

Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) – Lead Country Mechanism

1. Mekong - Ganga Cooperation (MGC) comprising India, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam, is one of the oldest mechanisms of the Mekong sub-region. It was launched in November 2000 in Vientiane, Lao PDR, with the signing of the Vientiane Declaration. The MGC has no separate secretariat and the cooperation activity is coordinated by the Co-chairs. It holds the annual Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM), which is preceded by the annual Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM). The MGC has so far witnessed the total number of 13 SOMs and 11 FMMs.

2. The MGC promotes cooperation among its six member countries in ten priority areas. The Mechanism started with four foundational areas of cooperation, including tourism, culture, education and transport and communication. During the 9th MGC FMM in Singapore in 2018, six additional areas of cooperation were added to the Mechanism, including health and traditional medicine, agriculture and allied sectors, MSMEs, water resources management, science and technology and, skill development and capacity building. During the 10th MGC FMM in Bangkok in 2019, the Ministers adopted the MGC Plan of Action (2019 - 2022) that envisaged project-based cooperation in all these ten areas.

3. During the preparation of the first MGC Plan of Action, i.e. the Hanoi Plan of Action (2001 - 2007), it was decided that each area of cooperation would be coordinated through an Expert Working Group (WG) led by one M G C country. There were five initial Working Groups (WGs) under MGC with their lead countries, as follows:

- (i) Working Group on Tourism – Thailand
- (ii) Working Group on Education (Human Resource Development) – India
- (iii) Working Group on Culture – Cambodia
- (iv) Working Group on Communication & Transportation - Lao PDR
- (v) Working Group on Plan of Actions - Viet Nam

4. The addition of the new areas of cooperation under MGC, as well as the adoption of the project-based Plan of Action have necessitated a rethinking and revitalization of the Lead Country Mechanism of MGC. Furthermore, the current global context and external challenges, including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic slowdown and supply chain disruption, have also highlighted the need to reassess the strategic focus of our cooperation under MGC, with the view to strengthening the MGC cooperation to deliver tangible benefits to our peoples.

5. Proposal: In view of the above, the MGC countries have agreed that the role of the Lead Country and the WG mechanism for each area of cooperation under MGC should be reactivated and all ten areas should be designated with lead countries, per Thailand's proposal during the 11th MGG FMM in 2021. Since there has been an increase in the areas of cooperation, the initial distribution may need to be reworked. Accordingly, the WGs along with their lead countries could be as follows:-

Working Group	Lead Country
Working Group on Tourism	Thailand
Working Group on Education	India
Working Group on Culture	Cambodia
Working Group on Transportation and Communication	Lao PDR
Working Group on Health & Traditional Medicine	Myanmar and Thailand
Working Group on Agriculture and Allied Sectors	Myanmar
Working Group on MSMEs	Viet Nam
Working Group on Water Resources Management	India
Working Group on Science and Technology	Myanmar
Working Group on Skill Development and	India

6. Responsibility: The Lead Country would be responsible for giving inputs related to their WG and identifying suitable action points in preparation for future Plan of Actions (PoAs). It will also be responsible for providing guidance on implementing specific projects under the MGC PoA, so as to enhance cooperation in such areas among the MGC countries. The Lead Country may organise meetings of the WG, in order to seek comments from other MGC countries and suggest ways to implement projects in line with the PoA. The Lead Country may also monitor the implementation progress of cooperation under the PoA. The WG in each area of cooperation would comprise of at least six representatives from all of the MGC countries. The Co-chairs will start piloting the implementation of the lead country mechanism.

* * * *