



GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION COMMUNICABLE DISEASES CONTROL PROJECT

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Regional Communicable Diseases Control (CDC) Project is a \$38.75 million project over 4 years to support CDC in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. The Project is supported by the Governments of the participating countries, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the World Health Organization (WHO). About 11% of the funds are pooled regionally for regional activities (the "Regional Pooled Fund"). The project aims to (i) Strengthen national surveillance and response systems, (ii) Improve CDC for vulnerable groups; and (iii) Strengthen regional collaboration in CDC. This flyer covers only the third component (regional).

The Project enhances regional cooperation in CDC among the three countries and helps create sustainable cooperation by (i) strengthening the institutional capacity of MOH for regional cooperation; (ii) promoting joint learning, studies, and information exchange; and (iii) supporting cross-border cooperation in disease prevention and control. The Project facilitates collection and dissemination of information on regional CDC to professionals and institutions, and closely coordinates with regional partners and initiatives.

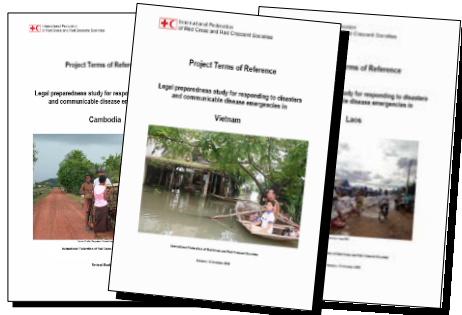
“Strengthening regional collaboration in CDC”

The GMS CDC project efforts in “*Strengthening Regional Collaboration in CDC*” are geared towards three main areas (the “3 Pillars”): Pillar 1: “*Regional Strategy, Policy and mechanism for Regional Cooperation in CDC*”; Pillar 2: “*Regional Knowledge Management and Human Resource Development*”, and Pillar 3: “*Cross-Border (ground) collaboration and health services*”.

Regional Strategy, Policy and Mechanism for Regional Cooperation in CDC

Legal preparedness studies

A sustainable regional collaboration in CDC requires naturally a sound regional legal framework to evolve; the GMS CDC project has contracted a three-fold study on “**Legal Preparedness for Responding to Disasters and Communicable Disease Emergencies in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam**”. The study is managed by the International Federation for Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) International Disaster Response Laws, Rules and Principles (IDRL) Asia Pacific Unit with technical support from the World Health Organization (WHO) and is funded by the Pooled Fund of the GMS CDC project. The objectives of the studies is - through legal research and consultations - to (i) identify gaps and areas of good practice in addressing legal issues and implementing the key regional and international instruments relevant to disaster and communicable disease emergencies in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, and (ii) recommend measures to minimize legal barriers and encourage effective national and international responses to disasters and



communicable diseases in these three countries. The findings from the three country studies will then be discussed among legal experts in a “**Regional Legal Preparedness Technical Forum**” advising on possible enhancement of regional collaboration through better harmonization of relevant legislation and/or regional or bilateral Agreements as well as the removal of identified legal obstacles.

Database of regional initiatives in CDC in the Mekong Subregion

Most regional bodies (WHO/WPRO-SEARO, APEC, ASEAN, MBDS, ACMECS, etc) with some health involvement have already launched initiatives in the Mekong subregion on control of communicable diseases, notably to enhance surveillance and

response, etc. These initiatives are varied, covering various geographical areas, different topical and technical areas, and with various timetables and funding investments. In order to

ensure better synergies among all these initiatives, the GMS CDC project compiles a database -- which will be made available to all -- identifying and mapping all the various organizations' involvements in CDC in the subregion.

Supporting countries' regional activities and in-country mechanism for regional collaboration in CDC.

Regional collaboration in CDC has already received highest level's political attention, as expressed in numerous regional summits' declarations. Nevertheless, operationalization of these high level regional commitments often remains a challenge to national CDC teams, who are already heavily absorbed by their own national duties. The project assists CLV countries in their regional activities as well as in establishing in-country mechanism for regional collaboration aiming for an “institutional consistency”.

Joint Regional Small Scale Operational Studies

Linkages between Mekong countries' research institutions are critical to develop collaboration, yet the former are either inexistent or very weak. The GMS CDC project promotes these linkages while addressing also the need for evidence base in operations by supporting *Joint Regional Small Scale Operational Studies*: Mekong countries after prioritizing -- each country individually -- which operational research studies they need in communicable diseases, meet and agree on a joint research prioritization, and finally on conducting studies jointly, after a strict “joint proposal” selection procedure. Two joint regional research studies have already been signed and started and two more are expected before the end of the project. The procedure, although extremely time-consuming, has already led to the signing of “scientific collaboration agreement” among CLV countries, and to now regular face-to-face or electronic exchanges among CLV countries scientists.



Signing ceremony of a GMS CDC-supported agreement on scientific research cooperation between Hanoi Medical University, the Lao PDR National Institute of Public Health and the Cambodian Institute of Public Health, on 25 February 2009 in Hanoi, Vietnam.

Regional Knowledge Management and Human Resource Development

There is no doubt that Knowledge Management (KM) approaches would enhance countries' CDC work performance. Yet, KM is still relatively unknown to public administration in the subregion. The project introduces senior management of CLV Ministries of Health to KM approaches, and strives to expand KM at a regional level. This is done notably through the sharing of CDC operational experiences among Mekong countries' CDC professionals either face-to-face through project-funded and organized regional

technical forums, regional workshops, symposium, etc. or through the GMS electronic technical forums (“dengue”, “parasites”, “lab services”, etc), which promote the nurturing of Communities of Practices (CoP) of Professionals.



Develop a vibrant network of CDC professionals in the region.

While the legal framework is critical to the sustainability and the institutionalization of regional collaboration (see above), informal networks are actually equally important to the good development of regional collaboration. The Project also maintains a “**Directory of Professionals involved in CDC in the GMS**” which promotes such informal networking of professionals. The Directory also allows better targeting for **Information Sharing** notably in

the steady sending of CDC-related information by the **Regional Coordination Unit** to targeted professionals.

GMS CDC website / newsletter (www.gms-cdc.org)

The regional Coordination Unit has also established a Website/Newsletter. The latter, rather than a stand-alone initiative, actually acts as the main support to all other parallel (non-IT) regional initiatives (see above): KM, information sharing, resource repository, calendar of events, forums, etc.



One proposed next step – which has appeared increasingly critical -- is the establishing of a **regional “Clearinghouse” in CDC** that would, among other things, pro-actively collect all relevant information on communicable diseases (CD) initiatives in the region (programmatic data), filter info/press clips on CD in the region and/or scientific new findings, and redistribute them to

targeted readership, maintain the Directory of all CDC-related professionals in the GMS, gather all various partners’ CD-related planned events in the subregion and produce a one integrated calendar of events, develop a database with all programmatic information on all regional initiatives/activities/projects to better identify the gaps and supports available, maintain an online repository of all information related to CD in the region, as well as a centralized GIS mapping service for all CD projects/initiatives, promote Knowledge Management, in particular CDC professionals’ Communities of Practices (best practices, lessons learned, etc). In other words, the Clearinghouse – if located in a regional body facilities -- would sustain services that the RCU has already partly started to provide, but beyond the GMS CDC project’s life.

Cross-Border (ground) collaboration and health services

“*Virus knows no border*” is often the rationale put forward to promote regional collaboration. CLV governments are very eager prevent the diseases entering their territories and cross-border collaboration is critical in that aspect. Yet, cross-border collaboration poses a number of specific challenges: confrontation of two different health systems, unequal health staff capacity, different equipment and pharmacopeias, language barriers, etc. The GMS CDC addresses cross-border issues through the organization of cross-border meetings and workshops, simulation exercises, calling together

human and animal health professionals, from central and local levels, international organizations (WHO, FAO), etc. For instance, the 2nd cross-border workshop in Siem Reap (Feb. 2009) led to 3-year cross-border plans among Cambodia, China, Lao PDR and Vietnam. In an effort to encourage donors’ coordination, all these above cross-border events have been co-sponsored by the GMS CDC project and the USAID (through Kenan Institute Asia). The Regional Coordination Unit is also mapping the various cross-border activities already undertaken by various partners in the subregion.



Participants from the 2nd Cross-Border Workshop between Cambodia, China PR, Lao PDR and Vietnam.

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“The only thing that will redeem mankind is cooperation”

-Bertrand Russell (1872-1970)
Logician and philosopher