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Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
Quarterly Report
Second Quarter –January 07, 2015 to April 6, 2015

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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COEs	Centers of Excellence
COP	Chief of Party
COR	Contracting Officer's Representative
COMET	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
EAI	Education Advisory Institution
GDA	Global Development Alliance
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HP	Hewlett Packard
IPSR	Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University
ITE	Institute of Technical Education (ITE)
LM	Lower Mekong
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MTOT	Master Training of Trainers
NGO	Non-governmental Organizations
PMEP	Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
SEAMEO	South East Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat Office
STEM+AT	Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics, Accounting, and Tourism
STTA	Short-Term Technical Assistance
TOT	Training of Trainers
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VIA	Volunteers in Asia
WRN!	Work Ready Now!

PROGRAM OVERVIEW/SUMMARY

Program Name:	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
Activity Start Date And End Date:	October 6, 2014 to October 5, 2019
Name of Prime Implementing Partner:	Education Development Center, Inc.
Contract Number:	AID-486-C-14-00001
Name of Subcontractors:	Mahidol University, Institute for Population and Social Research
Major Counterpart Organizations	Ministries of Education and Labor in Lower Mekong countries, universities, vocational training institutes, private sector partners.
Geographic Coverage (cities and or countries)	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam
Reporting Period:	January 7, 2015 to April 6, 2015

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Q2 2015, USAID 'Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training' (USAID COMET) focused on three activities to deepen our knowledge of the local context and to provide important lessons learned for subsequent project activities that we intend to take to scale across the Lower Mekong sub-region: 1) Completion of the regional baseline STEM+AT Labor Market Assessment (Baseline Assessment); 2) Engagement with public and private sector partners, including modeling opportunities for private sector engagement with curriculum development and training delivery; and 3) The Instructor Training Pilot, which took place at Mahidol University between March 30 – April 1, 2015.

The outcome of these activities is that the project has defined key regional industry clusters across science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism (STEM+AT) that will become the focus of USAID COMET training in the upcoming quarters, as well as the critical sets of skills identified by employers; developed a process for engaging the private sector on both the *supply side*, through engagement with delivery mechanisms and training materials (e.g., Google and Hewlett – Packard) and Mahidol University as well as on the *demand side*, through involving a local business partner directly in curriculum development (eg., Dutch Mill); tested out a new and innovative format for future trainings that include online and face-to-face content enhanced with real-life employer-based scenarios (i.e., blended learning). During this period, USAID COMET also started to disseminate updates via social media feeds and launched the project website on April 6.

Looking ahead to the next quarter, the goal of USAID COMET is to move from specific interventions, such as the instructor training pilot, to developing a *methodology* for combining the private sector, labor market trends, and instructor training into a systemic model that can catalyze real and lasting change across the Lower Mekong. Q3 will see the development of two new curricula, in two disparate areas of STEM+AT: chemical/mechanical engineering and tourism. The goal for developing these two, very different curricula in the upcoming quarter is two-fold: 1) to gain two full curricula in key industries, as defined by the Baseline Assessment; and 2) to develop an effective strategy for how USAID COMET will approach curriculum development in technical areas of specialization. With these two goals accomplished in Q3, USAID COMET will then be able to determine effective delivery mechanisms in Q4, thereby closing the theme for *Year 1: Testing the Model* with a comprehensive set of strategies that will guide the projects activities through the life of project.

During Q3 and Q4, USAID COMET will also work on building curriculum, identifying the Centers of Excellence and developing the portal. These three activities exemplify the three broad categories of activities that USAID COMET must define this year in order to move into Year 2 on solid footing. In brief, these are defining the **what**; or the curriculum and training model; the **how**; or identifying delivery modes including

developing a detailed plan for grantees and the training cascade model; and the **portal** which must be developed with care to support learning initiatives across the region while exhibiting innovating approaches to job/internship matching, featuring curricula, and providing updated labor market information and information on in-demand career pathways for all stakeholders. While not all these activities must be *complete* by the close of Year 1, the project intends to have a strategic plan for each in place by the close of Q4. The upcoming two quarters serve as a bridge, connecting the exploration and learning of Q1 and Q2 to the well-defined strategic implementation plan needed for Year 2. We are still *Testing the Model*, but are now doing so with a clear eye towards the future of the project.

1.1 Program Description/Introduction

The goal of the USAID 'Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training' (USAID COMET) Project is to help universities and vocational centers to increase the number of skilled workers in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting, and tourism (STEM+AT) fields in the Lower Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam).

USAID COMET will bring together public and private sector partners and use information technology to deliver accessible training in key sectors. The contract is managed by the USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and implemented by the Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC).

The ultimate objective of USAID COMET is to improve economic integration and global competitiveness through human resource development in the Lower Mekong sub-region. Through bringing technology and online resources to vocational and higher education institutions and learners, the project will seek to improve skills of young people in the Lower Mekong sub-region in STEM+AT. USAID COMET will connect large-scale multi-national and national firms with vocational centers and higher education institution and other local stakeholders, to bring in the demand-driven skills and competencies.

Regional Integration

USAID COMET is designed to accelerate the integration of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community through addressing goals outlined by the Initiative for ASEAN Integration. In addition, USAID COMET directly supports the strategy under the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity to enhance the free flow of intra-ASEAN skilled labor, which in turn will promote deeper intra-ASEAN social and cultural interaction and increase regional linkages among the skilled workers in the Lower Mekong sub-region.

USAID COMET will carry out consolidated trainings and customized courses for the least developed ASEAN Member States. USAID COMET-organized trainings will provide a platform for individuals from the various Lower Mekong countries working in a specific subject area or profession to interact with one another. This interaction between peers will consequently facilitate new connections, exchange of ideas and

information, and support mechanisms that can be sustained and strengthened through available technology such as social media platforms. Furthermore, USAID COMET seeks to integrate input from the private sector at each stage of the human resource supply chain, from curriculum development to work-based learning/internships to ensure that skills development in the Lower Mekong is sensitive to business demand. In this way, USAID COMET will improve people-to-people, business-to-people, and business to educator connectivity across the Lower Mekong, and cultivate many formal and informal networks that will collectively contribute to regional integration across ASEAN.

Leveraging Innovative and Evidence-based Education Solutions

As the Lower Mekong nations are all facing similar challenges in developing their current and upcoming skilled workforce in STEM+AT, USAID COMET will take advantage of the new “revolution” in higher education offered by online training, mobile technology, and educational courses and engage workers in all the Lower Mekong countries in targeted, sub-regional trainings. USAID COMET will share best practices to promote transformational change and uptake by stakeholders.

By adopting innovative technologies under USAID COMET, educational providers in the Lower Mekong sub-region will:

- Transform the classroom from a place where lectures are delivered to one where teachers and students have lively discussions about online content and relate that material to real scenarios derived from input from local businesses;
- Promote the exchange of information, knowledge and ideas;
- Establish new formal and informal professional sub-regional networks;
- Widen the reach of post-secondary education and training to rural and remote areas in the Mekong sub-region.

Coupling technological breakthroughs with standardized curriculums in key STEM+AT industries will help spread consistent instruction at a relative modest cost per student to the education providers in the sub-region. Furthermore, by deepening education and business linkages, USAID COMET will enable the creation of a skilled, *work-ready* workforce.

Building upon these foundations, USAID COMET seeks to engage with higher education and vocational institutions in the Lower Mekong sub-region that have the capacity to absorb technical assistance to deliver sub-regional trainings and courses in STEM+AT. USAID COMET will then identify potential sub-regional centers of excellence (or technical hubs) that can deliver education and training over the long-term in order to sustain the growth in skilled human resources in STEM+AT and enhanced connectivity across ASEAN.

1.2 Summary of Results to Date

Achieved indicators:

Indicator #1 Number of workforce development initiatives completed as a result of USG participation in public-private partnership (standard indicator #4.6.3-8)

Annual Target: 6

Quarterly Target (Q2): N/A

Quarterly Achieved: 2

Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: 66% achieved

Notes:

In late March 2015, USAID COMET conducted 2 workforce development initiatives:

- Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training Instructors Pilot – Training of Trainers.
- Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training Instructors Pilot - Blended Learning (students)

The Blended Learning Pilot was conducted on April 1, 2015 (Q3); however, since it was a continuous activity following the Instructor Training Pilot which was conducted on March 30-31, we included the Blended Learning Pilot in Q2 reporting figures.

Indicator #3.1 Number of universities with instructors trained in innovative approaches to teaching STEM+AT courses

Annual Target: 0

Quarterly Target: 0

Quarterly Achieved: 1

Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: No target in Y1

Notes: The USAID COMET Instructors Training Pilot was conducted in Mahidol University, Salaya Campus, Nakhon Pathom Province, Thailand. There was no target set for Y1.

Indicator #3.2 Number of university instructors that receive training in innovative approaches to teaching in-demand skills in targeted STEM+AT fields as a result of USG assistance

Annual Target: 16

Quarterly Target: 0

Quarterly Achieved: 11

Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: 69% achieved

Notes: USAID COMET Instructors Training Pilot had a total of 11 instructors who participated in the training. The instructors were all from the Faculty of Engineering.

Indicator # 3.4 Number of university students in STEM+AT fields with access to curriculum that meets the ASEAN-targeted standards in STEM+AT sectors as a result of regional TOT workshops

Annual Target: 0

Quarterly Target: 0

Quarterly Achieved: 16

Annual Performance Achieved to the End of Reporting Period: No target in Y1

Notes: THE USAID COMET Instructors Training Pilot Blended Learning Showcase had a total of 16 students who attended the training. The students were all from the Faculty of Engineering.

2. ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS

2.1 Progress Narrative: Component 1, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

Component One is intended to support the other two components under the project by strengthening online information sharing, research and data management, and job forecasting in order to collectively support institutional capacity development and the strengthening of networks of education providers in the Lower Mekong (LM) sub-region.

Baseline Regional Assessment

As a first and fundamental step towards achieving its objectives, in Q2 USAID COMET completed a regional baseline STEM+AT Labor Market Assessment (Baseline Assessment) to identify specific industries, jobs and skills in high-demand in STEM+AT fields in the LM sub-region, through consultations with leading industries. A mixed-methods study was conducted by EDC in partnership with the Institute for Population and Social Research (IPSR) at Mahidol University in Thailand. The study used qualitative and quantitative primary data collection methods, as well as a desk review of secondary data.

A synthesis of key findings is below:

Some of the core findings from the survey are the following:

1. *Rapid growth transforming leading industries and sectors*

The most common industries surveyed employers were tourism, food processing and automotive which accounted for 60% of the respondents. Findings from the study show that the majority of employer respondents indicated they perceived growing demand within their industries, with nearly 80% of respondents indicated that they were looking to hire new staff, most commonly in order to expand the scope of their businesses.

2. *A set of regional key industries “stood out” as candidates for USAID COMET*
The baseline identified 5 regional key industries clusters with links to STEM+AT skills that will be the main focus of skill development for this project: agriculture/aquaculture, agro-processing, food and beverage processing; automotive parts manufacturing/vehicle assembly; construction; electronics; and tourism.
3. *The representation of female workers varies by industry*
Findings from the companies surveyed indicate that there were fewer female employees than male full-time and part-time employees. Industries with low female representation were automotive, chemical, construction, agriculture, and tourism, with agriculture and construction having the lowest female participation. Industries with near equal participation included: electronics and food processing. The industries with the highest female representation were the garment and health care industries.
4. *Skill gaps vary by industry, but reflected common themes*
Employers often report that recent graduates were unprepared, in terms of technical, non-technical, and non-cognitive skills. Employers largely felt that fresh graduates were unable to perform well on the job or that they required additional training. Several employers noted that new employees take between 3 months to 2 years to learn the necessary skills to perform their job. Employers frequently identified computer and English as non-technical skills that their employees need to improve. Moreover, diligence, teamwork, adaptability, communication, and time management were the most commonly cited as critical and lacking skills in new workforce entrants.

More information about the findings and methodologies in this study can be found in the 2015 Regional Baseline STEM+AT Labor Market Assessment.

Website and Web Portal Development

USAID COMET attended the Mobiles for Development (M4D) Forum Asia 2015 held at USAID RDMA from January 20-21, 2015. EDC’s Chief Technology Officer, Bob Spielvogel, participated as a speaker on the panel session: “Closing the gap between Developers and International Development.” The event was a key networking opportunity for web portal development-related activities, with several contacts made with local web developers. These developers all completed the Partnership Survey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/cometpartnership>) for new potential partners of USAID COMET.

The MekongSkills2Work domain name (www.MekongSkills2Work.org) was registered on February 25, 2015 and will be launched on April 6, 2015. Several key components of the website build-up were completed during this quarter, including the submission and approval of the Scope of Work for the MekongSkills2Work website development as well as preliminary wireframes. The Google-driven @mekongskills2work.org domain address is being setup to serve as the common domain for both social media and website/web portal access. The initial website – to be the basis of the full web portal/platform for USAID COMET – was successfully launched on April 6, 2015.

Social Media sites are being setup prior to the launch of the website in order to build an audience for the website launch. The MekongSkills2 Work Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/MekongS2Work>) was setup and launched with the first tweet on March 31, 2015. The Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) Facebook page will transfer ownership to USAID COMET and will convert the page name to MekongSkills2Work. All current fans will be retained and a transition strategy is being developed to maintain and build the fan base once USAID COMET assumes full ownership of the page. Targeted messaging driven by guidelines from the communications plan will drive Twitter and Facebook users to the MekongSkills2Work website to become the first audience for the site.

2.2 Implementation Status: Component 1, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

Findings results: Baseline Regional Assessment

Please refer to Section 2.1 above regarding the Baseline Regional Assessment.

Preliminary Result: Website/Web Portal Development

Web portal development is proceeding on schedule, with the majority of setup components for the website completed in Q2 with the mekongskills2work.org site launched on April 6, 2015.

2.3 Implementation Challenges: Component 1, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

USAID COMET worked diligently with IPSR to help them improve their range of tools used for the Baseline Assessment. This included guidance in the development of six tools, three procedures, and a glossary reference document for data collectors to use during the baseline. The development of the tools went through a series of revisions based on actual input from both USAID COMET and IPSR technical staff from a two day workshop in mid December 2014. Inputs were also considered from the pilot that had been conducted in the same month. The tools will be introduced to data collectors during a training workshop to be held from January 11 – 12, 2015 during which data collectors will be able to practice using the tools and have the opportunity to provide feedback and revise as necessary.

The subaward with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been delayed pending the USAID COMET contract modification, in particular regarding alternative language for contract section H.7. The project expects to resume discussions with MIT once the contract modification is finalized

PMP Update: Component 1, Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce

In Q2, the M&E department received feedback from USAID on the Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (PMEP). The PMEP was revised and adjusted in accordance with the suggestions and inputs from USAID. After discussion of the second draft of the M&E Plan with USAID in late Jan 2015, the PMEP was approved in Feb 2015. It should be noted that the PMP is a living document, to be revisited and revised as program priorities evolve throughout the life of project.

Indicator #1.2 Number of users reaching USAID COMET online portal and social media sites each month

Q2 Achievement: 0

Q2 Target: N/A

Y1 Target (annually cumulative): 2,500

Note: Targets for Y1 begin in Q3

There are no targets for indicators 1.1 in Y1.

2.4 Progress Narrative: Component II, Training Today's Workforce

Component II Overview

The goal of Component Two is to provide vocational training to the current workforce in priority areas. USAID COMET will work with a group of higher education and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in each country to prepare and implement supplemental curricula based on the skill gaps and key sectors identified by the Baseline Analysis. The partner institutions will work closely with local businesses to

enhance the supplemental curricula with local employers skill requirements, provide learning experiences for students with the local employers, and provide a closer link with the work environment as a part of the training process.

Core technical activities under Component 2 include the following:

- Selection of vocational schools.
- Development and delivery of Master Trainer modules
- Follow-up training to ensure uptake of both pedagogy and curriculum content in the network of Master Trainers

Key deliverables under Component 2 include:

- Identification and selection of vocational schools
- Delivery of training to Master Trainers (and through them, vocational schools and centers)
- Follow-up support to Master Trainers

Progress Narrative – Component II

Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH) was identified as potential Educational Advisory Institution (EAI). The team plans to develop in-depth discussions with LANITH in Q3 to invite LANITH to participate in a Master Training of Trainers (MTOT) and Training of Trainers (TOT) trainings for university and TVET EAIs in Q4.

While USAID COMET will pilot curricula in TVET institutions in the latter half of the first year, the project does not expect to identify grantees until later in the project life. Grantees will be selected through a grant competition in Years 2 and 3 after the project has selected the Centers of Excellence (COEs) so that the project can maximize capacity building and input from COEs, relationships among COEs and local businesses, and between businesses and local vocational schools. In Q2, the USAID team began implementing the groundwork in preparation for grant competition in Year2 by exploring data and information of vocational schools in the five Lower Mekong countries.

2.5 Implementation Status: Component II, Training Today's Workforce

Following from the USAID COMET Roadshow in the three Lower Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) in early January, the team has identified LANITH as potential TVET partner for TVET EAI. LANITH is a tourism vocational school supported by the Government of Luxemburg. The project is interested to partner with LANITH as they use a similar training approach of the USAID COMET blended learning approach. For instance, they produce short video vignettes on curricular topics of interest and post them on YouTube in both English and Laotian. The project expects that LANITH may be a strong vocational level COE and could assist the project in designing its tourism curriculum. LANITH could also work with other partner countries to support the tourism sector outside of Laos. There may be common areas of interest such as temple tourism, eco-tourism, etc. that could become points of collaboration.

The South East Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat Office (SEAMEO) agreed to connect the project team with VOCTECH (Center for Vocational Education) in Brunei to explore the possibility of sharing data and information of vocational schools in the five lower Mekong countries and identification of possible areas of promoting the USAID COMET modules at the regional level. In March, the USAID COMET Chief of Party (COP) and M&E Manager met with the Deputy Director for Professional Affairs and Research Manager/Specialist, SEAMEO VOCTECH Regional Center to discuss about the USAID COMET Institutional Assessment. The SEAMEO VOCTECH Deputy Director assisted the project by forwarding a list of contacts in the Lower Mekong Region who could provide official information from each country. The team started reaching out to the identified contacts requesting information in late Q2. To date, no response has been received yet.

2.6 Implementation Challenges: Component II, Training Today's Workforce

USAID COMET is in the process of contacting the sources of TVET schools provided by SEAMEO VOCTECH. Once the list of institutions is received from each country, USAID COMET will decide if the information is sufficient for programmatic planning and use. The project team is considering an alternative plan to partner with EAls to collect primary data at the country level if the necessary information cannot be obtained from the VOCTECH sources.

2.7 PMP Update: Component II, Vocational Training to the current Workforce in Priority Areas Improved.

Indicator # 2.2 Number of trainers that receive training in innovative approaches to teach in-demand skills in STEM+AT as a result of USG assistance

Q2 Achievement: 0

Q2 Target: 0

Y1 Target (annually cumulative): 120

Note: Instructors here apply to instructors in vocational schools

There are no targets for indicators 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, and 2.6 in Y1.

2.8 Progress Narrative: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

Component III Overview

Under Component Three, the focus is placed on developing the leadership capacity of higher education institutions and key TVET institutions in the Lower Mekong sub-region. USAID COMET anticipates designating one higher education institution and up to two TVET institutions in each country as COEs. The COEs will be responsible for keeping the supplemental curriculum up-to-date, keeping blended learning components current and relevant, disseminating training to new institutions and instructors, linking with local and multinational businesses, and carrying the responsibility for project best practices'

sustainability beyond the life of the project.

Core technical activities under Component 3 include the following:

- Selection of COEs and the creation of a community of practice for COEs to share best practices in blended learning and other USAID COMET activities with one another through a sub-regional partnerships network.
- Development and delivery of Master Trainer modules
- Follow-up training to ensure uptake of both pedagogy and curriculum content in the network of Master Trainers

Key deliverables under Component 3 include:

- Selection of COEs and the development of a regional network to promote partnerships
- Development and delivery of Master Trainer modules
- Follow-up training to ensure uptake of both pedagogy and curriculum content in the network of Master Trainers

Progress Narrative – Component III

The Instructor Training Pilot was successfully implemented in collaboration with the Faculty of Engineering at Mahidol University, Google, Hewlett Packard (HP), and Dutch Mill, a Thai dairy products company. Cisco Systems and Intel Corporation observed and commented on the Blended Learning Simulation, and based on their improved understanding of USAID COMET's training approach, are preparing to offer additional support to the project. This pilot training was conducted to test USAID COMET's blended learning approach, which aims at delivering effective work readiness training to youth using innovative technology tools, existing online content and active, participatory student-centered methodologies. This blended learning approach comprise of three key components including 1) online learning, 2) face-to-face training and 3) workplace simulation. Additional reporting materials regarding the pilot training will be updated in the Q3 2015 Quarterly Report; Please see Annex A for additional documents.

The training was conducted at the Faculty of Engineering, Mahidol University, Salaya Campus from March 30-April 1. During the first two days, a total of 11 instructors were trained; three of the trained instructors then demonstrated the use of their new instructional skills in a half day of live simulation activities on written communication with 16 students from several engineering departments. In Q3, the team will provide technical and monitoring support to the instructors to assist them to implement the other modules to students in regular university classes. The other training modules include Effective Leadership, Team Building and Effective Presentations. A complete formative evaluation report summarizing the results, feedback, lessons learned and suggestions to improve the future training curriculum and approach will be available at the beginning of June.

2.9 Implementation Status: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

The Instructor Training Pilot focused on training in cross-cutting 21st Century work readiness skills relevant to STEM+AT sectors. Skills in high demand were identified through the Baseline Assessment, and were included in initial pilot of blended-learning modules for higher education teachers. This pilot modeled a learning environment that leverages existing online and classroom learning content (i.e., blended learning), appeals to students and teachers, and serves to invigorate private sector involvement in student learning and workforce preparation. The project will integrate lessons learned from the pilot, and use these to develop a template for continued USAID COMET training.

To develop the curriculum model, the USAID COMET field team worked in collaboration with EDC's Washington DC-based Instructional Designer/Curriculum Specialist. The team developed four modules for the pilot, following a three-step approach using online learning, face-to-face training and workplace simulation. USAID COMET used active and participatory learning techniques across all the three steps, with each step building upon the previous one. For the Instructor Training Pilot, HP LIFE provided online learning content, the interactive face-to-face content was adapted from the Work Ready Now! (WRN!) curriculum and the workplace simulation was developed from a real workplace situation provided by a local business – the dairy products company, Dutch Mill. The four pilot training modules introduced Google apps such as hangouts, Slides, YouTube and Gmail to encourage students to engage with technology as an active part of their work.

The USAID COMET team partnered with the Faculty of Engineering at Mahidol University to host the pilot. The Engineering Faculty nominated 10 instructors from all departments of the Faculty to fully attend and participate in the training. On the final day, three instructors conducted a live simulation session focusing on written communication with the participation of 16 students selected from all departments of the Faculty. The training pilot will serve as a model for future USAID COMET training activities.

Following the pilot training, the project will provide post-training technical and mentoring support for the instructors to roll out student sessions in their regular classes. All these activities will be implemented in Q3.

Since this was a pilot activity designed to help assess the viability of USAID COMET's training methodology, a formative evaluation protocol was conducted in parallel with the implementation of the pilot activities. The evaluation was developed to provide inputs on the effectiveness of using existing curricula that has been enhanced with blended learning components, the impact of simulations, the use of technology and online apps, role plays and other active learning methodologies, the role of instructional partners, the value of the linkage with a local business, and possibilities for scalability and sustainability. The USAID COMET M&E team created four surveys to collect formative evaluation data.

1. Training of Trainers Feedback Survey: designed to collect feedback from participants of the TOT. Respondents were instructors from the Faculty of Engineering who attended the training.
2. Student Feedback Survey: designed to collect feedback from participants of the student training which was on the last day of the pilot. Respondents were students from the Faculty of Engineering.
3. Observers Feedback Survey: designed to collect feedback from observers of the student pilot training. Respondents were guest observers of the event.
4. Instructors Feedback Survey: designed to collect feedback from instructors who conducted the training for students during the pilot. It also includes instructors who observed the training.

The formative evaluation for this pilot was created using Google. Analytics of the results will be shared in Q3.

2.10 Implementation Challenges: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

The USAID COMET team considered procuring 12 Chromebooks for use in the Instructor Training Pilot. During the implementation of the required USAID procurement procedures, the project learned that the procurement of the devices could not be completed before mid-April. This meant that their delivery would not be in time for their inclusion in the Pilot. The project team initially decided that the Pilot would not use procured Chromebooks, but rely on the participants' laptops and tablets for the technology-based activities. This was a viable alternative since Google Apps can be used with any Internet browser-capable device. However, one week before the training Google offered to loan a total of 27 Chromebooks for use in the Pilot.

In addition, the team planned to use Google Classroom during the pilot. Due to difficulties in registering to use Classroom the project elected to use Google Drive to provide online files and materials storage/retrieval. The project was finally given access to Google Classroom on March 20 and was able to successfully register the following week. The project will use this valuable online tool for future training.

The subaward with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been delayed pending the USAID COMET contract modification, in particular regarding alternative language for contract section H.7. The project expects to resume discussions with MIT once the contract modification is finalized

2.11 PMP Update: Component III, Developing Tomorrow's Leaders

Indicator # 3.2 Number of university instructors that receive training in innovative approaches to teaching in-demand skills in targeted STEM+AT fields as a result of USG assistance

Q2 Achievement: 12

Q2 Target: 0

Y1 Target (annually cumulative): 16

There are no targets for indicators 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6 in Y1.

It should be noted that although there no targets set for Y1 for indicator 3.5 “Percent of impacted [university] students that receive improved methods in the delivery of STEM+AT instruction are from rural communities in the Lower Mekong sub-region”, pending targets for Y2, Y3, Y4, and Y5 for this indicator will be set by the M&E team based on the findings from the Labor Market Assessment Baseline. The team aims to have the targets set in Q3 and share with USAID for any further discussion.

3. INTEGRATION OF CROSSCUTTING ISSUES AND USAID FORWARD PRIORITIES

3.1 Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

The USAID COMET project intends to address gender equality and female empowerment through project activities, by providing mechanisms to boost female participation in e-Learning or face-to-face training in STEM+AT in the Lower Mekong. An Institutional Capacity Baseline Assessment, to follow, will also provide supplemental information on female enrollment rates in regional universities, by area of STEM+AT focus. Together, these two baseline surveys will inform the particular strategies to be implemented by the project to address skills gaps and industry/labor market participation by gender.

3.2 Sustainability Mechanisms

The portal – and its associated functions of providing updated labor market information to jobseekers and facilitating regional Public Private Partnerships and institutional networks, is designed to be sustainable. Through the selection of Centers of Excellence, USAID COMET will identify candidate institutions capable of taking ownership of the portal within Year 5 of the project. The project will then provide on-going capacity building to enable the institution to learn the necessary Information Technology, Labor Market Forecasting, and/or other skills needed to maintain the portal.

In order to boost the sustainability of the portal, efforts will be made to define and explore the potential for creating a tiered service model for the portal, providing free access to jobseekers but potentially requiring a subscription fee from businesses seeking to hire through the portal or universities interested in participation. Fees would be intended to support the local host institution in an on-going manner, to fund portal maintenance as well as updated labor market surveys.

3.3 Environmental Compliance

In accordance with clause H.15 of the USAID COMET contract, EDC does not anticipate any ongoing or planned activities that would impact environmental compliance.

3.4 Local Capacity Development

IPSR is a research institute based in Thailand that conducts research specialized in population and development relevant to social, economic, reproductive health, and medical and public health fields. To collaborate effectively with IPSR to conduct research on labor market forecasting, the USAID COMET team briefed IPSR on issues related to the current context in the region on education, skills developed in schools (supply), skills required from employers (demand), and the capacity of educational institution in the region. In addition, as labor market analyses are a new focus area for IPSR, the USAID COMET team worked closely with IPSR during the initial development of tools, adjusting the tools after the pilot, and will provide technical support during the workshop for data collectors in January 2015. Throughout this process, USAID COMET ensured that the Employer Survey and the School Survey were in-line with the required data needed for the baseline. In addition, USAID COMET supported IPSR in developing the In-depth Interview guidelines for teachers, employers, and government officials, as well as the development of the Student Focus Group Discussion procedures for the data collectors.

USAID COMET has built the capacity of IPSR in the following ways:

- Review and finalization of data collection tools;
- Provision of data collection protocols;
- Desk research and producing the baseline report;
- Active participation in two data collection tools workshops (discussion, technical advice, etc.)
- Training/practice on data entry using online survey software (SurveyMonkey)
- Understanding of USAID guidelines and protocols

3.5 Public Private Partnership (PPP) and Global Development Alliance (GDA) Impacts

No activity this quarter.

3.6 Science, Technology, and Innovation Impacts

The key to USAID COMET's success will be to leverage support from the private sector. Therefore, the project aims to bring together a coalition of private sector technology partners, businesses active in key STEM+AT industries, and higher education centers of excellence to test, implement, and promote innovative approaches and technology applications and content to expanding skills in the Lower Mekong region. It is through

this coalition that USAID COMET expects to make significant impacts on innovation in STEM+AT training throughout the region.

Innovation

USAID COMET will establish an interactive portal to provide real-time content to learners/job seekers, employers, and universities and training institutions. The online project presence and the portal are dependent upon support and linkages existing content, expertise and technology. Portal innovations will depend on collaboration with cutting-edge technology partners. The project is already working with Google, Intel, Hewlett- Packard (HP), and Cisco Systems. More will be added as the project expands.

Beyond support for the portal, the project is seeking partners in mobile technology, online learning, and/or who have expertise in technical skills areas (such as electronics, automotive manufacturing, health sciences) to develop solutions to catalyze job growth in high demand industries in the sub-region.

Following the Instructor Training Pilot, which introduced novel and innovative classroom instruction, USAID COMET will provide post-training mentoring support for the instructors, additional interactive activities for the students and the business partner, and continuing support for the linkage between the host institution and the collaborating business. This approach effectively models a learning environment that leverages existing online and classroom learning content (i.e., blended learning), appeals to students and teachers, and serves to invigorate private sector involvement in student learning and workforce preparation.

Science and Technology

USAID COMET is focusing on key skill areas including science, technology, engineering, mathematics, accounting and tourism, also known as STEM+AT. Preliminary results of USAID COMET's baseline regional analysis have identified key sectors, both regionally and for each of USAID COMET's participating countries. As USAID COMET progresses, specific career pathways and related skills sets within each key industry will become areas of focus for the portal and blended learning curricula.

Key sectors and industries across the region include accounting, tourism, agriculture/aquaculture, automotive manufacturing and assembly, and electronics. Within each country, the key sectors and industries identified include:

- Cambodia: Light manufacturing and automotive parts production
- Lao PDR: Garment and textile manufacturing
- Myanmar: Real estate/construction and telecommunications
- Thailand: High value-added electronics, medical device manufacturing, and food processing
- Vietnam: Chemicals, real estate/construction, information technology, and ship building

4. STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION AND INVOLVEMENT

The successful implementation of the USAID COMET project will largely depend on the facilitation of innovative and dedicated partnerships between the governments, the private sector, civil society, donors, educational institutions and multi-lateral organization in order to secure workforce education and training in the Lower Mekong sub-region. In this quarter, the USAID COMET project implemented the following key activities to promote stakeholder participation and partnership:

- The USAID COMET Project Roadshow

From January 3-13, the USAID COMET COP together with the USAID Contracting Officer's Representative (COR), an ASEAN official responsible for education, youth and sport and the Google Emerging Markets Manager for Asia Pacific travelled to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to officially introduce the project to the USAID Mission, the Ministries of Education, universities and vocational schools, and bilateral donors. A greater understanding of the local needs, country specific contexts, and possible partnerships were gained during the visit to each country, and this information will help to define the design of the program and the implementation of activities. Following up from the trips, the team has continued discussions with potential universities and vocational school partners namely Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH), Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST) and Institute of Technology of Cambodia (ITC). The project is seeking to develop partnership with these universities and vocational school for the pilot following-on activities to test the USAID COMET training approach for technical skills training modules in the subsequent quarters.

- Partnership Database Initiative

To effectively facilitate management of current and potential partners, the USAID COMET team has established a partnership database through online survey application. The information will be used to refine partnership-building strategies. The online survey was designed and sent out to collect inputs from potential and existing partners. To date, the partnership database has collected about 23 existing and potential partners including corporate, NGOs, donors, education institutions, international organizations, USAID or other donor-funded projects and media design agencies. The database reports that those organizations are largely interested to provide professional/technical expertise to support the implementation of the project and secondly to provide training content support. Twenty-one of 23 organizations also reported that they would benefit from improved job and work related knowledge and experience among graduates in LM sub-region. The USAID COMET site, Mekongskills2work.org, also contains a fillable form for potential educational institutions or businesses to fill out. The fillable form is an abbreviated version of the online survey,

and is meant to function as an initial screen that provides data to USAID COMET to evaluate and to follow up with interested parties best suited to collaborating with the project.

- Partnership Development Efforts

In this quarter, the USAID COMET team met with about 20 organizations to explore possible partnerships and collaboration. Key stakeholder partnerships and collaborations being developed in this quarter to support current and future implementation activities of the USAID COMET project were summarized as below..

Institute of Population and Social Research (IPSR)

IPSR at Mahidol University is the USAID COMET partner in the baseline regional research. On February 27, 2015, USAID COMET submitted to USAID the IPSR-USAID COMET Regional Baseline Assessment report which included the Executive Summary, Full Report Narrative, and Appendices. USAID has provided feedback that the M&E team will make adjustments accordingly. The final report will be submitted to USAID on April 9.

Mahidol University

In early January, the USAID COMET team started implementing the identification of a university partner for the Instructor Training Pilot and Faculty of Engineering at Mahidol University was identified as one of two university candidates. In late January, the Engineering Faculty agreed to partnership with the USAID COMET project to host the pilot. A Letter of Intent to confirm and coordinate the mutual efforts was signed on February 23. The Engineering Faculty agreed to:

- Nominate up to 10 instructors from all departments of the Faculty to fully attend and participate in the pilot training on March 30 to April 1.
- Have one participant instructor conducting a live train-the-students showcase session with the participation of up to 20 students selected from all departments of the Faculty on April 1.
- Delivery of at least two train-the-students sessions from April to May.

Dutch Mill

The USAID COMET team met with Dutch Mill, a Thai dairy products company, in late January to explore partnership possibilities in the Instructor Training Pilot. Dutch Mill agreed to arrange a factory visit to its Nakorn Prathom province facility so that the project can collect more detailed information required for workplace scenario development. The project visited the Dutch Mill pasteurization factory in Nakorn Prathom on February 19. Senior factory management including the Plant Manufacturing Director, Head of the Engineering Department and the Plant Human Resources Manager, represented Dutch Mill. The meeting was very productive and two workplace scenarios were identified that could be integrated into the modules for the Pilot.

Google

On February 2, USAID, Google and the project joined the kick-off meeting to discuss integrating the use of technology into the USAID COMET training modules to roll out in the Instructor Training Pilot. Google introduced Kudosiz, an IT training start-up, to work with the project to plan the Pilot, training IT interventions and to effectively integrate Google Apps into the modules. Kudosiz also help design the formative questionnaires in relation to the effective use of technology in the blended learning approach. In addition to the technical assistance provided via Kudosiz, Google loaned a total of 27 Chromebooks for use in the pilot.

Google also provided the project with an official registration for Google Classroom on March 27. The project will explore the best ways to integrate Google Classroom in future training events and is considering tryout the Google Classroom with the planned training of master trainers in Q4.

South East Asian Ministers of Education Organization Secretariat (SEAMEO)

The USAID COMET met with SEAMEO to discuss initial areas of collaboration in late January. The Secretariat of SEAMEO agreed to connect the project team with VOCTECH (Center for Vocational Education) in Brunei to explore the possibility of sharing data and information of vocational schools in the five lower Mekong countries and identification of possible areas of promoting the USAID COMET modules at the regional level. In February, SEAMEO formally introduced the USAID COMET project to VOCTECH in Brunei suggesting that VOCTECH has data on vocational education in the five Lower Mekong countries and would be willing to share it with the project.

In March, the COP and M&E Manager met with the Deputy Director for Professional Affairs and Research Manager/Specialist, SEAMEO VOCTECH Regional Center to discuss about the USAID COMET Institutional Assessment. The SEAMEO VOCTECH Deputy Director assisted the project by forwarding a list of contacts in the Lower Mekong Region who could provide official information from each country. After the institutional assessment design is finalized by the project, the M&E Manager will share the study design including required profile information with VOCTECH. In addition, as a follow-up to the meeting, the Deputy Director confirmed that SEAMEO will invite the project to make a presentation to the SEAMEO Center Directors Meeting in Bangkok in May 2015.

Hewlett-Packard

The USAID COMET team has continued discussions with HP team since Q1 to identify possible collaboration. Out of the discussions with the HP team in this quarter, HP donated two Chromebooks in support to the USAID COMET Instructor Training Pilot as prizes for the participating instructor and student. Discussions for a long-term partnership will be continued in the next quarter as HP expressed a keen interest to support the scale up of the training and to develop partnerships with the COEs.

Intel

USAID, Intel and the USAID COMET team continued exploring possible areas of collaboration under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Intel and USAID. Scope of collaborative activities included the provision of technical inputs for portal development, technology training support to COEs, and technology competitions for USAID COMET leadership conferences were identified and will be added to the USAID/Intel MOU.

Volunteers in Asia (VIA)

The USAID COMET team explored possible partnership with Volunteers in Asia (VIA) and one possibility of using VIA fellows to provide technical staffing support for the project was identified. VIA sent a concept note to the project for consideration. The project team is reviewing the concept note and considering strategic partnership approaches. In-depth discussions with VIA to develop the partnership will be continued in the next quarter.

Institute of Technical Education (ITE)

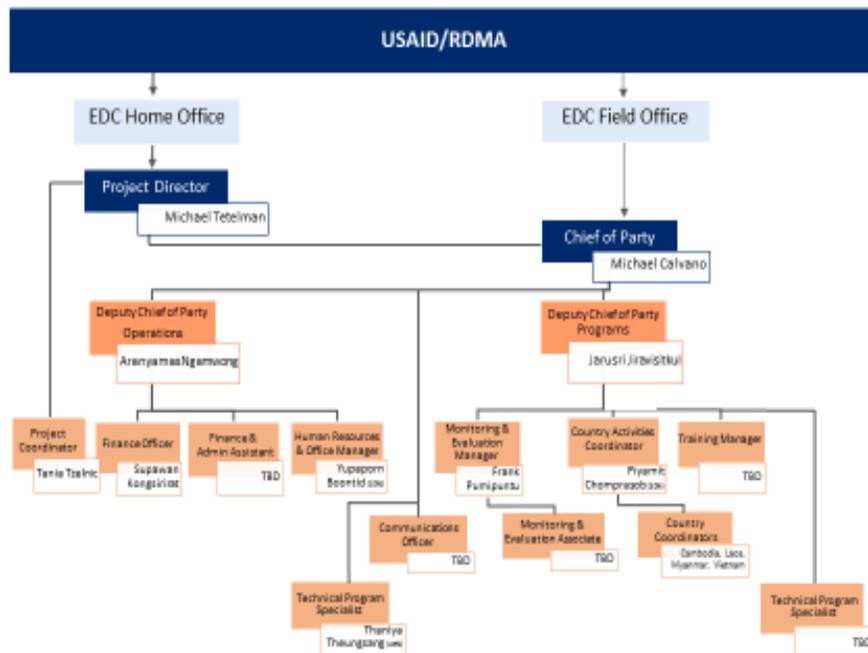
The USAID COMET COP met with the Institute of Technical Education (ITE) in Singapore in early January 2015. Following the meeting, ITE submitted a proposal to the USAID COMET project proposing four training programs to promote the leadership capacity of TVETs in the area of blended learning and the use of technology in March 2015. In addition to the reviewing of the submitted proposal, the project team is exploring a possibility of establishing a long-term regional technical partnership with ITE as an alternate to MIT should does not work out due to USAID intellectual property requirement.

5. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

STAFFING

In the second quarter, the project continued to operate from its Bangkok-based office. In January 2015, priority was placed on completing the renovation and expansion of EDC's original office to include space for the entire USAID COMET project. The expanded office was completed in early February 2015.

The project reviewed staffing needs and finalized the project organization chart which includes the following positions as captured below in the organizational chart that will work to provide management oversight and implement the USAID COMET project activities in Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar.



The project also prioritized efforts to identify and/or mobilize staff for the following positions:

- Chief of Party
- Deputy Chief of Party – Operations
- Deputy Chief of Party – Programs
- Finance Officer
- Monitoring and Evaluation Manager
- Human Resources and Office Manager
- Country Activities Coordinator
- Administrative and Finance Assistant
- Communications Officer
- Training Manager
- Technical Program Specialist (Communications)

All of the above mentioned staff with the exception of the Communications Officer, Training Manager, Technical Program Specialist, and Administrative and Finance Assistant have been contracted. Recruitment for the vacant positions continues. Section 8.1 below details the efforts made to hire a full-time Communications Officer, which has been challenging to date.

Recruitment of M&E Associate and Country Coordinators in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam will be reviewed and refined in the third quarter given the need for better support in rolling out project technical and M&E activities in upcoming quarters.

STTA

During the past quarter, the project received technical assistance and support from the following EDC Home Office technical staff who were instrumental in making sure that the financial and accounting, and IT systems were set up and operational and key project deliverables were completed on time.

- **EDC's Senior Financial Analyst** provided two-week training and worked with the project staff on EDC and USAID financial systems and procedures.
- **EDC's Director of Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Team** worked with the project team to define M&E activities and draft the M&E Plan. She also worked with IPSR at Mahidol University to review and finalize the baseline assessment tools.
- **EDC's Instructional Designer and Facilitator** for the Instructor Training Pilot took the lead in the preparations for the Training Pilot and facilitation of the training during the three-day event held at the Faculty of Engineering, Mahidol University.
- **EDC's Director of International Security** conducted a project risk assessment, conducted training for USAID COMET staff on project security policies, and developed a project emergency action plan and evacuation plan.
- **EDC's International Project Coordinator** assisted with the instructional design for Instructor Training Pilot, joined planning discussions for the formative assessment, as well as subsequent USAID COMET training activities, including the anticipated MTOTs, and participated in the development of the project's social media strategy.

Other EDC-supported IT Assistance (there was no use of project funds for these STTAs)

- **EDC's Vice President and Chief Technology Officer** conducted a review of the IT system and developed IT improvement and support service plans for EDC Bangkok Office as well as for USAID COMET Project.
- **EDC's Service Technician** worked with staff to upgrade IT services, identify IT support service requirements and a potential service provider.

KEY PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND SUBMISSIONS

In the past quarter the project completed and submitted the following deliverables to USAID/RDMA:

Deliverable	Submission Date
• Draft of the Regional Baseline Assessment (focused on the desk analysis component)	January 5
• First quarterly progress report	January 15
• Life of project work plan	January 16
• Final M&E Plan including the M&E work plan and budget	January 27
• Pipeline and Financial Report for FY15Q1	January 30
• Final Year 1 Work Plan	February 11
• Scope of work for the development of MekongSkills2Work website	February 11
• Website wireframes	February 19
• Final regional baseline report entitled, "Regional Baseline STEM+AT Labor Market Assessment 2015,"	February 27
• Launching of MekongSkills2work twitter site	March 30
• Launching of the Mekongskills2work.org site	April 6

6. LESSONS LEARNED

During this quarter, the project began in-depth technical work. In many cases, the activities implemented this quarter were designed as learning experiences that were reviewed so that the lessons learned from the experiences could inform subsequent activities as the project grows and scales up. These include the Baseline Assessment Instructor, Instructor Training Pilot, the design and implementation of the online component, and institution selection and participation. It is expected that this learning approach will continue over the life of the project so that as the project matures, its activities and results will reflect a growth-based model. Some of the lessons learned this quarter include the following.

- All Baseline Assessment survey questions should be reviewed and updated to reflect the results and trends from the current report. Other questions that may arise during the course of Year 1 activities should be considered for inclusion.
- The Baseline Assessment collected primary data from three sources, institutions, students and businesses. Some 90 businesses were surveyed. However, not all

levels of businesses were included and not all the key sectors were included since the key sectors were only confirmed as a result of the analysis. In the next annual assessment, the business surveys should be expanded, should include all the key sectors for in each country, and should survey a selection of large scale businesses such as multinationals, local national businesses and SMEs. A larger sample should be considered.

- Better and more up-to-date telecommunications and Internet usage data should be obtained. This is needed to more accurately reflect the current status of IT device, smart phone, cell phone and Internet penetration in each country. This will assist the project to make more informed decisions on how to select and apply information technology to support project activities.
- The Instructor Training Pilot was designed as a formative evaluation activity. This means that many questions were asked concerning the structure of the training, its effectiveness, implementation, and other pertinent factors. The formative evaluation report should be carefully considered and the lessons learned from the pilot should advise the two curricula planned for the EAls. One specific recommendation regarding the participation of the local business has already been discussed. There needs to be a stronger link established with the local business partner, and it should be involved more directly in the training activities.

Establishing a strong link with the local business partner is critical to their substantive and sustained commitment to the training. While the project did hold several meetings with both the corporate human resources level and at the factory management level, this was not enough to garner in-depth support from Dutch Mill. Dutch Mill declined to allow the use of its logo on the events banners and announcements. They told the project that seeking corporate approvals was too complicated. The project saw this as an indication that the relationship with the project did not warrant the effort to recognize it officially. Further, involving actual Dutch Mill managers in the workplace simulation could not be arranged. The factory managers did not see the value added for them and respectfully declined to take time to participate actively in the simulation.

The project and later the training institutions will need to develop and implement a long-term strategy to engage, and sustain close and in-depth collaboration with local business partners. Based on the business inputs to the baseline assessment, they see activities such as internships, mentoring and on-the-job training support as effective ways to improve workforce competence, and add a valuable return on their investment to become more involved in pre-graduate workforce training activities.

- University faculty participating in the Blended Learning Pilot were most excited about the new instructional methodologies and techniques they learned. Active and participative approaches and applications for students enlivened the learning and raised the motivation of both students and instructors during the Pilot

activities. Most instructors asked for more support in this area. Based on this feedback, the project will develop an active learning tool kit that can be shared with those instructors who would like more help in implementing active learning in their instruction. The Centers of Excellence will be responsible for providing and training partner institutions in the use of toolkits over the longer term.

- The online component is designed to take advantage of user analytics and an iterative process of gradual refinement of the website as it is evolved into the workforce portal. Several private sector partners, namely Intel and Google have offered to assist in the development of the portal. The project should take advantage of these offers.
- The project has made extensive efforts to engage a variety of private sector partners in USAID COMET. To date, the project has either held multiple discussions or actively collaborated with nearly 30 partners. These potential and active partners run the gamut from savvy world and local players in development with strong Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) policies and strategies to those that seem to be new to the philanthropic side of business and extremely naive at how to approach their involvement for the mutual benefit of the partners. For newcomers, their interests would best be served by hiring staff that have international development experience and also experience in the area of focus, in our case, education and training. Marketing specialists can sell products, and technical specialists can design products, but they do not know how to work in development. Businesses with mature and effective CSR programs approach their activities with long-term goals and return on investment in mind. They think like development specialists. They do not use CSR as a means to short-cutting business development in emerging markets. Working with CSR-mature corporate partners is a pleasure for USAID COMET and adds real value to the supported activities. Working with the newcomers can be frustrating and counter-productive.
- As the project enters Q3, visits to the five pre-selected institutions that will serve as EAls will be made to negotiate their participation. Effort should be made to seek their recommendations on how to improve partnering arrangements and conditions.

7. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

Planned Activities for Next Quarter	
Activities	Outputs and Deadlines
COMPONENT 1: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLED WORKFORCE	
1.1 Develop and implement Baseline results dissemination strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reader-friendly info-graphics and PowerPoint presentations to disseminate regional baseline results (April 2015) • Dissemination of the regional baseline results to targeted business sectors, including members of

	the local American Chambers of Commerce, in each lower Mekong country (May 2015)
1.2 Management of social media site: Mekongskills2work Twitter and Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce digital campaigns that will drive traffic to the Mekong Skills2Work website to access content and services (April 2015 and onward) • Post 2 tweets/day on Twitter that uses website content and interactive elements derived from the labor market assessment and other relevant document resources such as infographics, online focus sessions, and feedback polls (April 2015 and onward) • Develop editorial calendar of survey questions and interesting content that feeds traffic to the Mekong Skills2Work website (April 2015 and onward) • Research and begin developing audience personas (hypotheses) initially informed by data from the completed baseline study for each stakeholder group that will be elaborated and refined based on feedback and reactions to the offerings by the intended users (April 2015 and onward) • Transition of Lower Mekong Initiative Facebook page to Mekong Skills2Work Facebook page (May 2015) • Identify existing online resources and conduct design charrettes to augment with desired resources to prepare elements for consideration for inclusion as the web site begins to evolve to a full-fledged portal by Phase 3 (June 2015 and onward) • Refine the personas and add other targeted subgroups to expand the design representation of key stakeholders (June 2015 and onward) • Iterate the Mekong Skills2Work website based on metrics of success/analytics (June 2015 and onward)
1.3 Takeover of Social media site – Lower Mekong Initiative Facebook page	
1.4 Evolution of Mekong Skills2Work website to portal	
COMPONENT 2: TRAINING TODAY'S WORKFORCE (VOCATIONAL)	
2.1 Curriculum outline development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping of existing post-secondary vocational curricula from completed institutional capacity assessments with EAs (June 2015) • Consultation workshop with key experts including vocational school instructors and STEM+AT expert(s) (July 2015)
2.2 Development of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitators guides developed (May and June 2015)

instructional tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of formative evaluation plan and refinement of the testing modules (May and June 2015) • Curriculum Development (June 2015 and onwards)
2.3 Selection of one to two Educational Advisory Institutions (vocational)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One to two vocational schools selected to join the network of Educational Advisory Institutions to support Year 1 model testing (June 2015)
3.4 Selection of Master Trainers from EAI(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of selection criteria and qualifications of master trainer (June 2015) • Identification of roles and duties of EAI(s) and master trainers (June 2015) • Four Master Trainers from each EAI selected (June 2015)
COMPONENT 3: DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS (HIGHER EDUCATION)	
3.1 Instructor Training Pilot Initiative follow-on activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least two train-the-students courses delivered by the trained instructors (April-May 2015) • Additional modules covering both 21st century work readiness/soft-skills and STEM+AT technical skills will be developed after the pilot and will be informed by the three-day teaching and learning experience (April 2015 and onward) • Evaluation results of the pilot-tested modules (May 2015)
3.2 Institutional capacity assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of higher education and TVET institutes data (Carry over from February 2015) • Development of institutional capacity assessment and risks assessment tools (May 2015) • Institutional capacity assessment report completed (June 2015)
3.3 Selection of three to five Educational Advisory Institutions (higher education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three to five universities join the network of Educational Advisory Institutions (June 2015)
3.4 Selection of Master Trainers from EAIs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of selection criteria and qualifications of master trainer (June 2015) • Identification of roles and duties of EAIs and master trainers (June 2015) • Four Master Trainers from each EAI selected (June 2015)
Upcoming Events	
Month	Event
April 2015	USAID RDMA and the USAID COMET project will visit Yangon and Mandalay from April 6-10, to introduce the project to interested stakeholders and prospective

	partners.
April 2015	USAID COMET will provide a brief description of the project to the ASEAN SOM-ED to be held in Hanoi, Vietnam from April 23-24.
May 2015	Cisco Systems Thailand has invited USAID COMET to the Cisco Networking Academy Partner Summit to be held from May 21-22, in Bangkok. The Summit will bring together approximately 100 delegates from 15 countries in the region, with a significant number from the ASEAN region. USAID COMET will make a presentation to the Summit on the project.

8. COMMUNICATIONS

8.1 Recruitment

The USAID COMET project continues to place a strong emphasis on communications to promote project innovations and successes to a diverse set of audiences. The project's communication requirements follow two distinct tracts. The first focuses on what can be considered more traditional USAID communications products such as press releases, success stories, highlights of project activities, contractually mandated reporting, and even messaging for social media, while the second tract requires knowledge and experience with online communications, digital marketing, and the use of web analytics to drive social media and website usership and the user-defined design of the project's workforce portal. The two-tract nature of USAID COMET's communications has required a non-traditional approach to fulfilling the project's communications needs, one that separates the traditional communications products from the online requirements. After early attempts to recruit one communications specialist for both tracts failed, the project is now pursuing a two-tract approach to recruitment.

To cover the online tract, USAID COMET is assembling a team to oversee social media, MekongSkills2Work portal, and other communication channels outlined by USAID/RDMA. The project has contracted, on a short-term basis, a Communications Specialist to work on the design of the online component and prepare a social media messaging strategy. The consultant has helped outline a social media and web development strategy that focuses on generating user traffic, and refining website design and content to better fit the interests and needs of the target audiences. The project is still in the process of identifying a Communications Officer to cover the more traditional communications needs.

8.2 Improvement and updates of outreach materials to different target audiences

USAID COMET builds upon partnerships between the private sector, governments, and education institutions for program implementation and success. In order to engage different target audiences, USAID COMET is in the process of developing various outreach materials, tailored to the different stakeholders' needs. A Project Briefer for education institutions and the Blended Learning Training Model has been drafted and in the process of being finalized. Additional project documents tailored to different stakeholders are expected for the new quarter. USAID COMET is also in the process of developing documents customized for different industry sectors, and geographical areas.

8.3 Success story and press release

An official press release drafted by the USAID COMET communications team was finalized by USAID/RDMA and publicized on April 1, 2015 on the USAID Asia Flickr site. News about the press release was also shared on both the USAID Asia and MekongSkills2Work Twitter page. Instructors and the Dean from the Faculty of Engineering, Mahidol University who participated in the Instructor Training Pilot have also been notified about the press release.

A success story has also been submitted to USAID/RDMA for approval on [insert date]. The story highlights the mind shift of students and teachers after being exposed to the USAID COMET Blended Learning Curriculum, shifting from the lecture-based learning approach to an active, participatory pedagogy that utilizes technology and real workplace situations in the classrooms. The document explores possibilities of future implications in both the institutional level, as well as regionally.

8.4 Participation in the USAID communication workshop

On March 5, 2015, USAID COMET's Country Activities Coordinator and Technical Program Specialist attended the networking meeting for USAID project's communications staff. The meeting focused on creating effective infographics as outreach materials. At the meeting, tips on the basics of infographics were presented, and case studies of different types of infographics were discussed. The project has harnessed the best practices taken from the meeting and has applied them in the production of outreach materials.

9. HOW IMPLEMENTING PARTNER HAS ADDRESSED A/COR COMMENTS FROM THE LAST QUARTERLY OR SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT

No comments for corrective action were included from the last report.

ANNEX A. BLENDED LEARNING PILOT

1. Blended Learning Two-Pager



USAID COMET
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

USAID Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training

Blended Learning Training Model

Google and HP are collaborating with instructors from the Faculty of Engineering, Mahidol University to implement a trial of the USAID COMET Blended Learning Curriculum.

Blended Learning Approach

- 1 ONLINE LEARNING**
Online training program with interactive, self-paced content and full of practical exercises followed by a local face-to-face wrap session.
- 2 FACE-TO-FACE TRAINING**
Enhance the e-learning experience by fostering more in-depth knowledge through sharing and group exercises.
- 3 WORKPLACE SIMULATION**
Real life workplace situations are played out in the classroom with the option for employer participation.

Blended-Learning Approach
USAID COMET approach for delivering effective work readiness training to youth using innovative technology tools.

Using Technology for Education

Technology tools are used to aid organization and collaboration. Learners use Google and other online productivity tools such as Hangouts, Slides, Sheets, YouTube and Gmail to solve workplace challenges and collaborate. Learning resources are stored in the cloud using Google Drive, Dropbox, or other online storage systems and is used by learners to organize their work.

Teaching Students

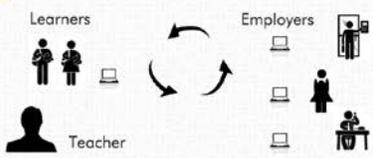
Active and participatory learning techniques are used across all 3 steps of the USAID COMET Blended Learning Curriculum. Each step builds upon the previous one, culminating in the workplace simulation activity. Each module topic is covered through the 3 step model. Here are some examples of modules in the curriculum:

- Teamwork & Cooperation
- Written Communication
- Giving Presentations
- Effective Leadership

Simulation with Employers

Learners have a chance to apply the lessons learned from the online learning and face-to-face training in a workplace simulation. These classroom-based simulations all include an option for real engagement with real employers.

For each module, instructors provide students with a workplace problem or challenge, which requires collaborative work with their colleagues to solve. For example, learners may need to talk to their technicians, sales, and logistics team to solve a particular issue such as accommodating a delivery that does not fit on the loading dock.



Learners Employers Teacher

II. Press Release

USAID Leads New Initiative to Expand Job Prospects and Workforce Development in Lower Mekong Countries

NAKORN PATHOM, Thailand, April 2, 2015 — Students in Southeast Asia may soon have education better tailored to the marketplace under a new training model piloted by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in partnership with Google, Inc. It puts businesses in the driver's seat with university partners in shaping practical education that will enable job-ready graduates to communicate well in a team and meet the needs of industry.

At a three-day training program this week at Mahidol University's Faculty of Engineering, professors learned how to go beyond theory to use technology and apply workplace scenarios from factories to their courses so students better understand their future work responsibilities.

This training will help the USAID Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID COMET) project further scale up this approach to other technical colleges and universities in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to strengthen workforce competitiveness in a range of sectors.

"It's vital to bridge the gap between the private sector and education institutions to increase the number of youth with the right skills to meet the needs of local employers. This will create new opportunities for youth and help them move their communities and countries forward," said Michael Yates, director of USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia.

This training is part of the U.S. Government's support for the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI). USAID COMET will work with more than 100 selected technical colleges and universities in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam over the next five years. The project will focus on communications, teamwork and technical skills related to science, technology, engineering accounting and tourism.

Dutch Mill, a local dairy products company in Thailand, participated in the training by providing real-life scenarios relating to production line efficiency and safety and efficient packaging and distribution. Participants discussed how clear communication among engineers and other employees is key to avoiding problems on the production line.

Hewlett-Packard and Google donated Chromebook laptop computers to the training, which helped the instructors and trainers carry out activities that directly enhance work readiness skills, such as leadership, communications and team collaboration. For example, the students worked on the same document at the same time through Google Docs to build teamwork and IT skills.

According to businesses based in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, the need for skilled graduates is clear. In a recent USAID study of employers in the Lower Mekong countries (Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and

Vietnam), nearly 80 percent indicated that they are currently looking to hire new staff, most commonly in order to expand the scope of their businesses. However, only 15 percent of the employers surveyed reported that education institutions in these countries are doing a good job in preparing the workforce they need. Surveyed companies identified lack of language skills, teamwork, and technical skills as the three most significant skills gaps in their current workforce.

The study also noted that in Vietnam, an employer commented that students who received high grades in school could fulfill only 50 to 70 percent of the job requirements. In Burma, employers from leading industries including agriculture, fisheries, telecommunications and tourism said about half of new hires needed more training to meet basic job requirements.

Preparing Youth for Work – Bringing the Workplace into Classrooms!

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND INSTRUCTORS BENEFIT FROM AN INNOVATIVE BLENDED-LEARNING APPROACH

“What I experienced at the workplace simulation was unique. It really showed what it is like in real life, and required us to use real problem solving skills.”

Narat Suchartsunthorn, a fourth year Computer Engineering at Mahidol University in Thailand is happy to be completing his Bachelor’s degree this Spring. He loves working with technology, and aspires to become an entrepreneur. In his regular classes, Narat has learned a lot of technical skills – such as computer-aided design, but he has yet to experience the world of work or test out his skills in a real workplace.

Narat, along with 19 of his peers at Mahidol University, were recently challenged to solve a genuine workplace problem; one that actually occurred at a local dairy company. The problem involved a miscommunication between the sales and receiving departments resulted in lost revenue to the company when a shipment of raw milk arrived on pallets that were the wrong size. Role playing as employees, the students taking part in the challenge assumed the roles of supervisors, sales representatives, suppliers, and warehouse associates to apply newly learned technology and communication, and teamwork skills to work together to identify the problem and to put in place a long-term solution. Leveraging Gmail, Google Hangouts, and face-to-face interactions, they collaborated to solve this challenge. “I wish that more classes would teach like this: more interaction with students, more chances for us to move around, and show us how we will get to use it in real life.”

This challenge was part of the USAID Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training (USAID COMET) project, which brought together private sector partners such as Google, Hewlett-Packard, and Dutch Mill, together with Mahidol University to train instructors and students on its active and participatory Blended-Learning Curriculum. As part of its broader effort under the Lower Mekong Initiative to improve youth employment utilizing technology-based solutions in classrooms, the project weaves

together interactive online tools and face-to-face interactions to prepare youth for work. The curriculum moves beyond the traditional theory based teaching, providing Narat and his peers the opportunity to experience the applied skills that employers look for when making decisions about hiring. Indeed, the project's recent baseline labor assessment found that businesses in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam would like to hire more workers, but are looking specifically with those with applied skills and knowledge about communications and technology.

“At first I thought that this was just going to be a technical training on technology, which I’ve experienced before, so I wasn’t too excited about [this training]. I was wrong! It was really relevant to see the link on how we can use each of these tools and skills in real life,” Narat explains. “I want to create apps that many people will use – and while I get to learn how to program [in the university], classes like this, even when it’s about a dairy company, will help me work with people in the real world successfully.” Many businesses in the region agree, reporting that work readiness skills such as teamwork, communications, time management, and adaptability are crucial for their employees’ success.

Especially with the upcoming launch of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) that will promote the free flow of skilled labor across the region, youth like Narat will need to compete with graduates from other countries for available jobs. Narat, and other students like him will benefit from developing skills through interactive activities and technology that are aligned with the labor market needs. “This kind of training will help our young generation cope with the changing workplace environment and the upcoming impact of the AEC,” Professor Phattanard Phattanasri, participant of the instructor training adds.

At an institutional level, “we must train the teachers to change their mind sets and techniques in order to keep up with the dynamic environment in the classrooms and the workplace. This teacher training content is very relevant, important, and timely,” reflects Professor Worawit Israngkul, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Mahidol University.

USAID COMET will continue to provide trainings and support on private sector partnership development, and long term strategic and programmatic planning to education institutions. Over the next five years, USAID COMET will work with more than 100 selected technical colleges and universities in the Lower Mekong Sub-region to prepare youth to enter the workforce in ASEAN growth industries

For students like Narat, the experience made it clear that success in the workplace involves far more than theory and technical skills. Narat explained that “online learning, discussing things together in class, and then trying out what I learned in a work simulation helped me understand the concepts much easier than hearing a lecture about it. What I experienced at the workplace simulation was unique. It really showed me what having a job is like in real life, and required me to use real problem solving skills.”



1Narat (right) applying his skills on written communications and technology tools in a workplace simulation in the USAID COMET Blended-Learning Curriculum.