



6.1 Draft Implementation Plan of the Recommendations of Mid-Term Review (MTR) of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Executive Summary

The MTR of the MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025, conducted between August and October 2023, assessed MI's progress, challenges, and relevance in addressing regional development needs. Led by an independent consultant in collaboration with the MI Secretariat, the review gathered insights from MI's Governing Bodies, management, donors, and stakeholders through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and other data collection methods. Findings were presented to the Governing Board, which endorsed the MTR report as a guide for refining MI's strategy.

In response, the MI Council approved the formation of a Subcommittee tasked with reviewing the findings and proposing actionable strategies. The Subcommittee convened in an online meeting on 18 October 2024 to discuss the MTR report, MI's progress, identify operational barriers, and set the direction for the remaining period of the current Strategic Plan as well as laying the groundwork for the next one.

(see Annex 1 for more details)

Key Recommendations and Conclusions

Due to delays and challenges arising from COVID-19, the Sub-committee recommends that MI focus on realistic, immediate actions within the current Strategic Plan (2021-2025) to strengthen its organizational structure, enhance in-house technical expertise, and ensure financial stability. Short-term priorities include refining MI's operational framework and exploring the feasibility of offering select training programs on a fee basis for self-sponsored participants. Increasing member engagement and improving communication channels are also critical to ensuring MI's work aligns with the evolving priorities of GMS member countries.

As part of the formulation of the new Strategic Plan 2026-2030, MI should validate and adapt its aspirations as a Centre of Excellence, Regional Think Tank, and Advisory Service Provider, aligning its focus with GMS development needs. The Sub-committee recommends building stronger partnerships with development stakeholders to foster feedback loops, increase collaboration, and align MI's programs with regional goals. Establishing a balanced mix of long-term and short-term projects will support both sustainable growth and flexibility. A refined budget strategy and enhanced resource mobilization will ensure that MI can meet the minimum financial requirements of its annual work plans.

Additionally, the Sub-committee advised a cost-benefit analysis of relocating MI's headquarters or adopting a hybrid model that retains a core presence in Khon Kaen with project offices in

strategic locations. This approach would enhance MI's visibility and operational reach while maintaining cost-effectiveness.

Moving forward, the Sub-committee supports a phased approach to implementing these recommendations. Immediate actions in 2025 will lay the foundation for the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, strengthening MI's resilience and adaptability.

(see Annex 2 for more details)

Key Progress and Achievements (2021-2024)

From 2021 to 2024, the MI made notable strides under the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Key achievements include;

- Implemented projects to support climate-smart agriculture and sustainable food systems, reaching farmers, academic institutions, and government agencies with practical knowledge on climate resilience and sustainable practices
- Promoted regional agribusiness and improved food safety through training and technical assistance, enhancing agricultural productivity and resilience across the GMS
- Organized Lancang-Mekong Business Forums to boost cross-border trade and agribusiness investment, aligning with the ASEAN and GMS development frameworks
- Engaged in policy advocacy and capacity-building for digital trade facilitation, helping businesses, especially SMEs, integrate with global markets
- Advanced renewable energy adoption and climate finance initiatives, such as workshops on low-emission rice cultivation and climate-smart agriculture
- Collaborated with partners on sustainable development projects to foster green energy transitions and address environmental challenges in the GMS
- MI integrated themes of social inclusion, digital economy, and labor mobility across its programs to foster inclusive growth.
- Strengthened organizational capacity and governance with improved operational frameworks and policies, enhancing MI's efficiency and stakeholder engagement
- Expanded partnerships with governments, development partners, and the private sector, leveraging new funding avenues
- Establishing the GMS Knowledge Network and collaborating with the ASEAN Climate Resilience Network helped MI amplify its impact and align with regional priorities

Key Short-term Implementation Plans (2025)

As MI concludes its Strategic Plan 2021-2025, key priorities and a focused implementation strategy aim to maximize impact and prepare for the next strategic cycle. Key action plans include *(see Annex 3 for more details)*:

- Fully implement MI's revised organizational structure and update the Operations Manual.
- Assess the validity of MI's roles as a Centre of Excellence, Think Tank, and Advisory Service Provider.
- Increase engagement with Governing Board and Council members through regular consultations and feedback.

- Enhance communication channels with member states for better alignment with GMS needs.
- Adjust salary and incentive structures to attract and retain skilled professionals.
- Develop inter-departmental Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for effective project management.
- Launch a strategy to diversify funding, including multilateral and private sector partnerships.
- Assess the feasibility of fee-based training services for additional revenue.
- Simplify the Results Framework and align project outcomes with strategic objectives.
- Establish systematic data collection for adaptive management.
- Tailor CDM to meet specific GMS country needs, with organization-level impact and structured follow-up processes.
- Update the alumni database and engage alumni in strategic discussions and regional initiatives.
- Develop initiatives in energy, environment, and workforce development to broaden MI's thematic portfolio.
- Explore partnerships within GMS frameworks and address gaps not covered by existing cooperation mechanisms.
- Improve MI's knowledge-sharing and documentation processes to capture lessons learned and disseminate insights across the organization and stakeholders.
- Conduct a cost-benefit analysis of maintaining or relocating MI's headquarters, with possible short-term project offices outside Khon Kaen if needed
- Pilot innovative delivery modalities, including digital platforms and off-campus courses.

Key Long-term Implementation Plans (2026-2030)

Looking ahead, the MI will develop its Strategic Plan for 2026-2030, aiming to enhance its relevance, expand capabilities, and align its aspirations and mission with the GMS long-term development needs. Key action plans include (*see Annex 3 for more details*):

- Develop clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), targets, and timelines for each aspiration in the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan.
- Align programs with evolving regional needs, especially in priority areas like climate resilience, sustainable development, and energy.
- Institutionalize structured engagement with Governing Board and Council members, enhancing their roles in strategic planning.
- Host annual Development Partners' meetings to increase collaboration with private sector, multilateral, and philanthropic stakeholders.
- Establish a focused research agenda and thematic working paper series on regional priority issues.
- Appoint regional experts and research fellows to build MI's credibility as a knowledge hub.

- Implement data-driven RBM across all projects, emphasizing high-impact indicators and systematic tracking of outcomes.
- Extend MI's CDM to organization-level interventions, ensuring sustainable capacity-building beyond individual participants.
- Strengthen partnerships across sectors, adapting collaborations to address emerging GMS needs.
- Assess the need and possibilities to relocate MI to Bangkok or other strategic locations for submission to the GB as part of the new SP
- Shift MI's approach to address the needs of GMS countries as they transition to middle-income status, focusing on economic resilience and social strengthening initiatives.
- Refine budget arrangement and resources mobilization strategy to meet minimum requirements of annual work plans of the new five-year SP.
- Strengthen cross-departmental collaboration to optimize resources and reduce siloed operations, aiming for a more integrated approach in achieving strategic objectives.
- Develop a strategy to engage MI Alumni in future work plans, provide relevant information through communication channels like the website and e-briefings, and foster cooperation within alumni subgroups and professional rosters on specialised topics.
- Increase alignment with key regional cooperation frameworks to open new funding and partnership opportunities, strengthening MI's role in GMS cooperation.
- Establish a more significant presence in regional policy dialogues by enhancing MI's policy advocacy capacity
- Explore digital transformation within MI's internal processes, such as implementing an e-office system

Annex 1: Detailed Implementation Plan of the Recommendations of Mid-Term Review (MTR) of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Background

Under the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, MI conducted a Mid-Term Review (MTR) during August-October 2023 by engaging an independent regional consultant. The overall objective of the MTR was to reflect on the progress of the strategic plan implementation, identify challenges, and recommend possible changes and improvements to the strategies/approaches for better implementation in the remaining duration of the Strategic Plan. The consultant, in consultation with the MI Secretariat, developed Review's methodology and tools of the data collection of the MTR. The consultant and MI Secretariat jointly conducted Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to capture MI's progress, achievements, and results; identify gaps and challenges, and possible actions for course-correction; and developed an MTR report. The key recommendations were included in the report and the findings of the report were presented to the MI Steering Committee in the second Governing Board (GB) meeting in December 2023. After the deliberation, the Steering Committee agreed to propose the following recommendations to the Council:

- *The independent MTR report is a useful reference for future improvement.*
- *The MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is still valid. Necessary modification could be introduced to refine activities for GMS development and institutional strengthening.*
- *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 member-driven approach.*
- *Short-term measures to improve Organizational Structure, Operations Manual, and Salary Structure could be considered.*
- *As a longer-term measure, the Council may form a sub-committee as necessary to review the recommendations and map out measures for further consideration.*

Set-up of A Sub-committee on MTR Recommendations

During the MI Council Meeting 2/2023, the Council considered and approved short-term measures for improvement of the implementation of the Strategic Plan, namely the revised Organizational Structure, revised Operations Manual, and the revised Salary Structure. For longer-term measures, the Council was of the view that more in-depth assessment of the recommendation was needed. As result, the Council approved the creation of a Sub-committee on MTR Recommendations. A Sub-committee has been formed, comprising the SC members of Cambodia, China, and Lao PDR, the Council member of the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP), chaired by with the Steering Committee (SC) Chairman and supported by the Executive Director as Secretary of the sub-committee. The main purpose of this Subcommittee is to develop a realistic action plan based on the review of the recommendations of the MTR. The scope of the subcommittee's work includes i) Review the findings and recommendations of the MTR of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025, ii) Develop strategies and approaches for implementing each of the recommendations of the MTR, iii) Draft a detailed action plan to address the findings/recommendations of the MTR, and iv) Submit the action plan to the MI Council for

approval through the MI Steering Committee. Upon approval by the Council, the Steering Committee will be tasked to incorporate the action plan as part of the preparation of annual work plans as well as the formulation of the new Strategic Plan (2026-2030).

Annex 2: Summary of MTR Sub-Committee Meeting

MI Secretariat initiated an initial draft of the Implementation Plan of the MTR Recommendations in September 2024. After a first round of comments by the Sub-Committee members, a revised draft of the Plan was prepared. The MTR Sub-Committee held an online meeting on 18 October 2024 and made a thorough review of the Plan. The meeting highlighted MI's strengths, challenges, and progress while setting the direction for the remaining period of the current Strategic Plan as well as laying the groundwork for the next one.

1. Progress and Strategic Relevance

The Sub-Committee reaffirmed the importance of MI's core aspirations as a Centre of Excellence, Regional Think Tank, and Advisory Service Provider in addressing the Greater Mekong Subregion's (GMS) development needs. Especially, all members aspired MI to be a center of excellence for training, for research, and for policy advocacy on GMS development cooperation. Members noted, however, that MI's progress has been impacted by technical capacity, reliance on short-term projects, and post-COVID-19 recovery efforts. These challenges have constrained MI's ability to realize its broader ambitions, especially in policy advisory roles. Nonetheless, MI's strong foundation in capacity development remains a valuable asset that can support future growth. The Sub-Committee emphasized the need for MI to validate the ongoing relevance of these aspirations within the context of evolving regional needs. This validation should take place alongside the development of the new Strategic Plan, ensuring alignment with future GMS priorities.

2. Institutional Challenges and Adaptability

Key institutional challenges were identified, including limited in-house technical depth, an overreliance on external consultants, and uncompetitive salary structures that hinder talent retention. MI's location in Khon Kaen also poses logistical challenges for engaging with stakeholders and raising its regional profile. The Sub-Committee supported a phased, flexible approach to address these issues: immediate adjustments to MI's organizational structure and salary scales, followed by longer-term strategies to enhance internal capacity and align resources with MI's strategic goals. To address these limitations, members recommended that MI focus on institutional construction and building expertise that aligns with its strategic mandate, rather than adapting technical depth based solely on current projects, which would enable MI to establish a more specialized and impactful presence in the region. However, in the process of achieving this MI should act according to its capacity, resources available, and current situation, and try to avoid complicating its management and governance structure.

3. Governance and Financial Sustainability

The Sub-Committee highlighted the importance of deeper engagement from the Governing Board and Council members to ensure alignment between MI's mission and member countries' priorities and plans. Enhanced governance through active participation in MI's key events, national consultations, and decision-making processes was recommended to reinforce MI's alignment with member country needs. It is also stressed in the meeting the importance of strengthening communication and exchanging views with member states, paying particular attention to their observations and concerns. Moreover, the chairman stated that GB members have to take an active role in persuading development partners to participate in the financing and a contribution to those programs approved by the governing board. Financial sustainability was also prioritized, with calls for a diversification strategy that moves beyond bilateral funding. Members recommended exploring partnerships with multilateral organizations and private-sector collaborations. In addition, the subcommittee recommended further discussing and exploring a new set of ideas regarding methodologies and criteria for funding MI activities. One possible approach is setting the target and criteria on how to adjust the membership fee and the requirement based on the economic development of each country. This model would promote stable and predictable funding while reducing dependency on project-specific financing, supporting MI's long-term sustainability goals, and helping to mitigate reliance on short-term projects. However, it was emphasized in the meeting regarding the importance of recognizing that projects of varying durations serve different purposes and yield different results. Thus, MI should maintain a balanced proportion of long-term and short-term projects to enhance overall effectiveness

4. Strategic Partnerships and Regional Positioning

Strengthening strategic partnerships within the GMS was highlighted as essential for MI to enhance its influence in policy and research. The Sub-Committee recommended developing a focused research agenda on priority themes such as environmental sustainability and energy policy, which are aligned with GMS needs. Collaborating with academic institutions and engaging pro bono research fellows could deepen MI's knowledge base and regional contributions. Expanding partnerships and engaging in formalized research partnerships would be valuable for MI in building robust knowledge-sharing networks that support thematic research across the region. Members also endorsed establishing a thematic series of working papers and regional forums, such as the Mekong Fora, to reinforce MI's positioning as a thought leader and trusted partner in GMS policy discussions.

5. Headquarters Location and Operational Flexibility

The potential relocation of MI's headquarters to Bangkok was discussed as a strategic option to improve accessibility and visibility among regional stakeholders. However, members

acknowledged the financial and operational costs of such a move and proposed a hybrid model as a more feasible alternative. One of the supporting reasons was that while visibilities could be increased in other strategic locations, maintaining the headquarters in Khon Kaen is essential for MI to effectively function as a think tank and for policy advocacy, given its proximity to universities and available resources. This model would retain MI's primary base in Khon Kaen while establishing project offices in Bangkok or other strategic locations, allowing MI to extend its presence cost-effectively, noting that funding for these offices should come directly from project budgets. A cost-benefit analysis was recommended to explore relocation feasibility and evaluate if maintaining a hybrid model would offer a sustainable advantage for MI's strategic and operational functions.

6. Programmatic and Operational Improvements

In response to member suggestions, the Sub-Committee endorsed expanding MI's Capacity Development Model (CDM) across all programs to ensure that MI's impact extends from individual participants to organizations across the GMS. Tailoring the CDM to specific country needs will create sustainable capacity at both individual and institutional levels. It was recommended that MI seek feedback from training participants on the current CDM to ensure that the new model effectively addresses participant needs and supports refinement based on real-world feedback. Members also recommended establishing protocols for cross-departmental collaboration to enhance project management and align program activities with MI's broader strategic objectives. This approach would enable MI to optimize resources and streamline operational processes for greater impact across its initiatives.

7. Implementation Phases and Strategic Outlook

The Sub-Committee supported a phased approach for implementing the MTR recommendations, emphasizing MI to ensure the plans are realistic. Immediate actions for 2024-2025 will focus on operational adjustments, resource mobilization, and enhanced governance engagement. The result of these immediate actions and other proposed actions will be incorporated in the development of MI's 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, ensuring that MI remains adaptable, resilient, and better positioned to address GMS priorities in the coming years. This phased strategy, members agreed, enables MI to tackle current challenges while laying the groundwork for sustainable, long-term impact across the region. The phased approach was also supported as a means to periodically review and adjust MI's course, incorporating an ongoing assessment and adaptability to ensure MI remains aligned with shifting regional priorities and needs.

Proposed Action Plans

1. Short-term *(during the remaining of SP 2021-2025 implementation)*

1.1 Strategic Role and Capacity Development:

- 1.1.1 Strengthen MI's operational foundation to further its role as a *Centre of Excellence*, *Regional Think Tank*, and *Advisory Service Provider*. Initiate the new organizational structure and update the Operations Manual to reflect current and emerging responsibilities. This will include establishing a results-based management (RBM) framework to monitor progress against strategic objectives systematically.
- 1.1.2 Enhance MI's in-house technical expertise by identifying core areas for growth, such as environmental policy, sustainable development, and energy. Bring in regional experts and pro bono research fellows to expand MI's capacity in high-demand fields. Collaborative projects with academic institutions should be prioritized to ensure the necessary support for research and training aligned with regional priorities.
- 1.1.3 Develop a KPI framework for each of MI's strategic aspirations, setting measurable targets that will guide program implementation and help track MI's impact on a regional level.

1.2 Governance and Member Engagement:

- 1.2.1 Foster strong Governing Board and Council involvement in MI's strategic planning and implementation, ensuring their insights guide MI's direction in alignment with member country priorities. Regular consultations and feedback sessions will be established to support ongoing engagement and ownership by member states.
- 1.2.2 Launch national consultations with member countries to seek guidance and capture feedback on the impact of MI's activities, thereby reinforcing MI's understanding of member needs, challenges, and past successes. These insights will directly inform the development of the framework of the 2026-2030 Strategic Plan, allowing MI to align its mission with the evolving goals of the GMS.

1.3 Operational Adjustments and Organizational Development:

- 1.3.1 Implement a revised salary and incentive structure to strengthen talent retention and attract skilled professionals to address technical gaps. This includes immediate adjustments to salary scales and additional benefits to maintain competitive standards in the GMS market, especially in high-priority roles related to policy and advisory services.
- 1.3.2 Establish robust inter-departmental collaboration protocols for effective project management and delivery. Documented Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) will be created to streamline coordination, ensuring that all departments contribute effectively to MI's strategic objectives.

- 1.3.3 Establish a resource allocation framework to optimize budget distribution across core areas. This framework will support program priorities, ensuring MI maximizes resource use without compromising project quality.

1.4 Resource Mobilization and Diversification:

- 1.4.1 Roll out a resource mobilization strategy to diversify MI's funding sources, focusing on multilateral agencies, private sector collaborations, and philanthropic foundations. Begin by conducting a feasibility study for fee-based services, especially in areas where MI's expertise could benefit the private sector. This pilot program, guided by feedback, could become an additional revenue stream to fund core initiatives.
- 1.4.2 Design and implement a criteria-based model for member country contributions to create a stable and predictable funding base. This approach will consider each country's economic capacity and development priorities, promoting fairness and sustainability in MI's financial model.
- 1.4.3 Update the MI alumni network, enhancing engagement with former MI trainees and program participants. Alumni will be invited to participate in strategic discussions, provide advisory support, and contribute to regional initiatives as ambassadors of MI's mission.

2. Long-term (during the preparation of SP 2026-2030 and its implementation)

2.1 Strategic Role Validation and Alignment with Regional Needs:

- 2.1.1 Reassess MI's core aspirations—*Centre of Excellence*, *Think Tank*, and *Advisory Service Provider*—in the 2026-2030 SP, developing KPIs, timelines, and outcomes for each. Establishing an accountability framework will allow MI to adjust strategies as needed, ensuring its work aligns with shifting regional dynamics and remains relevant to member countries.
- 2.1.2 Broaden MI's research capacity through a thematic research agenda focused on high-impact topics like climate resilience, sustainable development, and regional energy strategies. This includes utilizing the Mekong Fora as a platform for policy dialogue and regional thought leadership. Appoint regional experts and fellows to lead specific research themes, enhancing MI's credibility as a knowledge hub.
- 2.1.3 Embed data collection and performance metrics within the results-based management (RBM) framework, allowing MI to systematically measure impact and inform strategic adjustments. This data will also support knowledge-sharing efforts and strengthen MI's reputation as a knowledge-based institution.

2.2 Governance Strengthening and Expanded Stakeholder Involvement:

- 2.2.1** Institutionalize stronger Governing Board and Council engagement and communication through structured planning and reporting mechanisms.
- 2.2.2** Host annual MI Development Partners' meetings to engage with potential partners and development stakeholders, including representatives from the private sector and philanthropic organizations. These meetings will provide opportunities to solicit feedback, increase collaboration opportunities, ensure MI's programs align with regional priorities, and secure multi-year partnerships, ensuring MI's strategic goals are adequately funded.
- 2.2.3** Integrate a data-driven approach in the RBM framework for consistent tracking of program outcomes, with a particular focus on high-impact indicators. This approach will also enhance alumni engagement, providing opportunities for them to contribute strategically and extend MI's influence through partnership roles.

2.3 Headquarters Review and Strategic Positioning:

- 2.3.1** Conduct a thorough cost-benefit analysis on the proposed relocation of MI's headquarters to Bangkok, considering operational, strategic, and financial implications. Members recommended maintaining a primary base in Khon Kaen while establishing project offices in Bangkok or other strategic locations by mobilizing project budgets if relocation is pursued.
- 2.3.2** Assess MI's infrastructure needs in the context of its training, workshops, and regional stakeholder engagement requirements. This review will ensure MI's facilities and resources are optimized to support capacity-building efforts for member countries effectively.

2.4 Flexible Partnership and Resource Strategies:

- 2.4.1** Create a flexible framework for engaging various partners across the GMS, tailored to their specific expertise and resources. This framework will enable MI to strengthen collaborations with both traditional and non-traditional partners, allowing for adaptable responses to emerging regional needs.
- 2.4.2** Establish a pooled funding mechanism that guarantees baseline financial support for core initiatives, regardless of project-specific timelines. By securing ongoing resources, MI will have the flexibility to implement high-impact projects that align with long-term GMS objectives.
- 2.4.3** Invest in staff training and capacity building to support effective resource mobilization and management. MI's internal team will be equipped with skills to secure grants, build strategic partnerships, and manage donor relationships, ensuring sustained support for the organization's mission.

Final Reflections and Outlook

The MTR Sub-Committee concluded with an emphasis on the importance of *institutional resilience, responsiveness, and adaptability*. As MI continues to navigate a complex and rapidly changing regional context, maintaining its relevance and operational effectiveness will require a balanced approach — one that values both traditional strengths in capacity development and new strategies for research, advisory, and policy engagement. The Sub-Committee commended the Secretariat for coordinating the review process and called for focused efforts on implementing the recommendations, ensuring that MI remains a key player in GMS regional cooperation and development.

Moving forward, the Steering Committee Meeting will be convened on 19 November to review the revised implementation plan and updates from the Secretariat on the implementation progress, as part of an ongoing commitment to monitor and refine MI's strategic direction. Consequently, the secretariat will revise the implementation plan based on the feedback from the steering committee meeting and propose for council approval at the council meeting on 17 December. With this structured approach, MI is expected to transition effectively into its next five-year plan, aligning its mission with regional needs and ensuring that it remains a responsive, resilient, and innovative institution serving the GMS region.

Annex 3: Proposed Implementation Plan of the Recommendations of Mid-Term Review (MTR) of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025

The Sub-committee has carefully reviewed the MTR report and identified key actions to be taken by MI in two phases- i) Short-term Plan (during the SP 2021-2025 implementation) and Long-term Plan (during the preparation of SP 2026-2030 and its implementation).

The recommended actions by the Sub-committee are presented in the following table:

Sl. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
1	Strategic Roles of MI		
1.1	Work towards achieving MI SP's higher-level aspirations (Center of Excellence in capacity development, Regional Think Tank, and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify measures for how the three aspirations could be achieved within the current SP. Determine the extent of validity of the three aspirations in the new SP. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), targets and timelines for each of the key aspirations as part of the new 5-year workplan and budget as well as monitor and report the progress and achievement to the GB on an annual basis.

Sl. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
	Advisory Service Provider)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify measures for how KPIs and targets will be met on an annual basis.
2	Governance		
2.1	Capitalize the members of the Council, Steering Committee, and Coordinating Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage GB and CA members in key events and undertaking and seek their advice on support to the planning and implementation of such events/activities. Strengthen communication and exchange views with member states, paying particular attention to their observations and concerns Submit request for GB/CA support in the proposed annual work plan. Propose each of non-GMS members of the Council (i.e. academic representatives, business representative, and international organization representative) to provide advice and support to MI policy and work plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Propose discussion with the GB/CA on their enhanced roles and support to MI during the new SP.
2.2	Perform structural reform according to major services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully implement the approved Organizational Structure, and Operations Manual as well as assess the need to refine them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the organizational structure, Operations Manual on major services areas to support the new SP.
2.3	Increase the technical depth of MI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the needs of expertise or specialization needed for project implementation Consider appointing selected staff as technical leads in areas of their expertise. Fully utilize expertise from collaborating partners with MoUs with MI. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue best practices in technical mobilization from the previous SP. Consider MI appointments of “Research Fellows” on pro bono basis.

SI. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase the capacity and technical depth of MI staff through need-based training. 	
2.4	Increase MI's research capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize research initiatives in MI's programs • Collaborate with national/international academic and research organizations to conduct quality research and share useful materials. • Develop new research partnerships and strengthen existing partnerships • Facilitate knowledge exchange with other similar organisations to understand different experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct research priority setting as part of the new SP development. • Consider setting up GMS working paper series. • Utilize Mekong Fora as a platform to promote relevant Mi research work. • Determine appropriateness of technical departments whether they will follow functional (research, capacity development, policy & advocacy) or thematic topics (trade and investment, agriculture, energy, environment). • Strengthen the MEL unit's capacity with adequate skilled staff capable of research design and conducting quality research.
2.5	Optimize MI's work management enhancing collaboration between program and operations departments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly demarcate areas of responsibilities between program and non-program departments on implementation of activities • Develop SOPs or a manual for organizing program related activities to ensure timely actions from relevant departments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a policy and protocol in working with the Private Sector. • Re-structure the MKCF Management Unit to be under the GMCA department.

SI. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
2.6	Adopt and implement MI Capacity Development Model (CDM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the existing project activities by all programs following the steps of the new CDM in implementing projects • Establish a well-designed follow-up process to provide technical (and financial when possible) to the MI participants • Identify organization-level capacity development interventions • Seek feedback from training participants on the current CDM to ensure that the new model effectively addresses participant needs and supports refinement based on real-world feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With MI's facilitation at organization-level, participants implement their plans and bring greater impacts beyond individual level (i.e., organizational, sectoral, and country/GMS level) • Extend MI's support for organizational development in the GMS
2.7	Adopt and establish results-based management (RBM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and simplify the existing Results Framework and Logical Frameworks of the current SP. • Ensure alignment of project outcomes with the SP's Results Framework. • Practice adaptive management in the organizational decision-making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in outcome monitoring in projects • Establish systematic data collection processes to support RBM and practice adaptive management based on evidence
2.8	Capitalize MI Alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the alumni database to be more convenient in terms of information display, access, retrieval, and generation. • Communicate with the alumni as sounding board for MI activities. • Consolidate GMS country-specific alumni networks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine strategy to engage and seek support from MI Alumni in future MI work plan. • Include information that is beneficial to MI Alumni in existing communication tools such as website, e-briefing, etc. • Enhance cooperation in respective subject matters

SI. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
			within the Alumni, subgroups or rosters of professionals
2.9	Enhance institutional strengthening initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise work plans of the SP (OED, ERP, CKM, MEL) • Improve knowledge management functions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review/revise MI's OP (Operation Procedures) • Develop an e-office system, including the potential use of Generative AI in institutional services and strengthening.
3	Program		
3.1	Align MI workplan with SP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise MI work plans 2024-2025 and establish links between the work plans and the SP objectives and implementation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a five-year work plan to implement the SP with an annual rolling plan. • Fully align future projects with the SP, considering their contributions to KPIs.
3.2	Deliver country-specific tailor-made need-based interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on designing capacity development interventions to address the needs of all member countries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the country-specific needs as part of the formulation of the new SP. • Finalize designing country-specific need-based capacity development interventions • Focus on recruitment of staff with experience records in the GMS countries
3.3	Paradigm shift when GMS countries become Middle Income Countries (MICs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine evolving needs of GMS countries in refining annual work plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign MI's programs and delivery modalities to address country-specific needs.
3.4	Adopt innovative intervention delivery modality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore other innovative and agile modes of delivering using digital platforms • Assess the cost-effectiveness of alternatives (including organizing the courses "off campus") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try different modalities and find the best option suitable for MI's best contribution to GMS

SI. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find options for higher value added for the organization rather than charges from facilities 	
3.5	Offer paid training courses to the private sector participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess the need and feasibility to offer some seats in the MI training courses as fully or partially self/organization paid rather than fully funded. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore a fee-based MI training. Explore collaboration with competency-based institutions to issue competency-based certificates.
3.6	Address the gaps of energy and environment thematic areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the GMS energy as well as environmental-related issues that MI is capable of addressing Define both MI's energy and environment portfolio in terms of technical intervention, projects, development partners to be involved, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement more environment-related projects across thematic areas. Expand energy-related projects towards low-carbon development.
3.7	Address labor mobility issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate workforce development and labor mobility into future development projects across thematic areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand portfolio related to workforce development and labor mobility in the new SP.
4	Partnership & Resources Mobilization		
4.1	Align to major regional cooperation and development frameworks and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore partnerships with key GMS-related cooperation frameworks Find the gaps that the current regional cooperation mechanisms that have not addressed Refine a resources mobilization strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement joint projects/interventions under new partnerships Initiate to address the unattended gaps
4.2	Increase implementation of long-term projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore possibilities to develop multi-year projects. Align projects with the SP's Results Framework. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine budget arrangement and resources mobilization strategy to meet minimum requirements of annual work

Sl. No.	Key SP Areas for Actions	Short-term Plan	Long-term Plan
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a mechanism to engage consultancies in preparing multi-year project proposals. • Explore funding from non-traditional funding sources and new partnership models. 	plans of the new five-year SP.
5	MI HQ location		
5.1	Move MI HQ to Bangkok or retain in Khon Kaen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the rationales with a cost-benefit analysis for staying in Khon Kaen or moving to Bangkok • In the short-term, consider the necessity to set up a project office outside Khon Kaen, if the need arises, and with project funding support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the need and possibilities to relocate MI to Bangkok or other strategic locations for submission to the GB as part of the new SP.

Annex 4: Key Findings and Recommendations of the MTR of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025

1. The Mekong Institute (MI) has developed its Strategic Plan (SP) 2021-2025 to guide the direction, focuses, and implementation background for the organization toward 2025. Building up from its historical strengths of capacity development, the SP sets course for MI to achieve the three interconnected aspirations: center of excellence for capacity development; regional think tank; and recognized advisory service provider.
2. Since the start of the SP, the MI endeavor to implement the SP had been interrupted and delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic until the second quarter of 2022. This delay was further intensified by increasing uncertainty and risk created by the worsening external environment. Since then, MI has introduced institutional strengthening and other recovery measures. At the time of this mid-term review (MTR), MI has bounced back after experiencing a stoppage in its business-as-usual operations, a sharp decline in funding mobilization and staffing during COVID-19. This creates an important background for MI to accelerate the SP implementation in the remaining half of the SP until 2025.
3. In this context, this MTR was made to assess to what extent MI has progressed toward the aspirations set by the SP, what are the challenges for progression, and what should be done to deliver the SP in the remaining half of its 5-year duration. The MTR findings and recommendations were made through a vigorous consultation process with the MI governing bodies, its senior management team (SMT) and staff. In addition, consultation was also made with the donor

partners, implementing agencies, and beneficiaries. The findings and recommendations were also subject to several rounds of comments from the MI Steering Committee and Secretariat and validated through two workshops organized by MI in Khon Kaen and Bangkok.

Continued relevance but progressions were below expectations

4. The MTR first concluded that the current directions and *foci* defined the SP continued to be relevant. Therefore, revising or adjusting these directions and *foci* are not required. However, to keep relevance in the long-term, MI needs to respond to the changes in the regional and wider development context, where private sector development and climate financing becoming the key development forces. In addition, MI should be more responsive to the needs of the GMS member countries as well as aligned to major regional development frameworks and agendas.

5. Whilst MI has successfully recovered after COVID-19, there was a long way found for realizing the SP aspirations.

6. Advancing toward a center of excellence in capacity development from a strong historical strength in capacity development was more challenging than expected. MI was widely perceived as a competent organizer of training courses but lacked in-house expertise in the subject domains. The current modality of organizing the training courses in Khon Kaen produced low value added for MI. Although a new capacity development model (CDM) that aims at different levels of capacity development was developed, actual adaptation was slow. MI has not yet customized its capacity development to meet the specific needs of the GMS countries and to generate income from this core competence in market-based terms.

7. With regard to the aspiration of becoming a regional think tank, MI was perceived to have a limited role as a research institute with a constrained technical depth. It lacked a research agenda at the organizational level. The number of research outputs produced by MI was modest whilst many published papers lacked analytics and substances required for high-quality research and the diversity of knowledge products deteriorated. Several existing knowledge products, including some good quality research, were not disseminated. MI has not been able to produce a flagship publication. The lack of significant research renders MI from being a visible actor in policy dialogues at the regional level and in the GMS countries.

8. Progression toward a recognized advisory service provider was below expectations. MI was not centrally positioned as an implementer of development projects or other advisory services. MI has not put in place measures that could be instrumental for operationalizing the aspiration of being a recognized service provider. The organization was not yet active in platforms where advisory opportunities were usually posted. Services offered to clients remain focused on capacity development or secretariat support. There was a lack of diversified services to meet the needs of these private sector and civil society organizations.

Challenges were serious and persistent

9. There were some key challenges that blocked MI from operationalizing the directions and objectives of the SP. Notably, these key challenges were found serious and persistent.

10. Weak technical depth was a root cause of many challenges encountered by MI in the pursuit of the SP. Lack of in-house expertise and resultant dependence on external resource persons and consultants was a fundamental limitation. Most of the MI staff, including technical staff, were mainly involved with project management. The location of MI Secretariat, competitiveness in salary rates, and a lack of clarity regarding career progression were some of the main concerns in attracting qualified technical staff to join MI Secretariat. This limitation has been persistent for at least a decade without significant changes.

11. The primary intervention *foci* remain on capacity development and networking. MI has been more diversified in its interventions over times, especially under the course of the current SP, but capacity development and networking were pre-dominant activities. Over reliance on the historical strengths in capacity development was an impediment for MI service diversification toward other advisory services. Being focused on that traditional core competency, which was sometimes referred to as “comfort zone”, constrained efforts and investments required to move toward more diversified services.

12. MI has been driven and overloaded with short-term projects. Out of the total number of projects implemented since 2016, at least 70% were one-off activities or short-term projects with less than 12 months. This short-term and one-off dominance was insufficient for MI to build up its interventions to sufficient tipping points of transformation. Being driven by donor-funded short-term projects renders it difficult for MI to align with long-term plans required to achieve the SP aspirations. Operating such many projects also resulted in a high management workload.

13. MI lacked diversification in fund sourcing. Bilateral donors were the major funding sources. MI has not been able to tap into multilateral sources from international development banks or UN agencies (except some small and short-term projects). Access to philanthropic organizations, a major form of private contribution to international development, was absent. Notably, MI lacked an explicit and well-grounded resource mobilization strategy. Instead, mobilizing funding in MI was an unclear process that was reliant mainly on the SMT.

Breaking the limit

14. Severity and persistence of the key challenges (as above) require bold or even radical measures that MI should be determined and strongly committed to. The MTR provided 12 “breaking the limit” recommendations to be pursued in the remaining half of the SP and 03 “unthinkable” recommendations for consideration in a longer-term.

15. For “breaking the limit” on technical side, it was first recommended MI to deepen its technical depth through a new Research Unit on an agile basis and flexible arrangements for networking. Investment in quality policy advocacy research was called for. Tapping into multilateral and philanthropic sources of funding would be strategic for MI to enhance its fund sourcing. In pursuing this shift, MI should move from the current project-based modality to program-based operational approach. This would be instrumental for MI to address its limitation of being trapped with short-term projects. Adoption of the new CDM model whilst exploring more innovative, value-adding, and locally responsive approaches were recommended to consolidate its strength in capacity

development. It was also suggested that MI should strengthen the environmental focus in the portfolio.

16. For “breaking the limit” on strategic management side, MI must enforce inter-departmental cooperation to break the silo toward more synergy of resources and operations. MI should also optimize service delivery by re-arranging “management work” of the project implementation pursued by the program departments to the management units. Capitalizing the members of the Council, Steering Committee, and Coordinating Agencies was strongly recommended to broaden entry points and visibility for MI. Adding to the structure a non-voting Steering Committee to provide strategic and technical advice for the MI Secretariat in addressing fundamental issues was suggested. The MI Alumni presents a truly invaluable resource for MI networking in the GMS countries and should be therefore capitalized. Alignment to major cooperation frameworks and development agenda were recommended. Finally, the MTR suggested MI to accelerate ongoing institutional strengthening such as the revision of the Operation Manual, improving work planning arrangement, refining the MEL frameworks, and strengthening knowledge management, and putting an Action Plan to implement the approved recommendations of this MTR.

Thinking of the unthinkable

17. Whilst perusing the “breaking the limit” intermediate actions in the remaining half of the current SP, the MTR recommended MI to consider radical changes for a longer term – those might be presently “unthinkable” but are important for a 2030 vision.

18. A strategic move to Bangkok, being a regional hub in the GMS, will significantly boost the MI visibility, opportunities, and networking. It also enhances the ability to attract leading experts. It is acknowledged that investments in infrastructures in the current MI headquarters are valuable, but the background for remaining in Khon Kaen will be eroded as MI embarks successfully to its current SP aspirations. A gradual transition might be adopted to keep MI training wing remaining in Khon Kaen for a definite period while research and advisory services and main management functions will be reallocated to Bangkok before 2030.

19. Pursuing a structural reform according to major services was recommended. Being interdisciplinary is increasingly required for development interventions, and therefore, organizing the MI structure by program departments according to thematic focuses will be obsolete in the coming years. The MTR suggested MI restructure according to the main types of services and core competencies. With this restructuring, MI would eventually adopt the product-based approach (rather than project-based or program-based).

20. Finally, MI should make a paradigm shift when GMS countries are becoming (upper and lower) Middle Income Countries (MICs). The GMS is approaching a “middle income” region. Becoming a MIC changes the development aid architecture and development trajectories. Development priorities will be shifted from focusing on poverty alleviation to broader economic resilience and social strengthening. MI needs to adapt to these fundamentals through a paradigm shift in its mission, vision, strategies, and operation model.