



21st Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-21)

20 May 2008
Sihanouk Ville, Cambodia

Meeting Summary

I. Introduction

1. The 21st Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-21) was held in Sihanouk Ville, Cambodia, on 20 May 2008. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Tith Chantha, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Cambodia, and attended by representatives from national tourism organizations (NTOs) of Cambodia, PRC (Yunnan Province), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, and representatives of ADB, UNESCO, SNV Netherlands Development Organization, Tourism Trade Report Weekly, and Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO). Observers from other media organizations in the Subregion also attended. The list of participants and observers is in [Appendix 1](#).

2. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss follow-through initiatives to implement key directives of the Third GMS Summit for the tourism sector including strengthening of sustainable management of natural and cultural tourism sites, promotion of joint marketing of tourism in the Subregion, and strengthening of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office.

II. Opening Session

3. Mr. Tith Chantha, Cambodia, welcomed the participants to Sihanouk Ville. He said that Sihanouk Ville is significantly located in the Southern Economic and Tourism Corridor which links Cambodia with Thailand and Viet Nam. The city is a center for trade, industry, and tourism, with an existing seaport and an airport that will soon become international. He noted that the TWG is working closely for tourism development in the Subregion. He thanked the development partners, including ADB, for their assistance and looked forward to their continued support for the socio-economic development of the GMS countries through tourism development. He stated that TWG-21 will discuss implementation of the tourism action plan as part of the Vientiane Plan of Action endorsed by the Third GMS Summit.

4. The meeting adopted the Agenda/Program, a copy of which is in [Appendix 2](#).

5. Cambodia briefed the participants about the business arrangements and the dinner to be hosted by MOT, Cambodia.

Session 1

III. Agenda Item 1: Directives of the Third GMS Summit and Joint Summit Declaration for the Tourism Sector: Implementation of Tourism Projects Under the Vientiane Plan of Action (by Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero, ADB)

6. Mr. Alfredo Perdiguero briefed the meeting about the Third GMS Summit held in Vientiane on 30-31 March 2008. The Summit revolved on the theme - *“Enhancing Competitiveness through Greater Connectivity”* and was attended by the 6 GMS Leaders, ADB President, GMS Ministers, Senior ADB Staff, GMS National Coordinators, GMS Youth Participants, GMS Business Representatives, other officials and staff. Representatives of the diplomatic community and media were present in selected events. Several events were held in conjunction with the Summit. A GMS Youth Forum was attended by 36 youth participants from the 6 GMS countries that traveled to Vientiane in 3 caravans along the North-South, East-West, and Southern Economic Corridors. The GMS Youth participants met with the GMS Leaders and ADB President and handed them a GMS Youth Message articulating their aspirations for the GMS Program. A Business and Investment Dialogue was attended by over 80 representatives of business organizations in the GMS countries and multinational corporations. Recommendations arising from the Dialogue were presented to the Leaders, including those relating to challenges to intra-GMS trade and improvements in the GMS investment climate, possible roles for the private sector to implement the Cross-Border Transport Agreement, and enhancing the involvement of GMS small and medium-sized enterprises in the export market.

7. A Closed Door Meeting among the GMS Leaders and ADB President reviewed the progress of the GMS Program and noted among others, the substantial expansion of trade, investment, tourism, and greater understanding among the peoples of the subregion from the improved and expanded transportation infrastructure. The GMS Program was recognized as a key element in reducing poverty in the subregion. Important achievements in other areas of cooperation, notably in energy, telecommunications, tourism, agriculture, human resource development, environment, trade facilitation and investment were acknowledged to have contributed to laying a strong foundation for sustaining and deepening cooperation in the subregion. The Leaders called for accelerating the construction and improvement of the remaining sections of the GMS corridors and fully putting into place the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement, reiterated the key role of the private sector in GMS development as a source of financial and knowledge resources, underscored the need for capacity development and training to improve the subregion’s competitiveness while improving public health services and protecting the interest of migrant workers, emphasized addressing environmental impacts of development activities, and highlighted the need to further strengthen partnerships among all stakeholders in continued sustainable development of the subregion.

8. At the Summit, the GMS Leaders witnessed the signing of the MOU on the Road Map for Implementing the GMS Cross-border Power Trading and the signing of the MOU Toward the Sustainable and Balanced Development of the North-South Economic Corridor and Enhanced Organizational Effectiveness for Developing Economic Corridors. The Leaders also participated in the Ceremonies for the completion of Route 3 in Lao PDR along the GMS North-South Economic Corridor and of Phase 1 of the GMS Information Superhighway Network.

9. Mr. Perdiguero stressed that the various events of the Summit had direct and indirect implications on and opportunities for continued tourism development in the Subregion.

10. Another significant event of the Summit was the GMS Exhibit which had 3 components: the My World, My Home Children’s Art Competition, My Mekong Youth Forum Exhibit, and the GMS

Ecotourism Exhibit. Mr. Perdiguero showed some photos taken of the ecotourism display in Vientiane. He acknowledged the support and assistance of the TWG focal points, with special mention of the officials and staff of the Lao National Tourism Administration led by Mr. Thavipheth Oula who were instrumental in putting up the display.

11. At the conclusion of the Summit, the GMS Leaders issued and signed a Joint Summit Declaration and endorsed the Vientiane Plan of Action for GMS Development for the period 2008-2012. It marked the first time that the GMS Leaders signed their Joint Summit Declaration (JSD). The Declaration contains important directives to guide implementation of the GMS Program and sustain its achievements.

12. Mr. Perdiguero highlighted the key points in the JSD relevant to tourism. Among others, the Leaders resolved to translate the achievements in physical connectivity into full and sustainable connectivity, and promote the use of the improved and expanded subregional infrastructure to increase trade, investment, and tourism. In their Declaration, the GMS Leaders specifically identified the following key priorities for the tourism sector:

- Strengthen the sustainable management of natural and cultural tourism sites;
- Promote joint marketing of tourism in the subregion; and
- Strengthen the MTCO.

These directives for the tourism sector are consistent with the tourism development and marketing agenda that were discussed at the last 2 TWG meetings and endorsed by the GMS Tourism Ministers at their meeting in Bangkok in January 2008. Mr. Perdiguero also stressed that the priority tourism projects listed in the Vientiane Plan of Action coincide with the prioritized lists of projects developed by Ms. Christine Jacquemin and Mr. Peter Semone of MTCO in consultation with TWG and subject to further review and refinements by TWG as the work progresses and funding resources become available.

13. Mr. Perdiguero urged the TWG to move forward to implement these Summit directives. He said that the agenda of TWG-21 was designed to ensure that the TWG's work plan moves towards implementing the high priority tourism projects included in the Vientiane Plan of Action. He stressed that the Plan of Action is a living document and will be regularly fine-tuned and updated as TWG's work progresses and that it is important for the TWG, with the assistance of MTCO, to consciously translate its list of projects in the Plan of Action into doable and realistic work plans, given available resources. The key elements to achieve this objective are the mobilization of the required funding resources from the GMS countries and the development partners to implement these projects and continued strengthening of the MTCO to drive the TWG's tourism development and marketing agenda.

14. A copy of Mr. Perdiguero's presentation is in Appendix 3. Copies of the Joint Summit Declaration and the Vientiane Plan of Action were distributed to the TWG-21 participants (copies attached as Appendix 4).

15. The Chairman thanked Mr. Perdiguero for his presentation.

Session 2

IV. Agenda Item 2: Operations of the Mekong Tourism Coordination Office

(i) *Status of Recruitment of MTCO Executive Director*

16. Mr. Don Ross, Chairman of the Selection Committee, reported that despite wide circulation of the advertisement for the Executive Director position, only 3 applications were received. Two applicants came to Sihanouk Ville to be interviewed by the TWG members after the meeting, the third applicant declined to come. He suggested for the TWG to seriously assess the situation given the low turnout of applicants.

17. Mr. Peter Semone noted the generous support that Mr. Don Ross has given to the task on hand. The TWG members echoed the expression of gratitude to Mr. Ross for his help.

(ii) *Financial Situation and Financial Plan of MTCO*

18. Mr. Peter Semone reported that MTCO has been quite conservative with its expenses. He reported that the Marketing Fund amounting to US\$25,000 which was transferred from the Tourism Authority of Thailand representing left-over funds for marketing activities before the MTCO was organized remains untouched, even as MTCO now has some suggestions on how to put this fund into good use. He also reported that, altogether, MTCO has accumulated assets of \$157,000, which includes the \$15,000 contribution each for 2008 so far received from 3 GMS countries (totaling \$45,000); the other 3 countries' contributions are awaited for 2008. Computer equipment worth \$16,000 has been purchased. Altogether, MTCO's assets amount to \$157,000. Mr. Semone stressed that the business community remains interested to be involved in tourism marketing activities but not in supporting the operational expenses of the MTCO. He reiterated the need to get from the countries their continuing commitment to MTCO in light of the impending appointment of a new full-time Executive Director. A copy of the MTCO financial report is in [Appendix 5](#).

Discussion:

19. The Chairman expressed the hope that the new Executive Director would show commitment to assist the countries in pushing for the work of the MTCO and TWG.

20. With regard to contributions for 2009, Lao PDR confirmed its commitment to pay while the other countries will send confirmation after consultations with their relevant authorities.

Decision:

21. Countries which have not remitted their 2008 contributions will do so as soon as possible. Countries will send confirmation on their 2009 contributions to the other TWG members and MTCO after consultations with their relevant authorities.

(iii) *Website, Publications*

22. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, Project Coordinator, MTCO, reported on the improvements/reconstruction of the MTCO website meant to provide information on the tourism development projects of the region including those under the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy, and to develop a web-based knowledge center providing material resources on sustainable tourism, including training material, tourism statistics, list of educational institutions delivering tourism training, updated information on border check points and visa requirements in the GMS, and development

organizations active in GMS tourism. Samples of pages can be found in [Appendix 6](#). She also mentioned continued publication of MTCO newsletter, for which readership has increased by at least 1,000 names.

Decision:

23. The Meeting agreed with the Chairman's suggestion for the countries to provide Ms. Jacquemin the names and contact details of their respective officials who would provide the links to their country website.

(iv) Rotation of MTCO

24. Ms. Jacquemin, having noted that Thailand has generously hosted the MTCO for almost 3 years, inquired if other countries would like to host it based on the original plan to rotate the location of the MTCO.

25. The Chairman thanked Thailand for accommodating the MTCO in Bangkok for the past years. He put forward two options for TWG to consider: to rotate location on voluntary basis or in alphabetical order.

26. Lao PDR expressed willingness to host the MTCO in Vientiane and to provide office space, limited local staff support, and basic equipment (computers) and office furniture.

27. PRC agreed that MTCO should be rotated, and suggested that rotation be done in alphabetical order for a term of 2 or 3 years.

28. Mr. Semone stressed that the issue needs to be considered in the context of two separate streams working under 2 different sub-offices, i.e., the marketing and the development streams. The hub of business is in Bangkok and needs to remain there for the foreseeable future. While the marketing focus needs to be in Bangkok, the tourism coordinating function could be rotated among the different countries.

29. Cambodia supported the rotation and inquired whether countries would agree to keep the marketing aspects in Bangkok since location would not really matter due to existing communication facilities and as long as results are delivered.

30. Ms. Jacquemin stated that the senior advisor in charge of marketing was not using the MTCO office anyway, so a small office could just be maintained in Bangkok while the MTCO could rotate to other countries.

31. Viet Nam noted that it would be difficult to maintain MTCO operations in different locations but in principle supports the proposed rotation. If the next host country based on alphabetical order is not prepared to host location, TWG should consider the proposal of other countries.

32. Myanmar noted that MTCO budget is not big, and it may not be fruitful to be moving around but recognized the sentiments of the other countries that support rotation in alphabetical order.

33. Thailand remained willing to host the office but would go along with the majority decision.

34. The Chairman summed up that majority supports rotation in alphabetical order while giving allowance for another country to host the location in case the next host country is not prepared to do so. He suggested for TWG to agree on a timeframe.

35. Mr. Perdiguero supported the sentiments of the countries and those of Mr. Semone but stressed that there should be only one official organization, the MTCO, with 2 different functions: marketing and development. The marketing function could remain in Bangkok and the development function could rotate. Thus, there may be no need for a full time executive director; instead the 2 functions could rest on 2 key officials. Rotation could start with Lao PDR which has volunteered to host the next location for 2 years.

36. Ms. Jacquemin felt that the two functions should not be dissociated from each other and instead need to be coordinated closely as they are interlinked and complementary, but she would support the decision of the countries subject to concurrence to the final decision of the TWG by the French government which is financing her secondment to ADB and MTCO. She stressed the need for the MTCO to have an executive director.

37. Mr. Steven Shipani, MTDP project consultant, raised the question on where could the best results be achieved, rather than tying the expected results to a specific geographical location.

38. Mr. Perdiguero noted that Lao PDR has volunteered to host MTCO, Ms. Jacquemin is prepared to go there, she can be assisted by a local Lao staff which would cost only a small amount, Mr. Semone can continue with the marketing function in Bangkok, with Ms. Saeng continuing to support him. The only issue left is the time frame for rotation.

39. **Decision:** The Meeting agreed in principle to rotate the location of the MTCO, starting with Lao PDR which has volunteered as the next host country. TWG will discuss the matter further and decide finally at its next meeting on whether or not to split the MTCO's functions and their geographic location, the various implications, and other measures to further strengthen the operations of the MTCO, including possible secondment of staff from the GMS countries. Meanwhile Ms. Jacquemin was requested to get confirmation of agreement from the French government on the proposed move to Lao PDR.

Session 3

V. Agenda Item 3: Tourism Development Agenda/Priority Projects

(by Ms. Christine Jacquemin, MTCO)

40. Ms. Christine Jacquemin, Project Coordinator, MTCO, presented her completed (for period January-April 2008) and planned (for period May-December 2008) activity reports. For the months of January-April 2008, she was able to (i) finalize the TWG status report and action plan that were subsequently endorsed by the GMS Tourism Ministers at their meeting in January 2008; (ii) liaised with various development partners concerning MTCO's work, for generation of external funding support for TWG's priority projects, and expanding tourism networks; (iii) attended various meetings/conferences and undertook project visits to different sites in the GMS countries; (iv) prepared the groundwork, including discussion papers, for planned 4 workshops to jump start priority projects under the Tourism Sector Strategy in collaboration with Asia-Pacific consultants; (v) secured funds for the 4 workshops to launch 4 priority projects (EUR 40,000 from France and US\$100,000 from ADB); (vi) improved and expanded the contents of the MTCO website and database; and (vii) supervised the daily administrative operations of the MTCO. Ms. Jacquemin summarized her achievements to include being able to position MTCO as a central actor for tourism development in

the subregion and increase the awareness of development agencies, donors, and other partners about the TSS objectives and challenges.

(i) Proposed Workshops

41. Ms. Christine Jacquemin presented the plans for the launching of 4 priority projects between May-December 2008, including the holding of 4 workshops on (i) HRD vocational training course for SME's in Cambodia, in September 2008; (ii) pro-poor tourism with a focus on public-private partnerships in Lao PDR; (iii) tourism and biodiversity in Bangkok; and (iv) scenic corridors along the East-West Economic Corridor in Viet Nam. The workshops are designed to define the projects' scopes and objectives in coordination with main actors and specialists in each country; create respective task forces to follow up the projects; develop conclusions and draft proposals for the consideration/approval of the Task Forces; finalize detailed proposals to be submitted to donors; and organize a donors' conference to submit projects proposals. Each workshop will have its own set of participants, objectives, and expected outcomes, based on the assigned topic. She explained that the choice of the workshop topics was based on areas that already have ongoing start-up activities, have more chances to succeed, and have tourism potentials

42. MTCO will organize the workshops in coordination with the TWG country coordinators. Invitations will be sent out to about 3-4 participants from each GMS country to attend each workshop. ADB and the French Government are providing some funding support to cover the air fare and small per diems of the official country participants. Host countries are expected to designate their representatives to the task forces, provide complementary funding for their national participants if sponsored per diem is insufficient or if they want to send more participants to the workshops, and if possible, sponsor the costs of meals and workshop venues and provide logistics support in each country. Regarding the tourism and biodiversity workshop, Ms. Jacquemin inquired if Thailand would agree to sponsor a field visit to Khao Yai national park or Kaeng Krachan for nature-based tourism experience. Feedback from the countries is requested by Ms. Jacquemin. A copy of Ms. Jacquemin's presentation and details about the proposed workshops are in Appendices 7 and 8.

Discussion

43. Mr. Perdiguero clarified that the workshops are being organized to start-up implementing 4 priority projects categorized under Group 1 of the tourism action plan under the TSS. The main outputs of the 4 workshops are 4 project proposals to be presented to GMS governments and prospective donors to mobilize resources for the projects. He clarified that the detailed project proposals will be developed by Ms. Jacquemin with the assistance of Mr. Ludwig Rieder of Asia-Pacific Consultants, in coordination with the host countries. The target is for the projects to have firm donor commitment by 2008 and to actually start in 2009. Meanwhile, ADB is providing \$100,000 to MTCO to organize the 4 workshops. Hopefully, by the next meeting, the TWG would have 4 concrete proposals to endorse to prospective donors. He also mentioned the additional assistance that ADB is providing for pro-poor sustainable tourism development in Lao PDR and Viet Nam, and to tourism development in the economic corridors also in Lao PDR and Viet Nam. Meantime, Ms. Jacquemin will try to find other donors.

44. Thailand suggested that proposed activities under the proposals should not duplicate ongoing or planned activities under the ASEAN framework.

Decision:

45. The meeting agreed for the countries to communicate further with Ms. Jacquemin, about the organization of the 4 workshops to be held in 2008 to start-up implementing priority projects under

the TSS. The prospective host countries were requested to communicate to Ms. Jacquemin their concurrence to serve as host, cooperate in organizing the workshops, and include the pilot sites chosen for the Tourism and Biodiversity and Pro-Poor Tourism projects as explained in Appendices 7 and 8.

(ii) Project Updates

46. Mr. Perdiguero requested the lead countries of the priority projects under the TSS to provide brief project updates to Ms. Jacquemin and to inform MTCO of activities under each project for wider dissemination.

Decision:

47. The meeting agreed for the project lead countries to provide the requested project updates to MTCO, including summary of proceedings of project review meetings.

Session 4

Agenda Item 4: Tourism Marketing Agenda/Priority Projects
(by Mr. Peter Semone, MTCO)

48. Mr. Peter Semone stated that the GMS represented a golden piece of tourism real estate. He recalled the target under the TSS to achieve 52 million international tourist arrivals by 2015, hence the need for the GMS countries to be prepared and to create the right rhythm to achieve the expected outcome. He stated that the tourism marketing plan focuses on the 13 priority tourism zones identified in the TSS, chosen for the density of poor people living in them and their tourism assets. For 2009, the plan is moving towards building awareness about the Mekong tourism brand. Toward this end, MTCO initiated the development of a slogan and logo through a survey, involving tourism industry people. An illustration of the slogan and logo focusing on the theme "Explore the Mekong" and that captures the key elements of nature, culture, and people is in Appendix 9.

49. Also, the MTCO website will be integrated into the world wide web as one of the means for pursuing the Explore the Mekong campaign. The campaign will consist of 2 core activities: (i) Great Mekong give-away 2009 and 2010; and (ii) anchor events to be organized and sponsored by each country based on the Mekong theme. The critical success factor is to get private sector partnership and collaboration.

Discussion:

50. In response to a question from Thailand, Mr. Semone clarified that the Explore the Mekong logo is a consumer campaign logo, different from the institutional logo of Mekong Tourism.

51. In response to a question from Myanmar, Mr. Semone clarified that the regional tourism campaign which rests on the MTCO does not conflict with the national tourism marketing campaign of the individual countries. Mr. Perdiguero also noted that tourism promotion and development is one of the priority thrusts under the GMS Program that the GMS Leaders emphasized in their Joint Summit Declaration.

Decision:

52. The Meeting agreed for the TWG members to consult their relevant tourism marketing authorities and communicate their formal position on the slogan and logo by e-mail to MTCO on a no-objection basis within three weeks from the time Mr. Semone sends the pdf file to the TWG.

53. With regard to the remaining balance of the marketing fund, the Meeting requested Mr. Semone to send his proposal for putting the fund to productive use in advance of the next TWG meeting to allow prior review by the TWG. Alternatively, consultation need not wait for the next TWG meeting and could be done by email to avoid further delay in implementing the marketing agenda.

Session 5**Agenda Item 5: Other Matters**

- ***Date and Venue of the 22nd TWG Meeting***

54. In consideration of the current difficult situation arising from the natural disaster in Myanmar, the TWG will await official confirmation from Myanmar as the prospective host of the 22nd TWG Meeting scheduled before the end of 2008. Following Myanmar, the next country host will be Lao PDR.

55. Mr. Perdiguero clarified that in the event the next meeting is held in Myanmar, ADB will not be able to attend nor provide any kind of support, including technical support. Ms. Jacquemin, who is seconded to ADB, will also not be able to attend.

56. In conclusion, following are the meeting's key decisions:

- Countries which have not remitted their 2008 contributions will do so as soon as possible. Countries will send confirmation about their 2009 contributions to the other TWG members and MTCO after consultations with their relevant authorities.
- Countries will provide Ms. Jacquemin the names and contact details of their respective officials who would provide the links to their country website to be linked with the MTCO website.
- The Meeting agreed in principle to rotate the location of the MTCO, starting with Lao PDR which has volunteered as the next host country. TWG will discuss the matter further and decide finally at its next meeting on whether or not to split the MTCO's functions and their geographic locations, the various implications, and other measures to further strengthen the operations of the MTCO, including possible secondment of staff from the GMS countries. Meanwhile Ms. Jacquemin was requested to get confirmation of agreement from the French government on the proposed move to Lao PDR.
- The meeting agreed for the countries to communicate further with Ms. Jacquemin, about the organization of the 4 workshops to be held in 2008 to start-up implementing priority projects under the TSS. The prospective host countries were requested to communicate to Ms. Jacquemin their concurrence to serve as host, cooperate in organizing the workshops, and include the pilot sites chosen for the Tourism and Biodiversity and Pro-Poor Tourism projects as explained in Appendices 7 and 8.

- The meeting agreed for the TSS project lead countries to provide the requested project updates to MTCO, including summary of proceedings of project review meetings.
- Regarding the Marketing Plan, the Meeting agreed for the TWG members to consult their relevant tourism marketing authorities and communicate their formal position on the Explore the Mekong slogan and logo by e-mail to MTCO Senior Advisor on a no-objection basis within three weeks from the time Mr. Semone sends the pdf file to the TWG.
- With regard to the remaining balance of the marketing fund, the Meeting requested Mr. Semone to send his proposal for putting the fund to productive use in advance of the next TWG meeting to allow prior review by the TWG. Alternatively, consultation need not wait for the next TWG meeting and could be done by email to avoid further delay in implementing the marketing agenda.
- TWG will await official confirmation from Myanmar as the prospective host of the 22nd TWG Meeting scheduled before the end of 2008. Following Myanmar, the next country host will be Lao PDR.

Closing Session:

57. The Chairman expressed his thanks to the participants for their active participation. He also expressed in behalf of everyone his deep sympathy to Myanmar and PRC for the recent natural disasters that occurred and caused untold suffering to their peoples.

58. Consistent with previous practice, the draft Summary Report of the Meeting will be provided to the participants the following day for initial comments and later circulated by e-mail within two weeks to the GMS countries for their further review and ad-referendum approval.
