

Opening Remarks: Jackie Pollock, Chairperson, MMN Steering Committee

On behalf of MMN, it is my great pleasure to welcome you all to the “Migration Trends and Responses in the Greater Mekong Subregion and Beyond” Workshop. I’d like to welcome delegates from all the countries of the Mekong—except unfortunately Laos who were unable to come—representatives from governments, academics, from NGOs and most important of all, migrant representatives.

While we would have liked to have migrant representatives from all the countries of the Mekong here, representing all the migration trends and patterns that we will talk about over the next two days, that is not possible. Migrants can rarely travel beyond the work destination, have no free time to attend such meetings, and are often afraid to tell the truth about their working and living conditions.

Indeed there are multiple challenges for migrants all over the world. Every day we hear amazing stories of migrants on crowded rickety boats who have set out to travel across the world—purely in search of livelihood. For want of nothing more than a job with a salary, with which they can support themselves and their families, migrants everyday risk their lives. But it is also clear, that they set out understanding that the world needs them. They are far from ignorant, they know that the globalised world, depends on the labour of people such as them.

They know that many countries of the world are desperate for factory workers, fishermen, domestic workers etc. But when they arrive—they are turned back, they are sent on or they are rejected. Instead, the countries which need migrants have selected other people, often people with more education and more skills. Rather than invest in training those in need, they prefer to take those who already have been trained in their countries of origin—stealing the training and education time from poor countries and robbing those countries of their skilled citizens. Migration could redress the imbalances and inequalities of the world, but instead the current migration regimes are only perpetuating and increasing these very inequalities.

The GMS is just a small part of the world, but some of the global challenges are here too, we hope in the next two days to look at the challenges from the last ten years, and to project a new vision of migration in the GMS for the coming ten years.