financial Report 2022

72. Mr. Suriyan reported that based on the Audited Financial Report for the year 2022 conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers (Lao), no material audit findings were reported for MI's Financial Statement for the same year. MI closed 2022 with total revenue of USD 3,283,856, a total expense of USD 3,140,938, and total earnings of USD 142,918.
73. **On behalf of the Steering Committee, the Chair approved to endorse the Audited Financial Report 2023 to the Council.**



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**Item 6.4 Transboundary Haze in the Greater Mekong Subregion**

74. The Chair invited Mr. Suriyan to present about the Transboundary Haze in the GMS. Mr. Suriyan discussed the impacts, causes, existing transboundary haze policy and cooperation mechanisms in the ASEAN and GMS, and MI's approach and proposition on addressing the matter.

**Comments from the Steering Committee Members on the Transboundary Haze in the GMS**

75. The Chair suggested that MI can engage with various development partners to collaborate on finding solutions to address the issue of transboundary haze.
76. Mr. Ke acknowledged the significance of addressing the transboundary haze as an environmental and climate change concern. He expressed support for MI's exploration of projects aimed at tackling this problem. China also shared that some of its clean air initiatives are carried out under the frameworks of the United Nations (UN) and ASEAN.
77. Mrs. Arunee Hiam of Thailand shared that the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) supports climate action and enumerated specific initiatives undertaken with development partners.
78. Mr. Nguyen Viet Ha of Viet Nam emphasized the importance of sharing data on forest fires among member countries. This information exchange would enable countries to collaborate more effectively in mitigating and responding to forest fire incidents.

**Item 6.5 Establishment of Liaison Office in Bangkok**

79. The committee was informed about the proposal to establish a Liaison Office in Bangkok, as presented by the MI Secretariat. The purpose of this office is to enhance MI's presence and engagement, facilitating better coordination and communication with relevant stakeholders and partners.

**Comments from the Steering Committee Members on the Establishment of a Liaison Office in Bangkok**

80. Mrs. Arunee inquired about the office's responsibilities and whether it would be in charge of ACMECS (Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy).
81. Mr. Suriyan clarified that while some support for ACMECS would be based in Khon Kaen, the majority of ACMECS support would not fall under the purview of the Bangkok Liaison Office.
82. Mr. Viet Ha suggested that a financial evaluation, numeric explanation, and financial projection be conducted to assess the impact of establishing a liaison office on fund mobilization and operational costs of MI.
83. In response, the Chair instructed the MI Secretariat to prepare a financial forecast for presentation to the SC, taking into account the financial implications of the proposed Liaison Office.
84. Mr. Ke reiterated the need for explanatory notes to guide members in discussions and expressed concerns about the potential fiscal burden the establishment could have on MI's revenues. He suggested focusing the budget on the implementation of the Strategic Plan and raised concerns about the office's consistency with cost-effectiveness. He expressed that they cannot make a decision about the matter at this time and suggested keeping the discussion for another meeting, with the MI Secretariat producing a comprehensive concept note for further consideration.

85. **The Chairman concluded that the idea of a Liaison Office is still welcome, but more analysis and further deliberation are required. With regard to the concerns raised, the Committee agreed to subject the matter to further deliberation prior to providing recommendations to the Council.**

#### **Item 6.6 The Results of Executive Director Performance Evaluation 2022, and End of Term Performance Evaluation and Term of Office**

86. To maintain the confidentiality of deliberations within the SC, members of the MI Secretariat were excused from the discussion.
87. **The meeting endorsed the Results of the Executive Director Performance Evaluation 2022, and End of Term Performance Evaluation and Term of Office. The Executive Director was highly evaluated. As a result, the meeting agreed to endorse to the Council the renewal of the Executive Director's contract for a second term, which will commence on September 1, 2023, and continue until August 31, 2026.**
88. Once the Council approves the decision to renew the Executive Director's contract, MI Secretariat will prepare the Offer Letter and the Employment Contract. These documents will be presented for the incoming Council Chairman's signature, formalizing the Executive Director's continuation of his role.

#### **ITEM 7 COUNTRY REPORT OF STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

##### **Mr. Hang Suvidhya, MI Steering Committee Member from Cambodia**

89. Mr. Suvidhya expressed his pleasure in being present to review the progress made and future plans of the organization. He congratulated MI for its remarkable efforts in successfully implementing various programs and projects. Mr. Suvidhya acknowledged the crucial role of MI in fostering cooperation among member countries, ASEAN members, and beyond, particularly in areas such as human capital development and cross-border trade facilitation.
90. He proposed that MI extend its support to member countries by providing in-country training to government officials and the private sector. This training would benefit Cambodia and neighboring countries, as well as Mekong-Lancang and ASEAN member countries, in the realms of cross-border trade and trade-related fields. He emphasized the importance of solidarity among MI's member countries and their commitment to multilateralism and south-south and triangular cooperation.
91. Furthermore, Mr. Suvidhya joined other member countries in congratulating MI for its achievements and performance, even in the face of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. He expressed strong support for MI's pursuit of the goals and targets set in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025.
92. In conclusion, Mr. Suvidhya reaffirmed Cambodia's commitment to cooperate with MI, other countries in the region, and development partners. He expressed his enthusiasm for jointly implementing programs, projects, and activities outlined in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and MI's flagship programs.

##### **Mr. Ke Yousheng, MI Steering Committee Member from P. R. China**

93. Mr. Ke extended his greetings to his fellow colleagues. He expressed his delight at participating in the meeting and thanked Dr. Narongchai and Mr. Suriyan for their insightful briefing on MI's work progress.
94. Mr. Ke highlighted the significance of the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative and the 7th anniversary of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. He acknowledged the positive contributions made by China and the five Mekong countries in promoting these initiatives, which have resulted in substantial economic growth and sustainable development in the subregion.
95. The level of connectivity among the six countries continues to improve, with noteworthy projects like the China-Laos Railway, the Golden Port Expressway in Cambodia, and the China-Vietnam Railway Express

exemplifying South-South cooperation and high-quality Belt and Road collaboration. Mr. Ke shared impressive statistics on the success of these projects, underscoring their positive impact on trade and freight transportation.

96. Mr. Ke also emphasized the strong economic and trade cooperation among the six countries, citing the success of the New Western Land-Sea Corridor and the significant increase in trade volume between China and Mekong countries. He praised the positive outcomes of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund, which has supported numerous livelihood projects benefiting local communities.
97. Regarding global challenges, he recognized the need for continued development and cooperation among countries, mentioning the Global Development Initiative (GDI) proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Mr. Ke expressed China's commitment to cooperate with all countries in promoting the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the subregion, aligning MI with GDI, Belt and Road Initiative, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, and other cooperative mechanisms.
98. As a member of MI, P. R. China has been a strong supporter of MI's work, contributing significantly to the development and prosperity of the subregion. Mr. Ke highlighted China's role as the largest donor and consistent contributor to MI, facilitating projects in various areas such as agriculture, poverty reduction, and digital connectivity.
99. Mr. Ke commended MI's ongoing efforts to implement the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and encouraged the successful Mid-term Review of the Strategic Plan. He urged MI to continue promoting solidarity and cooperation among member states and addressing their concerns promptly.
100. Mr. Ke expressed P. R. China's support for MI's conference documents and research reports, emphasizing the importance of objective and accurate representation of regional development. He further encouraged MI to expand its development partnerships, fostering sub-regional cooperation and development.
101. In conclusion, Mr. Ke conveyed China's commitment to supporting MI and the Mekong countries in overcoming challenges and seizing opportunities, fostering a peaceful and prosperous Lancang-Mekong community of shared future.
102. He extended a warm welcome to all attendees to join the Mekong Forum 2023 and Council meeting in Yunnan Province, P. R. China, expressing confidence that these events would further contribute to MI's work and enhance development partnerships among all parties.

**Dr. Marlar Myo Nyunt, MI Steering Committee Member from Myanmar**

103. Dr. Nyunt highlighted the potential areas where MI could support Myanmar, focusing on social and economic recovery from the onslaught brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and Cyclone MOCHA. Dr. Nyunt expressed gratitude for the support received from P. R. China, Thailand, other GMS member countries, and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (ASEAN AHA) during this challenging time.
104. Dr. Nyunt shared that the country is now in its rehabilitation stage, where economic recovery is of paramount importance. The Myanmar government is prioritizing the promotion of the MSME sector to create job opportunities. Efforts are being made to develop the nation's economy through agro-based businesses, the establishment of an MSME development fund, and providing all possible support for economic recovery in disaster-affected areas.
105. Myanmar is striving to enhance the productivity of agricultural and livestock products to meet local demands and achieve regional and global export levels. To this end, Dr. Nyunt proposed a research grant titled "Detection of sugarcane white leaf disease (SWLD) spreading through cross-border transfer into Myanmar and technology exchange and transfer of disease management and control measures project in the agriculture and rural development sector." This research program involves collaboration between the Department of Agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Myanmar Sugar and Cane related Products Association (MSCA), and the Department of Biotechnology, Faculty of Agro-Industry, Kasetsart University, Thailand.

106. Furthermore, the representative shared specific capacity-building and technical assistance program requests proposed by relevant ministries, which will be sent via email to the Secretariat.
107. Regarding Myanmar's contribution to MI, it is currently in the processing stage, and the representative acknowledged the need for some additional time for bank transaction procedures. The representative assured that Myanmar will closely coordinate and cooperate with MI's budget division to facilitate the process.
108. Lastly, the representative expressed appreciation to MI for its efforts in ensuring equitable participation of GMS member countries in overall MI activities. The representative extended support to Mr. Ke in highlighting the importance of equitable participation and encouraged consideration for more staff from member countries in MI's recruitment plan.

**Mrs. Arunee Hiam, MI Steering Committee Member from Thailand**

109. Regarding Thailand's contributions to the four security areas prioritized in international development cooperation, Mrs. Arunee provided examples of projects implemented:
110. **Border Health Security.** Thailand engaged in collaboration between twin hospitals and efforts to strengthen disease control for emerging and reemerging diseases along the border areas.
111. **Food Security.** Projects included the development of twin culture in Rakhine State and joint research on fish production technology, along with other initiatives to enhance animal population and breeding technology.
112. **Job Security.** Thailand implemented a skill development project along the borders of Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar.
113. **Environmental Security.** Thailand collaborated with development partners to enhance air quality management and reduce PM2.5 in the borders of Myanmar and Lao PDR.
114. The representative mentioned that a detailed report on these projects would be submitted separately to the MI Secretariat.

**Mr. Nguyen Viet Ha, MI Steering Committee Member from Viet Nam**

115. The representative from Viet Nam addressed the Chairman and informed them that they would be sending the report to the Secretariat soon after the meeting.
116. Mr. Nguyen Viet Ha shared that their country faced several difficulties in the first half of 2023, including a drop in global demand for manufactured goods, regional conflicts, and internal inflation, which led to the need to increase the interest rate to control inflation. This situation posed challenges for enterprises in Viet Nam. As a result, Viet Nam is determined to put in more effort in the remaining six months of 2023 to achieve the target of GDP growth and other socio-economic development objectives.
117. He shared that the Mekong-Delta region in Viet Nam is considered one of the most important and vulnerable areas, requiring increased resources and public investments. Viet Nam has mobilized significant resources amounting to a total commitment of 2.5 billion for this region, mostly for transport and immigration projects funded by ODA from major donors in Viet Nam.
118. Viet Nam, like other countries, remains committed to supporting Greater Mekong development cooperation and contributing to the work of the Mekong Institute.

**Mr. Khamphinh Philakone, MI Steering Committee Member for Lao PDR**

119. Mr. Khamphinh Philakone commended MI for their efforts in securing financial mobilization, which showcased the organization's strong position within the Mekong Sub-region. Despite the changing socio-economic landscape and shifts in people's means of subsistence, MI demonstrated flexibility and shrewdness in carrying out their programs and work plan. He recognized the support of MI to GMS countries in tackling new challenges through capacity building and regional integration.

120. Mr. Khamphinh recognized MI's significance within the GMS. He mentioned that Lao PDR is glad about the implementation of MI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which prioritized the development of human resources across member nations. They expressed their sincere desire for MI to continue providing more efficient and targeted training courses, especially in areas like trade promotion, investment, tourism services, supply chain improvement, connectivity, digital transformation, and regional and international cooperation. The Lao PDR took note of MI's current strategic plan and expressed readiness to collaborate with MI and member countries in conducting the mid-term review to ensure effective implementation going forward.

121. Additionally, Mr. Khamphinh expressed their deep gratitude for MI's review and update of the 2023 Annual Work Plan. They highly appreciated the projects supported by MI, development partners, and Mekong members over the past six months, particularly the physical and online training courses, seminars, workshops, and programs related to food safety, SMEs, tourism, agriculture, energy, and trade facilitation. These initiatives significantly contributed to strengthening capacity building for public officials and the private sector.

122. Mr. Khamphinh proposed the continuation of the secondment program, acknowledging it as an effective means of capacity development for GMS member countries.

#### **ITEM 8: DATE AND VENUE OF THE 2/2023 GOVERNING BOARD MEETING**

123. The Meeting proposed the next Steering Committee meeting to be held on site in Cambodia. The exact date, time, and venue will be advised later by the Chair of the Council.

#### **ITEM 9: OTHER MATTERS**

124. No other matters were raised and discussed during the meeting.

#### ***Adjournment***

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

**Annex I - List of Participants**

<b>MI Steering Committee</b>	
<b>Chairman</b> Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee Chairman of MFC Asset Plc. Private Sector Representative	
<b>Country Representatives</b>	<b>Steering Committee Member</b>
<b>P. R. China</b>	Mr. Ke Yousheng Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of China to UNESCAP Embassy of P. R. China, Bangkok
<b>Cambodia</b>	Mr. Hang Suvidhya Deputy Secretary-General General Secretariat for Population and Development Ministry of Planning
<b>Lao PDR</b>	<i>Mr. Bombay Phapmexal</i> on behalf of Mrs. Phonekeo Sakdavong Regional Economic Cooperation Department of Economic Affairs Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>Myanmar</b>	Mrs. Moh Moh Naing Director Foreign Economic Relations Department Ministry of Investment and Foreign Economic Relations
<b>Thailand</b>	Mrs. Arunee Hiam Deputy Director General Thailand International Cooperation Agency Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>Viet Nam</b>	Mr. Nguyen Viet Ha Official Foreign Economic Relations Department Ministry of Planning and Investment
<b>Non-voting Member</b>	
<b>MI Secretariat</b>	Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn Executive Director Mekong Institute

<b>Meeting Secretariat</b>	
<b>Mekong Institute</b>	Mr. Madhuriya Kumar Dutta Director Trade and Investment Facilitation Department
	Ms. Maria Theresa S. Medialdia Director Agriculture Development and Commercialization Department
	Mr. Rithy Buth Director Finance and Operations Department
	Mr. Halimur Rahman MEL Specialist Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Department
	Ms. Jian Wang Sustainable Energy and Environment Department Program Manager
	Ms. Pornwilai Pumira

	Partnership and Resource Mobilization Manager
	Ms. Anusara Tanpitak Communications and Knowledge Management Manager Communication and Knowledge Management (CKM) Unit
	Mr. Narathip Dahan IT Support Team
	Ms. Anna Leigh Anillo Communications Coordinator CKM Unit
	Ms. Thitiporn Rattanatraisri Communications Assistant CKM Unit