Collaboration in Distance Education in the Greater Mekong Subregion

TONG-IN WONGSOTHORN
President
Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University

1. The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) consists of 6 countries:
   1. China (Yunnan Province)
   2. Cambodia
   3. Lao PDR
   4. Myanmar
   5. Thailand
   6. Vietnam
2. Collaboration in Distance Higher Education

The GMS Countries, with the assistance from UNESCO Office in Bangkok, SEAMES, and SEAMEO RIHED and the support of the government of each country, have collaborated in the development of distance education in the subregion. The GMS Virtual University is being planned with the purpose of piloting 3 programmes:

1. GMS Tourism
2. IT Programme
3. GMS Studies

3. GMS Tourism Programme

3.1 Participating institutions

- Yunnan University, China
- Yunnan Radio and TV University, China
- Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- National University of Laos, Lao PDR
- Distance Education University, Myanmar
- Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand
- Hanoi Open University, Vietnam

3.2 Meetings

1\textsuperscript{st} Meeting August 2001, STOU, Bangkok
2\textsuperscript{nd} Meeting January 2002, Yunnan, Kunming
3\textsuperscript{rd} Meeting May 2002, STOU, Bangkok

3.3 Outcome

It is agreed that a Training Programme on Tourism in the GMS will be launched.

1. Target groups
   Target groups consist of policy makers, government officials, key players, managers, and supervisors in tourism industry.

2. Course details
   It is suggested that a short course of about 6 semester credits is to be piloted. Required models include:
   - Definitions, concepts, and components
   - Tourism marketing and promotion
   - Impact of tourism
   - Tourism in China’s Yunnan Province
   - Tourism in Cambodia
   - Tourism in Lao PDR
   - Tourism in Myanmar
   - Tourism in Vietnam
   - Tourism in Thailand
(3) Media
Media consists of
(a) Printed material/CD-Rom
(b) Computer-based tutorials
(c) Supplementary media, i.e., satellite broadcasting, audio tape, video
tape, and VCD

3.4 Next step
Participating institutions will work together to produce instructional materials.

4. The IT Programme
4.1 Participating institutions
- Hanoi University of Technology, Vietnam
- Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, Thailand
- University of Distance Education, Myanmar
- National University of Laos, Lao PDR
- Yunnan University, China
- Yunnan Radio & TV University, China
- Royal University of Phnom Penh, Cambodia

4.2 Meetings
1st Meeting 17-19 June 2002, Hanoi, Vietnam
2nd Meeting 29-31 October 2002, Bangkok, Thailand

At the second meeting, representatives of partner universities outside
GMS are invited:
- Group T Leuven Institute of Technology
- Danish Technology Knowledge Center
- University of Wales
- Manchester Metropolitan University

5. Collaborative Network

Cambodia

Vietnam

Thailand

Myanmar

China
(Yunnan Province)

Lao PDR

Focal Point
It is still loosely structured. Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) is serving as focal point. Meetings are organized with support from UNESCO office in Bangkok, Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat (SEAMES) and SEAMEO RIHED. When regional training is available, STOU often extends invitations to member institutions.

6. Distance Learning System is conceptualized as follows:

6.1 Student Learning and Advising
   (1) Students study instructional materials by themselves.
   (2) Computer-based tutorials could be provided at home or at the study centers located at participating universities.
   (3) VDO presentation could be provided through the DLF satellite. Satellite receivers should be installed at the study centers located at participating universities. Internet may be used for student advising.

6.2 Facilities and Equipment

Satellite

VDO Broadcasting

Distance Learning Foundation

Channel 17

Univ. A
Univ. B
Univ. C
Univ. D
Univ. E

Production
6.3 Computer Support
Each participating university will provide computers for students at the study centers.

![Diagram showing providers and receivers of computer support]

7. Collaboration in Media Training
Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University has collaborated with Deutch Welle Institute in Germany in two training programmes: one on multimedia production and the other on TV production.

The course on Multimedia Production will be organized again this year (2002). The three-week training programme will take place at STOU from November to December. Participants from other GMS countries: Cambodia, China (Yunnan Province), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam are also invited.

8. Problems
8.1 Language
National Languages are different. It is agreed that English is to be used as a medium of instruction. However, English proficiency in the subregion is still poor. There is a need to upgrade skills in using English language. This adds to the problem of training.

8.2 The availability of ICT infrastructure and the affordability.

![Table showing affordability of ICT infrastructure]

Urban people, with good ICT infrastructure, can afford to pay. But for those in remote areas, it is difficult.
8.3 Funding
    As large parts of the region are still less developed, it is difficult to raise funds from local and subregional sources.

8.4 Knowledge and Skills
    Staff members in participating institutions are lacking knowledge and skills in distance education. Training in the use of ICT for distance teaching is necessary.

9. Recommendations
    9.1 There is a great need to establish linkage between education networks and socioeconomic development networks of the subregion. For example, under the GMS Economic Cooperation, there are many standing Working Groups who work to coordinate regional development activities and programmes. Tourism is one of them. If the linkage is established, it will help strengthen both educational development and economic development of the subregion.

    9.2 International and regional organizations such as UNESCO, SEAMES, SEAMEO RIHED should extend support to create and strengthen the network. Assistance from donor countries should also be sought for technical and financial assistance in line with the aim of the network.

    9.3 National efforts must be mobilized for close collaboration. The Ministries of Education of the GMS countries should recognize regional higher education cooperation as a priority.