

TERMS OF REFERENCE (TOR)

Consultancy:	Study on Strategic Directions for the Mekong Institute in Addressing Global Issues Impacting the Greater Mekong Region
Type:	Individual and/or Team of Consultancy Services
Duration	December 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025 (4months)
Location:	Homebased and Fieldwork

1. Introduction

The Mekong region, comprising key Southeast Asian countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, is at a critical crossroads characterized by rapid economic growth, dynamic social change, and significant environmental challenges. As these nations strive for development and integration into the global economy, they are confronted by a myriad of contemporary global issues that threaten their sustainability and stability. Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns are exacerbating droughts and flooding, endangering food security and livelihoods. Additionally, socio-economic disparities across the region demand urgent attention. Rapid urbanization, coupled with a lack of adequate infrastructure and services, has led to growing inequalities. The marginalization of certain communities, notably ethnic minorities and rural populations, is increasingly evident, necessitating inclusive policies that promote equitable growth. Regional dynamics, influenced by major powers' interests and investments, are reshaping the political and economic environment. Moreover, issues such as public health, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and transnational crime, including human trafficking and drug smuggling, further complicate the situation in Mekong countries, highlighting the need for regional cooperation and comprehensive governance strategies. In conclusion, addressing these contemporary global issues is imperative for ensuring sustainable development, fostering resilience, and enhancing cooperation among Mekong countries. The interplay of these challenges calls for innovative and collaborative solutions, making it essential for policymakers, stakeholders, and communities to engage in a collective effort towards a more sustainable and inclusive future for the region.

The impacts of various economic challenges are both commonly experienced across several countries and uniquely defined by the specific circumstances and contexts of each nation. For example, in Cambodia, the primary focus revolves around diversifying the economy, which includes developing a wider range of industries and reducing reliance on specific sectors. Enhancing manufacturing capabilities is also a critical aspect, aiming to boost productivity and create new job opportunities. Additionally, there is an urgent need to improve climate resilience, which involves implementing strategies to combat the effects of climate change and protect natural resources. In contrast, China faces different yet equally pressing challenges. Key issues include managing structural reforms within its economy to adapt to changing global dynamics, mitigating the adverse effects of an economic

slowdown, and ensuring environmental sustainability. This latter point is crucial, given China's industrial growth and its significant ecological footprint, necessitating a balanced approach to development. Laos is currently grappling with elevated levels of public debt, which poses risks to its economic stability. In light of this, the government is focused on enhancing fiscal management practices, ensuring that financial resources are allocated efficiently. Furthermore, advancing infrastructure development is vital for promoting economic growth and facilitating trade. Myanmar, on the other hand, faces a multitude of challenges tied to political instability. This instability adversely impacts on the investment climate, making it difficult to attract foreign and domestic investments. Additionally, humanitarian concerns present serious challenges that need to be addressed to foster a stable and sustainable environment for development. Thailand is actively working on stimulating private investment, crucial for driving economic growth. Additionally, the country is tackling structural labor market issues that hinder productivity and efficiency in various sectors. By increasing productivity, Thailand aims to enhance its competitiveness in the region and attract more diverse investments. In Vietnam, the focus is on strengthening domestic demand to achieve sustainable economic growth. Upgrading infrastructure is also a priority, as it significantly impacts the movement of goods and services, thereby fostering trade. Furthermore, diversifying exports is crucial for reducing vulnerability to external market fluctuations.

Despite the unique circumstances facing each country, these challenges are inherently interconnected and regional in nature. The countries of the GMS (Greater Mekong Subregion) are interdependent in terms of human and capital flows as well as resource sharing. This interconnectedness highlights the necessity for cohesive policies and coordinated efforts among these nations to effectively address the multifaceted issues they face. It is essential for governments to work together, share resources, and implement collective strategies to promote shared prosperity and resilience in the region.

2. Rational of the Study and MI Strategic Plan

The Mekong Institute (MI) aligns its programs and projects with a five-year Strategic Plan (SP), with the current plan covering 2021-2025. This SP aims to position MI as a center of excellence for capacity development, a regional think tank, and a recognized advisory provider. However, the implementation of the SP faced delays due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which affected activities through mid-2022. Additional challenges emerged from an increasingly uncertain global environment, prompting MI to introduce institutional strengthening and recovery measures to accelerate the SP's implementation through 2025. Read the full MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025 [here](#).

As MI prepares for the next SP (2026-2030), the organization recognizes the importance of addressing global challenges impacting the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). The region faces critical issues that require a comprehensive strategy to support sustainable development, economic stability, and social cohesion. This period marks a pivotal moment for MI to reassess its strategic direction, ensuring relevance and responsiveness to emerging needs. Addressing these global challenges demands regional cooperation and action rooted in an understanding of interconnected structural issues.

The proposed study is designed to reflect MI's SP objectives, ensuring the strategic plan remains multifaceted and adaptable to the needs of the region. By aligning its strategy with contemporary challenges and stakeholder priorities, MI can strengthen its role in fostering sustainable development, inclusive growth, and regional cooperation across Mekong countries. The study will support MI's objective of enhancing regional collaboration and achieving a resilient and equitable future for the GMS, ensuring MI remains an effective, influential force in regional development.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study aims to provide critical insights into the impact of contemporary global challenges that the Greater Mekong Sub-Region faces and respond to global issues by identifying existing gaps and suggesting strategic directions for MI.

More specifically, the study will:

- Identify and analyze contemporary global issues affecting the GMS while reviewing MI's strategic plan to propose targeted directions that can better position MI to address contemporary global issues and their impacts.
- Assess National Policies and Mekong sub-regional cooperation frameworks address the impacts of global issues in GMS countries to identify gaps in existing strategies and mechanisms that limit effective responses to these global challenges to suggest strategic directions for MI.
- Enhance Synergies by addressing overlapping sub-regional cooperation mechanisms to enhance synergies and prevent duplication of efforts within the GMS.

The consultancy assignment is scheduled to commence from December 1 2024 to March 31, 2025.

4. Study Approach

The study approach will comprise of two interrelated activities:

Part 1: Research Study	1. Literature Review: Explore existing studies on global issues and their impact on the GMS, focusing on climate change, economic inequality, health crises, and migration.
	2. Data Collection: Utilize qualitative and quantitative methods including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Surveys from stakeholders in GMS countries.▪ Interviews with key policymakers and experts.▪ Analysis of national policies and cooperation frameworks.
	3. Gap Analysis: Compare current strategies against best practices and international standards to pinpoint inadequacies in policy response and implementation.
	4. Stakeholder Engagement: Engage with local communities, NGOs, and governmental organizations to understand ground realities and concerns.
	5. Strategic Review: Review the Mekong Institute's strategic plan, identifying areas for improvement and alignment with current global challenges.
Part 2: Consultation workshop	1. Consultation Workshop: present initial findings, gather feedback, and validate conclusions.
	2. Final report: Compile a comprehensive report detailing findings, gaps, and policy recommendations based on stakeholder feedback and expert analysis.

5. Methodology

The study will employ a multi-faceted methodology comprising desk research, stakeholder engagement, and a mixed-methods approach to data collection and analysis. The key components are outlined below:

1. Desk Study

The initial phase involves a comprehensive desk review to gather foundational insights and contextualize the study. This phase includes:

- **Literature, Policy, and Report Review:** An extensive review of existing literature, policies, and reports focusing on critical contemporary global issues impacting the GMS, such as climate change, economic disparities, and public health crises. Key documents from each Mekong cooperation framework, including reports, strategic plans, and evaluations, will be examined to assess achievements and challenges.
- **MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025 Review:** A focused review of the Mekong Institute's strategic plan 2021-2025 and midterm report will be conducted to identify areas for improvement and alignment with pressing global challenges. The assessment will evaluate MI's effectiveness in addressing issues such as climate change, economic disparities, and geopolitical tensions impacting the GMS.
- **Secondary Data Analysis:** Secondary data sources, including academic articles, governmental reports, and gray literature, will be analyzed to support findings and provide broader context.

2. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement will incorporate Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussions (FGD), and structured surveys to ensure a comprehensive collection of qualitative and quantitative data, the consultant should:

- **Semi-structure interviews of key informants and focus group discussions covering sectors**—including government officials, NGO representatives, private sector actors, and local community—will be conducted. These interviews will gather perspectives on current challenges, the effectiveness of MI's strategic plan, and the impact of national policies and cooperation frameworks. Special attention will be given to the role of the FCDO and UK perspectives in stakeholder engagement. Suggested sampling and data collection: 1 group of government official per country, (1) NGO representatives per country, (1) private sector per country. Each group for FGD should consist of 7 to 10 participants;
- **Structured questionnaire survey** to complement the personal interviews and FGD is known as a way to facilitate the assessment of the patterns, trends, and relations among stakeholders in the value chains and markets. 30 filled questionnaires in each country.

3. Data Analysis and Draft Report

Collected data will undergo rigorous analysis through both quantitative and qualitative methods:

- **Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical tools will be used to analyze survey data, providing summary insights on achievements, challenges, and stakeholder perceptions.
- **Qualitative Analysis:** Thematic analysis will categorize and interpret responses from interviews and focus groups, uncovering common themes, trends, and actionable insights.

- **SWOT Analysis:** A SWOT analysis of MI's strategic plan will be conducted to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, with a comparison to other regional initiatives to pinpoint areas for improvement and collaboration.

4. Regional Consultation Workshop

- **Design the Regional Consultation Workshop to be held in Bangkok, Thailand:** Develop a concept note and agenda, and identify 30 key stakeholders and contacts, including representatives from the UK. The workshop will employ engagement techniques like breakout sessions and roundtables to ensure diverse perspectives are integrated into future strategies. The workshop objectives should cover:
 - (1) Review and validate interim study findings;
 - (2) Formulate a coherent set of actionable recommendations;
 - (3) Identify mechanisms to establish synergies and strengthen collaboration across Mekong cooperation frameworks and development initiatives;
 - (4) Outline strategies for UK engagement to enhance cooperation and address identified gaps;
 - (5) Foster stakeholder ownership for equitable resource allocation, with an emphasis on the roles of the private sector and local communities.
- **Presenting research findings and facilitating** at the Regional Consultation Workshop to validate results with stakeholders, and gather actionable recommendations and insights to inform MI's strategic directions, using engagement techniques such as breakout sessions and roundtables.
- **Revising and submitting the final report:** Following feedback from the Regional Consultation Workshop, finalize and submit a comprehensive report. The report will outline the multifaceted impacts of global issues on the GMS, evaluate MI's strategic plan, and provide findings, conclusions, and actionable recommendations for the Institute.

6. Deliverables

1. **A comprehensive report** detailing findings, analysis of contemporary global issues, evaluations of MI's strategic responses, and recommendations for improvement.
2. **A gap assessment** highlighting in current cooperation mechanisms, along with actionable recommendations to enhance regional collaboration, including engagement with the development partners such as UK, to strengthen cooperation and address identified gaps.
3. **A compilation of actionable insights** and recommendations from stakeholder consultations to effectively guide MI's strategic directions.
4. **Strategic guidance** for strengthening synergies and collaborative efforts within the GMS, aligned with national policies to effectively address identified global challenges.

7. Timeline and Payment

The Consultant is required to prepare a detailed work plan that sets out an approach for conducting and fully completing all activities within the set timeframe per Table below:

Activities	Dec 2024			Jan 2025			Feb 2025			Mar 2025		
Phase 1: Desk Study and Inception Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design methodology and strategy for conducting the study. Present methodology, strategy and outline of the study to MI. Conduct desk review including literature, policy, and report review. Conduct survey and KIIs / FGDs/Field work. Gather information and analyze the data. Present the inception report to MI. 			X									
Phase 2: Regional Consultation Workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare concept note, agenda, stakeholders list for the Workshop. Present findings and facilitate their validation, gathering recommendations and insights. 							X					
Phase 3: Final Report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate feedback from the Regional Consultation Workshop and finalize the report. Submit the final study report to MI. 											X	X

The total lump-sum amount of this consultancy service is **US\$ 7,000**. The payment schedule is as follows:

- 40% of the total value is paid upon signing contractual agreement / TOR;
- 40% of the total value is made upon submission of the final draft report by the Consultant; and
- 20% of the total as final payment is made upon acceptance of the final report by MI.

In addition:

- MI shall facilitate the consultant to carry out fieldwork activities and meetings with local partners and stakeholders in the Mekong countries/ASEAN.
- During the fieldwork in the Mekong countries/ASEAN, MI will cover economy airfare, transport in the country and accommodation costs. Other costs such as allowance, insurance etc. will be bear under consultant responsibility.
- MI shall not be responsible for any further expenses incurred by the Consultant during the consultancy works and for any losses and/or damages caused to consultant.
- All payments will be made by bank transfers in the name of the Consultant as specified in the TOR /contract.

Note:

- Any delay of the work by the consultant without notice (at least 5 days in advance) and agreement from MI will be penalized by deducting the payment at USD 35 (0.5% of the total consultancy fee) / per day based on the days of latency.
- The consultant's failure to deliver all the required outputs for over one-month delay will be considered as a default, which requires the consultant to pay back the first payment added with the compensation for the loss of the MI (50% of the total consultancy fee).

While we acknowledge the benefits that AI tools provide for research, however, we appreciate the authenticity and depth that human insights contribute to our consultancy outcomes. Therefore, we advise against relying solely on AI- generated responses for conducting this consultancy assignment.

8. Qualifications of the Consultant

- Master's degree or higher in International Development, Economics, Political Science, Public Policy, Environmental Studies, or related fields.
- Minimum 10 years of experience in conducting evaluations or strategic assessments, ideally in the GMS or Southeast Asia.
- Proven expertise in areas like climate change, economic development, or public health within regional cooperation contexts.
- Proficiency in mixed-method research design and data analysis
- Skilled in SWOT analysis, comparative assessments, and strategic evaluations.
- Strong stakeholder engagement skills, with experience facilitating workshops and presenting findings to diverse audiences.
- Excellent report writing skills with experience producing clear, actionable reports on regional cooperation or sustainable development topics.
- Familiarity with the Mekong Institute's mission and understanding of cooperation frameworks in the GMS is a plus.
- Awareness of global issues affecting the region, such as environmental challenges and economic disparities.
- Proficiency in English, both written and spoken. Knowledge of GMS languages is a plus but not essential.
-

9. Assignment Prohibited and Termination

The consultant is prohibited to assign or sub-grant any part of the activities under the agreed assignment without prior written consent of MI. Where such prior written consent is given, it shall not relieve the Consultant of any of its responsibilities under this contractual agreement.

The consultant shall ensure that the writings, textual matter, drawings, photographs, picture, maps, and diagrams, and all materials submitted to MI are either (i) original with the Consultant in all respects and do not infringe the copyright or intellectual property right of any third party; or (ii) should there be any part of the writings, textual matter, drawings, photographs, picture, maps, diagrams and material which are not of the consultant's original work, the consultant shall have obtained / cleared all copyright permissions.

MI shall have the rights to terminate this contract in the case that the Consultant is unable to fulfil his / her obligations under the terms and conditions of this TOR; or the contractual agreement may be terminated by either MI or the consultant, whichever comes first.

10. Miscellaneous

MI shall not be responsible for any liability for any damages, losses, illness, injuries, and / or death, which may occur to or be caused by the consultant during the assignment.

11. Submission of Application

Interested consultant is requested to submit:

- An updated CV demonstrating their qualifications and experience;
- A detailed study proposal outlying understanding of the study concept; including
 - Desk study outline;
 - Study methodology and design study plan;
 - Stakeholder workshop concept and facilitation process;
 - Final report outline.

Shortlisted proposals will be required to present the study outline and approach, methodology and etc. via online meeting. Application should be submitted electronically to procurement@mekonginstitute.org and cc to dutta@mekonginstitute.org by November 22, 2024.

12. About Mekong Institute

Mekong Institute (MI) is an intergovernmental organization founded by members of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). MI serves the GMS countries, namely Cambodia, P.R. China (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam by providing, implementing, and facilitating integrated human resource development (HRD), capacity building programs, and development projects related to regional cooperation and integration.

MI aims to foster regional cooperation and connectivity by working with local government authorities, development partners, and local organizations to deliver standardized and customized learning programs, workshops, seminars, policy dialogues and consultations as well as research and development projects.

For more details, please visit www.mekonginstitute.org.