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Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
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ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
COMET	Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training
COR	contracting officer's representative
EAs	Education Advisory Institutions
EDC	Education Development Center, Inc.
ELF	English Language Fellow
IPSR	Institute for Population and Social Research, Mahidol University
LM	Lower Mekong
LMI	Lower Mekong Initiative
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MTOT	master training of trainers
NGO	nongovernmental organizations
PMEP	performance monitoring and evaluation plan
PPP	public-private partnerships
RFA	request for applications
RFP	request for proposals
SEAMEO	South East Asian Ministers of Education Secretariat Office
STEM+AT	science, technology, engineering, mathematics and accounting and tourism
TOT	training of trainers
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VIA	Volunteers in Asia
WBL	work-based learning

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This quarter witnessed some catalytic moments for the USAID COMET project. At the end of March, COMET hosted its first Annual Leadership Summit (Summit). Administrators and instructors from the 12 new Mekong Learning Center (MLC) grantees attended the Summit, along with key partners and stakeholders such as USAID, US Department of State, private sector companies (e.g., Intel, Cisco, RingMD), other donor organizations (e.g., the World Bank), and partner institutions (e.g., Wedu, ITE). The Summit represented the birth of the powerful human and knowledge network that COMET embodies and brings together to address critical skills challenges across the Lower Mekong sub-region. During the Summit, the MLC grantees received their first in-depth exposure to such key issues as the use of technology, monitoring and evaluation, and roles and responsibilities for grants management. Following the Summit, the grantees spent a week in an intensive training-of-trainers activity (TOT), becoming immersed in the issues surrounding blended learning, improved pedagogy, project-based learning, and student-centered assessment. During the subsequent months, the USAID COMET team conducted intensive onsite visits and provided virtual support to help the MLC instructors start to actively embed the new teaching practices into their classrooms, with the goal of revolutionizing the way that youth and job seekers are prepared for the workforce.

Significantly, USAID COMET continued to deepen and expand its efforts in data-driven modeling and knowledge management and exchange. For example, it has selected a vendor to develop the core architecture for the interactive portal. COMET is also conducting an extensive array of youth employment surveys across the MLCs to (1) gather crucial baseline data about employment outcomes and (2) refine project activities to ensure youth, educational institutions, and employers are effectively aligned.

The USAID COMET project also sought to expand its outreach and innovation efforts. Most notably, this included significant progress on the YSEALI Innovation Challenge, arguably one of the most highly visible and cutting-edge programs taking place in the international workforce development environment today. In this challenge, student teams across the Lower Mekong Initiative sub-region, as well as in Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines, are developing technology-based solutions to problems related to the food chain. From an initial first round that featured hundreds of applicants, the project selected 10 semi-finalist teams to compete at a bootcamp in Singapore in early July. Technology partners Cisco and Intel are at the forefront in sponsoring the competition and providing technical guidance to the teams, along with partners, such as Wedu, who are providing invaluable mentoring support.

USAID COMET continued its active and effective partnerships efforts as well. This included the pilot with Google to introduce an Internet server/cache that enables content to be downloaded and accessed in low bandwidth environments. MLC partner LANITH

(Laos) is the site for the pilot, which is already showing exciting results in terms of the content that learners are accessing as well as providing valuable lessons learned for accessing content in other rural environments. USAID COMET is also extending efforts to partner with local and national employers. This will be crucial to its WBL (WBL) initiatives, which will provide learners with critical applied and experiential learning and networking opportunities.

This quarter, the project finalized its agreement with Volunteers in Asia (VIA). VIA's highly skilled and motivated volunteers have received their orientation and have been deployed at the MLCs. The VIA Fellows will act as the crucial "eyes and ears" of the project to ensure quality and also serve as liaisons with private industry and the MLCs.

Looking forward to next quarter, USAID COMET intends to strengthen efforts at solidifying WBL (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, job shadowing) across the MLC network.

Toward that end, USAID COMET has developed a robust human and institutional infrastructure and network so that it is poised to help significantly boost skills, improve firm competitiveness, and enhance the social and economic prosperity of ASEAN. It is imperative that the project continue to have the necessary level of resources to accomplish the following:

- Deepen engagement with the MLCs and its partners
- Continue with the Innovation Challenges
- Further strengthen monitoring and evaluation efforts
- Help the MLCs take advantage of other opportunities, such as entrepreneurship and offline technologies (e.g., robotics)

With the encouragement of USAID, the project has applied for supplemental funding for these activities.

Following is the status of the project's indicators:

Indicators

Indicator 1: Number of workforce development initiatives completed as a result of USG participation in public-private partnership

Fifteen initiatives in the form of university and vocational school courses were conducted by nine instructors from the Institute of Technology Cambodia, Mahidol University and Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality. These instructors incorporated and delivered MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook content into their courses such as Topographic Surveying, Restaurant Operation, Geography for Tourism & Hospitality, Engineering Mechanic, and Process Simulation. Instructors in the remaining Mekong Learning Centers (MLCs) will start to teach their courses with MekongSkills2Work content in quarter 4 of this year.

Thirty-three out of 63 (52%) initiative targets have been achieved thus far this year. This target should be met by the end of the fourth quarter in FY2016.

Indicator 1.1: Number of university/ vocational school instructors who register with the USAID COMET online portal

This indicator will be reported by the end of the fourth quarter of this year as the USAID COMET web portal will be opened for administrator and instructor registration in August 2016.

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

An average of 41,772 people per month were reached and engaged by the USAID COMET online portal and social media sites during this quarter. This is an approximate increase of 30% from the previous quarter where our program reached an average of 32,212 people each month. This increase came from the average audience reach of 24,935 unique visitors who saw 37 social media and website posts related to USAID COMET in each month. We have also gained an average of 11,905 new likes on the LMI Facebook page per month which has now expanded our Facebook community to over 270,000 people. For social media engagement, online users made an average of 4,933 actions (likes, comments, shares and retweets) within our social media channels per month during the last quarter.

For the cumulative result from October 2015 to June 2016, an average of 33,336 people were reached by our project, exceeding our monthly target of 10,000 people by 333%.

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

No additional vocational school trainers received MekongSkills2Work training in this quarter.

Indicator 2.6: Percent of impacted [vocational] students that receive improved methods in the delivery of STEM+AT instruction are connected to the online workforce portal

The result of this indicator will be reported in Year 3 after the web portal is launched and promoted to the students.

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

No new university trainers received MekongSkills2Work training in this quarter.

Indicator 3.6: Percent of impacted [university] students that receive improved methods in the delivery of STEM+AT instruction are connected to the online workforce portal

Like indicator 2.6, the result of this indicator will be reported in year 3 after the web portal is launched and promoted to the students.

A. COMPONENT 1: CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND SKILLED WORKFORCE

MekongSkills2Work Portal Development: Fostering Regional Learning Initiatives Using Innovative Approaches

The project is developing a dynamic Web portal for the MekongSkills2Work Network that will integrate an evolving set of Web-based resources, services, and online communities with a variety of social media tools. The portal will support learning initiatives across the Lower Mekong region while featuring innovative approaches to job and internship matching, curricula, and updated labor market information for job seekers. The portal will eventually serve as the career pathway hub for the skilled workforce—providing instructors with classroom-based tools, connecting business partners to institutions and learners, and updating youth on career and labor market information.

In this quarter, the project successfully recruited a vendor for the Web portal using the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) approach. The successful vendor has eight years of experience in developing role-based, high-complexity websites to contribute to the development of the MekongSkills2Work Web portal. A briefing session, which covered a brief introduction to USAID COMET and the requirements needed to develop a portal, was conducted for the vendor. The project worked with the vendor to develop information architecture documents, including an overall sitemap, a wireframe, and a visual design document. The Web portal is expected to have a modern and cutting edge design that is appealing to youth and job seekers, the primary target audiences. In alignment with the project's sustainability goals, the MVP portal architecture will be relatively simple and cost-effective and designed using an open source platform (Drupal 8) so that the project will be able to transition management of the portal to a third party.

Once the design is finalized, work on the portal will move to the implementation and production stage. Development is currently on track, and the MekongSkills2Work portal is expected to be completed by the end of September 2016.

Web Database Management System

In order to support the data collection of USAID COMET's performance indicators from participating MLCs, the project has hired a website development company to build a Web database management system. This system will allow MLC administrators, instructors, and learners to create a personal profile and submit indicator data, such as

the number of learners in the faculty or department of each MLC, the number of instructors who received training from the USAID COMET project, and the percent of learners who use the Web portal. The database system is expected to be completed and in use by administrators, instructors, and learners by the end of August 2016 and connected with the MekongSkills2Work portal around the end of September 2016. The first batch of indicator data from the 12 MLCs will be reported in the October 2016 annual report.

Youth Employment Survey: Revealing Impacts of Improved Instruction on Employability

While the benefits of improved instruction might take years to impact job seekers' lives in the form of stable and steady employment, the project seeks to measure short-term employment outcomes in accordance with its USAID Indicator #4.6.3-2:

Number of persons receiving new or better employment (including better self-employment) as a result of participation in USG-funded workforce development projects.

The project is planning an evaluation that will occur in three rounds:

- The first round will be implemented in Year 2 (baseline).
- The second round will be in Year 3 (midline).
- The third round will be in Year 5 (endline).

The three rounds of data collection will allow evaluators to capture the effects of project activities on the employment outcomes of learners turned job seekers who benefited from improved instruction supported by USAID COMET's training activities. Year 5 outcomes will be compared to Year 2 and Year 3 outcomes to showcase the longitudinal effect of the project's instructor-training activity and to identify trends that may indicate longer term impact.

This evaluation study makes use of equivalent-group longitudinal design (with both an intervention and a comparison group). The intervention group is composed of 12 MLCs from the five Lower Mekong countries, and the comparison group schools are recruited on the basis of having learners with similar demographic characteristics and similar academic concentrations.

Data collection for each round is a two-step process:

- Step 1 takes place before graduation day. Graduating learners answer survey questions related to demographics, employment preparation, and job-seeking behaviors.
- Step 2 occurs six months after graduation day. The same cohort of learners will answer a similar survey but with questions related to employment and the quality

of employment (e.g., job demands, salary, benefits, security, flexibility, and well-being).

As of June 2016, data collection for Step 1 has begun. Twelve MLCs have been enrolled in the study, and each MLC (except institutions in Lao PDR due to limited number of education institutions) is tasked with recruiting a comparison institution as a control. Overall, this study aims to collect data from over 2,500 learners across the five countries, from both the intervention group and the comparison group. The project has also modified a contract with each of these MLCs to provide a small data collection grant that ranges from \$750 to \$3,000, depending on the sample size of learners they will engage in the study.

Most of the Step 1 data will be collected by the end of August 2016, while the Step 2 data will be collected by March 2017. This will complete the baseline data collection for the new or better employment indicator. Two more rounds of data for this indicator will be collected in August 2017 and March 2018 (midline), and August 2018 and March 2019 (endline).

Adoption of the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook* at Mekong Learning Centers

The *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook: A Guide for Facilitators (Sourcebook)* was updated during the prior quarter, and the MekongSkills2Work website was also updated to reflect all changes in the hard copy version. The website updates include adjustments to graphics and content layout, which improve the overall viewing experience for Web users. The online *Sourcebook* is available at <http://mekongskills2work.org/toolkits>.

During the Training of Trainers Workshop (March 28–April 1, 2016), MLC instructors and administrators learned about and applied the methodologies outlined in the *Sourcebook*. (Summary of the workshop is provided on page 11) After the workshop, instructors created individualized work plans in which they demonstrated how they would apply the *Sourcebook* approaches in their classes. Instructors were asked to identify at least one class per semester where they would actively integrate various toolkits (such as work readiness skills, facilitation skills, participatory learning, learner-centered assessment, project-oriented learning, instructional design). They selected particular toolkits for each class and described their initial ideas on how they would apply the toolkit in that class.

The Training Manager began conducting classroom observations. Most institutions started applying the *Sourcebook* at the end of the semester, and as such, many started small, trying something new each day. Evidence of teaching and instructional improvement appeared quickly, with MLCs reporting that learners began actively engaging and collaborating in classes that had been previously taught as lectures. The project will be reporting on these results more formally in the next quarter.

**B. COMPONENT 2: TRAINING TODAY'S WORKFORCE (VOCATIONAL) and
COMPONENT 3: DEVELOPING TOMORROW'S LEADERS (HIGHER
EDUCATION)**

Mekong Learning Centers: Building Regional Leadership to Bridge the Identified Skills Gaps in Lower Mekong Labor Market

The project completed the grant solicitation process and selected 12 successful institutions from all five countries in the region. Following is the list of the 12 Mekong Learning Centers:

Mahidol University	Thailand
Maptaphut Technical College	Thailand
Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education	Vietnam
University of Economics – The University of Danang	Vietnam
Hanoi University of Science and Technology	Vietnam
Hue Industrial College	Vietnam
University of Danang	Vietnam
Institute of Technology Cambodia	Cambodia
University of South-East Asia	Cambodia
National University of Laos	Laos
Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality	Laos
University of Technology (Yatanarpon Cyber City)	Myanmar

The immediate task of each institution, after the agreement signing and apart from attending the Leadership Summit and the Training of Trainers Workshop, was to deliver the first milestone. This included developing a set of work plans for the administrator and lead instructors, a description of the space and time for regular team meetings in their institution, and the submission of President Obama's Young South East Asian Leader's Initiative (YSEALI) Innovation Challenge concept notes (see page 25 for details of the YSEALI Innovation Challenge). So far, 10 institutions have completed the first milestone, and 3 institutions are pending for the final review of their work plans.

In order to conduct several surveys within the institutions for the purpose of monitoring and evaluation (M&E), the project decided to include an M&E component in the grant agreement. This addition requires a modification of the agreement to certain sections, namely the scope of work, milestone schedule, and overall budget. The modification has been issued to the grant agreements of the 12 institutions.

2016 Leadership Summit: Key Professional Development Event for Mekong Learning Centers

The Leadership Summit is an annual event hosted by the project to serve as a platform for networking and information sharing among MLCs. The first Leadership Summit was held on March 25, 2016, in Bangkok, with the following purposes:

- Officially launch the MekongSkills2Work Network with the selected leadership institutions
- Promote collaboration and networking among the MLCs, industry partners, and regional networks
- Engage the participants in leadership building activities

Over 100 participants from 12 leadership institutions, English Language Fellows (ELF), private partners, international organizations, and USAID and the US Government agencies participated. The participants gained rich information and insights from guest speakers on topics including educational institution leadership, regional labor market, industry-education institutions linkages models (to develop student's work-ready and market-driven skills), and partner industries' showcases.

After the Leadership Summit, the project summarized responses from the participants' evaluation forms and found that the participants were satisfied with the Summit. They remarked that this event was a great networking opportunity between education institutions, private sector companies, and the government agencies, and that several sessions in the event helped them to understand the importance of establishing meaningful partnerships with the private sector for creating WBL programs for their learners. The participants also gave useful suggestions for the project's future events, for example, the inclusion of youth voices, participation of small and medium enterprises, and addition of ice-breaking activities or collaborative sessions to forge more partnership opportunities.

More information about the 2016 Leadership Summit, including the agenda, venue, and biographies of key speakers, can be found on the Leadership Summit webpage on the MekongSkills2Work website (www.mekongskills2work.org).

Training of Trainers Workshop: Instructors Training on *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook*

After the Leadership Summit, the project organized the Training of Trainers Workshop on March 28–April 1, 2016, to train the MLC instructors and administrators on how to use the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook*. Sixty-one instructors and administrators from the 12 institutions attended the workshop, plus five members of the ELF program.

Workshop Summary

Instructors were trained on the different toolkits of the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook: A Guide for Facilitators*, especially the toolkits about project-based learning,

instructional design, and learner-centered assessment. Instructors participated in a project-based activity that engaged them as learners, where they had to identify a problem, research a solution (innovation), test and revise the innovation, and then “pitch” their innovation to judges who were actual professionals. This process modeled for instructors the project-based approach, which connects real-world learning and real-world professionals, so they could conduct it with their own learners. Following their engagement with the activity as learners, the instructors deconstructed the activity as instructors, connecting it to higher-level thinking skills and workforce development skills.

The instructors were also introduced to assessment basic through a variety of rubrics, Bloom’s Taxonomy for questioning exercise, and the Backward Design approach. They then used these tools to design and assess their own project-based activity for use later in their institutions with their learners. Instructors from each institution practiced their project-based activity with instructors from other institutions acting as learners in their class. Following the activity, instructors received final feedback from the workshop facilitator, English Language Fellows, and from their peer instructors (“learners”) in order to improve the project-based approach.

Lessons Learned

The topics covered in the Training of Trainers Workshop are essential to helping MLC instructors change their teaching practices so they can inculcate in learners higher-level thinking skills and workforce readiness skills. But topics such as project-based learning and alternative assessments (including rubric design) are complex. As such, the following should be kept in mind:

- Matriculating learners need both hard and soft skills. The hard skills are strong technical skills and deep content knowledge within a domain (e.g., in mechanical engineering), and the soft skills are behavioral (or workforce) skills, such as problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration, which will allow learners to successfully apply the hard skills in a real world setting. To help learners develop both hard and soft, their instructors need intensive support in instruction and assessment.
- The project needs to provide more time and support for instructor learning. The changes that instructors need to make—implementing more active instructional methodologies, instructional design, and alternative assessments and promoting higher-level thinking—are behavioral and conceptual. And these changes are best achieved through frequent face-to-face, in-depth professional development sessions. USAID COMET is exploring ways in which instructors can provide this support and instruction to one another. Institution-based support is critical so instructors can implement what they have learned in workshops and do so with fidelity and quality, and the USAID COMET project is cognizant of this. More information is provided in the section Ongoing Support for Instructors later in the report.

Workshop Feedback

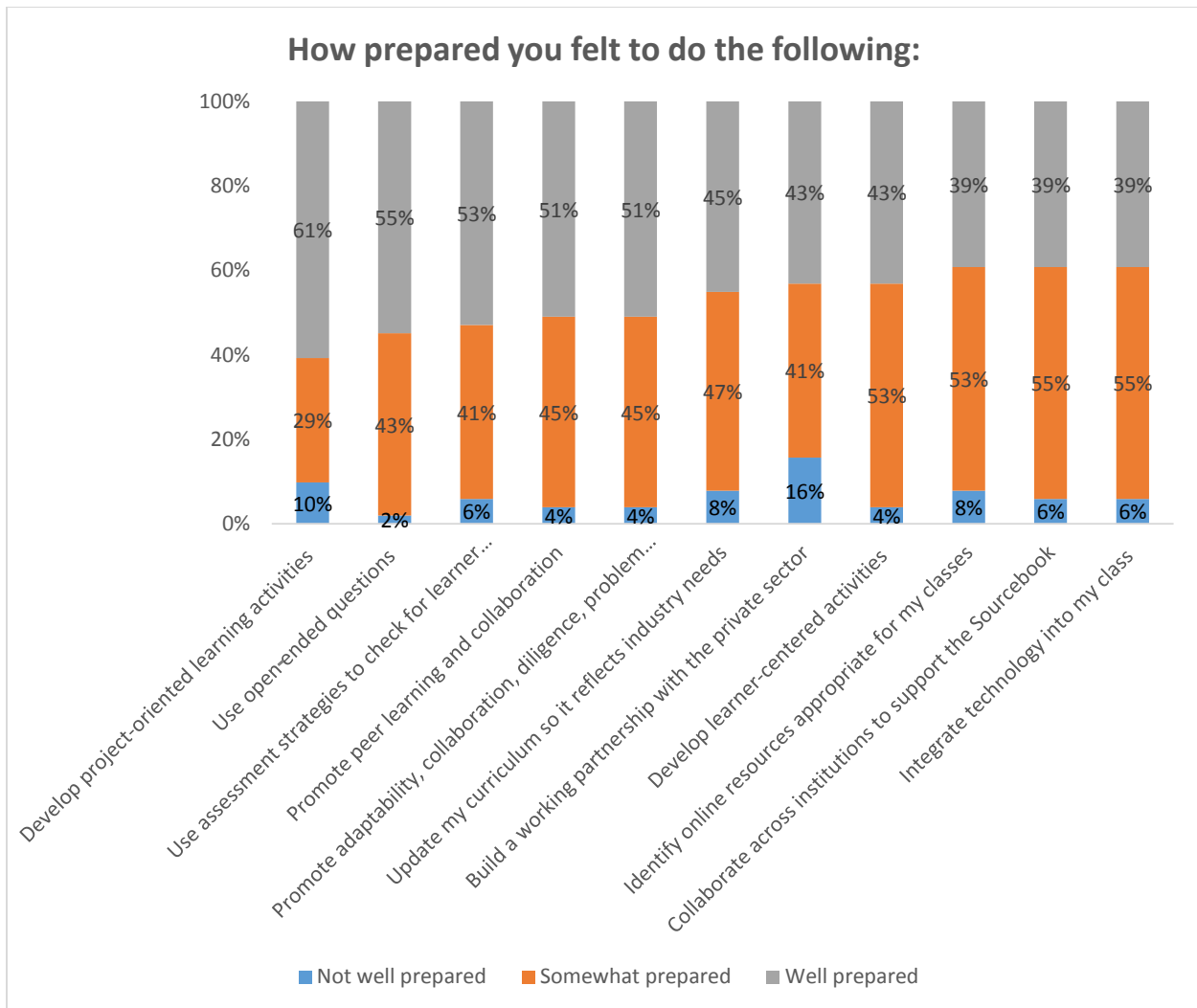
“My feelings on the understanding of the guideline of the Sourcebook are quite different before and after the training. I feel that I have gained useful knowledge and experience from the training and also ideas from other institutions in the Lower Mekong Sub-region so that we are better prepared to initiate the development of an effective education model at our institution.”

A Participant in the USAID COMET Training of Trainers Workshop

Following the Training of Trainers Workshop, the project summarized the feedback completed online by the 12 administrators and 44 instructors. A majority of the TOT participants felt they were *well prepared* or *somewhat prepared* to deliver content from the *Sourcebook*, for example:

- Develop project-oriented learning activities – 61% well prepared and 29% somewhat prepared
- Use open-ended questions in their classes – 55% well prepared, 43% somewhat prepared
- Use a variety of assessment strategies to check for learner understanding and make adjustments – 53% well prepared, 41% somewhat prepared
- Promote peer learning and collaboration – 51% well prepared, 45% somewhat prepared
- Promote adaptability, collaboration, diligence, problem solving, communication, and time management through classroom activities – 51% well prepared, 45% somewhat prepared

Nevertheless, more than 50% of the participants suggested that there should be more than five days of the training so they could have more time to learn and discuss the *Sourcebook* content at a more reasonable pace. Allocating more time for the TOT could result in higher percentages of respondents who felt they were prepared to deliver *Sourcebook* content.



Regarding the promotion of the MekongSkills2Work model, participants agreed to spread this instructional approach within their institutions via the following methods:

- Organizing orientation workshops with other instructors (72%)
- Inviting new instructors to USAID COMET meetings (70%)
- Organizing similar TOT workshops (68%)
- Setting up classroom observations to expose other instructors to the USAID COMET methods (66%)

In terms of continuing support from the USAID COMET team, participants would like to attend a master trainers workshop (77%), receive a facilitator’s guide for seminars and workshops (70%), and take online training (66%).

Technical Support and Monitoring Visits

After the Training of Trainers Workshop, the project conducted a series of technical and follow-up support activities, including ongoing support for instructors and site visits to

each of the institutions to ensure that the implementation of the grant and the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook* and the institutionalization of the MekongSkills2Work model were on track. Ongoing support for instructors is discussed below.

Ongoing Support for Instructors

The project team and the consultants have developed a tiered approach to providing ongoing support to instructors in the coming academic year. This blended model involves online and site-based support and creates cross-institutional support networks as follows:

1. Support within the institution. This has multiple levels:
 - Learning walks: MLC administrators conduct learning walks (quick, unannounced classroom visits) to ensure that instructors are implementing USAID COMET *Sourcebook* activities.
 - Peer observations: MLC instructors pair up with a colleague and conduct peer classroom observations and provide one another with feedback.
 - Open classrooms: Once per semester, each MLC instructor hosts an open classroom, where colleagues observe the class and have a post-class discussion. In this discussion, instructors share their activity design, give guidance to those wishing to try something similar, and receive feedback from peers.
2. USAID COMET online support for instructors includes the following:
 - Office hours: The Training Manager and Senior Institutional Specialist host office hours twice a month in two-hour blocks. Office hours are voluntary and “drop in.” Instructors call or send instant messages with questions, with topics ranging from milestone deliverables to implementation issues to pedagogy.
 - Group discussions: The project team hosts monthly one-hour online discussions focused on a particular topic. The first online discussion focused on the ongoing support plan and the second focused on the youth employment survey. The project team has experimented with different technologies and is moving forward with WebEx.
 - Mini courses: Every 6–8 weeks, the project hosts a brief webinar on a particular topic requested by MLC instructors. The first mini course will focus on project-oriented learning. Additional mini courses on particular toolkits will also be held as needed.
 - Online learning teams: Three times a year, as a part of their portfolios, MLC instructors share lesson plans, support materials, and video examples of their classes. They meet online at a designated time, and using a structured protocol, provide feedback on one another’s activities.

3. Face-to-face support:

English Language Fellows (ELFs) and designated project staff (currently the Training Manager and Senior Institutional Specialist) conduct face-to-face classroom observations with instructors using the USAID COMET classroom observation instrument. Classroom observations consist of pre-observation, in-class observation, and post-observation phases and will be conducted one to two times per semester.

Details of the support are provided in Annex 2: Support for MekongSkills2Work Instructors.

As the MekongSkills2Work Network adds more institutions and instructors, ongoing support will be an issue, especially given the small number of USAID COMET staff. Recognizing this issue, the project is conceptualizing a micro-credential program to identify particularly strong instructors who might be available to serve as coaches in their own institutions or in neighboring institutions. These instructors will be Master Trainers who will lead future TOT workshops. Performance evaluation methods will be established.

Visit to Hanoi University of Science and Technology

The Training Manager visited the Hanoi University of Science and Technology (HUST) in early April to observe classroom trainings and to discuss the implementation of the *Sourcebook*. HUST was one of the project's former education advisory institutions. HUST was very interested in having the project organize a senior-level meeting with the rectors of the MLCs so they could learn about one another, and so the administrator and instructors would have high-level support. Based on the observations and campus tour, the project considered assisting HUST with WBL ideas and the creation of complex project-based activities with the technical resources at their disposal. While instructors are starting to integrate participatory methods, they need to move from simple cooperation to collaboration and higher order thinking skills.

Visit to University of South-East Asia

On April 20–21, the USAID COMET team met with the senior management, instructors, and administrator of the University of South-East Asia (USEA) in Siem Reap, Cambodia. USEA is a new, but growing, privately funded university with an interest in becoming a higher education leader in the Siem Reap area. Meeting attendees discussed USEA's progress towards the first set of deliverables, answered questions USEA had regarding the grant process, and discussed longer-term plans for USEA's development as an MLC. The meeting was very productive and provided a strong start to the collaboration between the project and one of its newly awarded leadership institutions.

Visit to Maptaphut Technical College

On April 28, the project team visited Maptaphut Technical College (MTC) in Rayong, Thailand, to discuss the details regarding work planning and to learn more about the capacity of MTC and its industrial partnerships. MTC has received strong support from local petrochemical industries and has practiced the pedagogical approach of constructionism (constructivism),¹ project-based learning in classrooms, and work-based training for almost 10 years. Therefore, the team expected that it would not require a large effort for the college to master the MekongSkills2Work model.

Visit to National University of Laos and Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality

The project team visited the National University of Laos (NUOL) and the Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality (LANITH) on May 3–4. Although the administrators and lead instructors of NUOL have attended the Leadership Summit and the training program, the NUOL team required extra assistance in setting up the grant implementation process and obtaining support from the higher levels of NUOL's management.

As for LANITH, being a small institution, the administrator and instructors felt that they lacked the capacity for participating in the YSEALI Innovation Challenge. However, with the encouragement and guidance of the project staff, LANITH successfully participated in the Challenge, with a student team from LANITH winning a spot as 1 of the 10 teams to join the innovation bootcamp in Singapore.

Visit to Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education

On May 9, the project team visited Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education (HCMUTE) and met with the university's Vice President, who expressed appreciation and a strong commitment to adopting the MekongSkills2Work model and institutionalizing it within HCMUTE and its wider network. HCMUTE is a comprehensive university, offering a wide range of academic programs in STEM and technical education. It also has a well-developed digital infrastructure. The instructors and learners were very much interested and active in the YSEALI Innovation Challenge. The project team had an opportunity to observe the instruction of one student's project by one of the lead instructors. It was impressive, and HCMUTE is promising as a leadership institution.

¹ In education, Piaget described *constructivism* as being the process whereby students constructed their own unique systems of knowing, in consequence of which the teacher should focus on this individual process of internal construction rather than standing at the front and spouting their own models. Seymour Papert, a student of Piaget, expanded on this to describe *constructionism* in terms of helping the student produce constructions that others can see and critique. In this educational frame, then, *constructivism* is more cognitive and *constructionism* more physical (Changing Minds.org. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://changingminds.org/explanations/research/philosophies/constructionism.htm>).

In addition to being early on their work plans, HCMUTE's administrator has reached out to neighboring technical and vocational education and training (TVET) schools to introduce the MekongSkills2Work model, which is favorable for the planned institutionalization of the model in and around Ho Chi Minh City.

Visit to University of Danang, University of Economics – University of Danang, and Hue Industrial College

On May 11–14, the project team visited three MLCs in Central Vietnam: University of Danang, University of Economics – University of Danang, and Hue Industrial College. The purpose of the visits was to provide follow-up technical support on grant implementation and use of the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook: A Guide for Facilitators*. All three leadership institutions have proven to be highly capable of adopting the MekongSkills2Work model, especially in building industry partnerships and planning for institutionalizing the model. For example, Hue Industrial College took the initiative to organize their own innovation challenge and has also invited industry partners to provide input on improving their curriculum.

Visit to the University of Technology (Yatanarpon Cyber City) – Myanmar

In late May, the project team traveled to the University of Technology, Yatanarpon Cyber City (UTYCC). UTYCC was founded in 2010 as a training center designed to be part of the development of an information and communication technology (ICT) park implemented by the Myanmar government. However, only a few companies have invested in the technology park, with the result that the cyber city is not growing, and the university is geographically and academically isolated.

The purpose of the site visit was to accomplish the following:

1. Provide UTYCC with an orientation on administrative issues, monitoring and evaluation, institutionalization, communications, and grant management as they missed these sessions during the Leadership Summit and MLC Orientation
2. Support instructors and administrators with *Sourcebook* implementation
3. Conduct classroom observations

In terms of technical support, the team covered the programmatic implementation and oriented the administrator to the administrator toolkits. In terms of implementing the *Sourcebook*, the team observed classes conducted by all four lead instructors. The classroom observations indicated that all lead instructors understood and were enthusiastic in implementing the various instructional standards in their instruction. The level of achievement by individual instructors varied from struggling to successful. The team provided suggestions to help the instructors build higher-order thinking skills and relate the class content to the workplace. The presentation and discussion on the institutionalization of the MekongSkills2Work model indicated that the administrator and the instructors understood the purpose of the model and how it worked, and they were

prepared to implement it within and beyond their institution as required in the milestones.

Mekong Learning Center Support Team

The USAID COMET project set up the MLC Support Team to oversee grant activities in a systematic way and provide assistance to the MLCs as required. The MLC Support Team is composed of USAID COMET Focal Points, Volunteer in Asia Fellows – their job title is Country Managers, and English Language Fellows.

Focal Points

The project's Focal Points are the primary contacts for their assigned institution. They know their institutions in overall – how they work, strengths, weaknesses, and progress in implementing the MekongSkills2Work model. The Focal Points are responsible for managing trips and reviews of deliverables for their MLCs, coordinating between MLCs the project's technical and operations teams, and making sure that support needed by their MLCs is met and problems or issues are resolved. The Focal Points work closely with their counter parts - Volunteer in Asia Fellows and English Language Fellows.

Volunteer in Asia Fellows

The USAID COMET project and Volunteers in Asia (VIA) have come to an agreement that VIA will do the following:

- Recruit and deploy five fellows to support MLCs in each of the five Lower Mekong countries: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam
- Implement the project's training approach
- Build linkages with industry partners
- Foster partnerships with institution leaders

On June 13–17, an orientation workshop was organized in Bangkok for the five VIA fellows that will become USAID COMET's Country Managers for the project countries. The workshop was successful in achieving its objectives:

- Provide Country Managers with an orientation to all USAID COMET project components and the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook*
- Understand the roles and responsibilities of the new Country Managers, including how they will support MLCs

After the workshop, the Country Managers traveled to their assigned countries, where they will assume their duties for the period of June 2016 to June 2017.

English Language Fellows

Five English Language Fellows (ELFs) will provide instructional support and coaching to instructors as they apply the instructional methods outlined in the *Sourcebook* in their classrooms. The project provided a one-day orientation focused on introducing ELFs to

USAID COMET's classroom observation protocol (pre-and post-observation and the use of the classroom observation instrument to assess the USAID COMET instructor's activity) and protocols for providing feedback. The main components of the orientation included the following:

- Overview of the USAID COMET observation process
- Overview of classroom observations
- In-depth examination of the USAID COMET classroom observation tool, reliability testing, and summarizing and reporting information

The project team revised the agreements between the project and the ELF's to better reflect their role. The assignments were also revised to better reflect geography and balance workloads. The ELF's will visit each assigned institution once between September and December 2016 and once between January and June 2017 while their classes are in session, and they will observe each of the four lead instructors. During the visits, they will follow the observation protocols and tools that were presented in the orientation in March 2016.

Please refer to Annex 3 for the MLC support team for each institution and short biography of the VIA Fellows.

C. INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS: LEVERAGING EXTERNAL EXPERTISE TO INFORM PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

As an ongoing partnership development activity, the USAID COMET team had several meetings with potential partners over the last quarter to explore collaboration opportunities to support several of the project's focus areas. In addition to partnership development meetings, the project also carried out collaborative projects with corporate partners. Highlighted meetings and activities follow.

Collaborative Partnerships to Pilot the Use of Low-Connectivity Device to Assist Learners in Learning

Continuing the partnership with Google, LANITH has been piloting an innovative technology solution featuring an Internet cache server device since December 2015. The device is designed to enable instructors and learners to better access the Internet under a low bandwidth.

“Students can now access the websites through the search engine much faster than before. I haven’t informed them about the device being installed. They thought that the Internet service provider has upgraded our bandwidth! But when it comes to accessing YouTube, they still have the problem with the low connectivity.”

Souliphon Phengxay, Head of Education Department, LANITH.

The project conducted a study on the users’ experience using the Google device. The initial results reveal that the device has helped alleviate the issue of low Internet connectivity and significantly enhanced instructors’ and learners’ Web access experiences. Learners can now access the Internet sites that they frequently visit much faster and more effectively than before. However, the solution’s hardware specification does not allow for accessing YouTube sites, which learners badly need and which would improve the use of online content (blended learning) for instruction at LANITH. Google has indicated that they are considering improving this capacity in future designs.

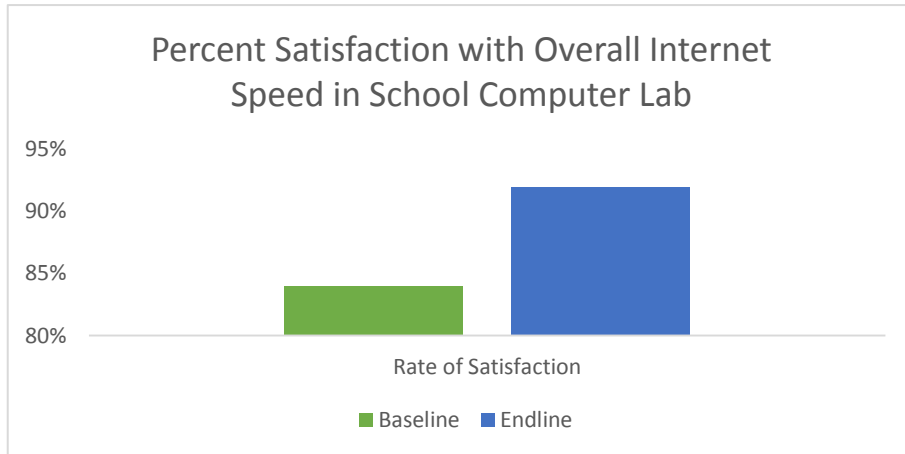
Google offered to contribute to LANITH’s Internet connectivity charge for the duration of the pilot. The project is engaging in further discussions with Google to determine the next steps for integrating Google’s technology into the learning and instructional development of the institutions in the MekongSkills2work network, both current and future.

In parallel with the low connectivity improvement pilot, Google has provided LANITH with training on using Google Apps for Education. However, LANITH instructors and learners have not been able to use the Google education apps due to difficulty registering as an educational institution on the Google platform. The project is working with Google to resolve this problem.

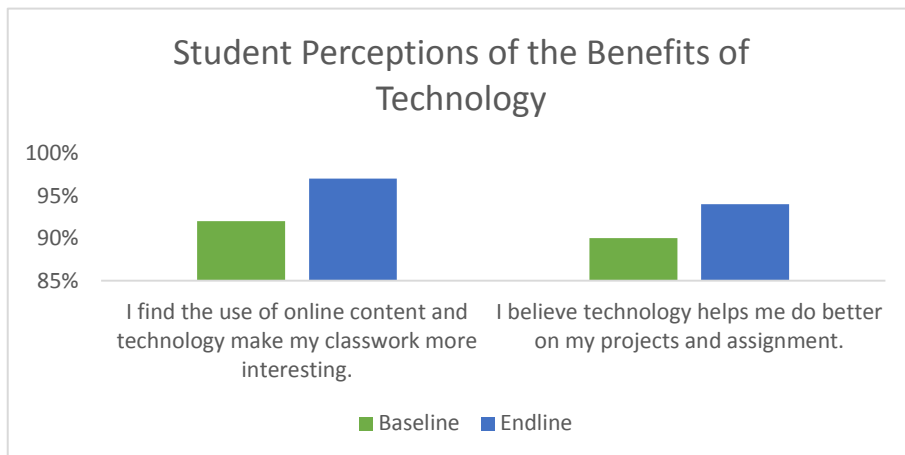
Highlights from the baseline (before the device was installed) and endline (two months after the device was installed) surveys of the users’ experience in using the Google device are summarized below:

Student Survey Results

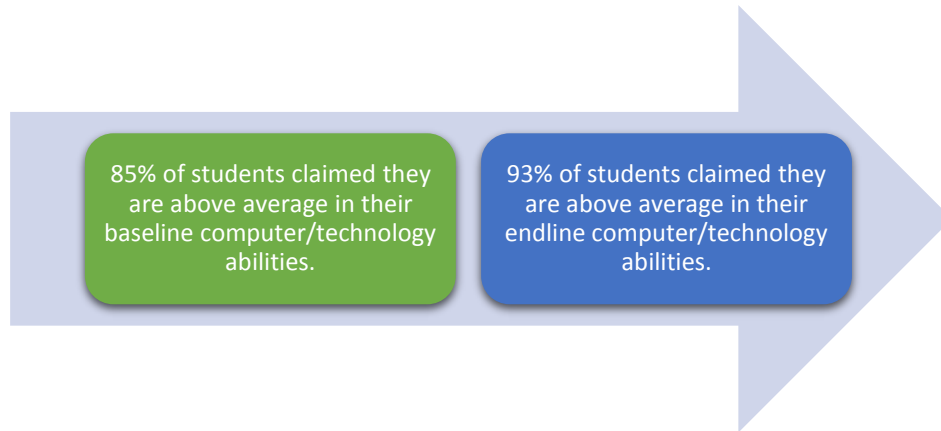
There was an 8% increase in satisfaction of students’ overall internet speed in their school computer labs, from 84% satisfaction in the baseline survey to 92% satisfaction in the endline survey. This satisfaction in internet connectivity directly affected students’ inclination to use technology in their studies. Additionally, it can pave the way for a more connected campus experience in the future.



More students believed in the benefits that technology can offer in their classroom studies and academic work. It is important that this positive perception continue to be cultivated to ensure that students employ the use of technology in the future.



More students stated that they have stronger computer/technology abilities after installing the Google Cache Device. There was an 8% increase amongst LANITH students. This shows that increased access to wireless connection through the Google Cache Device increases student knowledge and comfort in the use of technology.



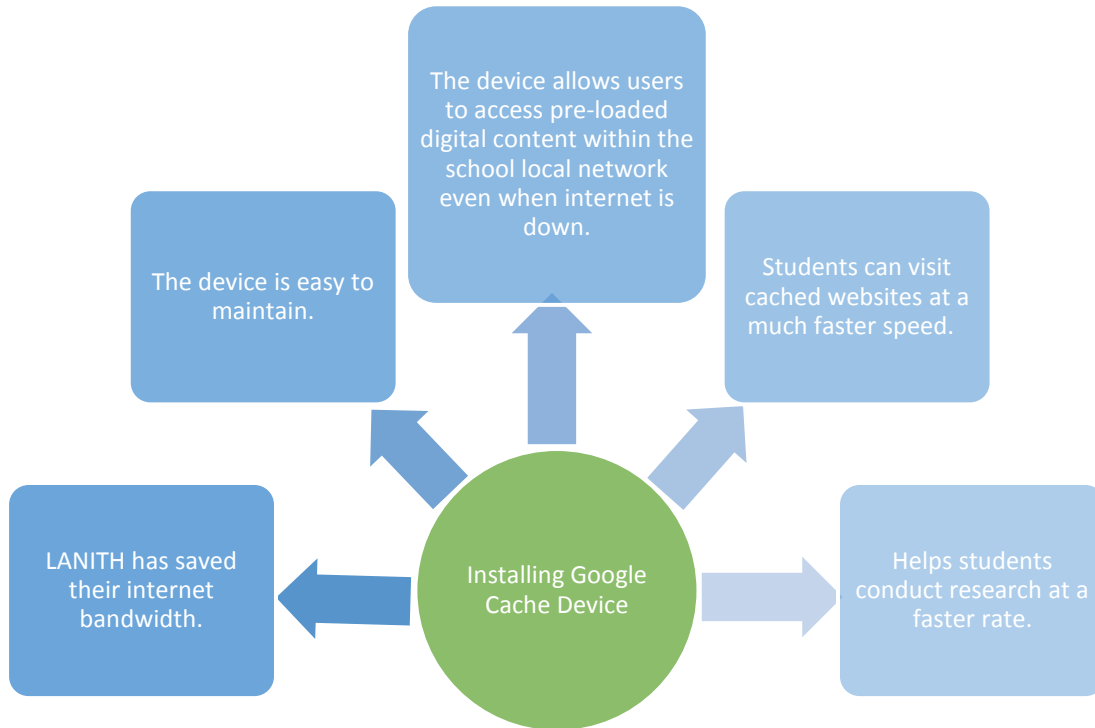
Summary: Because the endline survey was administered two months after the launch of the baseline survey, there was not enough time to adequately understand the impact of the Google Device on students. There has not been much change in other variables between the base and end-line surveys. The data-points with the biggest changes are captured above. Examples of data-points that have remained constant are: the low rate of Google application uses between teachers and students in classrooms, the lack of computers available for student use, and the lack of students' understanding of English-based websites. These results are understandable as Google Classroom applications were not available for students to use yet, and there were no specific activities to install more computers or improving the students' understanding of English-based sites.

Future Directions: The use of the Google Cache Device has impacted students in positive ways over a short period of time. By consistently using this device, students' access to the wireless network will be strengthened, furthering their abilities to use technology with ease and confidence, increasing the use of technology in their classrooms, providing more access to English-based websites, and more. A longitudinal survey will highlight the continued positive impact that the Google Cache Device can have in classrooms.

IT Administrators Survey Results

IT administrators are defined as full-time or part-time staff at LANITH whose roles and responsibilities include setting up, maintenance, and providing technical support to instructors and students in technology-related services.

As stated by administrators, the benefits of using the Google Device include:



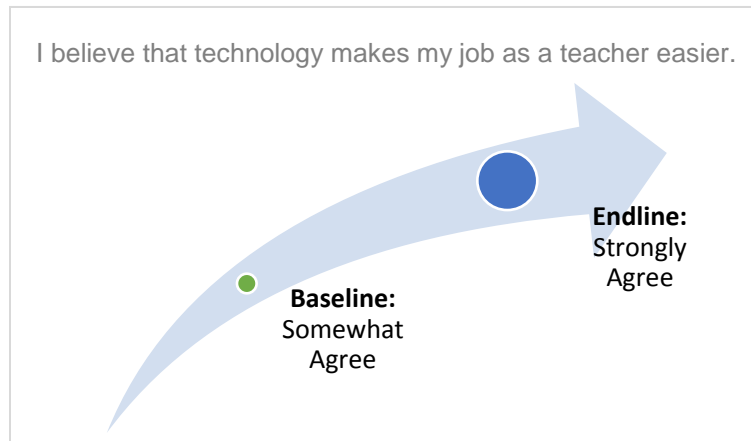
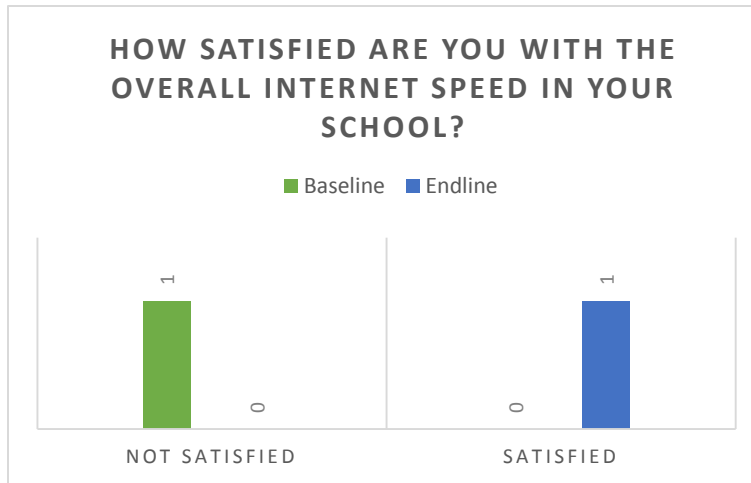
By installing the Google Cache Device, many of the main challenges to providing internet access and technology to teachers and students have been addressed. These challenges included slow internet speeds, lack of connectivity, and lack of WIFI access in computers.

Summary: IT administrators are able to save internet bandwidth, and allow students in the computer lab to access pre-loaded digital content when the internet speed is hampered by unstable provider.

Future Directions: It is important to increase the capability of this google device to allow other pre-loaded content such as YouTube videos, so that more students are able to benefit from this technology. Through continued longitudinal surveys, there will be further opportunities to explore the benefits of the Google Cache Device in other aspects such as cost savings, and overall uptake of technology programs and device usage in the school.

LANITH Instructors

While we surveyed only one instructor who taught the course that utilized a computer lab, it is important to notice the change in perception towards technology for this instructor upon the installation of the Google Device.



Summary: The overall impact of the Google Cache Device on the instructor did not significantly change between the baseline and endline surveys. The greatest change occurred in the two data points described above.

Future Directions: In order to continue tracking the impact of the Google Cache Device, this survey should take place in the beginning/before each semester begins. Additionally, it should be expanded to include other schools. The first base and end-line surveys were administered in the middle of the semester, making it difficult for instructors to include more technology usage into their pre-planned lesson plans/curricula. Because LANITH is a small school with a limited number of students and classes, expanding the use of the Google Cache Device and expanding the survey to reach more schools will allow us to further study the impact of the Google Cache Device on quality of instruction, ease of technology use, and level of engagement with technology from both students and instructors.

Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) and Microsoft Corporation Vietnam Training of Trainers (TOT)

In early April, Microsoft's YouthSpark Initiative organized a TOT workshop for vocational instructors in collaboration with VCCI in Hanoi, Vietnam. The workshop was also the kickoff event for the YouthSpark program. The project's Training Manager delivered one-day training focused on participatory learning and facilitation techniques. The 25 participants were from vocational colleges, NGOs, and private training institutes in Vietnam. The training pulled from the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook*, and the training model was well received.

Microsoft YouthWorks Platform

While exploring value adding elements for the MekongSkills2Work Web portal, project staff came across "YouthWorks," an interesting employability platform from Microsoft named. The platform provides a customized online portal for career guidance, training, entrepreneurship development, and career posting.

The project discussed a collaboration opportunity with Microsoft's Regional Director for Government Affairs and found that it needed more time to better explore the best collaborative options based on the portal's functions rather than on the portal's specifications. Therefore, the project decided to postpone the collaboration and will reconnect with Microsoft after the launch of the MekongSkills2Work portal.

Discussion on Web Portal Development with EdCast

On May 14, the project had an initial discussion regarding the project's web portal development with Karl Mehta, Founder and CEO of EdCast. EdCast's platform supports massive open online courses (MOOCs) and customizable course content. This platform, along with Microsoft's YouthWorks platform, will be considered as potential platforms for the project's web portal development.

Meeting with Siam Cement/Dow Chemical Group

The project met with Siam Cement/Dow Chemical Group (Thailand) on May 6 to explore partnership opportunities. Siam Cement/Dow Chemical Group is another potential partner for WBL and the sharing of training resources for MekongSkills2Work instructors.

YSEALI Innovation Challenge

This quarter, in collaboration with the ASEAN-U.S. Partnership for Good Governance, Equitable and Sustainable Development and Security (ASEAN-U.S. PROGRESS), the USAID COMET team selected the top 10 teams for the YSEALI Innovation Challenge (Challenge). The selection process took place in three stages: (1) eligibility screening, (2) quarterfinals with the selection of the top 20 teams, and (3) semifinals with the selection of the top 10 teams. The selection committee was composed of two separate teams: (1) the eligibility screening and preselection team and (2) the judging panel. The

two separate teams engaged in specialized roles in the Challenge selection process. Each team is described in further detail below.

Eligibility Screening and Preselection Team

This committee comprised the following representatives:

- Piyamit (Bing) Chomprasob, Senior Partnerships Manager, USAID COMET
- Tania Tzelnic, Project Coordinator and Technology Specialist, USAID COMET
- Mark Birnbaum, Deputy Chief of Party, ASEAN-US PROGRESS

Judging Panel

This committee comprised the following representatives:

- Michael S. Tetelman, Project Director, USAID COMET
- Jennifer Wilson, USAID Program Manager
- Nalindra Annalia, Cultural Affairs Specialist, United States Mission to ASEAN

Quarterfinal Selection

Two hundred and six teams, representing 9 of the 10 ASEAN countries, submitted concept notes for the Challenge. Of the 206 applications submitted, 138 passed the eligibility screening criteria, and 31 teams were advanced for review by the judging panel.

To ensure that the judging panel was unbiased in its selection, the top four teams from each country were assigned an identifier (e.g., Team A, Team B, Team C, and Team D). Identifiers were assigned in a semi-random order by country, with the top four teams assigned in ABCD order and some countries assigned in DCBA order. Only the USAID COMET Project Coordinator/Challenge Activity Manager had access to the files listing the identifier for each team name. In this way, the judging panel could not be biased through recognition of a particular institution or person, nor could their scoring be subject to primacy or recency effects (i.e., the first or last team to be scored is given the highest scores).

The judging panel was presented with a rubric to use for in-depth evaluative scoring. As in the pre-selection round, teams were scored *within country*. The judges were to numerically score all four teams, and then name their two highest scoring teams in each country, for a total of 16 teams.

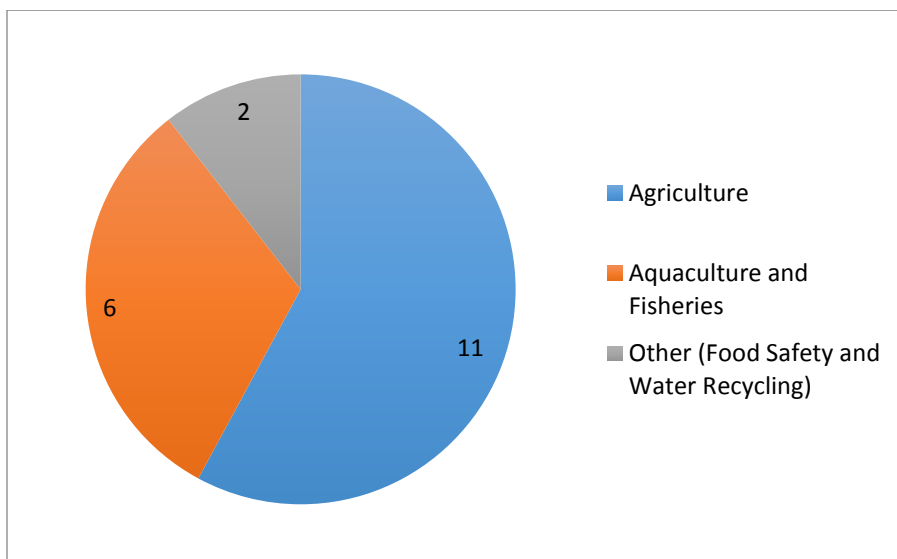
The key points for the scoring rubric were as follows:

- **Relevance.** Is the challenge described clearly, and does it address a question relevant to ASEAN? Is the solution described clearly, and does it specifically address the identified challenge?

- **Evidence.** Does the evidence provided cite real sources (i.e., Web links to resources, team-produced video diaries or interviews, and/or academic papers) and match the solution proposed by the team?
- **Technology.** Is the proposal using technology in a way that addresses the team’s Challenge solution? Is the proposed solution innovative in its approach or use of technology?
- **Approach.** Does the concept note, including evidence provided by the team, indicate creativity, thoughtfulness, and thoroughness in implementing the proposed solution?
- **Sustainability.** Does the proposed solution have the potential to be implemented in a sustainable and scalable manner?

Each of the three judges returned their completed score sheets, with numeric scores for the 31 teams, as well as a list of their two highest scoring teams for each country. Any two teams that were nominated by the majority of judges (two of the three judges) were automatically advanced to the next round, leading to 16 teams being advanced automatically. In order to meet the twin Challenge objectives of (1) promoting broad participation across ASEAN and (2) promoting broad representation across Challenge thematic areas, four additional teams were selected based on a combination of merit and thematic area.

The lowest scoring two teams for each of the judges were decoded, and teams listed by both thematic area and numeric score. The four teams to advance to the quarterfinalist round were selected to balance the thematic areas. Therefore, teams submitting concept notes in non-agricultural areas were given precedence. This resulted in the selection of three additional teams, one each in Fisheries, Aquaculture, and Other/Water Recycling). The following graphic depicts the distribution of teams across the Challenge’s thematic areas.



Semifinal Selection

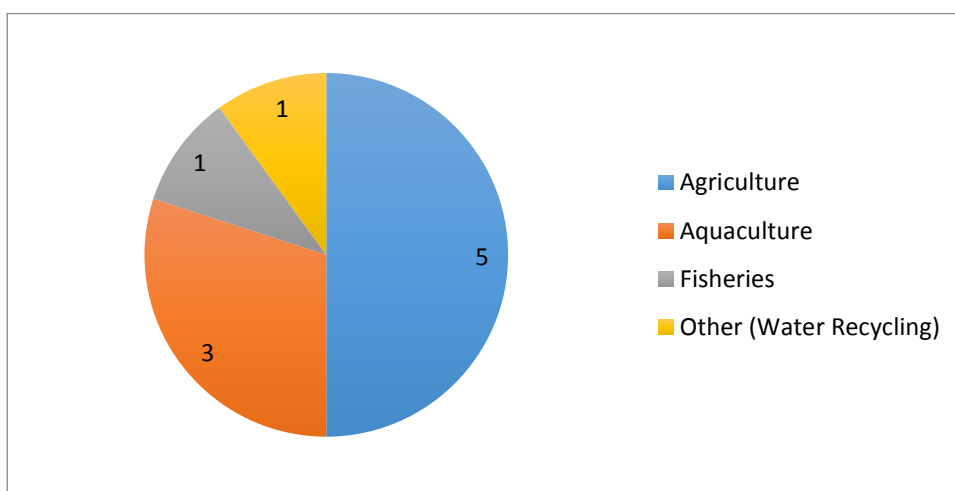
To qualify for the semifinals, teams were asked to submit a 90-second video pitch that had to meet the following criteria:

- Concisely, creatively, and articulately explains the team's concept note
- Demonstrates the need for and the applicability of their idea
- Is narrated by team members

For the semifinalist round, video pitches were scored using the same process as for the quarterfinalist round. However, to match the directions to the teams regarding the video pitch criteria, the judging panel evaluated pitches using the following rubric:

- **Completeness.** The team is able to concisely present their challenge and proposed solution.
- **Evidence.** The team demonstrates the need for and applicability of their solution to address a real-world problem.
- **Communication.** The team explains the challenge and their proposed solution in a clear and comprehensible manner.
- **Creativity.** The team is creative in explaining the challenge and their proposed solution.

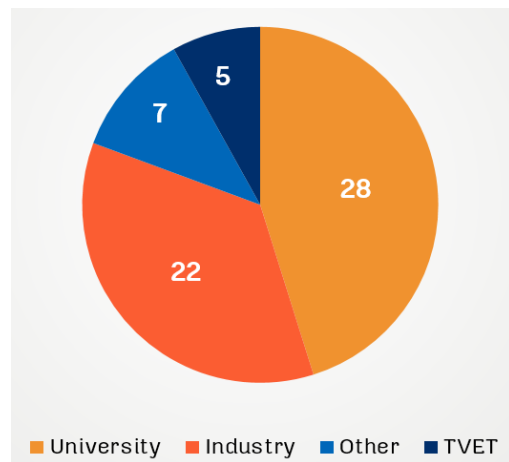
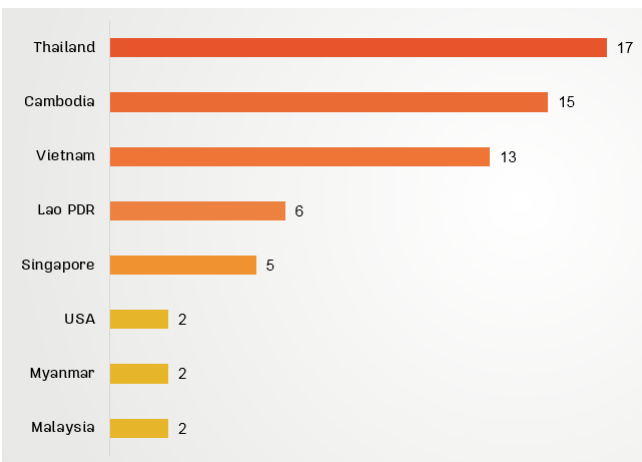
The judges' scores for the semifinalist teams were compiled in the same manner as the quarterfinalist round. Any team that was nominated by the majority of judges (two of the three judges) was automatically advanced to the next round, leading to 8 teams being advanced automatically. The two additional teams were selected on a combination of merit and thematic area. The final distribution of teams by thematic area is depicted in the following graphic.



A list of the top 10 teams, their concept notes, and the link to their video pitches is available in Annex 4.

Public-Private Partnerships Development: Tracking, Reporting and Evaluation Approach

Since the launch of USAID COMET in October 2014, more than 60 organizations in eight countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, USA, and Vietnam) have formed meaningful partnerships with the project. Thirty-three of these organizations are universities and TVET institutions that have participated in USAID COMET trainings, workshops, and seminars. Twenty-two organizations from the industry sector (many of which are leading multinational corporations, such as Intel, Cisco, Google, Microsoft, and Hewlett Packard) have also partnered with USAID COMET as organizers, sponsors, trainers, and speakers for various trainings and workshops. Intel is the most active partner and to date has engaged with five USAID COMET activities, followed by Cisco with four activities, and Google and Microsoft with three activities each.



Industry Partner Leverage Valuations

USAID COMET has had numerous discussions with our industry partners to calculate in-kind contributions and to estimate the monetary values of the partnership activities. Nevertheless, most of the industry partners prefer to keep the monetary values confidential as each has its own approach for calculating the partnership value. They do not want the leverage valuations to be used for comparative purposes. The project, therefore, faces a challenge in calculating an accurate partnership valuation in monetary terms.

INDUSTRY PARTNERS – FREQUENCY OF ENGAGEMENT



Partnership Tracking Indicators

In order to capture these complex and meaningful partnership values, the M&E team is developing partnership tracking indicators, which include frequency of engagement and level of engagement (e.g., attending meetings and events, participating as speakers or trainers, donating and sponsoring, co-organizing, and advocating) with USAID COMET. In addition, the project will track the different types of partnership activities, including curriculum development, WBL and employment, and services and products. The project will then create a partnership profile that reflects the strengths and weaknesses of these indicators for each of our main industry partners.

In late April, the project COP presented the USAID COMET partnership tracking approach to an RDMA workshop of USAID partnership managers. After the presentation, the Senior Partnerships Advisor, Center for Transformational Partnerships, USAID Washington, asked the COP if he could share the tracking methodology with USAID Washington. The Senior Partnerships Advisor said USAID Washington would be interested in being kept up-to-date on the development of the tracker.

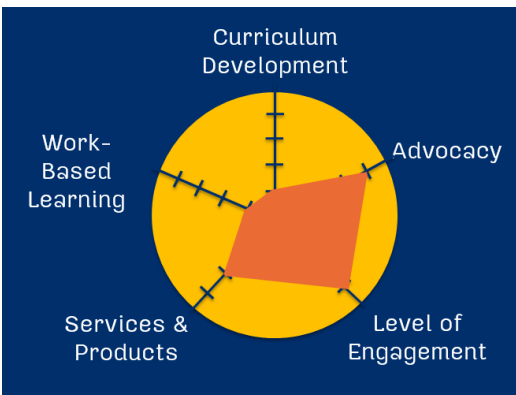


Figure 4: An Example of a Partnership Profile

D. STAFFING

The project's Deputy Chief of Party – Programs tendered her resignation effective on June 1. The project is currently seeking her successor and expects the position to be filled in the next quarter. Please refer to Annex 5 for the most recent USAID COMET Organization Chart.

E. KEY PROJECT DELIVERABLES AND SUBMISSIONS

- A total of 12 universities and TVET institutions were selected as MLCs to receive grants to undertake the USAID COMET MekongSkills2Work training and implementation activities. Grant agreements were made with the 12 institutions to commence the one-year program implementation from April 12, 2016, to April 11, 2017.
- The 2016 Leadership Summit and the Training of Trainers Workshop were held on March 25–April 1, 2016 in Bangkok, Thailand.
- The revised version of the *MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook: A Guide for Facilitators* was published on the project's website.
- The FY 2016 second quarterly report was submitted to USAID on April 11, 2016.
- The FY 2016 second quarterly financial report was submitted on April 30, 2016.
- The FY 2016 second quarterly accrual report was submitted to USAID on June 10, 2016.

F. PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR NEXT QUARTER, INCLUDING UPCOMING EVENTS

PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR THE NEXT QUARTER	
Component 1: Curriculum Development and Skilled Workforce	
Portal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin the implementation and production stage.• Launch the Web portal by the end of September 2016.
Database Management System	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begin the development stage.• Complete the database management system by the end of August 2016.
Youth Employment Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete Step 1 of the baseline survey by the end of August 2016.

Component 2: Training Today's Workforce (Vocational) & Component 3: Developing Tomorrow's Leaders (Higher Education)

<p>Grants Program for Mekong Learning Centers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide technical, programmatic, financial, and contractual monitoring support to Mekong Learning Centers. • Provide technical support both onsite and online to all Mekong Learning Centers as needed.
<p>Work-Based Learning Workshop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange a technical visit and training by the WBL specialist during July 21–August 15, 2016.
<p>Special Projects</p>	
<p>YSEALI Innovation Challenge</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize the bootcamp in Singapore for the top 10 semifinalists on July 3–5, 2016. • Recruit mentors for each of the 10 teams in July 2016. • Run a series of webinars on three thematic areas from the end of July to September 2016. • Host the Shark Tank session to select the top 3 final teams by the end of September 2016.
<p>Upcoming Events for the Next Quarter</p>	
<p>YSEALI Innovation Challenge Bootcamp July 3–5, 2016</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • USAID COMET in cooperation with ASEAN – U.S. PROGRESS will arrange a 3-day bootcamp in Singapore for the 10 semifinal teams. • On Day 1, the bootcamp will focus on work-readiness skills training with USAID COMET and Wedu. • On Day 2 and Day 3, the training will be conducted by Cisco and Intel on ideation and innovative solution design.
<p>Work-Based Learning Workshop August 1–5, 2016</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to develop a new toolkit on WBL for the <i>Sourcebook</i> and to train Mekong Learning Centers on WBL activities, an internal workshop on WBL will be delivered by WBL Specialist Chris Murray for the project's staff and VIA fellows. • Before the workshop, site visits will be made to Maptaphut Technical College, National University of Laos, and Lao National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality to observe and collect information about WBL activities and relationships with the workplace.

G. SUCCESS STORY DRAFT

CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL WAYS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN VIETNAM



Irrigation system project by participants of the Challenge at the final ceremony.

USAID COMET / Piyamit Chomprasob

Inspired by USAID and Intel’s model to learning, Vietnamese education institution adopts hands-on approach to problem-solving using technology.

Dr. Cung Trong Cuong, Rector of Hue Industrial College, Vietnam, got the chance to be a student again when he participated in “USAID-Intel Tech Innovation Workshop” in September 2015. Getting the opportunity to collaborate within a team to find solutions to real world problems using Galileo microprocessing boards provided by Intel, Dr. Cuong was inspired to take advantage of this partnership experience with Intel and bring the learning approach back to his institution.

“I learned so many things again without trying to. I learned from others in my team. I started thinking about problems that I see happening around me. I got inspired to learn how to use [Intel’s Galileo boards] as a way for me to help solve real-world problems – And I had fun throughout the process! Our team worked really hard to win the competition,” said Dr. Cuong.

While the concept of learning using technology was not new to Hue Industrial College, Dr. Cuong wanted to make learning exciting again. Building on the connection with Intel, Dr. Cuong spearheaded the 2016 Technical Innovation Challenge for students in Thua Thien Hue Province in May 13-14, 2016. The objective of the Challenge was to encourage youth to come up with technology-based solutions to problems that they see around them. Hue Industrial College was joined by the Hue University of Agriculture and Forestry and the

Hue University of Sciences, to collaborate with each other and with industry partners to create innovative learning spaces.

Hue Industrial College invited USAID COMET Project representatives to participate in the final ceremony of the Challenge, so they could observe how youth in Central Vietnam learned to innovate through project-based learning, how institutions work with industry partners to meet industry needs, and how industry partners help cultivate the next generation of entrepreneurs – those who are able to apply design thinking and the internet of things (IoT) concepts.

“Youth should get hands-on, practice experience with cutting edge technology. But technology is always changing, so they need soft skills such as the ability to adapt in new environments and to work with others. By letting youth learn in teams to solve real problems using technology, they are able to grasp the importance of value chains,” said Dr. Cuong. “Seeing the big picture, having both technical and soft skills – that’s what employers want. And that’s what education institutions should aim for”.

Annex 1: USAID COMET Indicators

Activity Goal: To strengthen the employability of youth in the Lower Mekong partner countries by strengthening the skillsets of current and upcoming workers in STEM+AT fields											
No.	Indicator	Indicator Type	Reporting Frequency	Data Source	Targets			Quarterly Result	Cumulative Result	% cumulative achievement against annual target	Notes
					LOA Target Cumulative	Annual Target (Oct 15 - Sep 16)	Quarterly Target (Jan - Mar)				
1	Number of workforce development initiatives completed as a result of USG participation in public-private partnership (standard indicator #4.6.3-8) Unit of measurement: workforce development initiatives Disaggregation: none	Outcome	End of activity	Partner activity records	1,219	63	15	15	33	52%	For Q3, nine instructors from ITC, Mahidol and LANITH incorporated and delivered MekongSkills2Work Sourcebook materials into 15 courses. Instructors in the remaining MLCs will start to teach their courses with MekongSkills2Work content in Q4.

Component 1: Curriculum and Skilled Workforce Portal Developed											
1.1	<p>Number of university/ vocational school instructors who register with the USAID COMET online portal</p> <p>Unit of measurement: Number of university/ vocational school instructors</p> <p>Disaggregation: Sex, country, institution type (university or vocational center)</p>	Outcome	Quarterly	Online portal, evaluation	408	48	0	0	0	0	<p>The web portal registration for instructors will begin in Q4.</p>
1.2	<p>Number of users reaching COMET online portal and social media sites each month</p> <p>Unit of measurement: Number of Facebook (reach, likes, shares, comments), Twitter (retweets, mentions), Youtube (likes, shares, comments), Instagram (likes), and number of web portal page views</p> <p>Disaggregation: sex, country, rural/urban, type of learner (instructor, trainee), target audience</p>	Outcome	Quarterly	Online portal	100,000	10,000	10,000	41,772	33,336	333%	<p>Note: In Y2Q3, we have a total of 125,317 users with 35,714 new members on Facebook, reach of 74,805 unique visitors on our posts, and 14,798 engagements. This is equal to an average of 41,772 per month.</p> <p>For the cumulative result of Q1-Q3, we add up averages of 26,024 Q1 to 32,212 Q2 and 41,772 Q3 divided by 3. The result is 33,336.</p>

Component 2: Vocational training to the current workforce in priority areas improved

2.2	<p>Number of trainers that receive training in innovative approaches to teach in-demand skills in STEM+AT as a result of USG assistance</p> <p>Unit of measurement: Number of STEM+AT trainers</p> <p>Disaggregation: sex, country, rural/urban</p>	Output	Quarterly	Activity records	364	40	0	0	11	28%	No additional vocational school trainers received MekongSkills2Work training in this quarter.
2.6	<p>Percent of impacted [vocational] students that receive improved methods in the delivery of STEM+AT instruction are connected to the online workforce portal</p> <p>Numerator: Total number of vocational students that have registered on the COMET online portal</p> <p>Denominator: Total number of vocational students instructed through the use of the STEM+AT modules developed by the COMET activity in the institutions with appropriate access to online content (eg, computers with internet).</p> <p>Unit of measurement:</p>	Output	Quarterly	Evaluation study	75%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Targets are set to start in Y3.

	percent of participating vocational school students Disaggregation: sex, country, rural/urban										
Component 3: Education of the university students strengthened in STEM+AT fields											
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 Unit of measurement: Number of university instructors Disaggregation: sex, country	Output	Quarterly	University records	116	20	0	0	35	120%	No additional university trainers received MekongSkills2Work training in this quarter.

3.6	<p>Percent of impacted [university] students that receive improved methods in the delivery of STEM+AT instruction are connected to the online workforce portal</p> <p>Numerator: Total number of university students that have registered on the COMET online portal, and/or who have enrolled in online STEM+AT classes</p> <p>Denominator: Total number of vocational students instructed through the use of the STEM+AT modules developed by the COMET activity in the institutions with appropriate access to online content (eg, computers with internet).</p> <p>Unit of measurement: percent of participating university students</p> <p>Disaggregation: sex, country, urban/rural</p>	Output	Quarterly	Evaluation study	80%	0%	0%	N/A	N/A	N/A	Target are set to start in YR3
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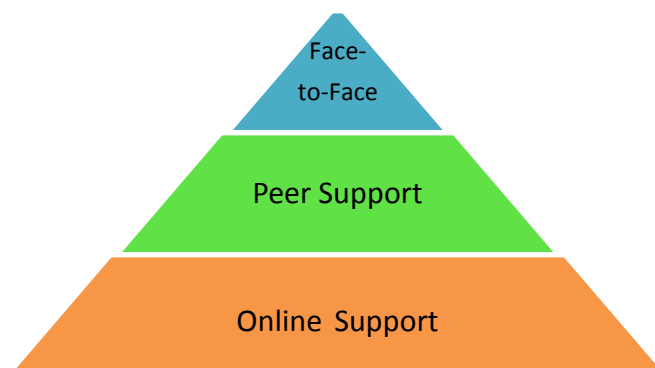
Annex 2: Support for MekongSkills2Work Instructors

Support for MekongSkills2Work Instructors – Overview

Overall Goals

1. Instructors are able to design and do the kinds of content-based activities that promote development of hard skills and soft skills (i.e., critical-thinking skills and behavioral skills).
2. Instructors are able to lead or partner with COMET staff to carry out professional development activities for colleagues in other institutions.

Amounts of Support by Type

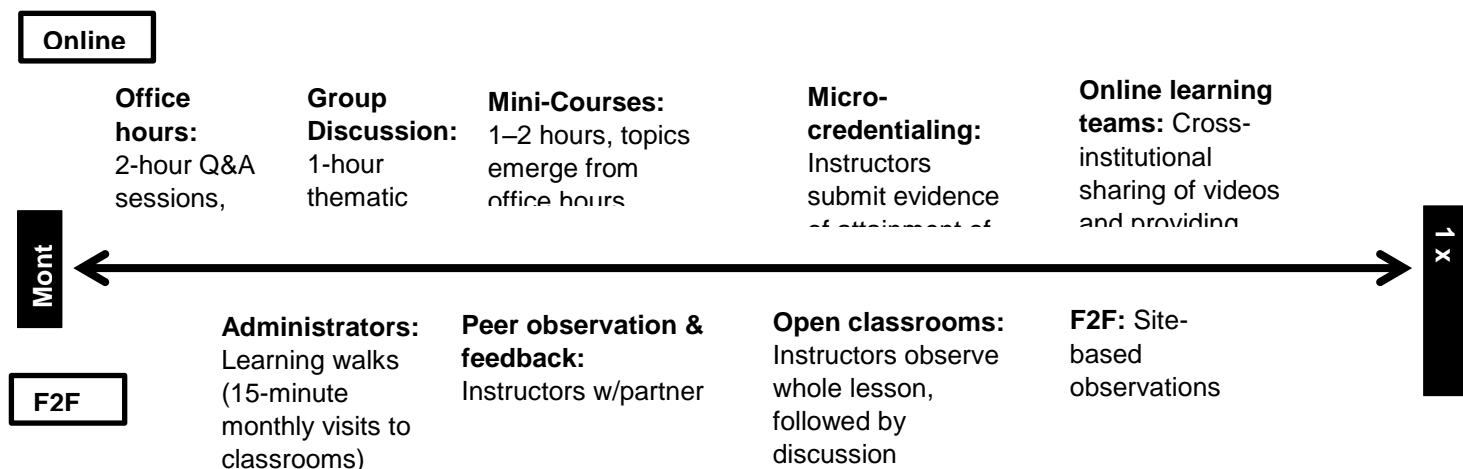


MekongSkills2Work Monitoring and Support

Overview

Continuum of Support:

- Mainly online support from COMET: Online office hours, thematic group discussions, mini-courses, cross-country learning teams
- Site-based support: Peer and administrator support (learning walks, observations, open classrooms) and face-to-face visits from ELFs and COMET staff



Annex 3: Mekong Learning Center Support Team

Institution	Abbreviation	Location	USAID COMET Focal Point	VIA	ELF
Hanoi University of Science and Technology	HUST	Hanoi, Vietnam	Nancy Chervin	Catherine Browning	Eric Wenninger
Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education	HCMUTE	Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam	Suparb Pasong	Catherine Browning (host institution)	Eric Wenninger
Hue Industrial College	HueIC	Hue, Vietnam	Piyamit Chomprasob	Dorothy Lutz	Mari Bodensteiner
Institute of Technology Cambodia	ITC	Phnom Penh, Cambodia	Abhilawan Otwong	Alex Breckon (host institution)	Kim Chilmonik
Laos National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality	LANITH	Vientiane, Laos	Suparb Pasong	Madeleine Lawson	Mari Bodensteiner
Mahidol University	MU	Nakorn Pathom, Thailand	Rungchai Punninda	Patrick Kelly (host institution)	Ami Christensen
Maptaphut Technical College	MTC	Rayong, Thailand	Rungchai Punninda	Patrick Kelly	Emily Claypool
National University of Laos	NUOL	Vientiane, Laos	Suparb Pasong	Madeleine Lawson (host institution)	Mari Bodensteiner
University of Danang	UD	Danang, Vietnam	Piyamit Chomprasob	Dorothy Lutz (host institution)	Ami Christensen
University of Economics – University of Danang	DUE	Danang, Vietnam	Piyamit Chomprasob	Dorothy Lutz	Ami Christensen
University of South-East Asia	USEA	Siem Reap, Cambodia	Abhilawan Otwong	Alex Breckon	Kim Chilmonik
University of Technology (Yatanarpon Cyber City)	UTYCC	Yatanarpon, Myanmar	Nancy Chervin	Patrick Kelly	Emily Claypool

Short Biography of Volunteer in Asia Fellows

Catherine Browning

Catherine graduated from University of North Carolina in public policy, journalism and mass communication. She has strong professional experiences in curriculum and instructional design, project management in e-learning education, research and development and client support with VIF International Education in North Carolina, USA.

Madeleine Lawson

Maddy graduated from Lesley University with a Bachelor of Arts in graphic and web design, and currently is a Master's Candidate in Service, Leadership, and Management at School for International Training, USA. She is highly experienced in customer service and interpersonal communication with professional-level writing skills. She has worked in a multi-cultural environment both in USA and abroad, including an internship with World Education in Laos in 2011.

Dorothy Lutz

Dorothy graduated from Brown University in 2013 with a Bachelor's degree in International Relations. For the past three years, she lived in Washington D.C. and worked as a senior analyst for a business consulting, research, and marketing firm, Avascent, focusing on information technology, aerospace, and industrials.

Alexander Breckon

Alex has an extensive experience in program and business development across cooperate, non-profit, and government sectors, both in the US and overseas. His areas of strength include resourceful leadership, strategic partnership development, and a team-oriented focus. Alex graduated in Advanced Studies in International Affairs from University of California, San Diego. His education background is in business and international political economy, particularly in International Security and Conflict Resolution focusing on Southeast Asia.

Patrick Kelly

Patrick graduated from New York University in Politics. He has a strong interest in working with international development in the developing world. His professional experiences include improving education in Ghana through tutoring and mentoring; promoting gender equality, sustainable development and youth empowerment; and writing executive summaries, blogs and social media contents on geopolitical and economic events.

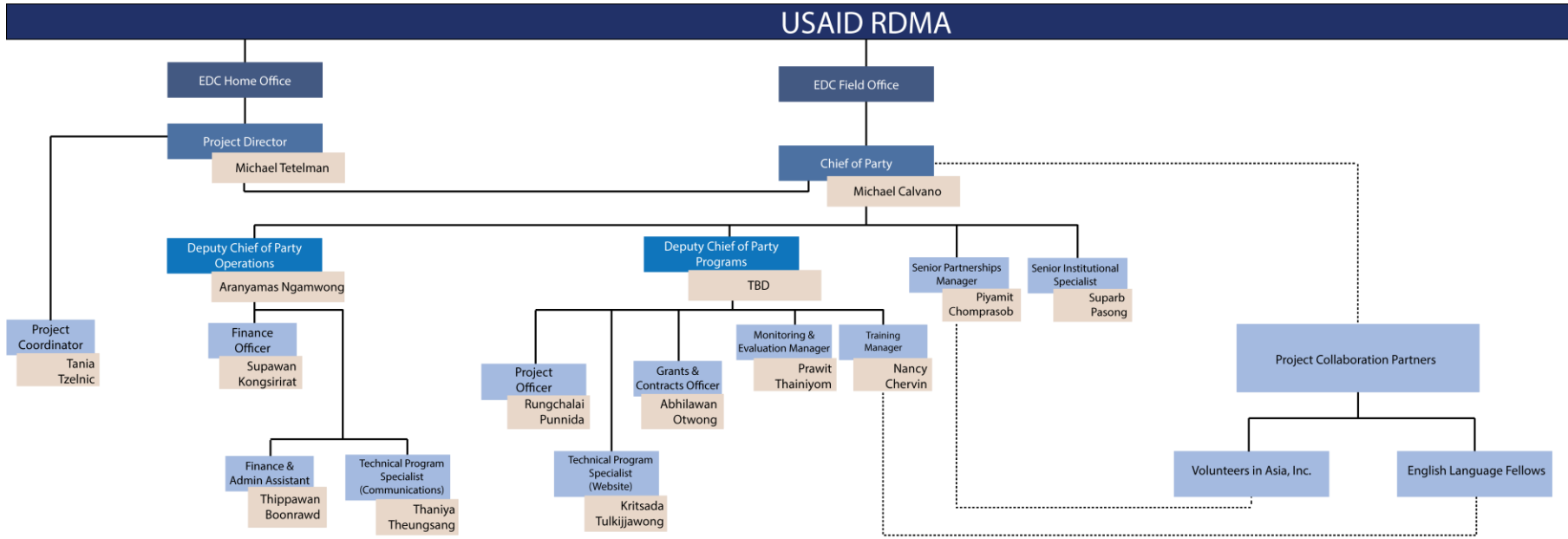
Annex 4: YSEALI Innovation Challenge Top 10 Teams

Country	Team Name	Thematic Area	Concept Note	Link to Video Pitch (for FlipGrid videos, password is ysealichallenge2016)
Cambodia	CFKs (Cam Fermentation Kits)	Agriculture	In order to improve the fermentation process for local sellers, we would like to introduce new fermentation kits which include the optimum fermentation tank; a standardized fermentation technology which is the secret recipe for the best quality of fermented cucumbers (pickles), and sealable plastic bags to pack the pickles to improve sanitation while distributing the product at the market.	http://flipgrid.com/#d8598c75
Indonesia	MINO	Aquaculture	This technology is designed to help attain the goal of 15 million tons of ASEAN farmed fish by 2030. Thus, we could reach the UN Sustainable Development goal by 2030 to end hunger and achieve food security; all these objectives shall be done in environmentally concerned manner.	http://flipgrid.com/#9edab72
Indonesia	RJR	Aquaculture	Our proposed technology is Eco-Aerator, a concept of simple, economical, and applicable oxygen supplier for fishponds using renewable energy. Eco-aerator has two energy sources, solar and wind energy. Solar energy for fishponds and coastal areas have a huge potential generate electricity using photovoltaic cells. Wind energy also can be converted into electricity using wind turbine technology. Due to unreliable wind characteristics for fishponds and coastal areas we can use Vertical Axis Wind Turbine (VAWT) technology. Electricity obtained from these sources will be stored in batteries using a charge controller, then the stored energy can be used to power DC water pumps to supply oxygen for fishponds. Eco-aerator will be equipped with a micro controller as a timer to schedule the operation of the DC water pump. Renewable energy will be used to supply the Eco-aerator so it's eco-friendly. Our hope is that this technology will give positive support to both fishpond farmers and also safeguard the environment.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8cdJnFx-Dfo&feature=youtu.be
Laos	Huk Num	Water Recycling	A Water Recycle System is the solution to conserve water by recycling water from the cleaning kitchen, cleaning restaurant, washing (this is grey water) for use in gardening. Moreover, we propose to use the Rain Harvesting System as part of our solution. For instance, when it rains, the rain can be used for gardening and cleaning.	http://flipgrid.com/#17276056

Malaysia	iSea Forces	Aquaculture	<p>This solution is also a platform for fish farmers to update or warn one another on their effective solutions to diseases or a rise in fish diseases. A facial recognition feature to recognize phenotype disease characteristics of fishes enable fast message transfer between the fish farmers.</p> <p>Our solution will provide access to professional updated information to enhance fish health during cultivation, maximizing business profit. The application is designed to inform users of drastic tidal changes with integrated warnings issued by meteorology control, including warnings for natural disasters and man-made disasters such as oil spills.</p>	http://flipgrid.com/#8943f0dd
Myanmar	2BEC	Agriculture	<p>Our solution will use a drip-irrigation method to decrease water consumption. This method consumes about 50% less water than traditional irrigation methods. Watering the plants in day-time causes greater evaporation, so we will irrigate using a schedule in the early morning and evening.</p>	http://flipgrid.com/#58840baf
Philippines	S-MART (Smart Market Assistance and Product Trading)	Agriculture	<p>S-mart is a web and mobile application that is designed to help farmers, producers and consumers by eliminating the middleman and allowing them to trade directly to consumers. S-mart has additional features that enables users to check market pricing trends in different markets through our predictive algorithm and calculates the cost of transportation to deliver the goods.</p> <p>S-MART also targets SMEs, agricultural cooperatives, and retailers. This will improve the ways of trading and limit the factors affecting the trading industry. S-MART will play a significant role in introducing a new way of trading, letting the producers maximize their profit and consumers can choose freely on what to buy and where they want to buy it.</p>	http://flipgrid.com/#5a8fcea9
Thailand	KU Check 'n Keep	Agriculture	<p>Once food can “INFORM” and “FIX,” food shelf life can be assured. We propose an intelligent system consisting of a real time sensor for food “INFORM” and an intelligent package for food “FIX.” Food “INFORM” allows the food to inform us of its own deterioration status, such as PLEASANT at plantation (growing well), 10-DAYS-TO-DIE at post-harvest (should be processed or eaten within 10 days), TOO-WARM at storage or distribution (high deterioration rate) and so on. With this information, we know what to do with the food. A tool/system to translate food status/deterioration degree based on the food deterioration causes into something that humans can understand in real time is needed. In the case of food “FIX,” once the environment begins to be detrimental to the food, the food system can promptly fix or alleviate the impact. The detriment is suddenly inhibited and the food comes back to a pleasant zone. Food</p>	http://flipgrid.com/#8e2a2f0f

			“INFORM” and “FIX” can be the solution to the reduction of food wastage.	
Vietnam	CACTUS SPKT	Agriculture	The innovative automatic growing systems for hydroponic vegetables applies an automated process to irrigate and supply water for the cultivation process through water purifiers. Our purifier is inspired by the growing advantages of CACTUS species such as permeability, fetch and hold water in the air specially in arid environments. Our Purifier system is also designed with a mechanism to absorb the mist from the external environment, save it in tanks and then mix it with Nutrient Source, then, irrigating the vegetables. This smart system has an electrical power supplied by wind energy and applies new IoT technologies. This will help the farmer monitor many updated parameters using sensors measuring light, temperature, nutrients, contamination, etc. It can be applied from a great distance with pinpoint accuracy, provide warnings related to dangerous parameters, and save time and labor while maintaining an environmentally friendly profile.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PB_LBU1-D23U&feature=youtu.be
Vietnam	Nothing Impossible	Fisheries/Aquaculture	Our solution is a heat exchanger that uses thermoelectric technology for controlling the temperature of fish pond. The key technology used to make the heat exchanger is thermoelectric technology. In particular, we are going to use Peltier Cooling Modules (also known as a TEC or a TEM). While they are typically used for cooling, they can also be used for heating (by reversing the electric current flow) and even power generation. We are going to mount many of the Peltier cells in the middle of aluminum radiators and each radiator will contact with one side of Peltier cell. When the Thermoelectric Peltier cells are powered, they will take heat energy from a radiator on one side and transfer the energy to the radiator on the other side. If we flow water through each side of radiator, we will have both cool and hot water flow. By cycling the water from the fish pond through the radiator and back to the fish pond, we will raise the temperature of one fish pond and lower the temperature of the other. Thus, we will use the heat energy of the cool fish pond and transfer it to the hot fish pond. Our solution opens possibilities for Vietnamese farmers to increase the different types of fish that can be raised in ponds by eliminating the effects of ambient temperature change. This method also exploits energy transfer to minimize the energy loss. If this product is tested and used effectively in Vietnam, it can also be mass produced sold worldwide.	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2XH6YrPhQC4&feature=youtu.be

Annex 5: USAID COMET Organization Chart



Annex 6: Assistance to the Government of Burma Report (as of June 2016)

Reporting Period	Awardee/ Recipient	Number of Recipients	Summary and Justification	Type of Assistance to Government of Burma	*Value	Percentage of Assistance to Activity Amount
Jun 22–23, 2015	Instructors from University of Yangon	2	Orientation to Education Advisory Institution (EAI) Partnerships, Vientiane, Laos	Workshop/Per diem & travel	\$ 1,355	19%
August 2–8, 2015	Instructors from University of Yangon	5	TOT workshop, Phnom Penh, Cambodia	Workshop/Per diem & travel	\$ 4,412	11%
September 22–25, 2015	Instructors from University of Technology (Yatanarpon Cyber City)	4	Tech Innovation Workshop, Kasetsart University, Bangkok Thailand	Workshop/Per diem & travel	\$ 4,387	26%
January 11–12, 2016	Myanmar students	4	Women in Technology Workshop, Ho Chi Min City, Vietnam	Workshop/Per diem & travel	\$ 2,024	12%
October 8, 2015–January 16, 2016	NYUNT, DAW TIN	1	Data collector specialist to collect data in Myanmar and organize it in a database to develop an institutional profile database for both universities and vocational schools	Vendor consulting agreement (VCA)	\$ 1,768	27%
October 8, 2015–January 16, 2016	Asia Research Centre (ARC), University of Yangon	1	EAI to pilot COMET model toolkits for the <i>MekongSkill2Work Sourcebook: A Guide for Facilitators</i>	Vendor consulting agreement (VCA)	\$ 5,261	19%
March 28–April 1, 2016	Instructors from University of Technology (Yatanarpon Cyber City)	4	TOT workshop for MLC in Bangkok, Thailand	Workshop/Per diem & travel	\$ 6,495	8%
March 28–April 1, 2016	University of Technology (Yatanarpon Cyber City)	1	GoPro camera for instructors to post COMET activity in MLC university	Equipment	\$ 395	7%
April 21, 2016–April 20, 2017	University of Technology (Yatanaporn Cyber City)	1	Grant award to build the leadership capacity of a network of universities and vocational centers and be capable of increasing the number of skilled students or workers.	Grant	\$ 24,485	9%

* Approximate U.S. dollar value should include resource directly supporting the activity described. This would exclude extraneous costs such as staff salaries not involved in the activities, office rental costs, or general support costs.

Your best estimates or actuals for ticket prices, the total cost of training for one individual, or that which would be considered a benefit accruing to an individual would suffice.