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1st Meeting of the Working Group on Health Cooperation
13-14 December 2017, Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

Opening Remarks

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Colleagues from GMS countries, Development partners, Civil Society Organization colleagues, distinguished guests, and ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning and welcome to the join this first working group on health cooperation (WGHC).

As representing the Lao PDR Resident Mission ADB, let me briefly introduce the importance of the regional cooperation and integration and the health sector in economic policy of the country and ADB's strategy. The Lao PDR is situated at the "heart" of the GMS, being the only country that borders five other GMS countries. The Lao PDR views economic cooperation as an important means for supporting sustainable economic growth. The ongoing National Socio-Economic Development Plan (NSED) 2016–2020 emphasizes that the Lao PDR should participate in regional and international integration with strong ownership to benefit all people and enhance favorable conditions for regional and international integration. ADB's recently approved Lao PDR Country Partnership Strategy (2017-2020) emphasized the importance of GMS program to support the government transform from landlocked to land linked county. In addition the CPS has identified three strategic priorities and one of them is Enhanced Human Development particularly improving access to health service.

As a background of this meeting, at the Extraordinary Meeting of the Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD-Ex), GMS countries agreed to restructure the WGHRD and establish the Working Group on Health Cooperation (WGHC). This decision was based on the findings of the review of the Human Resource Development Strategic Framework and Action Plan 2013-2017 and the recommendations of the Study on Strengthening the Greater Mekong Subregion Program's Institutional Framework. In September 2017, at the 22nd GMS Ministerial Conference, GMS ministers supported this decision.

At the Ministerial Meeting, the Ministers acknowledged the ongoing development of a GMS Health Cooperation Strategy to guide cooperation in this important area. The strategy will include time-bound action plans to improve service delivery, build stronger health systems, and increase health care access for vulnerable groups.

There are mainly three objectives of today's WGHC-1. They are to: i) agree on the Working Group on Health Cooperation (WGHC) terms of reference – composition, functions, roles, responsibilities, operational and monitoring mechanisms; ii) review and validate the draft framework for the GMS Health Cooperation Strategy 2018-2022; iii) conduct preliminary discussions on GMS Health Cooperation project pipeline. These are very important to facilitate regional cooperation and integration, particularly in terms of promoting inclusive growth by supporting vulnerable people affected by economic development. Today's first meeting is also

one of the great achievements before the 6th GMS Summit Meeting to be held in March next year.

Finally, let me thank the Lao PDR for hosting this meeting. I hope the discussion today will further facilitate the regional cooperation and strengthen the friendship among the GMS countries. Thank you very much.