COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY-INDIVIDUALS PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FROM THE MEKONG 1,000 PROJECT IN THE LOWER MEKONG DELTA REGION, SOUTH VIETNAM

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Abstract

Given the context of cooperation of the triads in the educational field, any institution in Vietnam has been implementing the interrelated-linked model: school-family-society, one of the Vietnamese education principles. Recently, there has appeared a new "handshake" among Community-University-Individuals (CUI) from the Mekong 1,000 Project in 13 provinces of the Lower Mekong Delta Region (LMDR), South Vietnam in cooperation with Can Tho University (CTU), with the hope of sending 1,000 candidates abroad for their graduate studies towards the human resource development and knowledge transfer in the era of industrialization and modernization of Post-war Vietnam. From this context, we would like to do research with the following issues.

The purposes of this study (May -November, 2010) were (1) to study the objectives, roles and responsibilities and initial achievements of CUI Partnerships from the Mekong 1,000 Project for sustainable development in the Lower Mekong Delta Region, (2) to examine the opinions of partners involved in this Project, and (3) to put forward to suggestions on CUI Partnerships objectives, roles, responsibilities to make the project a better success.

The methods of the research consisted of (1) a document research about the objectives, roles, responsibilities and initial achievements of CUI Partnerships since 2005, the official year of its operation, (2) a structured questionnaire with 22 items related to the respondents' personal data, English Improvement Program at Center for Foreign Languages (CFL) in CTU, the roles, responsibilities and future contributions of the Project's 27 candidates towards the future of LMDR, interviews with 1 Deputy Rector of CTU in charge of the Mekong 1,000 Project, 2 Deputy Directors at CFL, CTU, 6 senior lecturers in English language directly teaching 4 Modules of English Improvement Program, and 10 project candidates, and then close observations on administration, and directly teaching (in class) of the researchers, and (3) a descriptive report on suggestions on CUI Partnerships.

The results of the paper revealed that (1) CUI Partners are interrelated and mutual assistance to their objectives, roles and responsibilities for sustainable development in LMDR, and initial achievements are valuable motives to make CUI Partnerships better cooperate so as to fulfill

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their jobs in the years to come, that (2) each partner provincial authority, CTU/CFL and project candidate has to try its best towards the bright future of LMDR in terms of human resource development and knowledge transfer, and that (3) each partner needs to modify its objectives, roles and responsibilities when the socio events unexpectedly occur on the long way to its final goals.

Key words: Mekong 1,000 Project, Lower Mekong Delta Region, Can Tho University, Sustainable Development, Partnerships and Human Resource Development

Introduction and backgrounds

The study would cover the following things as basic foundation towards the partnerships among the tripods Can Tho University (CTU), Community (Mekong Delta areas) and Individuals (Mekong Delta candidates) from the Mekong 1,000 Project.

Vietnam, a glimpse

Vietnam, officially the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (Vietnamese: *Cộng hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam*), is the easternmost country on the Indochina Peninsula in Southeast Asia. It is bordered by China to the north, Laos to the northwest, and Cambodia to the southwest, and the South China Sea to the east. With a population of over 86 million, Vietnam is the 13th most populous country in the world.

Vietnam is approximately 331,688 km² (128,066 sq mi) in area (not including Hoang Sa and Truong Sa islands), larger than Italy and almost the size of Germany. The perimeter of the country running along its international boundaries is 4,639 km (2,883 mi). The topography consists of hills and densely forested mountains, with level land covering no more than 20%. Mountains account for 40% of

the area, with smaller hills accounting for 40% and tropical forests 42%. The northern part of the country consists mostly of highlands and the Red River Delta. Phan Xi Păng, located in Lào Cai province, is the highest mountain in Vietnam at 3,143 m (10,312 ft). The south is divided into coastal lowlands, Annamite Chain peaks, extensive forests, and poor soil. Comprising five relatively flat plateaus of basalt soil, the highlands account for 16% of the country's arable land and 22% of its total forested land. Historically, Vietnam has been an agricultural civilization based on wet rice cultivating.

In a historic shift in 1986, the Communist Party of Vietnam implemented free-market reforms known as "Đổi Mới" (*renovation*). With the authority of the state remaining unchallenged, private ownership of farms and companies, deregulation and foreign investment were encouraged. The economy of Vietnam has achieved rapid growth in agricultural and industrial production, construction and housing, exports and foreign investment. As of December 2007, Vietnam has established diplomatic relations with 172 countries. Vietnam holds membership of 63 international organizations such as the United

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Nations, ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), La Francophone, WTO (World Trade Organization) and 650 non-government organizations.

The people of Vietnam speak "Vietnamese" as a native language. In its early history, Vietnamese writing used Chinese characters. In the 13th century, the Vietnamese developed their own set of characters called "Chữ nôm." The celebrated epic "Đoạn trường tân thanh" (Truyện Kiều or The Tale of Kieu) by Nguyễn Du was written in "Chữ nôm." During the French colonial period, "Quốc ngữ", the Romanized Vietnamese alphabet used for spoken Vietnamese, which was developed in 17th century by Jesuit Alexandre De Rhodes and several other Catholic missionaries, became popular and brought literacy to the masses.

Vietnam has an extensive state-controlled network of schools, colleges and universities but the number of privately-run and mixed public and private institutions is also growing. General education in Vietnam is imparted in five categories: kindergarten, elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and college / university. Courses are taught mainly in Vietnamese. A large number of public schools have been organized across cities, towns and villages with the purpose of raising the national literacy rate which is already among the highest in the world. There are a large number of specialized colleges, established to develop a diverse and skilled national workforce. A large number of Vietnam's most acclaimed universities are based in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Facing serious crises, Vietnam's education system is under a holistic reform launched by the government. Regardless, school enrollment is among the highest in the world and the number of colleges and universities increased quite dramatically in recent years, from 178 in 2000 to 299 in 2009. (Wikipedia, 2009).

Mekong Delta on the move

Mekong Delta is located at 8°33'-10°55'N, 104°30'-106°50'E; the delta region of the Mekong River from the border with Kampuchea to the sea, including the provinces of Long An, Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Ben Tre, Cuu Long, Hau Giang, An Giang, Kien Giang, Minh Hal and Tay Ninh, Ho Chi Minh City and the southern parts of Song Be and Dong Nai provinces.

The Mekong River is one of the great rivers of Asia, ranking twelfth in the list of longest rivers of the world, and sixth in terms of mean annual discharge. It rises at about 5,000m in the Tanghla Shan Mountains, on the northeast rim of the great Tibetan Plateau, and flows for 4,160 km through or along the borders of six countries: China, Burma, Laos, Thailand, Kampuchea and Vietnam. The lower Mekong exhibits pronounced seasonal variations in flow, reflecting rainfall patterns. The river starts to rise shortly after the onset of the monsoon rains in late May, and attains its maximum level in September or October. It then falls rapidly until December and slowly thereafter to reach its lowest level in April and early May.

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The Mekong Delta is generally regarded as beginning at Phnom Penh in Kampuchea, where the river divides into its two main distributaries, the Mekong (Tien) and the Bassac (Song Hau Giang). The Mekong (Tien) subsequently divides into six main channels and the Bassac into three to form the nine "dragons" of the outer delta in Vietnam. The delta comprises a vast triangular plain of approximately 5.5 million ha, almost entirely below 5m above sea level. It extends for about 270 km from its apex at Phnom Penh to the coast, and has a coastline of about 600 km. Approximately 1,600,000 ha of the inner delta lie within Kampuchea; the remaining 3,900,000 ha constitute the southern tip of Vietnam. The delta is the result of sedimentation and erosion, the sediments varying in depth from at least 500m near the river mouths to only 30m at some places in the inner delta. At the nine mouths of the Bassac and Tien branches, the combined action of river deposition and the sea has produced a coastal belt of slightly higher elevation. Deposition in the delta continues to extend the Ca Mau Peninsula south and west at a rate of l50m per year in some places.

Can Tho City, center of the South west of Vietnam

Can Tho is a province in the South of Vietnam, located on the bank of the Bassac River (Hau Giang river), in the Mekong Delta, 170 kilometers southwest of Ho Chi Minh City. The province neighbors on five provinces: Dong Thap on the Northeast, An Giang on the North, Hau Giang on the South, Kien Giang on the west, and Vinh Long on the east. Can Tho has a complex of rivers and canals in which Hau river is considered as the benefactor of the region as yearly floods deposit large quantities of alluvia on the rice fields. That makes Can Tho "the green lungs of the Mekong Delta."

Can Tho has two distinct seasons: the dry and the rainy seasons. The province is endowed with sunshine all year round with a high humidity. There is almost no storm sitting the province. Average temperature is 27°C. The history of the city can be traced back to the 16th century, when the area was first invaded and developed by several ethnic groups, including the Vietnamese, the Hoa (Chinese), and the Khmer. These people turned it from a swampy area into a populous region and used the delta soils for fertile rice fields. At the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, the area was the battlefield between armies of the Nguyen dynasty and the Tay Son brothers. When the French invaded Vietnam, Can Tho was under French colonial rule.

The city is home to a large pagoda built in 1946 in the style of Khmer Theravada Buddhism. Can Tho is home to several educational institutions including Can Tho University (founded in 1966), a training college for teachers, and several vocational colleges that teach commerce, finance, medicine, and agriculture. The Department of Agronomy at Can Tho University houses Vietnam's largest research center on rice, one of the country's most important staple foods. International experts are determining whether the area, and especially its river water ecosystem, could

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sustain another National Nature Reserve. (Can Tho Tourist Office, 2009).

Can Tho University in Its Roles

Can Tho University (CTU), an important state higher education institution in the Mekong Delta, is the cultural, scientific and technical center of the Mekong Delta (MD) and Viet Nam. Since its founding in 1966, CTU has been improving and developing itself. It has an enrolment of 35,038 undergraduate students, 1,806 students have been following Master courses, and 40 students are Ph.D candidates. CTU has got 1,908 staff including 927 teaching staff and 981 supporting staff. From a university with a few fields of study at the beginning, it has developed into a multidisciplinary university. Currently, it has 77 undergraduates, 28 Master and 8 Doctoral training programs. Every year CTU receives students on internship programs from the U.S, Belgium, Japan and so on, or under agreements between their universities and CTU.

Can Tho University's main missions are training, conducting scientific research, and transferring technology to serve the regional and national socio-economic development. In addition to its training responsibilities, CTU has actively taken part in scientific research projects, applying the advances in scientific and technological knowledge to solving problems related to science, technology, economics, culture and society in the region. From achievements in its scientific research and international cooperation projects, the university has developed a variety of products and

technological production processes that benefit people's lives and promote export, thus helping the university gain prestige in national and international markets. The university has established scientific and technological cooperation with many international organizations, universities, and research institutes. As a result of these cooperative projects, the staff's administrative capabilities and specializations have been upgraded. The facilities, experimental equipment, and scientific materials have also been added.

International cooperation is a one of CTU's greatest strengths. Thanks to international collaboration programs, CTU has improved its management, planning, teaching, research. Funds from these programs have also been used to improve the University's facilities and infrastructure. Currently, CTU is working cooperatively with more than 80 institutes, universities, and organizations worldwide, particularly those from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, England, Finland, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the USA. Cooperation with Asian nations such as Cambodia, China, India, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Taiwan, etc. has been diversified and developed. (Can Tho University Annual Report, 2009).

Center for Foreign Languages in Its Assistances

The Center for Foreign Languages (CFL) was founded in August 1991 and officially nominated by the Vietnamese Ministry of

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Training and Education in December 1991. Since the foundation day, the center has been upgrading the infrastructure and equipping good facilities for teaching and conducting research. At present, the center is located in Campus 2, Can Tho University. There are 12 rooms available with the capacity of approximately 35 seats in each room. Classrooms are equipped with a desktop and a TV in order to teach languages through videos and the other multimedia. In addition, teachers can use more than 100 rooms in other buildings in the University for their Evening Language Classes, with the number of 27 teaching and office staffs and about 5,000 learners per course.

CFL in Can Tho University has its objectives (1) upgrading the teaching methods and skills of the teachers of English, French, and other foreign languages in Cantho University and those of the local community, (2) teaching English and other foreign languages to university staff that do scientific research, overseas studies, and communication with foreigners, (3) offering general English and other foreign language courses and specialized ones to local people who need English for various purposes, and (4) extending the bilateral cooperation with foreign organizations or institutions so as to make the teaching and learning environment better through short-term and long-term projects. (http://www.centers/cfl/english/index.htm)

CFL courses are of General language courses (English, French, Chinese, Japanese, and German) and specialized ones (Business English, TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), English for Tourism, and English for Children, IELTS (International English Language Testing System), Public Speaking, Pronunciation Practice and Communicative English). For certificates, candidates who successfully pass the exams are granted certificates according to corresponding levels (of English and French). End-of-course certificates are also issued to learners who have successfully passed end-of-course tests.

Mekong 1,000 project legends

Operated in August 2005, the Mekong 1,000 Project, an initiative from CTU leaders, is in cooperation among Can Tho University, 13 provinces in the LMDR and candidates, who have to sign contracts to contribute to the future of the LMDR after their comeback from abroad.

First of all, in the roles and responsibilities of CTU, this venue takes its responsibilities to be a 'linkman' as consultancy to foreign study majors and universities and colleges admissions because CTU has strong connections and cooperation with over 80 organizations worldwide. Also, CTU has helped hold study exhibitions and orientations to abroad study with the introductions of the counterparts. In addition, CTU established the Mekong 1,000 Project office near the International Affairs office in CTU Campus 2, and its website (http://www/ctu.edu.vn/mk1000) in order to update information and spread out the spirits of the CUI partnerships.

Center for Foreign Languages (CFL) had its first Mekong 1,000 project candidates (50 students) belonging to Can Tho Province

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150 Project. And now in 2010, the number of the students is over 300. The following are English Improvement Program schedule with teaching materials compiled by CFL staff and taught by teachers of English at CFL and Department of English, School of Education, Can Tho University.

English programs	Levels	Duration	Certification
Module 1	Level C (General English)	10 weeks	Completion of Module 1
Module 2	IELTS 4.5	10 weeks	Completion of Module 2
Module 3	IELTS 5.0	10 weeks	Competition of Module 3
Module 4	IELTS 6.0	10 weeks	Completion of Module 4

At the end of each module, a candidate can take any IELTS held by the British Council at CFL in order to apply to his or her university and college abroad if his or her scores meet foreign university admission requirements.

Second, in the roles and responsibilities of Community, since 2006, 13 provinces in the LMDR have begun their activities in terms of establishing budgets and recruitments of candidates to send them to CFL for English Improvement Program. According to Deputy Rector of CTU, the total budget for the Mekong 1,000 Project amounts to USD 49,345,185, distributed to per candidate each year at a specific university or college abroad. Also, Mr. Pham Xuan Binh, Deputy Director in charge of the Project says that, within there years of operation since 2005, the official numbers of candidates are 365 and 110 are now taking English modules at CFL and 154 are pursuing their graduates studies abroad.

Last but not least, in the roles and responsibilities of Individuals, also according to Mr. Pham Xuan Binh, candidates are fairly

selected by the provincial committees, especially Internal Service and Education and Training Service Candidates get consultancy in terms of majors and universities and colleges' admission requirements and funding as well. They have to sign their contracts to come back to their former workplaces and contribute their studies to their communities.

So far, the cooperation among Can Tho University, Provinces and Candidates has been reported to go smoothly. Each venue and agent is trying to help bring success to the Project, added by Mr. Pham Xuan Binh.

Questions of the Study

The questions of the study would cover the following issues (1) what are the objectives, roles and responsibilities and initial results of CUI partnerships from the Mekong 1,000 Project?, (2) what are the viewpoints of the partners involved in the Project?, and (3) what are the suggestions on CUI partnerships objectives, roles and responsibilities for a successful project?

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were as follows: (1) to study the objectives, roles and responsibilities and initial achievements of CUI Partnerships from the Mekong 1,000 Project for sustainable development in the Lower Mekong Delta Region, (2) to examine the opinions of the partners involved in this Project, and (3) to put forward to suggestions on CUI Partnerships objectives, roles, and responsibilities to make the project a better success.

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Significance of the Study

The benefits of this study posed as presented below:(i) for readers, they can find it a useful reference to get to know CUI Partnerships, in which the objectives, roles and responsibilities of the three agents-Can Tho University, Mekong Delta communities and Mekong 1,000 Project candidates were introduced. (ii) For social sciences researchers and project administrators and designers, they might get a new venue to contact for their cooperation besides authentic information about CUI Partnerships. And (iii) for the study authors, they themselves had a great opportunity to have in-depth survey about CUI Partnerships, a new handshake, as the roles of the project administrator and language teacher.

Review of Related Literature

Given the context of the university-community partnerships, Shahabudin (2007) from Universiti Kebangssaan Malaysia says that service to the community is part of the social contract whereby the university has a moral obligation to be accountable and socially responsible in return for the public funding spent on its up keeping. The social contract is fulfilled in two mutually benefiting ways. The university gains by enhancing the quality, relevance and effectiveness of the educational and research programs through links to the 'real' society/world. The community, in turn, achieves through a direct engagement of the University's expertise, resources and research outputs in participatory, bottom-up, people-centered development. Partnerships with the community also serve to cement 'good neighbor' relationship where the community is also host to hundreds of the university's students which include international students. Shahabudin (2007) adds that, in partnership for educational purposes, the community becomes the living classroom for students to learn in a holistic manner and where their learning experience will result in a wholesome individual and responsible citizenry. The community offers a fertile environment for the development of learning outcomes envisaged such as application of knowledge and practical skills, social skills and responsibility, ethics, values and professionalism, communication, leadership and team skills, problem-solving and decision making, managerial and entrepreneurial skills.

Shahabudin (2007) comes to a conclusion that university-community initiatives are valuable in instilling social responsibility and accountability in pursuit of a bottom-up approach to community development. For students, the community provides a real-life experience for developing leadership, organizational ability, team spirit and responsibility. The community is also a classroom for interethnic respect and valuing of cultural diversity. The community benefits from the expertise, resources and research output for its comprehensive development. To be effective the university needs to reorganize the way it interacts with the community and society at large as well as make it count in the staff appraisal and student credit.

In addition, Stephens, Hernandez and Boyle (2009) from Clark University, U.S.A and

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National University of Tucuman, Argentina, when mentioning about university-community partnerships, state that universities throughout the world are attempting to expand their relevance by responding to and engaging with local and regional societal challenges. Given the accelerating recent rates of change in many sustainability challenges facing human society resulting in increasing urgency for confronting these diverse challenges in creative ways, opportunities are emerging for different societal stakeholders and institutions to engage in new ways. Universities have a particularly interesting potential in society to facilitate societal responses to the plethora of sustainability challenges facing communities around the world, and as such, new university- community partnerships designed to promote sustainable development are emerging throughout the world.

In their conclusion, Stephens, Hernandez and Boyle (2009), indicate that sustainability requires people who are experienced with the type of 'bridge building' and 'world spanning' that university-community engagement encourages (Hollander, 2009). Rather, the institutions involved must heed contextual factors and understand the constant effort will be necessary by all stakeholders if the promise of the partnerships is to be achieved. New knowledge will be generated, as technologies are deployed in specific settings and as researchers reflect upon the socio-technical and educational challenges of bridge building and world spanning. It remains imperative that we understand how locales and contexts influence our ability to share and build such knowledge.

In terms of *sustainable development*, it has its roots in United Nations history in the environmental movement. Much of today's work in sustainable development can be traced back for several decades. Many milestones have marked the journey towards sustainable development including the landmark 1972 United Nations Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm, which led to the establishing of many environmental protection agencies and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). Nations realized that the widespread growth of environmental degradation needed international attention and collaboration rather than national approaches and solutions. While some attention was attached to the social and economic issues inherent in these environmental issues the focus was largely on addressing the ecological impact of ever increasing unrestricted development. Within 10 years of Stockholm the world was realizing that treating environmental concerns in isolation of development needs, such as grinding poverty for a large segment of humanity, was not going to serve either the environment or people. Hence, by the mid 1980's the United Nations launched a search for a larger strategy to address both the needs of society and the environment. In 1987 with "Our Common Future", the Report of the Brundtland Commission, sustainable development was endorsed as an overarching framework or construct for future development policy at all levels of government.

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From the time sustainable development was first endorsed in 1987; the United Nations General Assembly explored the parallel concept of education to support sustainable development. From 1987 to 1992, the concept of sustainable development matured as committees discussed, negotiated, and wrote the 40 chapters of Agenda 21. Thoughts concerning education and sustainability were initially captured in Chapter 36 of Agenda 21, "Promoting Education, Public Awareness, and Training". In addition, education as an enabling or implementation strategy was embedded in each of the 40 chapters of Agenda 21 and each of the negotiated Conventions arising from the Earth Summit. As well, every one of the nine major United Nations Conferences of the 1990s that further addressed and refined sustainability issues, identified education in its broadest terms as crucial in implementing the Conference action strategies. (UNESCO, 2005)

From the spirit of community-based education, Doeden (2001:3), with her case study of many site visits at the rural areas in Nebraska, U.S.A, states that community-based education fostered youth leadership and development, engaging students in community planning, economic and cultural development. She adds that the young people are collaborating with elders, advocacy groups, teachers, farmers/ ranchers, bankers/ civic leaders, and other residents in joint strategies for community development. Grauwe (2007:11), when motioning about decentralization in education, says that at the school level, the

development of a relationship between the school and its community is crucial as it turns the community into a genuine force of accountability and support. He adds that this relation is true for schools which receive little support from national authorities when the state is weak or if they are situated in remote areas. Grauwe (2007:13) also states that the obstacles to building up of the relationship between schools and communities are partly STRUCTURAL and CULTURAL. He suggests that all PARENTS should be well informed of their rights and there should be an EXTERNAL mechanism to control the functioning of community structure such as PARENT-TEACHER Association.

What's more, Ndoye (2007:13) , addressing about education for sustainable development , in the sample of African context, that "Schools and universities need to maintain interactive relationships with their economic and social environments, in order to link skills development with the search for solutions to the problems, both within communities and in the country in general." Higher education and research also have a decisive contribution to make through producing and disseminating relevant knowledge to the areas under consideration. At the same matter, Sinlarat (2008:3), when presenting a new model to promote sustainable development in Thailand, says that higher education is considered to be a significant tool to develop the country and the communities because it creates knowledge for the country development, produces people to develop the country and helps the country to

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solve various problems. She draws out a Creative and Productive Higher Education Model with four factors: Critical Mind, Creative Mind, Productive Mind and Responsible Mind, which will be the foundations to the curriculum design related to respectively: Criticality-based instruction, Creativity-based instruction, Productivity-based instruction and responsibility-based instruction (Sinlarat, 2008:5). She adds new ideas to UNESCO's four main pillars of learning: Learning to learn critically, Learning to do creatively, Learning to work together constructively, and Learning to be wisely. Meanwhile, when addressing communities and sustainable education and research, Waring (2009:6) puts down its definition: "Communities were different from each other had different cultures, had different histories, different power dynamics, different ways of working with, and uses for their natural environments. And they were EXPERTS on all this information. Field methods evolved to reflect this reality, and to change the dynamic of the research."

In the context of CUI Partnerships in the LMDR, this is the first 'handshake" among the tripods- Can Tho University (CTU), Provinces and Candidates. Deputy Director of CFL states that CTU is performing its roles as 'a governing committee" and 'a bridge' to link candidates to reach their knowledge abroad so as to serve their provinces for better communities. He adds that CFL is also trying its roles with English Improvement Program with a view to helping candidates load with enough English knowledge and skills for better IELTS scores and integration into foreign studies and cultures via the mastery of the English language.

Methods and Procedures

In order to process the study (May-November, 2010), the researchers deployed the methods as follows (1) for the first objective, the documentary research relating to the objectives, roles and responsibilities and initial achievements in the Mekong 1,000 project were collected and analyzed. (2) For the second objective, there was a mixed method with a structured questionnaire, consisting of 22 items with personal data, abroad majors and especially the contracts of the future contributions after comeback from 27 Mekong 1,000 project candidates. There were also semi-structured interviews with one Deputy Rector of CTU in charge of the Mekong 1,000 Project, two Deputy Directors at CFL, CTU, and six senior lecturers in English language directly teaching 4 Modules of English Improvement Program, and 10 project candidates. These dealt with their understandings about the Project, expectations and real assistances, and future implementation. Then there came with close observations on administration, and directly teaching (in class) of the researcher. And (3) for the final objective, there would be a descriptive report referring to specific suggestions on CUI Partnerships for their better fulfillments towards their goals in the Mekong 1,000 Project.

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the Mekong 1,000 Project in the Lower Mekong
Delta Region, South Vietnam

Results of the Study

The findings of the study revealed that, firstly, due to the needy requirements in terms of human resource development to the Mekong Delta regions prior to the national phase of implementation of industrialization and modernization, CTU leaders proposed a project called "Foreign Post Graduates Program to 1,000 government employees of scientific and technological majors served in 13 provinces of the Lower Mekong Delta Region (LMDR)" and the short name is "the Mekong 1,000 Project" with the Endorsement No 6143/QD-BGD&DT on October 31, 2005, by Tran Van Nhung, Deputy Minister of Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). From this official agreement, the organizational structure consists of (i) leaders of related authorities of MOET such as Personnel Department, Policy and Finance Department, International Cooperation and Graduate Studies Departments, (ii) Deputy Presidents of People's Committees of 13 provinces in the LMDR, and (iii) Rector of Can Tho University.

In the context of its objectives, the Mekong 1,000 Project aims to (1) train the working staff with scientific and technological knowledge from the graduate studies abroad in order to serve the national phase of the implementation of industrialization and modernization in the LMDR, (2) continue professional development towards working staff with scientific and technological knowledge in the LMDR in terms of development and integration, and (3) develop the process of mutual cooperation in the LMDR in the hope of joining the strengths of scientific and technological knowledge to make the LMDR "a stronghold" of science and technology' in the region in particular and throughout Vietnam in general.

Secondly, from a structured questionnaire of 22 items to 27 respondents (15 males and 17 females), who have been taking English improvement program Modules 2 and 3 at Can Tho University Center for Foreign Languages (CFL), the study found out that there were 13 respondents aged from 23-25, 12 from 15-30 and 2 from 30-35. That means that they are young and just graduates from universities. Yet, 25 candidates applied to the MA (Master) programs, and just one left to PhD (Philosophy of Doctor) program. From this point, it revealed the present matter in Vietnam higher education that doctoral degrees are badly needed in universities and colleges. And the long term professional development, particularly PhD programs, needs to be improved in both quantities and qualities. Moreover, 10 Mekong Project candidates asked about their future contributions said that all of them were eager to go abroad for their higher education and they would come back to their former working places for their contracts and great desires to serve their fellows towards better communities. Mr. Pham Xuan Binh, Deputy Director in charge of the Project said that the requirements of the qualified employees in this region were needed. Yet, the number of candidates was not well- prepared in terms of foreign languages, especially English. In addition, one important thing was that the

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funding to the candidates in the form of scholarships was not available, either. Meanwhile, six senior lecturers of English directly teaching four Modules at CFL all agreed that they were very satisfied with their assistance in the hopes of improving English to all the Project candidates and consultancy about foreign cultural aspects, in which candidates would encounter. Ms. Lien said that all the instructors involving in this English Improvement Program were well-educated in foreign countries, and they had experiences in both language competence and cultural aspects as well. Lien added that they all tried to modify their teaching materials with a view to equipped them with sufficient knowledge needed and skills to IELTS tests with adequate scores to each field of study in any foreign higher education setting. At the same token, Ms. Hoa, one of the candidates asked about their readiness to the program chosen after her IELTS modules expressed that she felt more confident to start her Ph.D. program in the University of Queensland, Australia the next year. Moreover, on behalf of the interviewees, Hoa pose that they were ready to start their modules of English and would take their official IELTS in the upcoming year. In addition, they all would be back to their former workplace in the Mekong Delta regions partly helping improve all-sided fields in the long run.

Finally, given the suggestions on the better fulfillment to the Mekong 1,000 Project, the researchers would pose some as follows. (1) For CTU leaders, they need to maintain their cooperation with the provincial committees,

especially Internal and Education and Training Services to supervise the study abroad of candidates through the foreign counterparts. From the roles and responsibilities of the Mekong 1,000 Project office, people in charge needs to contact more foreign universities and colleges in Asia, Europe, America and Africa for the new and long term cooperation in the future. Also, with the assistance of CFL in English Improvement Program, lecturers of English will try to focus on IELTS techniques in order to help candidates improve their test scores, which will help them shorten their time in reviewing English. (2) For the provincial committees' roles, the authorities need to reconsider the scholarships and stipends when the cost of living conditions is daily increasing. And (3) for the responsibilities of candidates, they have to follow the consultancy from their provincial authorities in terms of their majors abroad and jobs after their comeback

Recommendations for Further Research

The study just ends at the stage of taking a survey about the information and the participants' ideas, the roles and responsibilities of CUI partnerships, and the authors' suggestions on the CUI activities. Thus, for the further research, it should be great if there would be studies about (1) the contributions of the Mekong graduates from foreign study to their communities in the Mekong Delta regions, and (2) the impacts of the Mekong 1,000 Project on the professional development and

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human resource development in the Mekong Delta regions.

Limitations

Getting this study done, the researchers have got some of the limitations as presented below: First, for the sampling, the study just focuses on the Modules 2 and 3 students. It needs more ideas about individual efforts for their study towards the future contributions to their communities from the Module 1 (General English) students, who just begin the English Improvement Program, and from the Module 4 (the final English course) students, who are provided with enough knowledge of English before sitting for the official IELTS (International English Language Testing System) to be accepted to abroad study. Second, the study would be better if it were to have interviews with the Mekong graduates, who have just graduated from foreign studies and got back to their former working places towards their contributions to the Mekong Delta communities.

Discussions and Conclusions

The cooperation among the three agents-University, Community and Individuals in the Mekong 1,000 Project has been going on since August, 2005. It has seemed that there is good mutuality because each agent is trying to complete his or her parts in order to help develop the LMDR in terms of human resource development with the equipment of sciences and technology abroad and knowledge transfer later. This cooperation is of great impacts on (i)

improving "educational socialization" when all the stakeholders in a community have to put their shoulders on the social issues, (ii) exploiting the "community strengths" for better socio cultural, economic and political development and integration in the regional and global spheres, and (iii) strengthening " a lifelong learning environment" for all the stakeholders to get access to human intellectuals and achievements.

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