



**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION OF
THE STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING NO. 2/2023**
December 6, 2023, at 14:00 – 17:00 (Siem Reap)

OVERVIEW

1. Hosted by the Royal Government of Cambodia, the second Steering Committee Meeting of 2023 was successfully convened with warm welcome remarks from Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chair of the meeting. Representatives of the Steering Committee and observers from the six GMS countries, as well as the MI Secretariat, were present. The meeting proceeded with the adoption of the agenda, business arrangements, and the adoption of minutes from the previous Steering Committee Meeting.
2. The meeting covered significant topics including MI's 2023 achievements, the Summary and Recommendations of the Midterm Review of MI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, proposed revisions to MI's organizational structure, operation manual, and salary scale, and the review of MI's Work Plan and Budget for 2024 and 2025.

MATTERS FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

3. Matters for acknowledgment included MI's performance updates, a comprehensive Annual Performance Review (APR) for 2023, and the completion of the Promoting Safe Food for Everyone (PROSAFE) Project. **The Steering Committee acknowledged and endorsed these reports for submission to the Council.**
4. **Annual Performance Review for 2023.** The Steering Committee was presented with details about MI's performance throughout the year.
5. Thailand suggested diversifying the presentation of achievements by highlighting successful cases and impactful stories. From China, it was emphasized that a report on projects is essential for inclusion in the APR. There was a call to allocate time to provide an overview of programs and projects, ensuring a holistic representation of accomplishments and resources generated per project. The importance of comprehensive coverage was underscored, emphasizing that the APR should encompass not only financial details but also factors such as institutional strengthening and other relevant aspects.
6. **Completion of the Promoting Safe Food for Everyone (PROSAFE) Project.** The Steering Committee was presented with an overview of the successful conclusion of the PROSAFE Project, with insights into the project's impact and outcomes.
7. The CLMV countries still require support for their Prosafe-initiated initiatives. Cambodia emphasized the need for a focus on healthy food for aging societies and low-income countries. Furthermore, China highlighted that participants from China and Thailand were not included in PROSAFE. A crucial recommendation is for MI to ensure the inclusion and engagement of all its member countries in projects. It was stressed that partners should be encouraged to acknowledge the coverage of MI in terms of member states to enhance collaboration and inclusivity.

8. New Zealand conducted an end-of-project evaluation, engaging an independent consultant to assess the outcomes. While New Zealand anticipates a gap in possible support from NZAP, there is a potential prospect of initiating a PROSAFE transition project for one and a half years before the next cycle of New Zealand support to MI. NZ's annual contribution to PROSAFE stands at 1 million NZD or 700,000 USD. Notably, discussions are underway between New Zealand and MI regarding the exploration of the possibility of direct NZ funding for MI's core programs post-PROSAFE.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

9. The meeting also considered various items for future strategic planning, including the Mid-Term Review of the Mekong Institute Strategic Plan 2021-2025, proposed revisions to MI's organizational structure, operation manual, and salary scale, and the review of MI's Work Plan and Budget for 2024 and 2025. **These items were deliberated, and the Committee agreed to endorse the reports and proposals, subject to further actions.**
10. **Mid-Term Review of the Mekong Institute Strategic Plan 2021-2025.** The Steering Committee discussed the Summary and Recommendations of the Midterm Review of MI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025, which were deliberated and agreed upon during the Special Meeting held last month, November 16, 2023, aiming to reaffirm recommendations for endorsement to the Council.
11. China raised several points about specific matters in the MTR findings and recommendations. China emphasized the importance of achieving technical depth while not duplicating the work of other organizations. There was also a recommendation for a more thorough study of certain proposals in the MTR. China highlighted that capacity building is a comparative advantage of MI and should not be considered an impediment. The need for tailored approaches that consider the unique requirements of member countries was raised. China urged MI to avoid deficits and prioritize quality over quantity with the full support of members and partners.
12. With regard to seeking private sector partnership, China emphasized the distinction between MI's pursuit of public welfare and the private sector's profit-oriented motives. China reiterated MI's adherence to the "member-driven" principle, considering MI as an intergovernmental organization.
13. The Steering Committee agreed to propose the following recommendations to the Council:
 - a. The independent MTR report is a useful reference for future improvement.
 - b. The MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is still valid. Necessary modification should be introduced to refining activities for GMS development and institutional strengthening.
 - c. Efforts should be made to ensure annual financial surplus, and improved quality services in line with the mandate of MI that focuses on development cooperation and a members-driven approach.
 - d. Short-term measures to improve Organizational Structure, Operation Manual, and Salary Structure could be considered.
 - e. As a longer-term measure, the Council may form a sub-committee to review the recommendations and map out measures for further consideration.
14. **Proposed revisions to MI's organizational structure, operation manual, and salary scale.** The meeting noted the highlights of revisions to the organizational structure, operation manual, and salary scale.
15. In general, the Steering Committee expressed support for the revisions to MI's organizational structure, operation manual, and salary scale. However, members underscored the need for careful consideration in terms of financial implications and delivery of quality service.

16. Regarding the salary scale adjustments, there was a concern about the UN's suitability as a benchmark and suggestions for thorough presentations/analysis of the financial viability and potential impact.
17. **Review of MI's Work Plan and Budget for 2024 and 2025.** The meeting noted that the proposed Work Plan and Budget for 2024 and 2025 incorporated the MTR recommendations and has yet to be finalized.
18. China mentioned that digitalization should be a priority, aligning with current developmental trends and meeting the demands of the GMS. China highlighted the importance of integrating digitalization into the theme of the Mekong Forum 2024.
19. Emphasis was placed on the necessity of thorough preparation of all relevant documents before the meeting.
20. A sub-committee was proposed for the 2023 Executive Director Performance Evaluation, and **the Steering Committee approved the appointment of this sub-committee for endorsement to the Council.**
21. Proposed members of the Subcommittee:
 - Mr. Ke Yousheng, SC Member for P. R. China
 - Ms. Arunee Hiam, SC Member for Thailand
 - Dr. Jean-Pierre A. Verbiest, Honorary Advisor
 - Facilitator: Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, SC Chairman

COUNTRY REPORTS

22. A copy of the country reports will be provided to the MI Secretariat.

DATE AND VENUE OF GOVERNING BOARD MEETING NO. 1/2023

23. The date and venue of the next meeting were discussed. The SC agreed to have the next Steering Committee (1/2024) meeting 10 days in advance of the Council meeting (1/2024). The Council Meeting may be held back to back with the Mekong Forum 2024 in Khon Kaen in the last week of July. A Special SC meeting will likewise be scheduled within the day before the Council meeting to finalize recommendations.