

Draft MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING NO. 2/2021
Drafted as of December 14, 2021 at 5:00 pm

ITEM 1: WELCOME REMARKS

1. Mr. Yang Shaocheng, Chief of the Regional Cooperation Office of Yunnan Province, the representative of the Vice Governor of Yunnan Province, and the MI Council Chair (the Chair), opened the virtual meeting on December 14, 2021 at 1:00 pm from P.R. China. He welcomed and acknowledged the presence of all GMS government representatives, development partners, honorary advisor, representatives of MI coordinating agencies, and the MI Executive Director, as well as their respective delegates remotely observing the proceedings. The Chair then called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm.

ITEM 2: ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

2. The Chair sought comments, concerns, or points of clarification from the members regarding the meeting's agenda. **There being none, the members adopted the agenda of the Council Meeting on December 14, 2021.**

ITEM 3: BUSINESS ARRANGEMENTS

3. Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director (Executive Director), opened the MI Secretariat's administration and technical services to Council members during and after the proceedings.

ITEM 4: ACTION PROGRESS OF RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE GOVERNING BOARD MEETING 1/2021 AND MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING NO. 1/2021

4. The Chair sought comments, concerns, or points of clarification from members regarding the two documents. There being none, the members adopted the action progress of recommendations from the Governing Board meeting and the minutes of the Council Meeting of 1/2021.

ITEM 5: HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE STEERING COMMITTEE ON MATTERS FOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

5.1 Activity Report of 2H, 2021

5. The Executive Director provided an overview of the Activity Report of 2H, 2021, highlighting that MI has shifted its work plan and operations from activity-based management to results-based management as guided by the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. He emphasized the two mutually reinforcing work streams, namely MI's contribution to GMS development, which will be implemented through the Core Programs and Flagship Programs, and the strengthening of institutional services and organization. He also provided the key highlights of development during 2H of 2021, including operationalizing the Strategic Plan and mainstreaming COVID-19 response and recovery in the activities.

5.1.1 Program Progress

A. Core Development Areas

6. The report for the second half of 2021 in the area of Agricultural Development and Commercialization, 341 personnel trained on several food safety issues like Good Hygiene

Practices (GHP), food laws, market access, postharvest food handling, sanitation, AI based monitoring, forecasting and warning, and traceability in the food chain, among others. Two research studies were implemented on (a) ASEAN Stocktaking on “Consumer Awareness Campaigns on Food Standards and Safety in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam” and (b) “Post-Pandemic Response for Food Systems in the Lancang-Mekong Region”. MI actively engaged in the pre-summit dialogue of the UN Food Systems Summit, which was held in September 2021. As a follow-up, MI and other development partners were developing a concept note on supporting the implementation of initiatives on sustainable food systems in the GMS, which has the potential to be a new a flagship program.

7. In the area of Trade and Investment Facilitation, 3,138 personnel attended online capacity building events on e-commerce, cross-border electronic transactions, digital interactive infrastructure, sufficiency economy in microfinance, trade policy, investment on economic zones, special economic zone and industrial zones, and tourism, among others. A series of research studies were done on “Thailand Innovation and Technology Policy”, “Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) landscape in food processing, textiles, electronics and hard good sectors”, and “Implementation of National Single Window and ASEAN Single Window in the Mekong Countries”. In collaboration with the International Organization for Migration, a research on “Integrating Human Mobility into Cross-border Trade, Trade Facilitation, and Border Management in the Greater Mekong Subregion” was conducted. The study findings were used as one of the strategic inputs presented at the GMS Economic Corridor forum held on November 22, 2021. The study was recognized for providing good evidences, widely presented to the various stakeholders in the region, and received good feedback on how to tackle important issues that contribute to regional cooperation. The projects on market access through e-commerce, cross-border facilitation for trade and logistics development, and tourism were also conducted. This is on one hand to promote greater integration among countries and also to enhance the COVID-19 response and recovery.
8. Under the Sustainable Energy and Environment, MI conducted activities on using technologies as a response to COVID-19 pandemic, and at the same time promoting regional cooperation. A series of activities related to technology innovation, gender equality, and labor migration were also implemented. Around 1,180 personnel attended online capacity building events on regional economic integration and innovation for free trade zone development, powering energy transitions in the GMS, gender equality and women empowerment, private sector engagement in improving employability of CLMV workforce, technology and innovation policy development, and targeted poverty alleviation for better life, among others. A research on “Leveraging Technology to Fight COVID-19: The China Experience and Collective Subregional Response” was conducted. The UN Office for South-South Cooperation, MRC and MI entered into the collaboration for a project on “Water Energy and Food Nexus”. It is one of the examples on how important organizations can come together and work under the Nexus concept. A number of environment-related initiatives now has been mainstreaming the work of MI to promote a greener economy and climate resilience.
9. On Cross-Cutting Themes, MI worked to ensure that Social Inclusion is integrated into economic development. MI conducted activities on “Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Thailand’s Experiences and Practices”, “Promoting Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in the Lancang-Mekong Region: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences” and “Targeted Poverty Alleviation for Better Life in the Lancang-Mekong Region: Sharing Experiences – supported by P.R. China”.

10. Besides the training related to Labor Mobility, MI conducted activities on “Bridging Public-Private Links for Competitive Employability of CLMV Workforce – supported by TICA” and “Improving Institutional Capacities for Promoting Employability in the Greater Mekong Subregion”.
11. In order to advance the economic integration and also COVID-19 recovery, the activities conducted include the “Capacity Building for Regional Economic Integration and Innovation for Free Trade Zone Development”, “Action Plan Implementation by Cambodia and Viet Nam on Technology and Innovation Policy Development”, “Fostering Digital Connectivity in Lancang-Mekong Countries”, and “Study on Leveraging Technology to Fight COVID-19”.
12. In summary, the activities conducted under the regional thematic areas and cross-cutting themes have built in the COVID-19 response and measures.

B. Flagship initiatives

13. As recommended in the last Governing Board meeting, MI Secretariat should align the activities of Core Programs and Flagship Programs. Regarding the budget to fund the flagship programs “**Towards Post-COVID-19 Resilient Economies**” and “**GMS City Nodes Network**”, MI Secretariat received initial indication of funding support from P.R China and New Zealand government, particularly in support of COVID-19 recovery. The work is in progress and will be finalized as part of the proposed Work Plan 2022.
14. New fund sources for the GMS City Nodes Network is not yet fully identified. However, initial discussions were already done with Khon Kaen province as one of the cities and Yunnan government, with Kunming to be possibly used as a sample of the GMS City Nodes network.
15. The GMS secretariat has pushed forward the GMS Knowledge Network program by calling for the interim steering group meeting to be held in January 2022. MI expected to receive a new project fund from the GMS Secretariat, through ADB, to organize the GMS knowledge policy forum. It is also a signal to prepare for a long-term implementation plan of the GMS 2030 in support of COVID-19 response and recovery plan, which is another related flagship program.

Comments from the MI Council Members

Dr. Jean Pierre A. Verbiest, MI Honorary Advisor

Associate-Banking and Finance, West Indochina, Senior Consultant, Asian Economies

16. It is understood that it is only the first year for implementing the activities under Sustainable Energy and Environment. However, most of the core activities are related to gender equality, women empowerment, private sector development, and so on. The activities are not fit to the theme but more aligned with the cross-cutting theme. Ensure that the activity logic follows the theme.
17. In term of the Flagship Initiatives, two programs, “Towards Post-COVID-19 Resilient Economies” and “GMS Knowledge Network”, are clearly defined. While the “GMS City Nodes Network” is still an unclear concept. By looking at the city node project, it is a concept for cities related to each other and making their economy unique. Getting a city with a very good infrastructure and complementary economic zone, like Ubonrajchatani with Pakse, is one concept to make it regional and not only focused on city economic zone, which can be extended to, for instance, Poi Pet to Phnom Penh. This project needs to do a good combination of linked cities and to look at the areas and sectors to start the concept.

18. The monitoring, evaluation and learning is quite a huge task, particularly for initiating the capacity building needs assessment in the GMS and the baseline survey for MI Strategic Plan. Ensure that MI has enough skilled people to carry the assessment.

Response from Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, Executive Director, Mekong Institute

19. Regarding the issues on our work on energy, we are not able to continue our important projects like with the China Southern Power Grid, which was delayed since September. This will be a fundamental support project in the energy sector. The second project is with GIZ regional project on facilitating energy in transition. This will be a project under opportunity fund. These activities will concretize and will contribute to the robustness of the thematic area. They need to be remarketed between thematic theme and cross-cutting theme.
20. The “GMS City Nodes Network” project still needs to be elaborated. The idea behind it is that the City Nodes will be considered as a potential gateway to the GMS. They can act as light house in order to support neighboring cities to be green city by implementing various economic integration measures into the city development. Through this experience, the GMS city will learn how to incorporate economic integration and cooperation measures into the city development planning and provide benefits to the neighboring areas, including contribution to the economic corridor.
21. Due to the importance of the assessment, a consultant was engaged for this task. MI also intend to increase the number of staff for the MEL unit in order to perform the tasks. The issue raised on this part is the need for additional resources for non-program activities and MI is seeking the support from the council.

Mr. Elliott Kirton, MI Council Member for New Zealand Aid Programme

22. Through the New Zealand Aid Programme, the Government is building a larger area of investment on climate change and climate crisis. The strategic plan on sustainable energy and environment is seen as the potential area for New Zealand to invest in. It can join MI projects that are in line with the NZ’s government priorities, such as food systems, which MI wants to explore and conceptualize. NZAP will look into it and get into the energy and environment area. NZAP proposed the same ideas last year and showed a very strong support. New Zealand is also funding the light project, which can be part of the GMS city program. MI is advised to submit a related project proposal with details.

5.1.2 Institutional Strengthening

23. The Executive Director reported the following to the Council:

A. Greater Mekong Community

24. Considering the comments received during the last governing board meeting regarding the importance of tracking the progress of implementation of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025, MI Secretariat decided to spend its own fund to conduct the capacity needs assessment in the GMS and baseline survey of the Strategic Plan. The study has already started in November 2021 and expected to be completed by February 2022. The study will contribute to finalizing the Logical Framework Matrix for MI’s Contribution to GMS Development and Institutional Strengthening. NZAP praised the works of the MEL Unit. They emphasized on building a stronger MEL team and

internal MEL capacity of MI with the help of external experts, if required and expressed their commitment for future support in this aspect.

25. Regarding Communication and Knowledge Management (CKM), MI continued to proactively engage stakeholders through communication products and outreach activities, particularly via MI's website and social media channels. Progress was reported that 452 press releases, news, social media features, and IEC materials were produced by MI, and 23 press releases and news stories were published on MI and its activities by the GMS countries. MI generated 19,216 views on its official website, reached 289,392 people on Facebook, and collected 47,372 impressions on Twitter.
26. MI continued to enhance Partnership and Resource Mobilization (PRM) through enhancing MI's visibility by organizing stakeholders' forums and promoting partnership across GMS/Mekong-related cooperation frameworks, particularly GMS Economic Cooperation Program, Lancang Mekong Cooperation, ACMECS, ASEAN and Mekong Plus One Cooperation. MI Secretariat also strengthened collaboration and cooperation with existing and new partners.

B. Administration

C. Finance

27. Activity Report of 2H 2021 on Administration and Human Resources and Finance has been included in the Annual Performance Report 2021 in the subsequent Agenda.

5.2 Annual Performance Review 2021

A. Program

28. In implementing MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025, MI is gradually transitioning from Activity-Based Management to Results-Based Management (RBM). All Council members appreciated MI's new approach of strategic management towards bringing more tangible outcomes.
29. In 2021, MI implemented 39 projects, among them 13 were long-term projects, 18 were short-term projects, and the other eight were one-off activities. On the share of funds from the Development Partners, the Meeting observed that funding sources have been diversified, with the top three contributions from PR China, ROK and NZAP, respectively.
30. A total of 43 online capacity development events were organized by MI, which were comprised of trainings (21), workshops (13), forums (4), webinars (3), a dialogue (1), and a meeting (1), and organized under the regional development themes and cross cutting themes. A total of 4,770 participants attended the MI capacity development events, specifically: 341 personnel in ADC events, 3,138 in TIF events, and 1,180 participants attended in SEE events organized in 2021.
31. Seven researches/studies and policy development works (ADC-2, TIF-4, and SEE-1) were conducted by MI this year.

B. Administration and Human Resources

32. In the area of Human Resources, MI staff is decreased by 21 percent from October 2020. Currently, MI is composed of 34 staff members, the majority of whom are representing GMS countries. All MI staff had been assigned under the new organizational structure approved in the Council Meeting 2/2020. MI staff (100%) received the basic COVID-19 vaccine (2 doses) and the booster

dose will be arranged for all staff by early 2022. And MI Secretariat is planning to recruit eight (8) positions in order to respond to the needs of each department and support MI activities in 2022.

33. On Administration, the focus has been on implementing COVID-19 preventive measures, upgrading IT and online facility, and improving procurement planning and procedures.
34. Referring to the concern of the Council members on the number of staff, the Executive Director explained the challenges of recruiting new staff and the plan to adjust the recruitment strategy to fulfill the gaps according to MI projects.

Comments from Council Members

Dr. Jean Pierre A. Verbiest's Comments:

What is the reason for being under staff? Is it because the position has less application? Or because of the job hiring techniques?

Answer: COVID-19 has made the international travel difficult.

Response by MI Executive Director:

There are some problems in the recruitment process. MI conducted a number of interviews. However, some applicants changed their mind after the interview. Some are not qualified and some need to be re-advised. This is also indirectly affected by COVID-19. Most applicants are not sure if it is the best time to change job or travel. MI will plan to announce job openings earlier to have more time for the interviews.

35. The Council members acknowledged MI's report on "Administration and Human Resources".

C. Finance

36. On Finance, MI earned US\$ 1,500,555, spent US\$1,443,056, and generated US\$ 57,499 in cash. The MI Executive Director expressed that MI's financial performance result looks better compared to January to October 2020 (with a deficit amounting to US\$ 467,500).
37. The improved financial performance was due to MI SMT's regular monitoring and providing of effective tools to implement the projects' activities.
38. The MI Executive Director extended his appreciation for the financial support of the six GMS countries, which totaled to US\$ 563,667. To better maintain MI's health cash flow, he requested members for the possibility of downloading their 2022 contributions in the early part of the year.
39. The proportions of project implementation expenses and the operating expenses are 56% and 44%, and MI will need to control the proportion of expenses more appropriately since the KPI is set at 70 percent and 30 percent as approved by the council. MI will need to increase the annual revenue to maintain the targeted KPI of the expense ratio.
40. In conclusion, MI is projected to generate US\$ 2,035,741 in income, spend US\$ 2,031,966 in expenses, and incur US\$ 3,775 in earning by end of December 2021, but MI is expecting to earn US\$ 125,625 in cash by the end of the year.

41. The Council members acknowledged MI's report on "Finance."

5.3. The results of MI Coordinating Agencies' Meeting

42. The Executive Director reported the results and recommendations of the Coordinating Agencies' Meeting held on December 8, 2021. He also presented the four key recommendations in the meeting, such as (a) improving working mechanisms and information support between MI Secretariat and CAs, (b) making CAs act as a sounding board on progress of Strategic Plan and GMS' emerging issues and challenges, (c) continuing the conduct of regular CAs meetings, and (d) exploring ways to diversify approaches for conducting MI's activities, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Comments from the MI Council Members

Dr. Aung Moe Chai, Myanmar

43. Myanmar supported the recommendations of the Coordinating Agencies' Meeting, and also agreed to enhance the new Coordinating Agencies' roles, which can provide strategic recommendations and suggestions to the Governing Board in order to support the GMS cooperation frameworks.
44. The Council members acknowledged and approved the report on the results of MI Coordinating Agencies' Meeting.

ITEM 6: HIGHLIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE ON MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

6.1 Endorsement of MI Annual Work Plan 2022

45. For 2022, MI Secretariat will implement 21 projects and activities with the support of various development partners; nine of them are long-term projects, eight are short-term projects, and four are customized projects (one-off activity).
46. The majority of the total project funds is expected to come from three key development partners of MI, such as the Republic of Korea through the Mekong Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF) and Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) (41.03%), followed by P.R. China (27.86%), and NZAP (19.24%).
47. The three Flagship Programs are planned to be operationalized. With a potential new Flagship Program on implementation support to sustainable food systems in the GMS, which is to be confirmed at the next Governing Board meeting.
48. MI is expecting to generate a revenue of US\$ 3,049,979 in 2022, with total expenses of US\$ 3,016,995 including the non-cash expense. The estimated revenue over expenses would be US\$ 32,984, and the gross earning is expected to be US\$ 136,184 excluding the non-cash expense.
49. The different scenarios of MI 2022 Annual Budget were presented to the Council for review and approval:
- 1) Key factors influencing 2022 budget
 - 2) Fixed-approved projects with carried over budget to 2022
 - 3) Securing budget from Traditional Funding Sources
 - 4) Projects under the Opportunity Fund
 - 5) COVID-19 situation

- Worst case scenario – item 2-3 could not be realized and item 4 worsen: unlikely – revenue will be around US\$ 2.2M and financial standing expected to be a deficit.
- Likely scenario – item 2-3 could be on target and item 4 would be improving during the 2nd half of 2022 – the budget will be as proposed.
- Best case scenario – item 2 is secured with the possibility of higher than that of 2021. Item 3 would be doubled and item 4 would be improving during the 2nd half of 2022 – revenue will be around US\$ 3.3M-US\$ 3.5M and the financial standing is expected to be surplus of about 5% in cash.

50. The Council members acknowledged MI’s reports on “Review Draft of MI Annual Work Plan 2022” and approved the “Annual Budget 2022”.

6.2 Approval of Revised Plan for the 25th Anniversary Campaign

51. The Executive Director presented the revised plan to celebrate MI’s 25th Anniversary Campaign by following the recommendations from Council Chair and Steering Committee Chair. These include: (a) the change of plan for a dedicated commemoration event due to unclear COVID-19 pandemic situation, (b) raising profile and visibility of MI 25th Anniversary through regular releases of electronic stories, features, articles, and video interviews on MI’s social media channels from August 2021 to August 2022, (c) P.R. China’s contribution of US\$ 15,000 for developing souvenirs with logo of the 25th Anniversary and production of video clip series (based on the ‘Book of Narratives’), which will have regular release on MI social media channel in 2022, (d) organizing the Hybrid Development Partners’ consultation in February/March 2022, (e) launching of the ‘Book of Narratives’ and ‘1996-2021 Performance Report’ in July 2022 (at the Governing Board Meeting 1/2022), and (f) other major planned forums, i.e., the Mekong Forum, among others. These activities are expected to provide opportunities and alternative platforms to commemorate the 25th Anniversary.

52. The Council members acknowledged and approved the revised plan for the 25th Anniversary Campaign.

6.3 Approval of Proposal on Annual GMS Contributions

53. Following up to the discussion and guidance by the Governing Board in the last meeting, the Executive Director presented the current scale of contribution by each of the GMS countries. He emphasized the need for GMS annual contribution to cover the essential non-program expenses, particularly the monitoring and evaluation of the Strategic Plan as well as coordination and engagement activities of MI across GMS/Mekong-related cooperation frameworks. In the short-term, he informed the meeting that MI Secretariat will identify ways to fill the gaps by other means. The Executive Director expressed his heartfelt gratitude for the past years’ annual contribution and early transfer of the contribution. He also further requested CLMV countries to consider gradually increasing their contribution.

54. The Council members acknowledged and approved on “the need of gradually increasing annual contribution from GMS countries”.

55. The Steering and Council members of each GMS country will discuss and consider increasing the contribution from time to time according to their approved national annual budget.

6.4 Approval of Vehicle Procurement and Disposal

56. MI Secretariat proposed the disposal of three vehicles (a Van, a Ford, and a Camry) due to long years of service incurring high maintenance cost, which was approved by the Steering Committee.
57. Regarding the proposed procurement of a replacement of Camry, the meeting supported the replacement but requested MI Secretariat to explore importation options, which MI can avail the privilege of tax exemption.
58. The Council members acknowledged and approved on “MI Secretariat will explore the importation options and consult with a Steering Committee Chair for purchasing”.

6.5 Appointment of Subcommittee for 2021 Annual Performance Evaluation of MI Executive Director

59. Under the MI Charter (Article 5.1.8) which states that the Steering Committee must annually review the performance of the MI Executive Director, the MI Secretariat proposed for the Steering Committee to form a subcommittee to assess the deliverables against key performance targets of the MI Executive Director covering the period of January to December 2021.
60. The Steering Committee agreed and proposed the sub-committee members below for consideration and approval of the Council:
 - Mr. Ke Yousheng, representing P.R. China
 - Mrs. Arunee Hiam, representing Thailand
 - Dr. Jean Pierre Alex Verbiest, Honorary Advisor to Council
 - Dr. Narongchai Akkaraseranee, SC Chairman as a resource person
61. The Council members acknowledged and approved on “Sub-committee for 2021 Annual Performance Evaluation of MI Executive Director”.

ITEM 7: Recommendations and Commitments of Council Members and Key Development Partners

H.E. Mr. Chea Chantum of Cambodia

62. The Council Member of Cambodia appreciated the hard work and the achievements made so far, given the COVID-19 pandemic situation. Cambodia acknowledged the important role of MI in fostering regional cooperation and integration for socio-economic development, especially human resource development.
63. Like other countries in the region and the world, Cambodia is affected by COVID-19 in all sectors, especially health, education, tourism, manufacturing for export, and construction. The Royal Government of Cambodia recognized that timely vaccination is the key to curb the transmission of COVID-19. Through the WHO COVAX facility and bilateral support, Cambodia has been using a mix of Sinovac, Sinopharm, AstraZeneca, and Johnson & Johnson products. By the end of November 2021, more than 80% of the population had received two doses of the coronavirus vaccine. Cambodia has been one of the first countries in the world to roll out booster shots and to vaccinate children aged 5–17 years old. Coronavirus infections and mortalities have been declining recently due to the Royal Government’s efforts in successfully rolling out its vaccination program. These successes are not without good cooperation, especially with support from China, the United States, Japan, Australia and other neighboring countries.
64. During the pandemic, social protection has been put in place and extended universally. A program to support pregnant female workers and poor households is being implemented. Boosting pro-

poor public investments, including "Cash for Work" projects for workers and a Cash Transfer Program to provide financial support to poor households and vulnerable people has been introduced.

65. The Royal Government of Cambodia endorsed the "Strategy on how to live with COVID-19 under the new normal" in November 2021, and Cambodia is now living with COVID-19. Since November 2021, Cambodia has relaxed travel restrictions, reopening the country for business while continuing to strictly enforce protective health measures. The required quarantine period for those who have been fully vaccinated has been fully lifted since November 15, 2021. Cambodia has now relaxed travel restrictions, reopening key sectors such as tourism, travel, hospitality, and wholesale and retail.
66. The Royal Government of Cambodia is in the process of developing an Economic Recovery Plan for 2021–2023. After contracting by 3.1% in 2020, economic growth is gradually resuming, with real GDP growth projected to be 2.2% in 2021 and 4.5% in 2022. It is hoped that Cambodia will attract more foreign direct investments as the Royal Government of Cambodia has recently signed the Cambodia-China Free Trade Agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, and the Cambodia-Korea Free Trade Agreement.
67. Finally, the representative reaffirmed Cambodia's continued cooperation with MI, other countries in the region, and development partners to jointly implement programs, projects, and activities highlighted in the Strategic Plan 2021–2025 and the flagship program for mutual interests and benefits.

Mr. Kingphokeo Phommahaxay of Lao PDR

68. With regards to increasing the annual contribution by GMS country members, Lao PDR has started increasing its annual contribution to MI since 2020. Recently, due to the impacts of COVID-19, the government is still facing a number of difficulties, including financial issues. Therefore, Lao PDR would like to maintain its annual contribution till the next fiscal year. In term of resource mobilization, from traditional to non-traditional partners with support being received from new development partners, it is good news for us. So, the financial support for the projects and programs will increase in a propitiate manner. For the projects and programs to be implemented next year amidst COVID-19, the representative believed that MI and all of the CM members can adopt by conducting them through online or hybrid formats. Lao PDR is ready to work with all the members countries in implementing the activities according to the Strategic Plan 2021 -2025.

Dr. Aung Moe Chai of Myanmar

69. The CM representative of Myanmar appreciated MI's hard work in the entire year of 2021 amidst the ongoing pandemic. The representative further acknowledged the achievements and efforts made by MI throughout the 25 years, complimenting MI as the well-deserved winner of the ASEAN Prize.
70. The representative congratulated MI for expanding its work with other existing regional cooperation frameworks, such as ACMES, ROK, AADCP, and so forth. The representative reaffirmed the commitment of Myanmar to work with MI on the formulation of the Implementation Plan of the Framework for CLMV Development.
71. The representative recognized the efforts of MI in tailoring the capacity development programs in response to the needs and changing trends due to COVID-19. The representative expressed his

willingness to work with MI for future projects including, but not limited to, participating in “Call for Proposal”.

72. The representative encouraged MI to increase more capacity development programs on e-commerce, digitalization, health security, food safety, and labor migration. The representative additionally proposed the programs and technical support on access to affordable financing, infrastructure to support digital connectivity, and conducive policy environment for accelerating doing businesses.
73. The representative concluded his remarks by reiterating the commitment of Myanmar to cooperate closely with MI so as to achieve the Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

Mr. Cheevindh Nathalang of Thailand

74. On behalf of the Royal Thai Government and Mrs. Ureerat Chareontoh, Director General of the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) appreciated MI for arranging this important meeting and wished to congratulate all on the completion of activities in the first half of 2021. Without the certain concerns of country members of MI, it would not have been able to complete all of the planned activities and achieved its goals. The representative greatly appreciated the other member countries for their contributions to MI.
75. With the Results-based Monitoring Framework and Evaluation Learning Strategies, the representative appreciated the MI Work Plan 2022. It seems challenging under the current situation in terms of budget projection, but with the MI professional team, the representative believed that the MI Annual Work Plan for 2022 can be completed with outcomes, in accordance to the framework, that contribute to the success of MI Strategic Plan 2021–2025.
76. In addition, the representative emphasized that new technology and economic models, such as the Bio-Circular-Green Economic Model, should be applied in core development activities for the reasons of inclusive and sustainable development.
77. In this regard, the representative conveyed the message of assurance that TICA will give its support in the implementation of MI Annual Work Plan 2022. The representative also reiterated what TICA director general stated at the previous meeting: TICA stands ready to collaborate with MI and other concerned agencies on a variety of common focus areas, particularly enhancing sustainable development in the Mekong Region, especially in areas where Thailand has expertise.
78. The representative took the decision of MI to organize activities to celebrate the 25th MI anniversary event via online platforms. TICA is looking forward to participate on the activities and standing ready to provide support in any possible way. The representative reiterated the capacity of CM to play a constructive role in achieving the strategic plan.
79. In conclusion, the representative took the opportunity to inform the meeting that the Government of Thailand, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC) will jointly host the eleventh Global South-South Development Expo (GSSD Expo) in Bangkok, Thailand, from September 12 to 14, 2022. The overarching theme of the GSSD Expo 2022 is "Advancing South-South and Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable COVID-19 Recovery: Towards a smart and resilient future" with the aim of showcasing best practices and possible solutions in advancing sustainable development. The representative invited MI to be a part of the Expo. MI may consider utilizing this occasion to establish and showcase MI’s best practices through regional cooperation.

80. The representative believed that the event would be a timely opportunity to maximize MI's visibility and enhance MI's network with potential development partners. Further details of this event will be sent to MI.

Mr. Nguyen Viet Ha of Vietnam

81. On behalf of the Government of Vietnam and Mrs. Nguyen Yen Hai, Deputy Director General of Foreign Economic Department, Ministry of Planning, the representative acknowledged the importance of MI to GMS as a whole as well as to each member countries.

82. The representative found MI's performance and its step towards achieving the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 promising, despite the unprecedented challenges caused by the ongoing pandemic.

83. The representative informed the meeting that the pandemic has taken a significant toll on the economy of Vietnam. The representative outlined that Vietnam is striving to restructure and revive the economy in order to best address the negative impacts of COVID-19, and keep abreast with the developed countries.

84. The representative underscored that digital transformation is an unavoidable and inevitable solution not only for the member countries but also for MI in order to maintain success and growth.

85. Aside from serving the regional interest as a whole, the representative strongly recommended that MI is required to analyze and address the particular needs of each member countries to make its role more significant in the eyes of the GMS leader and people.

Mr. Elliot Kirton of NZAP

86. The Council Member representing NZAP congratulated MI's milestone as an ASEAN Prize Winner, and recognized MI's hard work and dedication in the past 25 years.

87. The representative noted with appreciation that the changes encountered in the course of the year, including the hit of the pandemic, strengthened MI.

88. The representative was positive that the recent changes provided clearer vision to MI regarding the developments that the institute would like to make in the future with the strategic cooperation of the GMS governments and development partners.

89. The representative expressed his observation on the increasing interest of development partners towards MI, which was reinforced by the profile of receiving the ASEAN Prize.

90. The representative was optimistic over the involvement of more development partners working and participating in MI's consultation mechanism in the near future.

91. The representative acknowledged the efforts of the Agricultural Development and Commercialization (ADC) team who has been implementing PROSAFE Project supported by NZAP. The representative was appreciative of the new implementation strategies, technologies, modification of programs, and achieving outputs and outcomes while navigating through the challenging times in the past 18 months.

92. The representative informed the ongoing discussion with MI's Executive Director for NZ's support for the newly focused areas of MI, which include integrated food systems and COVID-19 response.
93. The representative concluded by showing his appreciation to the governance and management of MI that led to producing proficient results, and anticipated the likelihood of becoming a more prominent organization in the region.

Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki of ADB

94. The representative expressed his appreciation to MI on behalf of the Council Member, Mr. Ramesh Subramaniam, Director General, Southeast Asia Department of ADB. The representative commended MI for working through a difficult time, tiding over the crisis and presenting a positive picture of performance. As the representative mentioned earlier, ADB has specific programs on which it would like to involve closely with MI, name the Early Harvest Program of CBTA and GMS Knowledge Network. The representative referred to the fact that several Council members have mentioned that MI is a natural partner for ADB and expressed hope that the partnership can be expanded in the future, as there is a synergy between ADB's Strategy 2030 and MI's areas of work. The representative stated that MI is a vein to create new networks, which is the biggest asset for MI and those who get involved in MI's work. Finally, the representative informed the Council that this will be his last Council meeting as he is leaving his current post. While he would like to remain in touch with MI, the representative's future post will not have much in common with MI. The representative's successor is likely to be involved with MI in the similar manner as him. The representative expressed hope that ADB and MI will continue the good partnership in years to come. The representative concluded by wishing all good health for the new year.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nawarat Wara-Aswapati Charoen of Khon Kaen University

95. The representative of Council Member or KCU congratulated MI on its performance despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the long-standing partnerships, the representative was confident that MI will continue to play an important role in various fields. KCU was aiming and looking forwards to collaborate with MI on the impactful efforts and projects, which will be beneficial to the development of the region.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nguyen Quang Linh of Hue University

96. The representative appreciated MI's performance in 2021, even with the COVID-19 pandemic. Some connection within Khon Kaen, from MI to Lao PDR, and then, to Quang Tri province in Central Vietnam, still keeps the connectivity. MI implemented some models for the development of rural areas, like linking coffee farmers to the consumers using the Internet. In 2020, the representative attended the data sharing activity for the rural training system. This year, he shared that they can already share data with MI and GMS system on market production system and rural welfare. The representative encouraged MI to build a platform for the community to input and share data on rural welfare. Line support from partners, such as ADB, New Zealand, and Thailand governments is recommended. This also includes China, as the country has done good work on food system together with COVID-19 prevention.

Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Business Representative, MI Steering Committee Chair

97. The Steering Committee Chair made his remarks as a business representative and provided his recommendations to MI. The Steering Committee Chair drew attention to two overall developments, which present opportunities for MI. First is the development in Thailand's North

Eastern region. This includes the opening of Laos-China Railways that has contributed to the enhancement of logistics in this region. This will open several opportunities in the logistics sector, which the Trade and Investment Department of MI could take advantage of. Second is the opportunity in bioeconomy, which is being actively promoted by Thailand. Northeast Thailand could be a major center for bioeconomy in tapioca and sugar, as a major sugar center is being set up in Khon Kaen right now. The Agricultural Development and Commercialization Department of MI should take note of these developments. Third is the development in the health sector, as there are three important medical centers in Northeast Thailand. One of the biggest medical centers in Thailand is being built in Khon Kaen University. These medical centers could meet the increasing demands for remote health services in the GMS. This could be incorporated in the work program of Sustainable Energy and Environment Department of MI. The second overall development is related to technology and finance that attracts the attention of the new generation in terms of the opportunities they present. Within this, first is blockchains, which is fast developing as a decentralized source of finance being used by the new generation to earn money and make a living. Second is metaverse trend, which has been growing since the onset of COVID-19. Perhaps, MI can create metaverse next year and bring different participants in the same room using this kind of technology. Inviting MI program directors to consider and incorporate such new developments in the departmental work programs, the Steering Committee Chair concluded his remarks by wishing everyone a happy new year.

Dr. Jean Pierre A. Verbiest, MI Honorary Advisor

98. The Honorary Advisor congratulated MI for a quite successful year in terms of project implementation, financial performance, and institutional development. It showed remarkable changes this year, even the COVID-19 was worse than last year, and MI has been facing staff shortage and other difficulties. The Honorary Advisor remarked that it is a good sign. With MI presenting a clear plan to implement the MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025, the Honorary Advisor was confident that MI will continuously make a good progress next year. He said that the assumptions and positive news that the Council members have heard are really optimistic. The Honorary Advisor thought that the flagship programs offered a good opportunity for MI to broaden its work agenda and to enhance its reputation in the region. It is the first time in many years to see a change in the traditional programs. If there is a rating mechanism, the Honorary Advisor would give MI a supper A plus rating at this stage. He wished everyone a happy new year and a good health next year.

Mr. Yang Shaocheng, on behalf of Chairman of MI Council and Representative of P.R. China

99. The Chair expressed thanks to all the Council members and honorary advisor for the insightful suggestions for the future development of MI. The Chair believe that MI will take into serious account and adopt the suggestions and recommendations. The Chair presented the following two points of suggestion for MI's future development:

100. First, the Chair hoped the MI will continue to uphold multilateralism to promote sustainable development. This year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of China-ASEAN dialogue relations. At the summit commemorating the occasion, Chinese President Xi Jinping made a five-point suggestion for future China-ASEAN relations: "build a peaceful home together, build a safe and secure home together, build a prosperous home together, build a beautiful home together, and build an amicable home together". MI's vision of "capable and committed human resources working together for a more integrated, prosperous, and harmonious Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)" shares the same spirit as the above suggestions. The Chair hoped that MI will continue to base its future development on multilateralism, adhere to the principles of "mutual

respect, win-win cooperation, mutual assistance, inclusiveness, and mutual learning", so as to ensure that MI grows in a more sustainable way and provides better intellectual support to the development of the Lancang-Mekong countries.

101. Second, the Chair hoped that the MI will give priority to serving the promotion of regional post-pandemic recovery and development in its following work. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Lancang-Mekong countries have assisted one another to overcome difficulties, which has set a good example for regional efforts against the pandemic. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the flow of people and goods has been disrupted, and the global supply chain has significantly impacted. The world is faced with numerous challenges in the post-pandemic recovery. The Chair stressed that MI should focus on post-pandemic recovery and development in the region on its current and future initiatives. The Chinese side will strengthen its communication and coordination with MI according to the situation of the pandemic, to better perform its duties as the rotating chairmanship of the MI Council, and spare no effort to support MI in expanding and deepening regional cooperation. In this connection, the Chinese side, in particular Yunnan Province, will work closely with MI to well implement the relevant programs with the following major consideration for our work:

1) Continue to order training programs from MI

Currently, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (RCEP) is about to enter into force, and the outcomes of existing regional cooperation have provided important opportunities and strong impetus for the post-pandemic recovery of the region. In 2022, Yunnan Province will continue to have two tailored trainings from MI with the topics on cross-border e-commerce and tourism, respectively.

2) Webinar on post-pandemic recovery

As one of MI's flagship programs, "Towards Post COVID-19 Resilient Economies" aims at helping regional countries contain the epidemic and advance post-pandemic recovery. The Chinese side is considering to co-organize a webinar together with MI to share with the Mekong countries the epidemic-control and recovery measures taken in Yunnan Province. The Chair is looking forward to the Council members' support in the webinar.

3) "From Vientiane to Kunming": A tour of friendship via China-Laos Railway

As a landmark project of the Belt and Road initiative and China-Laos friendship, the China-Laos Railway was officially opened to traffic on December 3, 2021. In accordance with the suggestion of MI, the Chair was looking forward to discuss with MI and the Lao PDR side the feasibility of inviting members of the MI Steering Committee and MI Council, as well as representatives of the development partners, to visit the China-Laos Railway after the international travel restrictions are lifted. The Chair hoped that his fellow Council members and representatives of development partners can join the trip all the way northward from Vientiane to Kunming, to enjoy the picturesque sceneries and delicious food along the railway, and to explore business and cooperation opportunities in the fields of transport facilitation, logistics, and service trade in the Lancang-Mekong region. Of course, if the situation does not allow, this can be done in 2023 or 2024. This invitation will be valid indefinitely.

ITEM 8: DATA AND VENUE OF THE 1/2022 GOVERNING BOARD MEETING

102. Based on the recommendations of the Steering Committee Chair, the next Governing Board Meeting 1/2022 will be on the second half of July 2022, with consideration of the current COVID-19 situation, will continue to be a hybrid event at MI in Khon Kaen and online via Zoom. The

Governing Board Meeting 2/2022 is expected to be organized in Yunnan province in P.R. China by the end of 2022.

103. As approved by the committee, the next Governing Board Meeting 1/2022 will be on the second half of July 2022, with consideration of the current COVID-19 situation, will continue to be a hybrid event at MI in Khon Kaen and online via Zoom. The Governing Board Meeting 2/2022 is expected to be organized in Yunnan province in P.R. China by the end of 2022.

ITEM 9: OTHER MATTERS

104. The Council Chair invited the Council members to raise any other matters.

105. On behalf of the senior management of MI, the Executive Director of MI expressed hope that MI will continue to receive support from the GMS member countries, especially in this difficult time.

106. The Council Chair commended the MI Secretariat for organizing the meeting successfully. The Council Chair wished all present in the meeting a happy new year and stated all the countries are ready to support MI in its endeavors. As there were no other matters raised, the Council Chair concluded the Council Meeting 2/2021 to be closed at 4:17 pm ICT on December 14, 2021.