

Working Group on Human Resource Development  
Extraordinary Meeting, 4 July 2017, Sofitel Sukhumvit Bangkok

## **WELCOME REMARKS**

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Sawadika!

On behalf of the Asian Development Bank, I have the pleasure today to welcome you to this Extraordinary Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Human Resource Development.

While I was preparing for today's meeting, I have learned that this group has a very long history and was established in 1996. So that since the inception, you met 15 times to discuss a wide range of issues related to education, health, labor and migration and social development. The agenda of the HRD working group here is based on two 10-year GMS overall strategic frameworks. So these frameworks also include other working groups on infrastructure, transport, and tourism. Both frameworks, the first was established from 2002 – 2012 and the current runs from 2012 – 2022, identify that human resource development is the strategic area for cooperation within the GMS member countries to enhance inclusive growth and competitiveness but also increase returns from physical infrastructure investment and improved connectivity, and build a foundation of a GMS community within ASEAN.

Over the past years, ADB, with co-financing support from the government of China, has supported your HRD working groups through technical assistance project and the last of this project, the current one is coming to an end this year, in December. So today in this meeting, we are all looking forward to discuss on how to move in the future. To inform these discussions, we have done two reviews. In 2015, ADB commissioned a review to look at the overall GMS Program's institutional structure. The results were presented at the 21<sup>st</sup> GMS Ministerial Conference last year and one key finding of that study said that the "over-ambitious diversity of areas covered by multisectoral working groups, such as our HRD working group, has hampered their effectiveness." The study also recommended to consider restructuring the working group on HRD to better clarify the focus and also recommended to establish specific working group on health based on the good success and good implementation on the importance of health cooperation, which is currently going on.

Subsequent to this review, last year, we commissioned a second review to look specifically at the progress of the strategic framework and action plan of HRD. The review was conducted by Sam Plummer. He presented the review scope in your last meeting in Kunming. Sam will also give a presentation later today. This review was sort of in line with what the first review has concluded. It concluded that the HRD working group, in its current form, has not become an effective platform for collective problem-solving and decision-making for delivering regional solutions. Although I know that each of the country, they have HRD action plans at the national level, but here we saw that at the regional level, we were not so effective.

So based on these findings and recommendations of the review, the objective of today's meeting is that we want to look forward and jointly discuss how to move

ahead in addressing human resource development issues in the region. Also, to specify clear objective and clarify roles and responsibilities amongst ourselves, which was a bit lacking in the past. So therefore I am really happy that we have a full house today so that we have representations from all of our GMS member countries and also friends from the development partners. When we split up on specific working groups in the afternoon, I think good people are up for a debate. Of course, ADB will continue to be a member in the HRD working group and will continue to support analytical work and at bilateral level through projects and programs, particularly in education and in health.

So with these first remarks, I would like to wish you a good discussion today and hopefully that we have some fruitful outcomes to guide us for the future. Thank you.