



Extraordinary Meeting of the GMS Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-Ex)

4 July 2017, Bangkok, Thailand

Summary of Proceedings

Introduction:

1. An extraordinary meeting of the GMS Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-Ex) was held on 4 July 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand. The meeting was attended by representatives of the six GMS countries (Cambodia, PRC, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and other development partners including GiZ, IOM, ILO, SEAMEO, and the ASEAN University Network (AUN) (list of participants in [Appendix 1](#)).

2. WGHRD-Ex was organized by ADB to seek the consensus of the six GMS countries on the findings and recommendations of the review of the GMS HRD Strategic Framework and Action Plan (SFAP) 2013-2017, and recommend new strategic directions for GMS cooperation in HRD beyond 2017. It aimed to (i) understand coordination efforts in the GMS within each of the HRD subgroups; (ii) obtain consensus regarding their future directions; and (iii) develop a plan of action for regional cooperation in health, education, labor and migration, and social development.

Opening Session: Welcome Remarks

3. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Wolfgang Kubitzki, Thailand Resident Mission, ADB. In his Welcome Remarks (copy in [Appendix 2](#)), Mr. Kubitzki recalled two important milestones that underlined the need for the GMS countries to decide on future directions and modalities for HRD collaboration moving forward. First was the review of the GMS Institutional Framework presented at the 21st GMS Ministerial Conference in 2016 which noted that the diversity of areas covered by multisector working groups such as WGHRD has hampered their effectiveness. The study further recommended that the WGHRD be restructured to clarify its focus, and that a separate working group on health be established, given the success and importance of GMS health cooperation. Second was the review of the HRD SFAP commissioned by ADB and completed recently which concluded that the WGHRD has not become an effective platform for collective problem-solving and decision-making for delivering regional solutions to HRD issues. He stated that ADB affirms HRD's vital role in regional economic development and seeks to continue its role as financier and provider of technical advice and support to bridge development gaps in the GMS.

Session 1: Introduction of Workshop Agenda

4. Ms. Elaine Thomas, ADB, introduced the objectives, agenda, and expected outputs of the special meeting as outlined in the Concept Paper and agenda/program of the meeting (copy in [Appendix 3](#)).

Session 2: GMS HRD Strategic Framework and Action Plan (SFAP) 2013-2017: Lessons Learned and Future Working Arrangements

5. Mr. Sam Plummer, ADB Consultant commissioned to review the implementation of the HRD SFAP 2013-2017, gave a brief background on HRD cooperation in the overall context and institutional framework of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program, as well as the evolution of the strategies and action plans which guided such cooperation starting with the SFAP for 2009-2012, followed by the SFAP for 2013-2017. He recalled two key documents relating to the overall GMS Program that contained recommendations of particular significance to HRD. One was the GMS Strategic Framework for 2012-2022 that suggested the continued review and strengthening of the institutional arrangements, structure, and operations of the WGHRD at the subregional, subsector and national levels, including WGHRD meetings. Second was the Study on Strengthening the GMS Institutional Framework ((2016) which noted that “although the WGHRD has achieved encouraging results especially in the area of health, the complexity of the WGHRD given its diverse sub-sectors (health, education, labor and migration, and social development) and involving different line ministries has hampered its effectiveness.” The Study further recommended that the WGHRD can be restructured to make it more focused, and a working group on health cooperation could be established given the success and importance of GMS health cooperation.

6. Mr. Plummer presented the key findings of the HRD SFAP review which pointed to several issues and challenges in its implementation and the limited role that WGHRD has played, as follows:

- While there has been success in regional health projects, there is limited ownership of activities in the Action Plan and WGHRD has not been a catalyst for many activities that did not happen, and some activities that did happen were championed by particular individuals or organizations.
- Overall the institutional mechanism represented by WGHRD has been hampered by its broad and fragmented scope; a lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities; high turnover and inconsistent nomination of delegates resulting in lack of institutional knowledge and continuity; lack of monitoring and reporting of progress vis-à-vis the SFAP; and lack of knowledge management.
- Despite these challenges, there continues to be a strong demand for regional cooperation and support particularly for regional health cooperation.
- Demand exists for TVET at the country level, and for Higher Education within the ASEAN framework. There is little demand for labor and migration, while Social Development is seen as a cross-cutting issue that could be linked to other activities.

7. Based on these findings, Mr. Plummer suggested for the working group and its subgroups to consider where the demand for regional cooperation is and which appropriate development partners could provide support, and presented the following recommendations:

General recommendations:

- (i) That WGHRD is disestablished.
- (ii) That any future working groups have **strengthened institutional frameworks** with clearly defined scope, terms of reference, appointment (nomination) process, secretariat support, clear strategy and rolling action plan and knowledge management system.

- (iii) That **links between GMS working groups are strengthened** to enable cooperation and comprehensive responses to emerging HRD demands and issues
- (iv) That **ADB continues to promote and coordinate regional dialogue** to support the development of regional perspectives on HRD issues, and that other WGs identify and address cross-cutting HRD issues through their projects or integrate solutions into the work of strategic partners, rather than addressing them through a particular HRD WG mechanism.

Sub-sector-specific Recommendations:

- Health: A GMS Working Group on Health Cooperation be created from the WGHRD health subgroup to serve as a regional platform for health issues.
- Education: Regional higher education issues be addressed through ASEAN. TVET concerns be addressed bilaterally with support of partners e.g., ILO.
- Labor and Migration: Possibility of establishing a working group on safe labor migration be explored with the assistance of strategic partners e.g., IOM.
- Social Development: Cross-cutting social development issues be integrated into appropriate projects rather than addressed through a formal mechanism.

8. Mr. Plummer requested the countries to send him and ADB any comments they may have on the Draft Report so that it could be finalized as soon as possible. A copy of his power point presentation is in [Appendix 4](#), and copy of his full draft report is in [Appendix 5](#).

Session 3: GMS Secretariat Perspective

9. Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero, Director, Regional Cooperation and Operations Coordination Division, Southeast Asia Department, ADB, stated that ADB as GMS Secretariat and a development partner institution reaffirms that HRD continues to be an important sector in the overall GMS Program notwithstanding the many challenges that have been identified. In Health, given the strong demand for regional cooperation and support, ADB would support, should the countries decide, the establishment of a new WG on Health. In Education, ADB recognizes this as a priority sector and would continue to support activities at the national level as well as knowledge sharing for many activities happening at the ASEAN level which ADB would not want to replicate, duplicate or even contradict. Labor and migration are important areas but ADB does not have the comparative advantage to support related activities and would leave it for the countries to decide if any country or another development partner could take the lead. In Social Development, managing the negative impact of regional cooperation and integration cannot be ignored and could be better mainstreamed across other sectors and working groups. In summary, ADB affirms that (i) HRD remains high in its agenda and that ADB will consider to extend support in different ways and to help attract attention and support from other development partners sectorally; and (ii) ADB supports the recommendation to focus on health cooperation and to establish a Working Group on Health. He noted that the recommendations of the meeting would be reported to the GMS Senior Officials' Meeting scheduled on 6-7 July 2017 in Bangkok.

Session 4: Country Statements

10. This session featured country views on the proposed reconfiguration of the WGHRD and on regional HRD priorities for development partner support.

Cambodia:

11. Cambodia presented an overview of national HRD policies, strategies and programs in the context of the Rectangular Strategy (Phase III) RGC of Fifth Legislature of the National Assembly. In line with the goal to progress to a developed country by 2050, Cambodia requires high-quality skilled and capable human resources, for which TVET has an important role to play. Cambodia noted that the subgroup on Health is important for promoting regional cooperation on emerging infectious diseases and for which ADB's support for a regional platform is needed. A working group on Education and TVET is also needed to promote AEC 2015 and ADB's support for a regional platform is required. A UN agency's support for a working group on Labor and Migration was suggested. Cambodia agreed to integrate social development issues in national initiatives and programs. Cambodia supported a review and refocus of the TOR and structure of the working groups, and presented their needs and priorities for regional cooperation in related areas.

PRC:

12. PRC noted that while there has been achievement under WGHRD, there has been difficulty in coordination and a need for change. They are open to the recommendation to reconfigure the working group based on consensus decision. On Health cooperation, PRC noted that with increased global economic integration, trade and migration, cross-border infectious diseases are increasingly threatening regional health security. Priority concerns are on the establishment of a collaboration mechanism and capacity building. PRC expressed willingness to support a Working Group on Health Cooperation and provide technical assistance for health security projects. On Education, at the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in May 2017, President Xi Jinping stated that cooperation in education should be boosted, more student exchanges should be encouraged (there were 5,000 GMS students in PRC in 2016, and more than 2,000 GMS students received PRC government scholarships), and performance of cooperatively run schools should be enhanced. Cooperation in higher education is mainly through bilateral channels and under the framework of ASEAN. Regional migration issues could draw on the international community's advanced experience to strengthen the country's capability in managing migration affairs. Social development is more important than ever in light of implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and PRC is willing to explore projects with other GMS members and ADB.

Lao PDR:

13. Lao PDR noted that HRD is one of the government's priorities in the context of improving the qualification of the labor force to meet the demands of socio-economic development and the labor market. Achieving Universal Health Care is also key in the development agenda to address cross-border communicable disease control and malnutrition. Regional and subregional cooperation in HRD is crucial to achieving the national strategic plan 2025 and vision 2030. LAO PDR agrees to the proposed establishment of a Working Group on Health Cooperation to serve as a regional platform for addressing regional health issues, implementing GMS health security, mobilizing resources for implementing IHR, improving surveillance and response for CDC, and building capacity on health services. They also propose to establish a working group on

education cooperation as a regional platform for addressing ASEAN initiatives on higher education and TVET, with focus on mutual skills recognition and credit transfer. They support the establishment of a working group on safe labor migration to generate and share knowledge and develop understanding of regional applications of labor migration. They also support the mainstreaming of social development issues in both regional and national programs/projects. Lao PDR emphasized the need for clear terms of reference, strategic framework and action plan, and monitoring mechanism with strengthened regional capacity on M&E.

Myanmar:

14. Myanmar stated that they have not been fully included in output 1 (TVET) and output 2 (higher education) of the ongoing RETA 8549, but appreciated the inclusion of some regional activities and that ADB is also expanding its country-level support to Myanmar in education and health. They fully agreed with the report's conclusions on the need to strengthen institutional structures, with clear terms of references and roles and responsibilities, and the need for consistency of focal points. However, they do not fully agree with the report's conclusion that GMS countries lack demand for HRD-related cooperation and support and in fact voiced demand for support through WGHRD for regional dialogue on common HRD issues facing Myanmar and GMS countries. Nonetheless, Myanmar agrees to the proposed establishment of a separate Working Group on Health Cooperation as a regional platform for health issues, and to dissolve the rest of the WGHRD structure and consider other platforms such as bilateral cooperation between GMS members and cooperation with other development partners and other non-GMS platforms such as SEAMEO, RIED, AUN, ASEAN, IAI (for education), ILO and IOM (for labor and migration), and UNAIDS, USAID, IOM, and NGOs (for social development).

Viet Nam:

15. Viet Nam expressed support for a reconfiguration of the WGHRD, and to maintain it in Higher Education and TVET, Health, and Labor and Migration but with corresponding shifts in focus. Thus, in Health, cooperation could be through annual or online meetings for exchange of information between countries; in Higher Education, shift to exchange of students and academic lecturers in GMS border areas in Viet Nam, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Myanmar, and Yunnan Province; in TVET, focus on teacher capacity development, competency-based program development, student and teacher exchanges, and soft skills for TVET students; and in Labor and Migration, focus on sharing of experiences on management of cross-border migrant workers. Social Development as a cross-cutting sector could apply to all development activities.

Thailand:

16. Thailand stated that HRD should focus on a holistic approach and emphasized capacity/institutional building. Thailand still supports WGHRD in its current form with support from ADB but would need the commitment of each country and support from development partner for it to be more effective. They were of the view that the Health sector should not be excluded from WGHRD as it is an integral part of HRD. Cooperation in Education needs to focus on quality assurance, credit transfer system among universities, Academic University Network platform for knowledge sharing, enhancing research capacity, and skills development for SMEs. In Labor and Migration, they suggested enhancing capacity to manage safe labor migration and proposed the establishment of a cross-border health fund to support health insurance, disease control and health promotion among migrant population. In Social Development, Thailand proposed that the GMS Health Security Project includes all 6 GMS countries towards cooperation in disease control and to engage with other development

partners for cross-border communicable disease control; preventing and combating human trafficking; empowering women, children, youth and persons with disabilities; addressing inequality and discrimination, and enhancing social protection and social welfare.

17. Copies of the country statements are in [Appendix 6](#).

Open Discussion:

18. Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero, ADB, encouraged the countries to deliberate carefully at the afternoon break-out group sessions and study the other options for cooperation in HRD. While ADB has decided not to finance WGHRD cooperation at the broad level, ADB can help the countries in identifying other development partners that would be interested to be engaged or take the lead in sectors that are of particular interest to them, and suggested for the countries to come up with concrete projects and good agenda for these sectors.

19. The meeting welcomed PRC's readiness to provide technical assistance for health security projects.

Session 5: Health Sector Initiatives in the GMS

20. Ms. Azusa Sato, ADB, recalled the series of events and consultations that have informed the proposed creation of a new working group on health, and briefed the meeting about ongoing efforts to develop a GMS Health Cooperation Strategy and the processing of a technical assistance for ADB financing to support these initiatives. She outlined the possible priority concerns that would benefit from regional health cooperation, namely: (i) communicable disease control and health security; (ii) expanded UHC coverage; and (iii) regional collaboration and health sector governance. In addition, there are other ongoing technical assistance projects that are already supporting GMS initiatives to eliminate malaria and control other communicable diseases, strengthen resilience to climate change in the health sector, support UHC for inclusive growth, and risk mapping and response for malaria and dengue. The proposed ADB technical assistance is envisioned to support the development and eventual implementation of a GMS health cooperation strategy, the establishment of a working group on health cooperation, knowledge sharing, and development of a pipeline of priority projects building on the Ha Noi consultation in 2015. Details of the proposed technical assistance would be further discussed at the subregional meeting on health the following day while the break-out group session in the afternoon could consider future cooperation arrangements. It is contemplated that by the first meeting of the Working Group on Health Cooperation in November/December, the concept or draft of a health cooperation strategy would have been fully developed for possible endorsement at the 6th GMS Summit in March 2018. A copy of her presentation is in [Appendix 7](#).

Session 6: Education Sector Initiatives in the GMS

21. Representative of the ASEAN University Network gave an overview of what it has done for ASEAN and for the GMS, and its future plans and activities for the GMS. Essentially, AUN has been established as the ASEAN quality assurance network in higher education, responsible for quality standards in higher education institutions, enhancing quality of higher education, and exchanging knowledge and experiences with other regional and international QA agencies for the benefit of the ASEAN community. As of June 2017, AUN-QA has assessed 244 programs in 37 universities in 8 ASEAN countries, as well as 3 universities from 3 ASEAN countries at the institutional level. AUN-QA has also organized 15 training workshops under Phases 1 and II of

AUN/ADB cooperation. Specifically for the GMS, under Phase I of the ADB project, AUN-QA organized 6 training workshops in CLM, 6 on-site consultancy visits, 8 capacity development workshops, and 1 road show, benefiting over 250 academic staff and QA personnel. QA handbooks have been published in 3 languages (Khmer, Laotian, and Burmese). These activities have resulted in a better understanding of the QA knowledge system, establishment of a quality culture, creation and expansion of a network of QA practitioners, and establishment of QA systems and mechanisms and customized QA manuals in local languages. A copy of her presentation is in [Appendix 8](#).

Session 7: Labor and Migration Sector Initiatives in the GMS

22. Ms. Maria Nnette Motus, IOM, gave an overview of labor migration trends and patterns as well as initiatives in the GMS. She noted that the GMS has some of the world's largest migration corridors with Myanmar-Thailand as 4th, and Cambodia-Thailand as 9th most important corridors globally. Migration has also increased in the northern GMS with flows representing both an increase in trade-related movement of Chinese investors into CLMVT and service providers and labor migration flow from CLMV to China due to emerging labor market shortages. Data on the latter migration flows is particularly scarce due to their irregularity. Most of the migrant workers in the GMS are in their most productive ages (25-34 years old), with low educational qualification, and in informal employment. Women migrants are more likely to have no education than men migrants and in traditionally feminized sectors; most go through irregular channels and are at risk of exploitation and labor trafficking. With support of the Swiss Development cooperation, IOM in collaboration with UN Women and coordination with ILO will start implementing a four-year multi-country project called "Poverty reduction through safe migration, skills development and enhanced job placement (PROMISE) in CLMT" that aims to develop interventions to equip migrants with skills to fill mismatches between the supply and demand sides between CLM and Thailand, and enable migrants to move up the employment ladder into occupations with better wages and working conditions. There are other regional and inter-regional processes in which GMS members are involved including ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labor, Labor Mobility Framework under APEC, and the Colombo Regional Consultative Process on management of overseas employment and contractual labor. A copy of her presentation is in [Appendix 9](#).

Session 8: Breakout session on future directions in health, education, and labor and migration

23. Breakout group sessions were held simultaneously to discuss and agree on future cooperation arrangements in health, education, and labor and migration.

Session 9: Presentation of Subgroup Reports and Plans Moving Forward

24. **Health.** The subgroup, represented by Kyi Thar, ADB, summarized its proposed future cooperation in health under 5 domains. First, the group suggested access to health services through the sustainable development goal (SDG) framework as an entry point to future collaboration in health. This involves provision of universal health care services, health insurance for migrant and mobile population (MMP), and improved access to healthcare services at the regional, subregional, national and subnational levels. The other domains are i) health education, promotion and advocacy, involving sharing of common messages and information at the regional level to improve health literacy and advocacy for communicable and non-communicable diseases that are directly linked to social development; ii) provision of

essential services to MMPs across the borders and the economic corridors, including mapping of MMPs and conduct of operational researches related to MMP interventions; iii) health policy and advocacy including the conduct of policy dialogues on health issues for both communicable and non-communicable diseases at various levels, as well as the formulation of policy and strategy on migrant health based on common interests of GMS countries; and iv) multi-sector collaboration with development partners, involving both health and non-health sectors. GMS officials called for one health initiative, incorporating health as a crosscutting approach to address development issues in the GMS. This involves resource mapping, coordinating and harmonizing initiatives among development partners and existing networks within and beyond the region.

25. **Labor and Migration.** The subgroup, represented by Arounyadeth Rasphone Lao PDR, presented the proposed future activities in regional cooperation in labor and migration in the GMS. It includes i) support for safe labor migration (social protection and welfare of migrants); ii) migration management (policies and legislation); iii) migrant management systems and regulations; and, iv) remittances or financial services for migrants. Migrant issues will also be addressed through bilateral cooperation through MOUs between countries. Two of the notable regional cooperation projects in the GMS on labor and migration are the TRIANGLE Project of ILO, which aims to strengthen formulation and implementation of labor protection policies and practices resulting in safe labor migration, and the PROMISE project of IOM that facilitates access to skill, which could be linked to TVET, migrant support services, and return migrant reintegration. The subgroup confirmed the inclusion of the technical assistance project in the Regional Investment Framework Implementation Plan 2018-2022 on building capacity in labor and migration management, but did not identify a funding source. Participating countries are Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam. Activities proposed were i) training to integrate and address specific vulnerabilities of men and women; ii) provide opportunities for countries to share experiences in managing migrant workers; and iii) establish IT system to manage labor migration data. The TA will be managed by IOM. Copies of the subgroup reports are in [Appendix 10](#).

26. **Education.** Alfredo Perdiguero, ADB, presenting for the subgroup, cited the robust work in TVET sector by GIZ and ILO, which projects have demonstrated vision for sustained cooperation, activities and projects in the ASEAN region. A brainstorming activity to be held in the next two months was proposed by ADB with GIZ to scope activities for regional TVET cooperation. On the other hand, representatives from higher education agreed to explore further the establishment of a separate working group, with opportunities for possible support from other development partners like SEAMEO-RIHED or possibly with a GMS country or countries taking the lead. After a lively debate and thorough discussion, the subgroup agreed to postpone decision to dissolve until after the proposed separate meetings have identified regional activities and lead country or development partner. While ADB can no longer support the working group in its current form, ADB reassures GMS countries that it will continue and even expand its support for national level projects in education, which it considers a very important sector in ADB operations. Copies of the presentations of GIZ, ILO and SEAMEO-RIHED during the subgroup breakout session are in [Appendix 11](#).

Session 10: Findings and Recommendations

27. Chair, Mr. Wolfgang Kubitzki, ADB, summarized the meeting's findings and recommendations as follows:

- Discussions confirmed that HRD remains an important sector but although the design of the WGHRD had the best intentions over twenty years ago, the requirements for cooperation have changed over time, and there is now a need to make adjustments in focus and approach for cooperation.
- ADB cannot provide the resources to drive the whole WGHRD process as it had done in the past, but would consider continuing support for analytical work and related initiatives at the country level, particularly in Education, if there is a clear demand for these. ADB does not have the comparative advantage in Labor and Migration which is best led by other development partners. Social development is to be treated as a cross-cutting theme, rather than a sector. ADB would be ready to support the establishment of a Working Group on Health.
- Details concerning the establishment of a new Working Group on Health and the development of a comprehensive GMS Health Security Strategy would be further discussed at the meeting to be held the following day in conjunction with the launching of the ADB-financed GMS Health Security Project.
- The next meeting planned in November/December in Lao PDR would be the first meeting of the Working Group on Health.