TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

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Human resource limitations, particularly skill and knowledge gaps, have been identified by Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries as well as by bilateral and multilateral agencies as a major obstacle to growth and economic development in the subregion. In late 2003, the Mekong Institute in Khon Kaen, Thailand, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Phnom Penh Plan Program, and the Greater Mekong Subregion Tertiary Education Consortium (GMSTEC) jointly carried out a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) study to obtain a better understanding of the priority training needs of people working in the public, nongovernment, and business sectors of the six GMS countries. The analyzed results from 140 interviews and 760 detailed questionnaires completed by senior to middle-level officials in the GMS are presented as prioritized training needs. The questionnaire data was statistically verified and integrated with respondents' perceptions — obtained during interviews — of difficulties in implementing effective capacity-building programs, and barriers preventing integration of newly acquired knowledge and skills into the workplace. The paper suggests a possible capacity-building strategy for GMS organizations, donor agencies, and training providers.

I. RATIONALE FOR A REGIONAL TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS STUDY

Socioeconomic development of GMS countries — Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC, Yunnan Province), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam — is essential if poverty is to be reduced and the quality of life of GMS people improved.

Bilateral and multilateral donors are assisting GMS countries in efforts aimed at poverty reduction, economic growth, and social development with a multitude of programs and projects. Considerable progress is being made, particularly in terms of infrastructure development, but socioeconomic development in individual countries is uneven (see Table 1).

Capacity building has been taking place in each of the GMS countries for many years. Many of the current senior public sector managers, particularly in Lao PDR, Viet Nam, and Cambodia, received their higher education in the former Soviet Union and other eastern European countries. These personnel have two major disadvantages in today's more market-oriented economies: the training they received is now less relevant, and they frequently do not have English language skills. Some are slow to recognize the need for change in their countries, or how to implement change programs, the result being that their countries are developing more slowly than those countries in which they were trained. Their rigid approach makes it difficult for younger staff to put into effect some of the training they are receiving today.

Younger officials and private sector personnel, particularly those with English skills, can participate in short-term training courses at home and abroad. Longer-term post-graduate training opportunities are more limited, but the countries themselves have identified the need for more people with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes toward work that such post-graduate study in western countries provides. Some GMS countries (e.g. Thailand and Viet Nam) are budgeting for increased numbers of their nationals to have tertiary education in western countries under scholarship programs that require the recipients to work for their government for a defined period upon their return home.

Over the past 2 to 3 years there has been a rapid increase in the number of in-country institutions (national academies and universities) in all GMS countries offering study opportunities for MBA-type qualifications. There has also been an upsurge in private universities in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Thailand. Participants study in the evening and on weekends. Fees are expensive and the quality of the programs is highly variable, but some institutions are linking up with overseas institutions to enhance the quality of their programs.

Foreign donors, through multilateral, regional, and bilateral activities, are building capacity across a wide range of disciplines. The emphasis in recent years, particularly for bilateral assistance, has been on short-term training — largely because of the cost of post-graduate study abroad. Many donors, however, are now questioning the usefulness of this approach.

Table 1: Selected Socioeconomic Indicators in GMS Countries

Indicators	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Viet Nam	PRC
Population, 2002 (million)	13.5	5.5	52.1	63.4	79.7	1284.5
Population annual growth rate (%)	2.6	2.8	2.0	0.8	1.3	0.6
Per capita gross national income (US$)	270	300	–	2020	390	890
Annual inflation rate, 2002 (%)	3.3	13.0	43.5	0.7	(0.4)	(0.8)
GDP growth rate, 2002 (%)	5.5	5.9	–	5.2	7.0	8.0
Proportion of population below US$1 per day (%)	–	26.3	–	2	17.7	16.1
Prevalence of under-weight children under 5 years old (%)	46	40	36	10	33	10
Net enrollment in primary education, total (girls +boys) (%)	95	81	83	85	95	83
Ratio of girls to boys in education By level (%)						
Primary	88	86	99	96	94	102
Secondary	57	72	95	95	91	90
Tertiary	38	59	175	82	73	50
Literacy rate for 15-24 year-olds (%)	80	79	91	99	96	98
Infant/ under 5 mortality rates (per 1000 live births)	97/138	87/100	77/109	24/28	30/38	31/39
Maternal mortality ratio (per 100,000 live births)	437	530	–	13	95	56
Proportion of population with sustainable access to improved water source (%)	30	37	72	84	77	75

– = data not available.
Source: ADB. 2004. *Key Indicators*. Manila. Available: www.adb.org

Within the GMS there are at least two institutions with a regional focus: the Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) in Bangkok, and the Mekong Institute in Khon Kaen, Thailand. Since 1959 AIT has provided post-graduate training (Masters and PhDs) with some 13,000 graduates. In addition, since 1977 it has provided specialist short-term training to some 18,000 participants.

The Mekong Institute (MI) was established with bilateral assistance from New Zealand and Thailand, and since 1995 has been offering short-term training courses (1–10 weeks) in subjects related to the market economy to participants from GMS countries. For most courses, participants number 30, 5 from each GMS country. The Institute now has some 1500 alumni.

All GMS countries are in a transitional phase of economic development along a planned economy-market economy continuum, seeking to develop a position in the global economy. New investment and development of trade within a good governance framework are essential requirements for economic growth. Human resource development (HRD) limitations, particularly skill and knowledge gaps, have been identified by GMS countries and bilateral and multilateral agencies as a major obstacle to growth and development.[1] These limitations are many and varied, and although some country-specific "needs" documented from projects and programs are available, there has been no regional approach to assessing GMS training needs. Neither has there been such an approach to collating information in a manner that would be useful to GMS countries, bilateral and multilateral donors, and other agencies working in the subregion.

With these issues in mind, MI saw a need to assess capacity-building requirements in the GMS. Such a study would also help ensure that MI, under its new Charter sharing ownership of the Institute among all six GMS countries, was developing courses and programs to meet GMS capacity-building needs. The ADB Phnom Penh Plan for capacity building and HRD of government agencies in GMS[2] had a similar need — to identify and confirm capacity-building requirements in the region.

MI and the ADB Phnom Penh Plan combined their resources to work with GMSTEC to jointly carry out a Training Needs Analysis (TNA) study in late 2003 aimed at providing a better understanding of the priority training needs of people living and working in the public, nongovernment, and business sectors of the six GMS countries. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for a regional focus for capacity building. The aim was to identify, from personnel working in GMS countries, knowledge topics and skills that are the highest priority for training in regional capacity-building programs.

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[1] Asian Development Bank (ADB). 2002. Proceedings of the 4th ADB Working Group on HRD, 5-6 September 2002. Vientiane: ADB. Quoted in Technical Assistance Report on the GMS Phnom Penh Plan for Development Management. Manila.
[2] Established following the first GMS Summit in Phnom Penh in November 2002.

Meeting country and regional HRD needs is critical for the success of any capacity-building program aimed at socio-economic development and facilitating changes to alleviate poverty. GMS governments and their agencies play a vital leadership role in promoting change and development. A critical mass of senior to middle-level officials with knowledge of economic, social, and development processes, and appropriate technical and management skills combined with exemplary behavioral skills, is required for change to occur.

II. SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

A. Scope

A contextual framework based on capacity building for poverty reduction was developed. This approach required research of country-specific poverty reduction policies and strategies and other government policies and strategies that lead to poverty reduction through economic growth. This core information was then compared to the TNA findings derived from questionnaires, meetings, and interviews.

To meet the requirements of this framework, the study team surveyed in late 2003 the training needs of senior and middle-level officials working in government ministries and agencies — e.g. state-owned enterprises (SOEs), small and medium business enterprises (SMEs), nongovernment organizations (NGOs), international nongovernment organizations (INGOs), training providers, and donors.

The TNA was not designed to survey specific sector, discipline, or technical training needs, but to survey generic training needs so as to be able to: (i) determine whether officials had basic-to-intermediate building blocks of knowledge and skill elements on which to develop higher levels; (ii) provide those stakeholders who were interested, with a more comprehensive database of existing and needed skills and knowledge; and (iii) identify cohorts of officials who would benefit from high-level national, regional, or international training.

The key outputs of the study were: (i) a database of survey and interview results that could be used by a broad range of stakeholders; (ii) an analysis of this information; and (iii) a suggested strategy to assist stakeholders to develop options for future training that respond to the priority training needs of key agencies in each GMS country.

B. Approach to Obtaining Data

In each GMS country the study team interviewed senior and middle-level personnel working in government ministries and agencies, businesses, NGOs, training organizations, and donor agencies — a total of about 140 interviews in the GMS. In addition, questionnaires (in both the national languages and English) were completed. The statistically-valid sample size of about 760 returned questionnaires was analyzed and the results combined with the interview data in order to get a more complete picture of the priority training needs of each country and the region.

In order to ensure balanced representation, target survey samples were stratified by country and by ministry (or sector). This was done by reviewing national poverty alleviation plans to identify government objectives, and to identify the ministries playing a key role in developing and implementing poverty alleviation polices. The ministries so identified were divided into three groups: (i) planning and coordination; (ii) those with a specific poverty alleviation focus; and, (iii) those implementing policies. All were included in the survey.

The TNA study team encountered a number of difficulties in gathering relevant information. Most of these related to government organizational issues, such as limited access to appropriate individuals within an organization or, in some countries, reluctance of individuals to express opinions or provide information. The survey originally intended to use focus discussion groups to obtain qualitative data, but irrespective of the size and make-up of the focus groups, the data obtained from each group could only be considered as a single opinion; generally, only one or two individuals per group — at the most — provided information. Despite these difficulties the survey results have statistical validity.

One issue that was significant in some cases was respondents' lack of knowledge and exposure to concepts that are probable future training needs for officials in their country. This was reflected by the fact that some respondents compiled a training-needs "wish list," or avoided answering the intent of questions. This was anticipated, and managed, by careful design of data collecting forms and follow-up interviews.

III. RESULTS OF THE TNA STUDY

The TNA study showed each GMS country has different needs and different priorities, but it identified many common needs that can best be met in a regional training environment. Specifically, the study provided key information on: (i) organizational effectiveness; (ii) prioritized training needs; and (iii) training delivery methods, which were then used to develop a possible capacity-building strategy for stakeholders. This information is discussed below.

A. The Organizational Environment

The first part of the individual survey questionnaire asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, on a four-point Likert scale, to certain statements formulated positively on seven key dimensions of their organization's strategy, structure, systems, staff, skills, style, and shared values (McKinsey's "7-S Framework"). The proportions of those who agreed and disagreed with each statement were then determined and summarized for each dimension. The proportion of respondents who disagreed with the statement on a particular aspect of their organization indicated the degree of need for improvement and, consequently, an implied training need. This was done for each of the GMS countries (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary Assessment of the Organizational Environment in GMS Countries

Dimension	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Viet Nam	PRC (Yunnan Province)
Strategy	75.7	84.7	90.8	65.8	82.2	76.1
Structure	83.7	90.6	95.0	68.9	86.3	82.3
Systems	67.4	83.3	86.5	56.5	80.8	83.1
Staff	69.4	73.6	77.0	51.5	70.2	54.1
Skills	72.6	78.4	85.1	62.7	78.1	64.5
Style	64.0	77.2	76.2	41.1	69.5	52.5
Shared Values	73.1	87.7	89.8	58.5	77.3	66.9

Note: The above figures represent average percentages of respondents who indicated they "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" with the statements; the balance (from 100%) represent those who indicated they "Disagree" or "Strongly Disagree" with the statements.

In interpreting the above figures, comparison of the absolute percentages across countries is not meaningful. The respondents' exposure or knowledge of government organizations is different in each country. Consequently, their expectations of what an efficient organization is, for example, could be expected to vary widely. Respondents from Thailand, for instance, may be very demanding in terms of expectations of efficiency. Thus a lower proportion would likely agree with positive statements about the efficiency of their organization compared with say, respondents from Lao PDR. Thus, the numbers are only meaningful if interpreted within the context of each GMS country. Implied training needs were derived from assessment of both quantitative and qualitative data within the context of each GMS country.

The summary of organizational assessment provided for each GMS country presents a broad picture of how the respondents view the environment in which they operate. Analysis of the survey information indicates that the environment is not exactly conducive to high performance, and the respondents have identified a need to strengthen internal systems and processes in their institutions. But in order to strengthen the institutions, individuals in them need to participate in capacity building, implying training needs for senior and middle-level officials.

Training for senior officials could include the following topics: (i) strategy development, (ii) organizational design, (iii) managing an organization's culture, (iv) management and leadership styles, and (v) decentralization. Reviewing the bottom-up planning process could also be included. The respondents in the survey did not identify the first two topics above as a priority, probably because they based their need's assessment on existing official systems and documentation, or if these were not available, on their perception of what the roles and functions and the corresponding organization structure should be. However, inasmuch as GMS economies are at different stages of transition from central planning to a market-oriented economy, top management needs new perspectives to be able to formulate strategies and design appropriate organizational structures to hasten the pace of transition.

A number of the implied training needs are more appropriate for middle-level officials. These include: (i) planning processes; (ii) systems development — e.g. management information system, financial system, personnel information system, performance evaluation system, reward system, etc.; (iii) recruitment; and (iv) communication. Management and leadership styles and decentralization may also be included for this level.

B. Training Priority for Knowledge and Skill Topics

The organizational assessment provided some leads on training needs of senior and middle-level personnel to strengthen their capacity to direct and lead an organization and develop internal systems and processes. However, these identified training areas are quite general and broad. The second section of the questionnaire listed some 51 knowledge topics and 53 skill topics, and asked respondents to rate them on a scale of 1-4 in each of three areas: importance to their organization, the current level of knowledge about the topic of people working in their organization, and the training priority that they would give to it for their organization.

The results obtained — of the knowledge and skills topics showing an average or mean rating of either "very important" or "important" in the respondents ratings — were not unexpected. When the study team drew up the list of topics, they included those topics they thought, *a priori,* would be relevant or important to GMS countries. The questionnaires had two objectives: confirming the degree of importance of a topic and identifying relative importance between topics.

The completed questionnaires were analyzed to determine which of the listed knowledge or skill topics were considered priority areas for training in each GMS country and for the subregion. Initially it was thought this could be done by computing the mean ratings for each topic and setting ranges that would define how important it is, the level of knowledge or skill on the topic, or its priority. However, when the results were produced in this format it was clear it did not make sense to use the absolute values of the mean ratings.

As explained in the previous section on organizational assessment, the respondents in each country completed their questionnaires in very different contexts. Their criteria in rating the importance of the topics, their level of knowledge or skills on such topics, and the priority they would assign to them in terms of importance for training, were not comparable across countries because the circumstances among the GMS countries are quite different. One cannot say, for example, that a mean rating of 3.5 on planning skills in Lao PDR indicates they are more skilful in planning than officials in Thailand if the latter's mean rating is 2.5 for planning skills. In this study, the mean ratings have been used to rank the topics according to relative importance, level of knowledge or skill, and training priority. Thus, regardless of the absolute values of the mean ratings, a list of the top 20 priority topics and a list of the next 20 priority topics for each GMS country was derived from the respondents' completed questionnaires.

When sorted and ranked according to importance, some topics were consistently in the top 20 for all six GMS countries, while other topics were consistently in the lower rank. This clearly suggests that there are common training needs among the GMS countries despite their different histories, cultures, and stages of socioeconomic development. Of course there are also country-specific training needs.

When the topics were sorted and ranked according to current level of knowledge or skill, the top 20 list for each of the six countries changed quite significantly, with some topics in the lower rank based on importance moving to the top 20 list, based on level of knowledge or skill within the organization. What this suggests is that the organizations may have developed certain skills to a relatively high level, but not necessarily in the areas the respondents perceive as important or very important. It could also be that the topics are new and therefore the organizations have yet to obtain the knowledge or develop the skills. It is also possible that while the topic is not new, it has now become more important in the context of a global economy. What is clear from the ratings given to the current level of knowledge or skills, is that there are knowledge and skills gaps in all countries, based on respondents' perceptions.

When the topics were sorted and ranked according to training priority, the top 20 list was almost identical to that produced when the topics were ranked according to importance. It appears that the respondents in all GMS countries prioritized the topics by perceived importance, i.e. the more important the topic, the higher the training priority, regardless whether they were already knowledgeable or had developed skills in it. These relationships were validated statistically using regression analysis. The mean ratings of the three variables — importance, current level of knowledge or skill, and training priority — were regressed against each other to determine their degree of correlation. Two regressions were done for each GMS country: one for knowledge topics, and a second for skills topics. The strongest correlation for both knowledge and skill topics was between importance of the topic and the training priority assigned to the topic.

C. Developing a List of Priority Topics for Regional Training

Because the strongest correlation was between importance and the training priority of a topic for an organization, the ranking of topics sorted by training priority has been used to identify regional training priorities.

Two lists, ranked by training priority, were prepared for each GMS country: one for knowledge topics and another for skills topics.

1. Common Knowledge Topics

From the top 20 and next 20 priority topics of each GMS country, those topics common to a majority (at least four of the countries) were identified. It is important to appreciate the significance of these common topics. They represent priority topics common to the six GMS countries that have been mutually identified by about 760 senior and middle-level officials of the six countries, without any communication between them on the subject. These topics can be regarded as "universal" training needs. The fact that so many people have identified them should be given some weight. They should comprise the core topics of training courses designed for participants from all GMS countries. Table 3 shows the top 20 priority list for common knowledge topics of the six GMS countries. Topics common to only three or even fewer countries may be considered for country-specific training. Potential training topics gathered during the interviews of staff in various institutions as part of this study are also important, and need to be considered in tandem with topics identified through the survey responses.

High in the priority knowledge topics were leadership and management. This also came out quite clearly during interviews. Other common topics included: (i) governance, (ii) HRD processes, (iii) technology, (iv) development concepts, (v) information systems, and (vi) decentralization. It may be noted that the listed topics vary in breadth and/or specificity. Some are subsets of the others. The next step therefore was to cluster these topics into major categories that can be developed into training courses. The countries with the highest number of knowledge topics not common to the others were PRC (Yunnan Province) and Viet Nam, which suggests that they may have more country-specific needs.

2. Common Skill Topics

Of the top 20 skill topics of the six GMS countries, only 5 were common to all six countries, 4 were common to five countries, and 5 were common to four countries (Table 4). Topics in the top 20 list, but common to only three or fewer countries, were moved down to the next 20 priority list. "Regional Cooperation," for example, was common to only three of the six country top 20 lists. For those countries where it appeared in the top

Table 3: Common Knowledge Topics for at Least Four GMS Countries

Knowledge Topic (top 20 and second 20 priority list of at least 4 countries)	Number of countries where topic is common	Topic not in the priority lists of these countries
In the Top 20 List		
• Leadership qualities	6	–
• Management style	6	–
• Principles of good governance	6	–
• Transparency, accountability, corruption	6	–
• HRD planning process	6	–
• Staff development management systems	6	–
• Appropriate technology	6	–
• Technology transfer	6	–
• Sustainable development	6	–
• Development theory	6	–
• Policy analysis and implementation	–	
• Management information system	5	PRC (Yunnan)
• Performance management system	5	PRC (Yunnan), Myanmar
• Performance appraisal	4	PRC (Yunnan), Viet Nam
• Decentralization	4	PRC (Yunnan), Viet Nam
In the Next 20 List [a]		
• Regional cooperation	6	–
• Project management cycle	6	–
• Investment incentives	5	Thailand
• Foreign investment	5	Thailand
• Resource management	5	PRC (Yunnan)
• Workings of government	5	Cambodia
• Sustainability	5	Lao PDR
• Water, land and forest resources	–	–
• Pollution	4	Myanmar
• Team building processes	4	Viet Nam
• Recruitment systems	4	PRC (Yunnan)
• Principles of organization design	4	Cambodia, Thailand
• Total Quality Management	4	Lao PDR, Viet Nam
• Audit requirements	4	PRC (Yunnan), Viet Nam
• Legislation	4	PRC (Yunnan), Viet Nam
• Poverty indicators	4	Cambodia, Viet Nam
• Command vs. market economy	4	Lao PDR, Thailand
• International trade	4	Cambodia, Thailand
• Role of civil society	4	Viet Nam, Lao PDR
• Ethical practices	4	PRC (Yunnan), Cambodia
• Participatory processes	4	Myanmar, PRC (Yunnan)
• Role of business sector	4	Lao PDR, Viet Nam

[a]. Developed from lists produced by combining topics from the top 20 priority list of the six GMS countries that were common to fewer than four countries with the topics each country listed in its next 20 priority list.

20 priority list it was moved down to their second 20 list. Because all three other countries had "Regional Cooperation" in their second 20 list, there are a total number of six countries with "Regional Cooperation" as a common topic in the second 20 list. The same approach was also applied to developing the second 20 list for knowledge topics.

Table 4 shows the top 20 priority list and the second 20 priority topics for common skill topics in the six GMS countries.

D. Summary of Prioritized Training Needs

The training needs identified from the questionnaires and interviews were collated with information from other sources: the implied training needs from the organizational assessments, public sector interview findings, national poverty reduction strategy papers, and government official training needs identified by INGO's, business, and NGOs. Data are presented in Tables 5 and 6 in the form of major and distinct topic categories that could be developed into specific programs or training courses. These programs could be either management related or crosscutting issues:

(i)   Management-related topics as presented in Table 5: leadership and strategic management, planning, human resource development, organization development, and project management.

(ii) Crosscutting topics as shown in Table 6: governance, regional cooperation, private sector development, train-the-trainer, communication, and special skills in English and computing.

Ownership of the TNA by all stakeholders was an important consideration because if there is little or no ownership, or no acceptance that there is a need for change, then the net return from all capacity building efforts and input of resources will be low. Even though all stakeholders come from a wide range of backgrounds and cultures, there was a surprisingly high degree of commonality in the views they expressed. As previously stated, information from the interviews, whether held with one respondent or a group, has been treated as a single response because of the nature of the meetings. It was difficult to identify opposing views, to determine whether a view was personal, represented a "government line," or reflected any level of deep consideration of the issue.

Table 4: Common Skill Topics in Top 20 and Second 20 Priority Lists of at Least Four GMS Countries

Knowledge Topic (top 20 and second 20 priority list of at least 4 countries)	Number of countries where topic is common	Topic not in the priority lists of these countries
Top 20 topics		
• Visioning and direction setting	6	–
• Strategic planning	6	–
• HRD planning	6	–
• Fluency in English language	6	–
• Facility in the use of computers	6	–
• Training	5	Thailand
• Facilitation skills	5	PRC (Yunnan)
• Transfer of knowledge	5	Cambodia
• Annual operational planning	5	PRC (Yunnan)
• Identifying potential projects	4	Thailand, Lao
• Project monitoring and evaluation	4	Thailand, Viet Nam
• Research	4	Lao PDR, Thailand
• Developing management info. sys.	4	Lao, Myanmar
• Managing relations with stakeholders	4	Thailand, Myanmar
From the next 20 list [a]		
• Developing systems and procedures	6	–
• Project design	6	–
• Problem definition & analysis	6	–
• Financial planning & budgeting	6	–
• Setting performance standards	6	–
• Designing organization structures	5	Myanmar
• Preparing feasibility studies	5	Thailand
• Managing project information	5	PRC (Yunnan)
• Mentoring/ counselling	5	Thailand
• Conducting meetings	5	Cambodia
• Report writing	5	PRC (Yunnan)
• Negotiation/ conflict resolution	5	Viet Nam
• Presentation skills	5	Viet Nam
• National/regional perspective	5	PRC (Yunnan), Thailand
• Securing project funding	5	Thailand
• Promoting regional cooperation	4	PRC (Yunnan), Lao PDR
• Developing job descriptions	4	PRC (Yunnan), Thailand
• Evaluating jobs and classifying positions	4	Cambodia, Myanmar
• Monitoring and evaluating performance	4	Myanmar, Lao PDR
• Delegating	4	Thailand, Lao PDR
• Procurement procedures	4	PRC (Yunnan), Myanmar
• Teamwork	4	Thailand, Lao PDR
• Networking with local/ international institutions	4	PRC (Yunnan), Thailand
• Office management	4	Thailand, Viet Nam

[a]. Developed from lists produced by combining topics from the top 20 priority list of the six GMS countries that were common to fewer than four countries with the topics each country listed in its next 20 priority list.

Table 5: Summary of Priority Training Needs and Target Groups: Management

| Major Categories | Target Group | | Knowledge Topics | Skill Topics |
	Senior	Middle		
A. Leadership and Strategic Management	X		Leadership qualities. Management style. Political systems. Development theory. Command vs. market economy. Role of civil society. Poverty indicators. Unemployment issues.	Vision and direction setting. Strategic planning. Organization culture management. Transition management. Policy analysis and implementation.
B. Planning		X	Planning concepts. Management information systems.	Annual operational planning. Forecasting. Financial planning and budgeting. Setting performance standards. Monitoring and evaluating performance. Office management.
C. Human Resource Development		X	Staff development management systems. HRD planning process. Performance management systems. Performance appraisal. Recruitment systems.	HRD Planning. Problem definition & analysis. Mentoring/counselling. Conducting meetings. Report writing. Negotiation / conflict resolution. Presentation skills. Delegating. Team building.
D. Organization Development		X	Principles of organization design.	Designing organisation structures. Developing job descriptions. Evaluating jobs and classifying positions.
E. Project Management		X	Project management cycle. Appropriate technology. Technology transfer.	Identifying potential projects. Preparing feasibility studies. Research. Project design. Managing project information. Project monitoring and evaluation. Securing project funding. Procurement procedures.

**Table 6: Summary of Priority Training Needs
and Target Groups: Crosscutting Topics**

| Major Categories | Target Group | | Knowledge Topics | Skill Topics |
	Senior	Middle		
A. Governance	X	X	Principles of good governance. Transparency, account-ability, corruption. Decentralization. Participatory processes. Workings of government. Ethical practices. Audit requirements.	Managing relations with stakeholders.
B. Regional Cooperation	X	X	Pollution. Sustainable development. Water, land and forest resources. Security, peace and order.	National / regional perspective. Negotiation. Networking with local and foreign institutions.
C. Private Sector Development	X	X	International trade. Foreign investment. Investment incentives. International trade. Legislation. Business (all aspects).	Negotiation.
D. Communication		X		Communication. Train-the-trainer.
E. Special Skills		X		English Language. Computer skills.
Sectoral			Ministries (eg: Education, Agriculture, Health and Tourism) in some countries provided lists of "technical training" required.	
Regional			A number of regional activities were identified in interviews as needing capacity building and training.	

IV. INTEGRATING THE TNA FINDINGS INTO A CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAM

The TNA study includes results from a wide range of respondents in government, business, NGOs, and bilateral and multilateral donor sectors. Tables 3 and 4 show only priority topics identified by respondents to the questionnaires where the majority of GMS countries (four or more countries) identified them as training needs. Details of the countries that did not consider these topics a priority are also provided in these tables. When these survey findings were integrated with information from interviews and secondary sources as shown in Tables 5 and 6, the extent of the commonality over the GMS can be seen. Tables 5 and 6 can be used as a basis for curriculum development.

Curriculum development and presentation that recognizes country-specific institutional barriers are part of a capacity-building program. While the term capacity building is commonly understood, interpretation of capacity-building processes may vary. The framework used to interpret the results of this TNA was based on the following model:

> …building capacity within civil society by strengthening the capacity of primary stakeholders to implement defined activities by improving communication processes and meeting their skill and knowledge gaps so that they, the stakeholders, can participate in the political, technical and socio-economic arenas.[3]

This model for capacity building provides a more holistic view than the normal capacity-building model, often seen as just providing resources together with a skills and knowledge transfer package. The knowledge/resource approach is based on false premises that: (i) knowledge can lead to change; (ii) issues of power have been dealt with; and (iii) attitudes will change. Interviews in GMS countries identified these issues in various guises, but the predominant need that came from interviews was the broad crosscutting concept of a "need for better communication." Training packages that are part of a capacity-building program need to take this into account if change is to occur.

The other crosscutting concept identified by a large proportion of respondents was that training to address skill and knowledge gaps must

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[3] O'Leary, M. and M. Nee 2001, *Learning for Transformation*. Phnom Penh: OXFAM.

be phased-in with development of an enabling framework that allows change to happen.

Interviews that formed part of the TNA highlighted a number of perceived impediments to successful capacity building. The key ones were:

(i)   Many donor programs are implemented within unrealistically short time frames and do not take into account that change in HRD is a time-based process that needs to be approached in a programmed way, especially when attitude change is a goal.

(ii)   Limited English language skills are a barrier to learning.

(iii)   Capacity-enhancement programs that involve reform are often out of step with skill and knowledge enhancement through training.

(iv)   The limited pool of capable national counterparts made available for project implementation means these individuals are often overworked or over-committed, and subsequently do not perform adequately.

(v)   The terms "training" and "education" are often confused, and the time factor which is an implicit part of the education process is often overlooked.

(vi)   Donors often have onerous reporting requirements, which mean that the very people meant to be doing capacity building must spend too much of their time reporting to the donor.

(vii)   Organizational structures in ministries are such that there is little in the way of coordination within a ministry — let alone between ministries, and this often leads to duplication of effort, conflict, and little in the way of change.

(viii) The slow pace of public sector reforms inhibit those with initiative who could be the drivers to implement change.

(ix)   Training courses are often seen as the start and finish, rather than part of a continuum of learning. Often the value of centralized courses is lost because there are no follow-up activities, or circumstances preclude the application of skills and knowledge.

(x)   "Sensitization" of larger groups of officials to key issues is needed for broader change to occur.

(xi)   An enabling framework for change exists or is developing in some GMS countries, but is almost nonexistent in other GMS countries.

(xii) Critical social and cultural issues are often overlooked in the challenge to implement change (footnote 3).

Although the study identified a number of apparently successful training and capacity-building programs in the GMS, frequent comments were made to the study team that, despite the significant funding put into capacity building, little if any meaningful change was observed. Some donors and INGOs expressed considerable frustration with some of their experience and the lack of impact of training, but no one agency had a formula for success. Key thoughts from these sources indicate that consideration of any combination of the issues listed above, in conjunction with good curriculum development, may help make capacity building more effective.

Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6 provide details on training priorities, but it was apparent that officials in GMS countries vary in their understanding as to what are the barriers to learning and implementation. The challenge for stakeholders is to close these gaps in communication and understanding. Underpinning issues for curriculum development highlighted during interviews are summarized in the following sections.

A. Skill and Knowledge Topics

There is a need to both educate people (provide underpinning knowledge) and to train them, so that underpinning knowledge or an associated skill can be used. Consideration of Tables 5 and 6 should take this differentiation into account as this has significant implications as to choice of training provider.

Interviews strongly reinforced the fact that knowledge and skills transfer must be part of most training programs, and that a train-the-trainer component is also necessary to enable "echo" training to be effective. It has to be recognized that training alone is not very effective, but needs to be integrated into a capacity-building or reform-orientated program.

B. Recognizing the Interdependence of Sector Development

Of importance was the general lack of recognition that development of a specific sector is interdependent with the development of other sectors, and this is a significant issue for capacity building. Although poverty

alleviation plans, national 5–10 year plans, and specific government, business, community, and development objectives are generally well aligned, sectoral interdependence is not always recognized by all sectors and implementation is not effective.

There are a number of reasons for this, many of them resource-based. One of the core issues is that many government officials in the service sector do not appreciate that inconsistency in policy development and implementation is a major concern for business and the private sector. This lack of recognition of the importance of an integrated approach to development is reflected in the fact that although, for example, the TNA identified international trade issues — such as the World Trade Organization, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Free Trade Area (AFTA), and ASEAN cooperation and integration — as important, two countries (Cambodia and Thailand) did not rate these topics at all.

This may reflect the amount or type of training that has been delivered on these subjects in recent years, but it could also reflect a lack of exposure to wider issues, and the more serious problem of lack of awareness that an integrated approach to economic development is important. If prompted, respondents could identify broad issues such as these, but they generally focused on narrower issues. This lack of awareness was referred to in interviews a number of ways: the "silo" or "chimney" effect, a lack of vision, a lack of strategic thinking capacity, or simply poor communication. Each sector has a particular agenda to pursue and this must be recognized, but the overarching result from the study was that one of the greatest impediments to change is the inability of those working in specific sectors to recognize that sectors are not mutually exclusive but interdependent. This is a core requirement of underpinning knowledge.

C. English Language Skills a Priority Need

English language skills, or rather the lack of skills, were clearly identified as an impediment. Yet in all GMS countries there are a myriad of English language institutions (although less in Yunnan and Myanmar). The quality of teaching is variable, but even the most questionable institutes provide the language basics and at minimal cost. Yet there is a barrier that prevents most people from enrolling in such programs. Many individuals enrol in business classes (both graduate and postgraduate), often paying themselves, yet find excuses or avoid doing the same for English language classes. It is accepted that the costs

associated with formal training can be onerous in terms of money and effort, but this does not explain why self-help is not practised at this basic level.[4]

D. Crosscutting Needs must be Integrated into all Curricula

The crosscutting needs identified in the TNA — (i) governance, (ii) regional cooperation, (iii) private sector development, (iv) communication, (v) train-the-trainer, and (vi) gender mainstreaming issues — can all be set up as stand-alone training courses. They must, however, also be integrated into theme training, both as content and by example — i.e. through course design, management, and delivery.

(i)   Governance

Good governance, in its broadest sense, is a vital need, both in terms of awareness and application. The initial reaction from a workshop held at MI to present the TNA study findings was that overarching issues, such as governance and its ramifications, could not be a valid outcome of the TNA. It was identified as a high priority by all six countries, probably reflecting the fact that many of the middle-level managers who completed the survey had short-term training experiences abroad, or had completed post-graduate scholarships in other countries. They had the opportunity to absorb the culture of the host country, giving them a comparative base. Their senior cohorts, in contrast, who comprised about 25% of the survey respondents, generally had limited English language skills and earlier training in Eastern Bloc countries. As a result they did not have the same basis for comparison.

All GMS countries are in transition along a continuum from planned to market economies, so there is a need for a new set of skills and knowledge to maintain momentum. The method adopted by each country may be different, but the objectives are the same. Decentralisation and

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[4]   The team leader raised this issue with a group of provincial officials in the Delta area of Viet Nam. On a Mekong River Commission project English was identified as a training need by all of the participants. Two of the group of 20 had reasonable language skills, and when questioned said that they had paid for night classes using their own resources. Further questioning established course fees as very low, but the barrier could not be identified. The thought that some individuals had paid for classes using their own resources was found to be an unusual concept in that particular group.

deconcentration are core activities of governance in most of these countries, but the problem is implementation, lack of appropriate human resources from the provincial level up, and poorly defined accountability, management and implementation systems. Good governance was seen by some respondents as "interference," or with the view that "we have a system that we cannot change."

(ii)   Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation was identified as a priority, but only in the second 20 priority list (Table 4). The reasons for this are probably a lack of vision or awareness, no reference experience to use as a benchmark, an education system that does not promote lateral thinking or a problem solving approach to an issue, or simply lack of knowledge of the issues. Only about 20% of the senior government ministry cohort interviewed identified regional cooperation and management of regional development (such as the GMS Flagship programs) as a training need. Their responses, however, together with the survey responses, identified this topic as a crosscutting priority. Given that managing regional alliances, cooperation, and trans-boundary issues are the lifelines of GMS countries, this finding was unexpected, but put into the context just outlined, not surprising.

(iii)   Private Sector Development

Development of the private sector is featured in the poverty alleviation plans of bilateral and multilateral agencies of all GMS countries as a key driver for socioeconomic development. Consequently it was not surprising that the topic was strongly represented in the priority listings from the questionnaire responses and interviews. The training needs are seen from the basic level up to regional alliances and developing competitiveness. Once again, however, the need for development and integration of an enabling business environment across all sectors, including regionally, was, in the words of one respondent, "more talk than action and this must change if GMS countries are to develop their potential."

(iv)   Communication

Effective communication is the link that enables change to occur. As a topic it was not identified directly in the survey, but it was implicit in a number of high priority topics. However, communication had strong

commonality across various groups of respondents to the extent that it should be included as a significant crosscutting skill because it is the weakest link in the capacity building chain. Central government styles of management do not promote effective communication, yet all GMS governments need effective communication styles to achieve their objectives of decentralizing or deconcentrating decision-making processes. Communication skill is a knowledge and skill development area in its own right, but is not effectively delivered as a training need as such. A preferred approach is integrating communication skills into courses by, for example, using participatory or active learning techniques.

(v) Train-the-Trainer

Training-the-trainer is often poorly understood and is often seen in terms of "give us the technical knowledge or information so we can transfer that knowledge." Train-the-trainer is first and foremost about adult learning techniques, not the typical approach adopted in GMS countries, where the focus is usually on the mechanics of delivery, such as presentation techniques, or even worse, on simply PowerPoint presentations. Almost all respondents interviewed agreed that training trainers was a vital consideration because: (i) transfer of information (seen as training) was haphazard at best and often ineffective; and (ii) centrally-trained people were normally used to transfer knowledge and skills to provincial staff, who in turn had to train district staff. This is an important issue because a broad range of respondents identified problems in this topic area. As with communication skill development, the best way of learning train-the-trainer skills is for the principles and practices to be embedded in a technical or topical course, especially if participants are expected to return to their respective countries to be trainers. This also means that the traditional approach of lengthy lectures must change.

(vi) Gender Mainstreaming

This topic did not rank as an issue in the priority listings of topics, and was barely featured in the listings at all. Most senior and middle-level respondents did not see this as an issue because they believed that government policies allowed for employment of women; there was little appreciation of the wider picture of gender issues. In general there was a low proportion of women in senior rank respondents. In both Cambodia and Lao PDR the proportion of women in upper-level public service ranks

is low. The reasons may well be cultural as much as systemic. The Mekong Institute has a policy of accepting equal numbers of participants from all six GMS countries and emphasizes gender balance. This raises a problem for Cambodia and Lao PDR, where the pool of suitable women in the government service is low. Consequently, unsuitable candidates are sometimes selected by these two countries so as not to lose the training opportunity, and this in turn impacts on course outcomes. Even though gender issues and balance hardly rated a mention in the identified training needs, the topics still need to be integrated into training programs.

E.   Core Topics of Management

The skills and knowledge required for management, organizational redevelopment, information-communications technology, and other core issues were clearly identified, but as previously pointed out, gaining knowledge does not necessarily lead to change or even skill application. GMS countries still see "new knowledge" as the solution to HRD development. It was clear that the term HRD is still misunderstood by many respondents. Often training and HRD were seen as being synonymous. Some respondents had, at their own initiative, prepared specific training needs, typically referred to as technical training needs. Although the identified needs were valid, little thought had been given to how their organization would manage and integrate the new knowledge and skills.

F.   Planning

A significant number of respondents from all sectors cited planning skills and knowledge as being needed at both the senior and middle levels. Other respondents suggested there appeared to be little or no change in the performance of officials who had attended training courses covering these topics. The weak links appear to be lack of vision, lack of problem solving skills, and lack of awareness or depth of knowledge. This indicates the importance of techniques to improve communication skills and change attitudes, and techniques that can be applied to work-related activities.

G. Sector Technical Topics

Respondents in some sectors provided a list of sector specific needs. Typically these were specialized and discipline-focused training needs. One area of concern is that many respondents saw their needs as simply information transfer, rather than adopting a holistic approach to the need — i.e. the learning process, information transfer, the train-the-trainer process, and the end result. Of concern is the view expressed by many NGOs that technical experts do not necessarily have information and skill-transfer skills, and such skills were often given token service, in that respondents saw their training needs as simply information transfer. They did not see it as part of an education and capacity-building continuum; hence improved competence was not necessarily a normal end result.

H. Course Duration

Course duration was a topic explored in interviews. It is an important consideration when developing a curriculum. The issues relating to course duration are not whether short-term or long-term courses are the most appropriate. More important is matching organizational needs with suitable training course participants, and ensuring that on return from training the trainee is given the opportunity to use acquired skills and knowledge to best advantage. As a general rule, long-term training (degrees) provide in-depth knowledge, whereas short-term training must be limited in either its coverage or its depth. Short-term training should be delivered in a modular, building-block fashion, or build on a good foundation of existing knowledge and skills. Key considerations of course duration include:

(i) The more senior the participant officials the shorter the time the individual can be away from the workplace.
(ii) The more senior the participant officials the higher the risk that English language will be a barrier. Although there are exceptions to this rule.
(iii) The more senior the participant officials the less receptive they are to "new wave" learning and teaching philosophies. Once again there are exceptions.

(iv) Different types of courses for higher-level officials are needed to take account of country differences in economic development and government systems.

(v) Short "high impact" awareness courses are essential for senior officials, including parliamentarians and senior managers who guide policy formulation, while those charged with policy development and implementation need more in-depth education.

(vi) Careful application of participant selection criteria is an essential requirement for the successful outcome of a course.

(vii) Practical or practice-related teaching combined with delivery of underpinning knowledge should be used in most situations.

I.   Other Issues Relating to Effective Training

Some interviewees expressed a high level of frustration regarding the ineffectiveness of capacity building and/or training. Their view was that training was commonly an add-on for technical projects, and not really seen as a core activity. The view was that often there was little consideration given to the fact that it was the training providers' role to fine-tune generic topics to meet sector needs. It was the joint responsibility of the agency involved, the training provider, and the funding agency to design courses and programs that maximized chances of a measurable improvement in competency, whether it be in skill or knowledge transfer. Some key issues identified by the interviewees included:

(i) Training courses should not be ad hoc; they must be integrated as part of a capacity-building program.

(ii) There is no preferred duration of a course; individual needs and organizational needs should determine the final choice.

(iii) English language ability of the target participants is an important consideration when deciding on the correct course type.

(iv) Selection of the course participants must follow strict criteria.

(v) Technical courses for grassroots level training are best delivered in the national language, by people with train-the-trainer skills using action learning and participatory processes.

(vi) The general issue of leadership and an attitudinal change to "planning rather than just doing" was acknowledged in the study as one of the keys for change.

(vii) There is a strong demand for applied management skills and more emphasis on "how to do it." Middle-level officers are the most appropriate cohort for this approach.

(viii) There must be continued emphasis on the priority issues of governance, economic reform, and poverty reduction in training programs designed to enhance HRD.

V. A POSSIBLE FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

The TNA study has provided core information on prioritized training needs in the GMS. Additionally, it has provided a collective insight into why capacity-building programs to date have produced limited benefits to the GMS. By far the most important considerations identified have been: (i) capacity building must be in step with an enabling framework developed through a reform process; (ii) there is a lack of appreciation of the barriers that prevent change from happening; and (iii) there has been little in the way of workplace mentoring to establish new systems and new practices in the workplace.

A key recommendation of the study is for stakeholders to carefully identify and manage the constraints identified in this study, integrate new and appropriate techniques into training programs, and consider some of the following issues that were articulated in interviews:

(i) Post-graduate scholarships can provide in-depth experience.

(ii) Adequate provision for training and development of provincial and district staff should be made.

(iii) Train-the-trainer courses are needed — not the mechanisms of imparting technical information but developing awareness of adult learning techniques.

(iv) Crosscutting issues, including gender mainstreaming and sustainable management of the environment and resources, must be considered.

(v) Careful selection of course participants to meet targeted objectives is essential.

(vi) Develop a building-block approach to training to ensure course participants have sufficient underpinning knowledge to meet the requirements of a course.

(vii) Develop awareness of training objectives at the most senior levels so that the results of training have a chance of becoming embedded in an organization.

(viii) Provide participants with takeaway skills and knowledge that can be applied directly. Case studies, work-related exercises, and the benefits of listening to the experiences of other participants build confidence to do this.

(ix) Mentor and monitor the learning experience in the workplace.

(x) Recognize that changing attitudes and developing problem solving and analytical skills can only be done over time, so this determines the type of course that is appropriate.

The study findings suggest that ownership of the outcome of capacity building is as much the responsibility of the in-country agency or ministry as it is of the assisting agency. For the in-country agency a possible strategy may include: (i) identify and designate a high-level HRD champion in each ministry; (ii) strengthen the HRD and organizational development in each ministry; (iii) conduct an organizational review; (iv) conduct a training needs analysis; (v) inventory all on-going training; (vi) prepare a 3-year rolling HRD plan; and (vii) prepare a training policy and guidelines.

The study has shown there is a huge demand for HRD development. Each donor agency or training provider must assume a role in training development that matches its mission, priorities, and resources. In this context, a recommended approach is: (i) review and prioritize training needs and target groups; (ii) choose a niche that fits the capacity-building profile of the agency; (iii) profile the characteristics of the training niche identified; (iv) decide on a training program and delivery system; (v) enter into strategic partnerships; and, (iv) conduct regular tracer studies.

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