CONNECTING THE MEKONG THROUGH EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The U.S. Agency for International Development Lower Mekong Initiative Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID-LMI COMET) project is a five-year (2014-2019) workforce development program that equips youth with market-driven skills, connects key stakeholders in education, business and government, and increases technology-based learning in classrooms.

With 70 percent of employers in the Lower Mekong sub-region looking to hire, but only 16 percent finding recent graduates who have the skills they need, USAID-LMI COMET better prepares youth for employment by bridging the gap between educational institutions and employers.

The project supports universities and vocational schools to adapt their curriculum and teaching approach to better meet private-sector demands, and to engage enterprises to strengthen work-based (hands-on) learning opportunities, such as internships.

By 2019, USAID-LMI COMET will help 12 post-secondary education institutions equip 80,000 youth with the workplace skills demanded by businesses in the Lower Mekong countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. These skills include critical thinking, communication, interpersonal skills and adaptability to new technologies.

RICHARD NYBERG / USAID

CONNECTING STUDENTS WITH THE MEKONG MARKETPLACE

Through annual labor market assessments, the project identifies the priorities, challenges and opportunities in the region as voiced by employers, education institutions and job-seekers. Through the MekongSkills2Work Network – composed of universities, vocational colleges and industry partners – USAID-LMI COMET promotes innovative education with technology-based solutions. Instructors are trained in dynamic classroom approaches, such as exploring real-world problems through project-based learning, and in modern strategies for complementing online learning with in-person classes. Work-based learning opportunities that provide hands-on experience, such as internships, are built into the curriculum.

IMPACT AND RESULTS

- Through over 1,150 trainings and events since October 2014 and a vast array of publicly-available resources on the MekongSkills2Work web portal, USAID-LMI COMET has trained nearly 1,000 instructors with cutting-edge instructional approaches and has reached over 60,000 students.

- The project has adopted "innovation challenges" as an interdisciplinary approach to foster technical, soft and entrepreneurial skills in youth as they identify and solve problems in their communities or global issues. U.S. companies including Cisco and Intel have provided mentorship and technology to aid teams in refining their innovative solutions. Several teams have gone on to win international innovation challenges.

- Sustaining innovation: the MekongSkills2Work model is deepening its roots within the USAID-LMI COMET leadership institutions -- the Mekong Learning Centers -- as well as branching out across the region. Instructors at these institutions are expanding training to more instructors across their campuses, while government and industry are looking at expanding more broadly across the region. For example, based on popular demand, the Mekong Learning Center in Myanmar conducted a country-wide MekongSkills2Work training for Technology universities in November 2018.

PARTNERS The project collaborates with leading multinational technology companies such as Cisco, Intel and Amazon Web Services to leverage technology and innovative instruction in classrooms. Collaboration with local industry partners is growing through the Mekong Learning Centers.

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