

EMM4 Youth Meeting Statement to Ministers

Why are GMS Youth Important? What do we believe?

Youth of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) are an energetic, innovative, and passionate group dedicated to actively participating and mobilizing our communities. Through this, we have the power to positively impact the development of the GMS.

The future of this region lies with the youth of today. Only through working together now, by mobilizing leaders and communities to critically tackle the problems of our region, can we, the youth of the GMS, achieve our goal of ensuring that development in the GMS is sustainable for generations to come.

As ambassadors of the GMS community, youth actively promote investment in natural and social capital.

Youth Environment Actions in the GMS

The youth of the GMS recognize the mandate for a diverse, involved range of actions through which we will support sustainable development in the region. Importantly, we commit to implementing awareness-raising and behavioral change programs that educate peers, communities, and other stakeholders, with the goal of increased public participation in environmental initiatives.

Specifically, GMS youth will scale up successful efforts to improve solid waste management throughout the GMS by supporting activities such as the Green Ribbon Campaign (Cambodia), Ruy Bang Xanh (Vietnam). Setting an example for other projects, youth will reduce litter to clean-up the GMS by mobilizing our peers and university communities.

In one such initiative, youth will organize educational workshops such as Mekong River trips to further engage our peers in integrated water resources management and other issues. Learning from these experiences, we will showcase the best practices of youth organizations by developing guidelines to further mobilize GMS youth.

Additionally, youth will facilitate collaboration in environmental initiatives, especially by supporting practical relationships between governments, communities and the private sector. Notably, youth can help GMS governments implement projects in remote areas such as forest protection, organic farming, livelihood activities and reducing crop burning.

Increasing GMS Youth Cooperation and Collaboration

Youth organizations anticipate supporting development in the GMS through many channels. In interacting with the government, we propose the following initiatives:

- Young government officers from GMS Ministries of Environment will organize events and set up online platforms that improve idea exchanges and relationship-building among them.
- GMS Youth will identify youth focal points of each GMS Ministry of Environment and different government offices.
- Youth will increase credibility of youth organizations by further showcasing effective solutions implemented by youth. Youth will continue to participate in and support ADB's Youth4ASIA solutions search competition.

- Youth proposes that NGOs such as Plan International serve as liaisons between youth, communities and local governments.
- Youth can engage through national youth networks such as youth unions and youth councils to improve communications and networking.
- Governments and youth work together in organizing policy discussions and youth debates.
- Youth will participate and invite our fellow youth to workshops and capacity-building events organized by governments and development partners.

A key point in youth peer interactions will be that youth must facilitate increased exchange and peer-to-peer learning between rural and urban youth. Urban youth can go to rural areas (and vice versa) to learn from each other. A channel through which youth will engage communities will be through support for education and awareness-building campaigns.

Additionally, youth-GMS interaction examples include:

- We propose GMS countries invite youth leaders to Working Group for Environment Semi-Annual/Annual Meetings. Youth leaders who participate in these meetings can establish an informal working group to facilitate cooperation.
- Youth will utilize social media platforms such to improve communication and to keep each other updated on projects and activities that provide opportunities for youth engagement.
- Governments can host regular meetings (twice a year for example) to invite youth to dialogue with GMS governments.
- We can approach Universities to develop a college degree that focuses on GMS issues.

Our Expectations and Recommendations

We call on our fellow youth and on regional leaders to mobilize cooperative initiatives and invest in natural capital in the GMS. To this end, youth of the GMS recognize the need and request assistance for establishing a coordinated program of learning communications and community actions under a regional GMS youth network supported by environmentally-focused partners. This network will further a discussion of capacity-building initiatives, inclusion of vulnerable and marginalized youth and encourage intergenerational dialogue.

Through partnerships with governments and groups such as ADB, UNEP, and WWF/CI/Plan, youth networks are setting the stage for a new movement towards curricula at all levels in Education for Sustainable Development, which will empower today's youth and future generations to be more effective voices for environmental initiatives in the GMS such as biodiversity conservation and responsible water management.

A major component of this educational initiative should be practical learning opportunities for youth including visits to field sites to understand the value of natural capital and the connectivity of the GMS ecosystems to their lives.

Through these suggested initiatives and many others, youth in the Greater Mekong Subregion seek to support responsible development in the GMS through appropriate valuation and increased investment in natural capital, and the continuous improvement of livelihoods for all citizens of our great region.