



**MEKONG
INSTITUTE**



**MEKONG INSTITUTE
STRATEGIC PLAN
2021-2025**

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Mekong Institute
123 Mittraphap Road
Muang District, Khon Kaen 40002
Thailand
+ 66 (0) 43 202 411 to 2
+ 66 (0) 43 204 041 to 2
information@mekonginstitute.org
www.mekonginstitute.org

Strategic Plan 2021-2025



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ACMECS	Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADC	Agricultural Development and Commercialization
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CKM	Communications and Knowledge Management
CLMV	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
ITC	Innovation and Technological Connectivity
LMC	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MGC	Mekong-Ganga Cooperation
GAP	Gender Action Plan
KM	Knowledge Management
MI	Mekong Institute
MTR	Mid-Term Review
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
SEE	Sustainable Energy and Environment
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SP	Strategic Plan
TIF	Trade and Investment Facilitation

FOREWORD

THE COUNCIL

A Renewed Commitment to Unified Action

The Mekong Institute (MI) Council representing Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam commends MI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

This action plan encapsulates our unified aspirations and commitment towards deeper connectivity, fair market competitiveness, and a greater sense of regional community.

It also serves as our call-to-action to recommit our guiding principles of socioeconomic development, poverty alleviation, and deeper regional cooperation and integration as we chart new pathways to deliver people-oriented, people-centered, and resilient economies against a pandemic landscape.

Given the changing contexts and needs of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), MI has invested time and effort in magnifying the scope and scale of its services to foster a broader range of constructive engagement. These hold great promise for institutionalizing information-sharing, dialogue exchanges, and project coordination among and between GMS countries, where diverse voices will be heard and transformed into effective evidence-based policies that will truly respond to the evolving needs of the people we serve.

But much work remains to be done. It is incumbent upon us to work with MI in widening partnerships and building deeper relations with governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society for the sustainable progress of our countries and subregion. These ventures will usher opportunities, reveal new strategies, open revenue streams, as well as integrate new knowledge, varying competencies, and reach in a sustainable, collaborative, and inclusive manner.

It is in this context that MI stands as a pivotal partner in helping bring to full fruition the tenets of our regional cooperation mechanisms such as the Greater Mekong Subregion Program Long-Term Strategic Framework 2030, ASEAN Community Building, Belt and Road Initiative, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy Master Plan, Mekong River Commission, Mekong-Korea Summit, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, Mekong-Japan Summit, among others. MI's initiatives and interventions—as laid in this document—harmonizes our agenda at the regional and national levels to ensure holistic development impacts that will last for generations to come.

As we move into the next chapter of our work and scale more milestones for the subregion, we enjoin the regional community to demonstrate political ownership and partnership with MI in mobilizing our shared mission and goals because, ultimately, the success of MI is the success of the people in the GMS and beyond.

Mrs. Nguyen Yen Hai
Council Chair

MESSAGE

THE STEERING COMMITTEE

MI Stands Ready to Deliver

The governments of the GMS have high expectations for MI, as they should. In the last two decades, MI has consistently grown from strength to strength in delivering technical services that respond to the emerging priorities and needs of the people of Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam across the areas of agricultural development and commercialization, trade and investment facilitation, innovation technology and connectivity, and in near course, sustainable energy and environment.

From 2021 to 2025, MI sets an ambitious trajectory in advancing human resource development and capacity building support to secure socioeconomic development and poverty alleviation in the GMS. With this progression,

MI will apply a more integrated and tailored approach of capacity development, dialogue, and advocacy to deliver holistic, comprehensive, synergetic, and multi-sectoral support that will further deepen regional cooperation and integration against an unprecedented global health crisis.

These courses of action do not rest on MI alone. With the view of maximizing benefits and intended development results at the regional, national, and local levels by synergizing development agenda and priorities of governments, development partners, and regional cooperation mechanisms, MI will need the continued support of partners—old and new.

This will be very much needed as MI expands its network of public-private partnerships, amplifies the scope and reach of its convening platforms, and multiplies its evidence-based studies to realize more robust agricultural commercial productions, stronger food systems, inclusive international markets, efficient cross-border trade, responsible investments, and wider access to clean and renewable energy connectivity through smart technologies.

While working to help build a stronger GMS, MI will concurrently fine tune its internal systems and processes so it will be more adept at systematic solution finding, be a precursor of innovative development approaches, and more importantly, invest in areas of specialization to build a network of qualified GMS experts within and outside the intergovernmental organization to produce collaborative work that delivers and matters.

It is in this shared mission that MI stands ready to respond with dedication to the call set forth by GMS governments, development partners, and the people of the GMS so we can cement our joint commitment towards an integrated, harmonious, prosperous, and resilient GMS.

Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee
Steering Committee Chair



Mekong Institute's
(MI) Strategic Plan
2021-2025 works
to accelerate
socioeconomic
development, alleviate
poverty, and foster
deeper regional
cooperation in the
Greater Mekong
Subregion (GMS).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Accordingly, its services will be diversified to cover human resource development, research and advocacy, and project implementation in addressing transboundary development across the areas of agriculture, trade and investment, energy and environment.

Formulated through an extensive consultative process involving GMS government officials, development partners, the private sector, alumni, as well as MI's Council, Steering Committee, senior management team, technical staff,

the Strategic Plan also sets MI's progression towards becoming a center of excellence in human resource development, a regional think tank, and convener for dialogue and collaboration.

From 2021 to 2025, MI will operate across three regional development themes of Agricultural Development and Commercialization (ADC), Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF), Sustainable Energy and Environment (SEE). Of these, MI will refocus its value-added and comparative advantages in the areas of ADC and TIF; while redirecting its technical capital on SEE to help address emerging transboundary environmental issues and their impacts on GMS economies. When operating these development areas, MI will mainstream cross-cutting themes of social inclusion and vulnerability, digital economy and innovation, and labor mobility to uphold holistic development deliveries.

In alignment with mechanisms of prevailing regional cooperation frameworks, the Strategic Plan will be executed through three main implementation strategies to reinforce multilateralism.

First, MI will implement projects in partnership with GMS governments, development partners, private sector, and civil society. Second, it will provide advisory services to clients on areas related to its programs and project management services for multi-country projects. Finally, MI will conduct research for policy advocacy to help governments better address transboundary development opportunities and challenges in the GMS and beyond.

To transform this Strategic Plan into action, MI will enhance its human resources, innovations, and concerted public-private efforts. It will strengthen internal systems and fortify a learning organizational culture that will harness potentials of current staff and attract leading experts and specialists into MI's fold. In due course, such investments will create a region-wide cadre of qualified leaders and development workers fully equipped in delivering areas of support for deeper regional integration and cooperation.

In addition, measured approaches will be applied to support greater synergy across countries, regional mechanisms, and within MI departments. MI's maturing monitoring and evaluation system and reinvigorated communications arm will support the mobilization of a more robust results- and evidence-based program management, which in turn will deliver stronger strategic planning, informed decision-making, more efficient use of resources, and a higher degree of transparency.

Overall, the objectives laid in this document set the path for MI to become a leading and trusted intergovernmental organization that seeks to effectively converge knowledge, proficiencies, and reach to narrow social divides, modernize policies and systems, strengthen public services, widen opportunities for entrepreneurship, enhance livelihoods, and generate employment to realize our long held aspiration for an integrated, harmonious, prosperous, and equitable GMS.



INTRODUCTION



MEKONG INSTITUTE AND ITS STRATEGIC PLAN 2016-2020

In a quarter of a century, MI has evolved from a training organization into an intergovernmental organization that is recognized for delivering human resources development and capacity development learning programs in the GMS and beyond.

Governed by a Council that is represented by the governments of Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, MI is guided by a Steering Committee, who oversees the policy direction, funding, performance, and trajectory of the intergovernmental organization.

Through its Strategic Plan 2016-2020, MI has built on its strong program history and expertise in capacity development across ADC and TIF. It has also facilitated deeper development by helping GMS countries better adopt to digital marketing, telecommunication, power trading, and renewable energy under Innovation and Technological Connectivity (ITC).

From 2016 to 2020, MI has

delivered standardized and customized capacity building trainings, learning programs, workshops, seminars, policy consultations, research studies, and development projects. These have garnered a network of over 51,000 direct and indirect beneficiaries and culminated to a project portfolio of US\$ 16 million.

¹ Data as of December 31, 2020.

CONSULTATION PROCESS FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

Beginning in 2020, MI mobilized the review of its Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and formulated its action plan for 2021-2025, as detailed below.

On March 2, 2020, 33 representatives from GMS governments, development partners, and other relevant stakeholders convened at a consultation workshop in Bangkok, Thailand to identify current and forthcoming development priorities in the region and the GMS, as well as to put forward recommendations to deepen collaboration and synergy in responding to issues and opportunities.

From results in the above-mentioned workshop, MI staff assessed the intergovernmental organization's

strengths, challenges, and areas of opportunities in relation to its operations and structure on March 4 and 5, 2020 in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The internal session also included a review of MI's vision and mission, including key goals, outcomes, and initiatives to ensure that MI's development direction continues to reflect and respond to the priorities and needs of the GMS. Results from an online survey shared among members of the MI Council, Steering Committee, staff, and development partners were also evaluated.

It is from these consultative activities that the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 was formulated.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS



Findings from the workshops revealed that development themes in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 remained highly relevant to the current regional context. In particular:

ADC remains a priority sector in the GMS and requires deeper and more synergetic capacity building support in the areas of food safety, disaster management and early warning systems, and innovation.

This prevails upon MI, who is considered by development partners as an important ally, to cement its position as a key enabling and facilitating agency for regional agricultural commercialization and development of food systems to advance food security.

To further foster inclusive and equitable agricultural growth, development partners have also called for expanded MI support in strengthening capacities of micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and link them with large-scale businesses and producers within and outside the GMS so they may be better integrated into global and regional value chains.

In addition, academic institutions tasked MI to bridge more partnerships between universities, GMS governments, and other stakeholders to advance agricultural development through the joint formulation and application of scientific, reliable, and evidence-based studies.

TIF is an essential driver of prosperity and development in the GMS. In the last two decades, MI has contributed to greater regional trade growth and market access through its work on e-commerce, special economic zones, freight and logistics development, cross-border regulations and standards, and free trade agreements. To build on these gains,

development partners requested MI to scale targeted efforts in enhancing capacities of more MSMEs in regional trade and investment for more inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Regarding ITC, the consultations highlighted a rise in digital and internet-based applications, social platforms, e-learning, and e-businesses. This trend is a development force in the region, presenting unparalleled opportunities for modern business development, productivity, and efficiency through smart agriculture, smart trade, smart medical services, smart cities, among others. In addition, digital applications are highly accessible to and adopted by

a large base of youth in the region, thus, expanding actors in the formal economy. It was, therefore, recommended that ITC become a clear cross-cutting theme that must be mainstreamed into ADC, TIF, and SEE.

Most development partners raised various aspects of climate change and environmental or natural resources management as an increasingly important theme both as a driver for development, as well as an essential necessity to sustain other forms of development. Based on these priorities, MI will elevate the “environmental sustainability” cross-cutting theme into a core service. Using MI’s technical capital,

SEE will focus on the development of the energy and environment sectors, as well as incorporate aspects of climate change and green economy in program deliveries under ADC and TIF.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented social and economic pressures across the globe. While the breadth and depth of the pandemic’s impact in the GMS have not yet been fully determined, MI will proactively address COVID-19 preparedness in its program of activities, where needed.

The consultations also elaborated on the intergovernmental organization’s mandate. Development partners and other relevant stakeholders reinforced the added value of MI as a convening power when providing support to transboundary GMS-wide issues. As such, MI will capitalize on its position as an intergovernmental organization to deepen regional interaction and collaboration through research, implementation of programs and projects, and advocacy.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR THE MI STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025



STRATEGIC CONTEXT FOR 2021-2025

In the formulation of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, GMS governments, development partners, and other stakeholders presented a redefined regional context of emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges, as described below:

The development landscape is rapidly changing.

As aid budgets from donor countries are becoming strained due to budget deficits and shifts in fiscal priorities, modern forms of development cooperation and the rise of a new breed of development partners—whose resources are increasingly committed towards climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental management, disaster risk reduction and response—are taking root.² This shift in priorities, as well as the re-alignment of funds to address pandemic emergencies, has contributed to the increasing curtailment of aid budget across the world.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and digitalization are altering the way people live, work, and relate to one another.

These hold the potential to boost efficiency, increase productivity, open new markets, facilitate a more porous international trade, and raise global income levels that will undoubtedly improve the quality and way of life of people. However, 4IR can magnify inequalities, particularly its direct disruption of labor markets due to automation. Rural transformation and poverty reduction in the GMS have been largely driven by rural-urban migrants and remittances. Manual and semi-skilled migrants would be most vulnerable to increasing automation in many labor-intensive sectors. For GMS economies to thrive in this competitive arena, governments will have to reinvent its policies and approaches, as well as upscale and reskill its human resources for the smooth adoption of technologies to ensure the delivery of quality public services and utilities.

²This is evidenced by the upsurge of environmental conventions and funding mechanisms such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and environmental funding mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund.



Increasing vulnerability of smallholder farmers.

The “new normal” brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has altered the agriculture sector, heightening vulnerabilities of smallholder farmers and MSMEs in the GMS. Rural-urban migrant flow was decelerated or, in some cases, even stopped. In many GMS countries, remittances are a major source of income for rural households, particularly those from remote areas. Moreover, social distancing guidelines and the economic downturn have reduced this source to modest or even none, resulting in household income shocks for many. Compounded by export restrictions or bans, surpluses in agricultural production, decreasing development aid, and economic downturns because of the pandemic, GMS governments must develop tailored policy actions to maintain the pace of their poverty reduction and rural transformation campaigns to strengthen the resiliency of smallholder farmers amidst changing circumstances.

Capitalize on new opportunities to restore economic resilience and boost pandemic preparedness.

While the long-lasting socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 are still being assessed, forward-looking and integrated measures will need to be mobilized and studied to restore productivity and resiliency of national economies, as well as to strengthen global health crisis preparedness. These will involve upskilling MSMEs to better access new markets and supply sources of goods and services within the GMS. Wider application of digitalization services and technologies such as e-commerce and smart technologies will also need to be institutionalized for the broad adoption of viable coping strategies in the local, national, and regional levels for the short-, mid-, and long-term recovery of the GMS.

Reallocation of foreign direct investment destinations. Cognizant of the risks in relying on segmented global supply chains and a shifting international trade environment, multinational companies have begun to explore the reallocation of sources in their supply chains to countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the GMS. This represents a new force in foreign direct investment flows, which GMS governments will prepare for to protect its industries and maximize opportunities.

Transboundary environmental issues, natural disasters, and other potential impacts on food security, rural livelihood, and development. The Mekong River and its ecosystems in the GMS countries have exhibited increasing uncertainties and climate change risks. As these conditions will escalate in the coming years, GMS governments and other key actors will need to find sustainable and concerted measures in mitigating the impacts of climate change and natural disasters to protect the region's food source, the way of life of millions of fishermen and farmers, and development investments.



Shifting balance in the trade and investment climate caused by changing trade negotiations. Evolving trade negotiations among major trading partners of the GMS countries have transformed the international trade environment. The pandemic has also given rise to unprecedented impacts on international trade, particularly the logistics services where direct human interactions are required. The GMS governments will have to explore other conducive trade policy options and apply innovative approaches to navigate through this scenario.

RESPONSES OF MEKONG INSTITUTE

MI stands ready to contribute to the region's socioeconomic development through human resources development and capacity building.

Furthermore, the strategic context presents opportunities for MI to expand its portfolio of services beyond human resource development and to re-position itself in the GMS and beyond.

From 2021 to 2025, MI will consolidate its existing expertise to work towards becoming a center of excellence in human resources development. In addition, it will invest in the groundwork to establish itself as a regional think tank that provides advisory services and technical assistance to GMS governments, development partners, and the private sector in transboundary development.

Specifically, MI will respond to the region's emerging trends, opportunities, and challenges by:

Serving as a regional convener of partnerships. As an intergovernmental organization represented by GMS governments, MI will position itself as a "convener" of a broad range of stakeholders by multiplying the number and reach of its conferences, seminars, and dialogues to establish diverse and multi-faceted partnerships.

Strengthening partnerships with existing regional cooperation frameworks. There are a plethora of regional frameworks supporting the GMS that cut across MI's specialized development areas.

MEKONG FORUM 2019

BRIDGING BORDERS: GMS Connectivity for Inclusivity and Sustainability

A JOINT FORUM ON LOGISTICS

GMS LOGISTICS FORUM 2019



MI has cooperated with and will continue to facilitate complementarities across regional mechanisms for stronger synergy and holistic development impacts. These include the ADB-supported Greater Mekong Subregion Program Long-Term Strategic Framework 2030, ASEAN Community Building, Belt and Road Initiative, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), Mekong River Commission (MRC), as well as other partnerships that support MI and GMS shared interests such as the Mekong-Korea Cooperation, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, and Mekong-Japan Cooperation.

Conducting transboundary research and an evidence-based body of knowledge on GMS transboundary development areas. In partnership with research institutes, academic institutions, GMS governments, development partners, and the private sector, MI will deliver, facilitate, and advocate evidence-based studies across the areas of agricultural development and commercialization, trade and investment facilitation, digital economy and innovation as well as sustainable energy and environment to foster a sound policy environment that responds to the realities of people in the region.

Functioning as a regional soundboard. MI will continue to organize its Mekong Forum as an inclusive platform for prime movers to exchange ideas, widen networks, and strengthen public-private linkages. Described by GMS governments as a credible avenue for regional knowledge exchange, MI will broaden the spectrum of its topical discussions to bring attention and find solutions to shared challenges and opportunities.

Advocating for GMS development. Through its extensive regional network and body of evidence-based projects and studies, MI will begin the progression of establishing itself as a think tank to better advocate agricultural development and commercialization, trade and investment facilitation, digital economy and innovation, green economy, sustainable energy and environment.

Providing regional policy support. Building on MI's technical gains and maturation, MI is well-placed to provide regional policy support on agricultural development and commercialization, trade and investment facilitation, digital economy and innovation, sustainable energy and environment, including climate change and green economy.



PROJECT

DIRECTION

what is..
NEXT

2 YEAR
PLAN

DESIGN

WEB.
APP/URL

Q1
Q2
Q3
Q4

30%

DIGITAL MEDIA



INNOVATION

PLAN
1.
2.
3.

SEO

TIME
LINE

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2021-2025



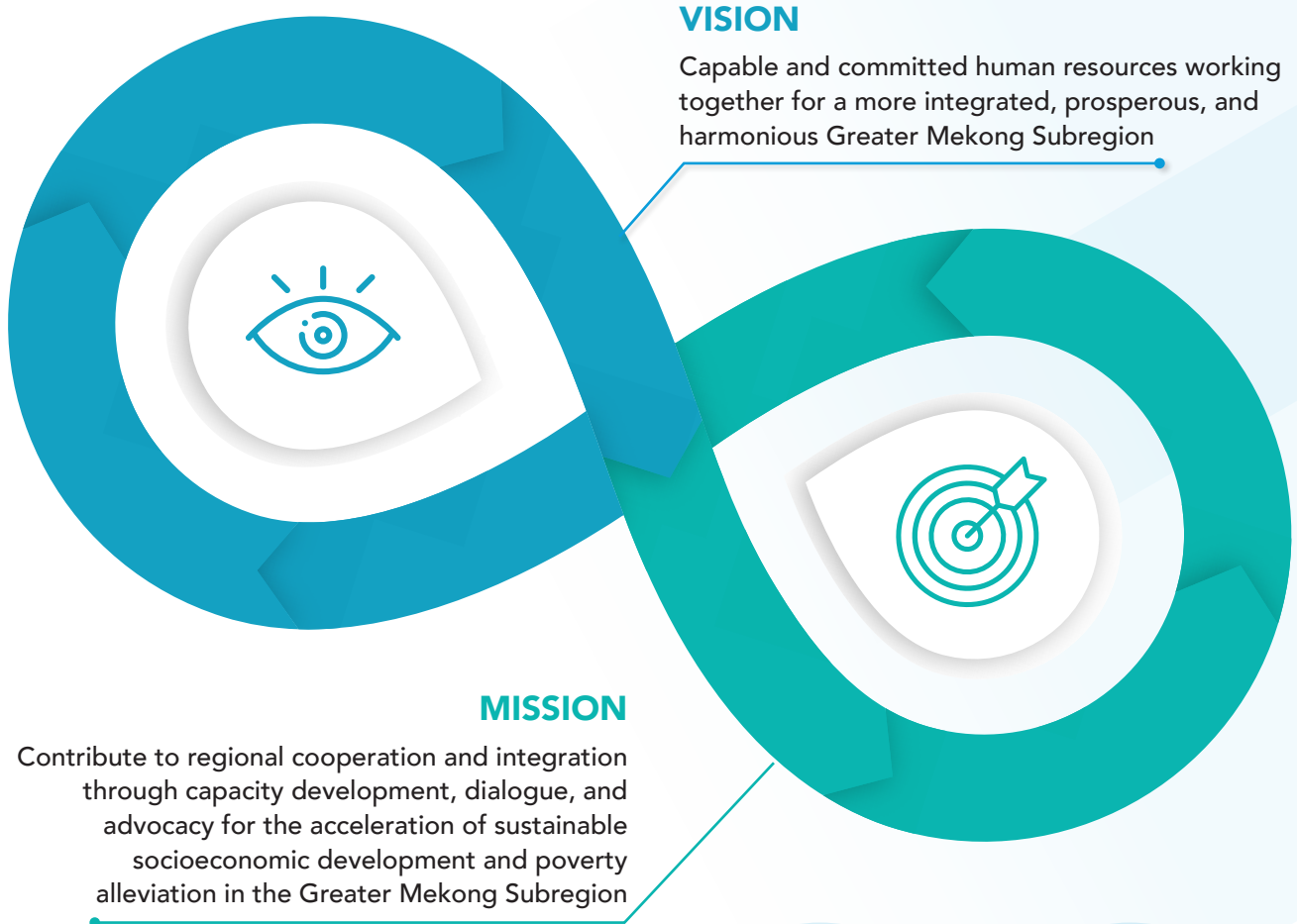
OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

An overview of MI's Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is provided in the chart below.

Regional Development Themes	Agricultural Development and Commercialization	Trade and Investment Facilitation	Sustainable Energy and Environment
Cross-Cutting Themes	Social Inclusion and Vulnerability	Digital Economy and Innovation	Labor Mobility
Implementation Strategies	Implementing Projects in Partnerships	Providing Advisory Services to GMS Governments, Development Partners, the Private Sector, and Civil Society	Conducting Research for Policy Advocacy on Transboundary Development Areas

VISION AND MISSION

As guided by its vision, MI's work is represented by the following mission statement from its Charter.



While MI's vision resonates to this day, MI has updated its mission so it may better respond to the evolving priorities and needs of the GMS. Therefore, the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 encapsulates MI's enhanced mission as follows:

"Contribute to regional cooperation and integration through capacity development, dialogue, and advocacy for the acceleration of sustainable socioeconomic development, and poverty alleviation in the Greater Mekong Subregion."

MI's mission goes hand-in-hand with strategies that strengthen equality, economic growth, environmental sustainability—core tenets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As such, MI will contribute to the advancement of Sustainable Development Goals by delivering the following long-term outcomes in the GMS by 2025.

Outcome

1

Increased agricultural commercial production and strengthened sustainable food systems

Outcome

2

Increased access to international markets and cross-border trade

Outcome

3

Increased adoption of power grid connectivity, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate-smart technologies in agriculture and trade initiatives

In delivering the above-mentioned results, MI sets the progression of becoming a center of excellence in human resource development and research; a regional think tank to advocate GMS transboundary development; and a trusted partner of GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society in the subregion and beyond.

MI will also invest on its organizational development in the next five years by:

1. Fortifying its reputation as a precursor in human resource development and capacity building
2. Expanding its services to research and advocacy to address fundamental and emerging GMS transboundary development areas in agriculture, trade and investment, energy and environment
3. Transforming into a learning organization built on an upgraded organizational structure that reflects more efficient human resources and operations
4. Serving as a soundboard on regional development opportunities and challenges
5. Strengthening its financial viability and independence



MI will develop a detailed Results Framework for the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 in line with the above-mentioned regional development areas, cross-cutting themes, and organizational development. In addition, an independent mid-term review and final evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 will be put into place.

MI will also conduct an internal annual assessment of programs and activities under the Strategic Plan. Other than to track progress vis-a-vis outcomes, these evaluations will also serve as a learning platform for MI to share their progress, lessons learned, and best practices to enhance internal synergy and deliver impactful program services.

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEMES

Agricultural Development and Commercialization



Overview

Agriculture is the highest priority sector with over 60 percent of the subregion's 340 million population engaged in small-scale agriculture.³

GMS countries are among the world's leading exporters in agricultural products (rice, vegetables, fruits, coffee, aquaculture, among others). Agricultural production and providing sufficient food for the GMS population are inextricably linked with

addressing food safety issues, health, and environmental concerns. The region has the potential of becoming a leading global supplier of safe and environment-friendly food products. Thus, it is imperative to strengthen the resiliency of this sector, which is currently challenged by delayed rural-urban migration and restrictions in agricultural trade flows as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ADC in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020

From 2016 to 2020, MI has worked with development partners to strengthen the agriculture sector in the region. Regional cooperation is taking hold to spur sustainable agriculture, agricultural productivity, diversification and commercialization, animal health, and sustainable management of land, water and fisheries, forestry and wildlife resources. Regional cooperation frameworks such as ACMECS, Lancang-

³ <https://greatermekong.org/agriculture>

Mekong Cooperation, and others represent key developments in this regard. Jointly, the agencies are working towards integrating the economies of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) into ASEAN, and transforming the agriculture sector in the region. The underlying purpose of these initiatives is to position the region towards becoming a sustainable food production hub. Against this background, and with support of the New Zealand Aid Programme, MI aims to become a center of excellence in food safety.

Areas of Focus of ADC in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Many development initiatives involving multiple national and international players pervade the agricultural sector in the GMS. To secure its place in this sector, MI will contribute to the following:

1. Reshape behavior and practices of farmers and the private sector towards safer and more environmentally sustainable agricultural production processes
2. Develop transboundary and inclusive food value chains
3. Advocate access to a variety of markets and develop sustainable innovative food system solutions
4. Promote climate smart agricultural practices, especially those that could be applied by smallholder farmers
5. Broaden compliance with food safety standards across the agricultural value chain to protect consumers and facilitate market access
6. Advance knowledge on the impacts of COVID-19 on the agriculture sector, particularly disruptions in the food supply chains and the subsequent increased vulnerability of smallholder farmers for governments, development partners, and food value chain actors to take informed steps towards building a more resilient agriculture environment
7. Provide research for policy advocacy to help GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society respond in a timely and concerted manner to emerging transboundary development issues, climate change uncertainties, and natural disasters



Trade and Investment Facilitation



Overview

Asia is pursuing its path as the growth engine of the world.

Some GMS countries have become one of the most open economies to international trade and investment. Between 1995 and 2016/17, the intra-GMS trade volume has increased from US\$15 billion to US\$486 billion, reflecting an annual growth rate of 150 percent. As of 2017, intra-GMS trade was equal to 60 percent of GDP in Cambodia, 54 percent in Lao PDR, 54.8 percent in Vietnam, 28.9 percent in Myanmar, and 21.4 percent in Thailand, underscoring trade cooperation in the region as an important driver of economic growth.

In this context, development partners and regional frameworks are focusing on facilitating cross-border trade and investment through the strengthening of intra-regional infrastructure linkages. In addition, the reduction of trade barriers and tariffs is an important aspect for the development of regional trade and economic growth, as well as private sector development and the increasing competitiveness of GMS economies. However, because of the pandemic, trade flows within the region have slowed due to movement restrictions, border closures, low consumer demands, and disruptions in the supply chains, thus, resulting to the downturn of economic activities.

TIF in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020

MI has enhanced entrepreneurship of MSMEs, microfinance, regional business cooperation, capacities of chambers of commerce and business associations representatives, as well as provided technical support to strengthen bilateral and regional trade facilitation arrangements (such as the GMS Cross Border Transportation Facilitation Agreement), economic

corridors (especially border/special economic zones), green logistics, freight management, and tourism development to advance trade and investment facilitation in the GMS. The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation has supported several of these MI initiatives.

Areas of Focus of TIF in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025

For GMS countries to maximize gains from trade and investment flows, MI is directed to advance knowledge and skills of stakeholders so they may better facilitate inclusive and balanced trade and investment in the region. Enhancing cooperation among GMS countries on cross-border measures is necessary to minimize the impacts of COVID-19 on trade and investment. The effective functioning of supply chains, upskilling and reskilling of labor, and SME internationalization are important elements to strengthen regional value chains and to promote regional pandemic recovery efforts. In this context, MI will focus on the following:

1. Improve trade facilitation to establish more efficient and cost-effective cross-border trade flows
2. Promote cross-border digital services such as e-customs and cross-border e-commerce
3. Create business information platforms to widen networking among business groups and companies in local, regional, and international markets
4. Support the integration of SMEs into global and regional value chains
5. Conduct research that will contribute to an enabling environment for trade and investment promotion, particularly through economic corridors and special economic zones
6. Advance knowledge on the linkage between post-pandemic recovery, trade competitiveness, and cross-border trade of goods and services for the development of business strategies that will enhance firm-level competitiveness of countries and SMEs in a post-pandemic situation
7. Respond to other opportunities and challenges to strengthen cross-border trade facilitation and investment promotion



Sustainable Energy and Environment



Overview

Environmental sustainability was selected as a cross-cutting issue in the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 from a sub-theme under rural development in the previous Strategic Plan. Its elevation from a cross-cutting issue into a development theme in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is reinforced by emerging energy and environmental issues in the GMS and recent shifts in the development aid landscape.

Sustainable energy is one of the key elements in sustainable development. It is a driver of poverty alleviation, social development, women and youth empowerment, equity, resilience, economic progress, and environmental sustainability. Demand for energy is rising as GMS economies have maintained impressive economic growth over the past two decades. By some estimates, it is expected to nearly triple between 2012 to 2025. New energy solutions and cross-border power trading are crucial for GMS countries to address this surging demand.

Climate change and environmental management have become priorities in the GMS. Around 200 million people in the GMS are dependent on their environment and natural resources for food, water, energy and income,⁴ straining the natural environment, biodiversity, and eco-systems.

⁴ <https://greatermekong.org/environment>

Moreover, several countries in the region are prone to landslides, floods, droughts, and other environmental threats. Scenarios and assessments presented by the MRC show that the ongoing degradation of water quality, fisheries, biodiversity, wetlands, and environmental assets are likely to continue, not only in the water sector (e.g., intensive agriculture and aquaculture, hydropower and irrigation dams, flood control work, sand mining and navigation dredging) but beyond (e.g., industrialization, urbanization, deforestation).

As traditional development cooperation priorities are changing, more resources are increasingly committed for climate change mitigation and adaptation, environmental management, disaster risk reduction and response. A clear upward funding trend is observed under various environmental conventions such as UNFCCC, CITES, CBD, and environmental funding mechanisms such as the Global Environment Facility and the Green Climate Fund. With a new program on energy and environment, MI will tap into these resources and work with GMS governments and development partners to address transboundary environmental areas that are critical for sustainable regional economic growth.

Areas of Focus of SEE in the Strategic Plan 2021-2025

Being a new development theme, MI will harness its proficiencies in this sector by (a) focusing on areas that are interlinked with ADC and TIF; (b) securing partnerships with existing regional frameworks on energy and environment; and (c) exploring other areas that MI can best leverage its position as an intergovernmental organization.

In relation to existing programs, MI will focus on the following:

1. Strengthen climate resilience through climate-smart agricultural production of farmers and the private sector
2. Boost the creation and facilitate investments in green economy by supporting MSMEs managing green businesses and circular economies

On partnerships with existing regional cooperation frameworks in the SEE sector, MI will focus on the following:

1. Implement the ACMECS Master Plan by providing coordination and brokering cooperation on environmental issues (e.g., protection, conservation, waste management, sustainable natural resources use) of the Ayeyarwady, Chao Phraya and Mekong Rivers. The Master Plan will also address other issues involving environmental challenges such as climate change, natural disasters, as well as the promotion of renewable energy
 2. Address impacts of climate change on regional food security through institutional and human capacity strengthening
 3. Participate in a variety of forums to promote good practices, lessons learned, and opportunities of SEE
 4. Collaborate with regional cooperation mechanisms and other organizations in a multi-sectoral framework for climate change, with the purpose of ensuring food and nutrition security
 5. Strengthen partnership with MRC and other related organizations to address energy and environmental issues related to water, water resources management, and hydropower development along the Mekong River. This is to contribute to more sustainable natural resources management and hydropower development, while protecting environmental sustainability, food security, and the livelihood of fishing and farming communities in the downstream
 6. Contribute to the implementation of the GMS Road Map for Expanded Cooperation in the Energy Sector, a GMS program initiative that guides efforts in the planning and implementation of projects for power generation, cross-border interconnection, and country transmission systems
-

INTERCONNECTIVITY OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEMES



MI's three development areas are interconnected and complementary. Reflections of their linkages are enumerated below:

Trade facilitation is crucial for cross-border trade in agricultural products. Food safety standards and sanitary and phytosanitary requirements are technical

prerequisites in the cross-border trade of agricultural products. These are governed by various quarantine and related agencies, who operate on different sets of rules and procedures. Trade facilitation towards the harmonization of technical requirements, simplification of procedures, establishment of a single-stop window facilities, among others, are instrumental to boost intra-GMS trade of agricultural products.

Energy and environment present opportunities for a sustainable agriculture sector. To leverage energy and environmental sustainability against rapid economic growth, broader scientific understanding, enhanced innovative capacities, and deeper linkages among multi-sectoral stakeholders are necessary. These will spur the joint development of cost-effective agri-environmental policies, sound water management practices, and mitigating measures to climate change uncertainties. Furthermore, these will alleviate impacts of intensive hydropower development and strains on natural resources, thereby helping increase agricultural production and boosting the resilience of rural and riparian communities.





Cross-border trade and investments are important for sustainable energy growth. To meet the surging energy demand of GMS economies, cross-border energy trading is crucial. This is also a central focus of the GMS Road Map for Expanded Cooperation in the energy sector. Regional cooperation in energy distribution, infrastructure, and cross-border energy trading will ensure efficient distribution of energy to fuel regional economic growth.

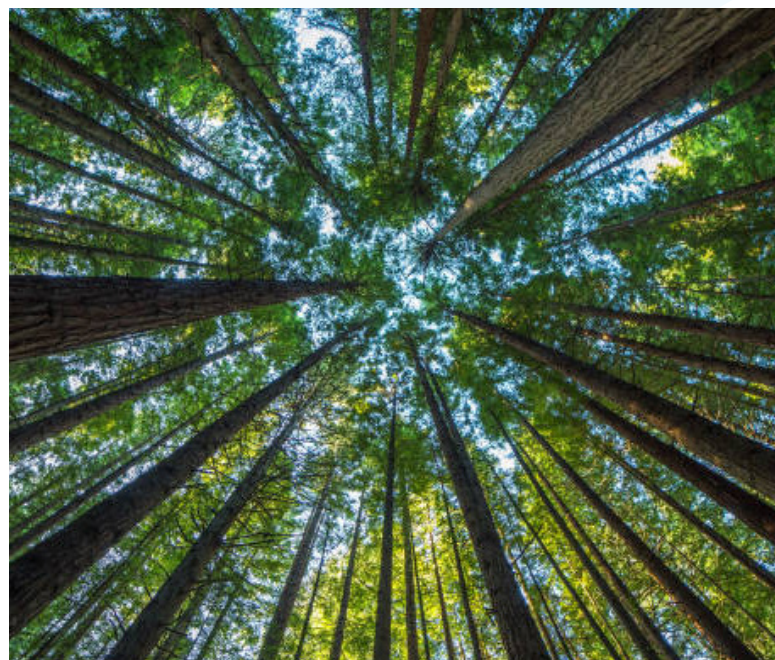
Given the interconnectivity of the three development themes, MI will foster institutional synergy in the design and implementation of projects and activities for stronger service delivery.

It is expected that MI's comparative advantage will be most pronounced in areas that overlap among the three development themes.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

From 2016 to 2020, MI worked to promote gender equality, environmental sustainability, and labor migration in all of its project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E). However, the mid-term review and assessment of the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 revealed that these cross-cutting themes were not fully applied in practice. In the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, MI will reinforce this connection by revising the procedures of design, implementation, and M&E of projects in ADC, TIF and SEE, using the guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development as reference.⁵

As such, the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 will address the following cross-cutting themes:



⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/peer-reviews/Final%20publication%20version%20of%20the%207%20Lessons%20mainstreaming%20cross%20cutting%20issues.pdf>

Social Inclusion and Vulnerability



The GMS region has been one of the fastest growing economies in the world but benefits from this economic growth was not equally distributed. In close coordination with GMS governments,

MI will focus on supporting those marginalized from the development process such as rural women, minor ethnic groups, and poor smallholder farmers, rural-urban migrants, and other groups from the informal sector.

Gender mainstreaming for inclusive development.

Men and women contribute to and are impacted differently by developments in the region. Better understanding and application of these differences are needed to enable gender-balance and inclusive development strategies that will secure equitable economic growth and poverty reduction. MI will need to design its support bearing in mind that the intended impacts of programs have different outcomes for men and women. This will require MI to develop and implement a Gender Action Plan (GAP) in all of its programs and projects. This GAP will be the basis for MI to monitor and evaluate how its interventions contribute to gender equality. In particular, gender will be mainstreamed in MI programs and projects through the following objectives:

1. Increase women's access to opportunities in technical knowledge and skills development, financial support, market linkages, and labor
2. Promotion of women's economic empowerment in the agriculture and trade sectors (e.g., support women-led MSMEs)

Addressing vulnerability and social inclusion of rural communities, including marginalized and minor ethnic groups. The social protection systems in the GMS are generally in the early stages. Creating and reforming these systems have become an increasingly important policy agenda for GMS countries on the path towards middle-income country status. Majority of the economically active population in the GMS do not have coverage for unemployment, work-related injuries, maternity, pensions, or health insurances.

In addition, GMS bears a wide composite of over 350 ethnic groups. Many of them are marginalized in the development process for their small population and isolated location. To date, poverty remains highest and persistent in areas with high concentration of minor ethnic groups in the GMS countries.

In response to these, MI will work towards sustaining the workforce and prioritizing the inclusion of rural communities, marginalized and minor ethnic groups, as well as other vulnerable groups.

In particular, while mainstreaming this theme into MI's programs and projects, the focus will be on delivering the following:

1. Improve their access to socioeconomic opportunities, including skills development and/or job markets to strengthen their coping capacity
2. Strengthen their safety nets by convening dialogues and solution-finding activities with GMS governments, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders



Digital Economy and Innovation



Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is recognized as a key driver in Asia's economic and social transformation. Advanced ICT infrastructure and a clear regulatory framework will be the backbone for growth in agricultural production, trade and investment, energy, environment, and regional connectivity. This becomes even more important in the era of 4IR. Digital economy in the form of e-commerce and other similar platforms are taking flight around the world, catapulting an unprecedented growth of internet-based companies and mobile applications.

Modern technologies are reorganizing and offering efficiencies in production, distribution, and delivery of services. The COVID-19 pandemic has opened opportunities for online business practices, which can be maximized to its full potential for the benefit of MSMEs.

With this cross-cutting theme, MI will focus on ICT adoption and economic transformation.

It will also promote digital trade in the GMS, notably for agricultural production, food systems, trade and investment, as well as environment and energy. MI will seek to integrate these in its programs and projects to deliver the following:

1. Promote the application of smart agriculture technologies by smallholder farmers and the private sector, especially in ensuring food safety and quality management
2. Encourage the growth and use of e-services (e.g., e-customs, e-commerce) in the agriculture and trade sectors
3. Widen the application of e-platforms for information and data-sharing to boost trade and investment facilitation
4. Enhance readiness towards 4IR by strengthening and upscaling human capital development investments

Labor Mobility



The GMS region is experiencing increasing levels of labor mobility. Statistics for intra-GMS labor migration is not yet available but intra-GMS mirrors trends in intra-ASEAN migration, which is on the rise. The total number of intra-ASEAN migrants have more than quadrupled, from 2.1 million in 1995 to 9.9 million in 2016. This active labor mobility is largely taking place in the GMS as migrants from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao PDR travel to Thailand, and move from Indonesia, Malaysia to Singapore.⁶ Majority of the intra-GMS migrants are rural labor workers seeking wage employment to lift themselves from rural poverty.

GMS countries are experiencing increasing mobility of labor due to varying levels of regional development and regional integration arrangements, especially within ASEAN. Because of extensive infrastructure systems (roads, rail, water) in the region and the easement of land travel restrictions for tourism and business purposes, the region is witnessing increased flows of people across borders. Inequities and

different stages of industrialization among GMS countries have also created a differentiated sub-regional labor market: Thailand faces labor shortage in certain low-skilled sectors, while Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Myanmar bear an unskilled labor surplus due to rural poverty, underdeveloped infrastructure, and low- or poor-quality education.⁷

MI will address labor mobility in the context of its ongoing support to agricultural production, food systems, trade and investments, and energy and environment.

⁶ World Economic Forum 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/08/southeast-asia-realising-importance-high-skilled-immigration/>

⁷ Caouette, Sciortino, Guest, Feinstein, Labor Migration in the Greater Mekong Sub-region. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290920098_Labor_Migration_in_the_Greater_Mekong_Sub-region/link/569c9f8e08ae6169e5633761/download

As such, MI support will be delivered through the following:

1. Enhance productivity of the agricultural sector to increase more lucrative livelihood opportunities for farmers and/or workers
2. Improve the welfare of the rural labor workforce, as well as their technical and vocational capacities so they can participate in competitive labor markets
3. Convene dialogue with GMS governments, the private sector, and other relevant stakeholders to address challenges experienced by migrant workers, notably in the areas of agriculture and trade
4. Facilitate platforms of engagement for governments and other stakeholders to better synchronize social sector mechanisms, particularly in providing access to employment services for returning migrant workers
5. Contribute to existing regional cooperation frameworks in order to promote a more enabling environment for greater labor mobility in the GMS and beyond



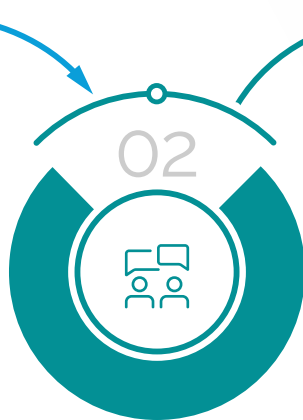
MAIN IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

With the view of maximizing benefits and intended development results at the regional, national, and local levels, MI will contribute to the synergism of development priorities and agenda as guided by

regional cooperation frameworks through its implementation strategies. The following will serve as the blueprint for MI to transform into action the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025:



Implement programs or projects in partnership with GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society across the three development themes



Provide advisory services to GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society



Conduct research for policy advocacy on transboundary development areas in the GMS and beyond

Implementing Programs or Projects in Partnership



MI has completed projects either through direct implementation modality or in partnership. With regard to the former, MI implemented projects funded by development partners with a degree of MI counterpart contribution, if any. On the latter, MI worked with development partners, government agencies, and other stakeholders in an integrated manner by pooling financial resources, knowledge, and technical expertise to achieve common objectives.

Being a donor-driven organization, MI has relied heavily on direct implementation modality, particularly for short-term projects or customized activities. While this form will continue to be an important strategy in the coming years for its financial viability,

Under this implementation strategy, MI will focus on addressing challenges across GMS areas rather than country-specific issues. MI will also develop projects that mobilize human and financial resources from GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society across the three development themes.

This will position MI and partners as cooperating agencies, contributing to projects to meet mutual goals and objectives. This departure from the conventional project implementation modality will steer MI to financial independence and impartiality in addressing transboundary development issues and opportunities in the GMS and beyond.

In pursuing this strategy, MI will capitalize its convening power as an intergovernmental organization to bring together various stakeholders and facilitate cooperation among them. In addition, MI will contribute to partnership projects by making available its in-house services from both the program and support departments. Development partners will also be requested to contribute financial resources and expertise, if applicable, while GMS government

**MI will steadily
move towards a
partnership
approach from
2021 to 2025.**

agencies will serve as implementers by deploying their staff on the ground. In addition, MI will actively bridge more partnerships with the private sector and civil society organizations to increase their representation in MI's programs and projects.

This partnership approach has become a preferred modality of project delivery by many governments and development organizations. Operating this implementation strategy requires a proactive stance in identifying and matching priorities and stakeholders. The annual Mekong Forum will be an opportunity for MI to explore these possibilities. Furthermore, MI staff will actively participate in various GMS events to showcase MI's knowledge and expertise, as well as to promote potential projects. Associations with existing regional cooperation platforms also present another avenue for securing opportunities and wider partnerships.



Providing Advisory Services

With this strategy, MI will provide advisory services to GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society. These will consist of human resource development, commissioned studies, program or project design and evaluation, and project management. For consistency,

At present, these services take the form of short-term training courses, studies, or evaluation work commissioned by development partners or the private sector. These services generated about 23 percent of MI's total revenue in 2019. MI will continue to provide this type of service in 2021 to 2025. In addition,

MI's advisory services will be directly related to its development areas so it can draw from its in-house expertise.

In addition, by delivering these customized projects, MI staff will be exposed to various stakeholders. This will further expand MI's network with prime movers in the GMS, making it instrumental for MI to procure more long- and short-term projects.

MI will deliver step-by-step project management as a core advisory service.

For many regional projects in the GMS, development partners prefer GMS government agencies to serve as project implementers. Furthermore, to ensure quality performance, development partners assist implementing government agencies by procuring external project management services. This opens opportunities for MI to leverage its extensive alumni network in GMS governments, as well as its convening power as an intergovernmental organization. Moreover, lessons learned and best practices gained from this service will be collected to support MI's research and advocacy work.

Conducting Research for Policy Advocacy



Research and advocacy work could either be independent MI activities or completed in partnership with other academic and research institutions to inform GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society organizations on emerging transboundary challenges across ADC, TIF, and SEE. From research findings,

MI will bring together stakeholders to exchange feedback, recommend strategies, and verify solutions.

Through this circular approach, MI will steadily be recognized as a regional think tank for GMS governments, development partners, and the private sector. It is also important to note that MI will focus its research for policy advocacy.

Being a regional think tank expert in the areas of agriculture, trade and investment, sustainable energy and environment will be instrumental for MI in many aspects. It will consolidate MI's contributions to the regional development agenda, opening funding

potentials from GMS governments. MI as a regional think tank will also create opportunities to jointly work with development partners in addressing transboundary development areas in the region. Finally, it will also open avenues for partnership with private sector actors to better advocate for sound policies.

This implementation strategy will be realized through the conduct of research studies, which will be the basis of MI's advocacy work. MI will hold a GMS working paper series to invite MI staff, government officials, as well as academic representatives and researchers to publish their work-in-progress papers. MI will also host a GMS research seminar series to attract top researchers, development experts, and GMS policy makers to share their research findings and practical experiences on issues that are relevant to regional development. MI will also formalize more partnerships with universities and research institutes to expand research and development programs on ADC, TIF, and SEE.

MI is currently at the nascent stage of becoming a legitimate regional think tank and advocate. Under the Strategic Plan 2021-2025, MI will take concerted steps in realizing the outcomes of other implementing strategies to solidify its position in research and policy advocacy.

RISK ANALYSIS AND MITIGATION

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The outbreak across the GMS has gravely impacted domestic consumption and investment, resulting to a decline in tourism and travel, weaker demand for goods and services in various sectors, disruptions in production and trade supply, and pressure on health and health-care systems.⁸ Countries such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam with strong trade and production linkages and high inbound tourism from China are experiencing massive economic setbacks—the extent of which will still need to be assessed.

For risk mitigation: MI will proactively monitor the pandemic and its impacts on socioeconomic development in GMS countries to better present policy recommendations for GMS governments. More importantly, MI will contribute to post-pandemic recovery, especially in the areas of ADC and TIF. It will advance knowledge on the “new normal” and help facilitate the smooth adaptation of relevant stakeholders to this new context.

Development aid on the decline. Development aid has been declining in recent years as donor countries wrestle with growing budget deficits and economic downturns. This was further magnified when some GMS countries transitioned to middle-income country status. Financing instruments are introduced by international development banks such as the World Bank or ADB for middle income countries but these are less preferential, while other forms of financing such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank have yet to operate.

For risk mitigation: MI will diversify its funding sources to become financially independent. Funding from MI’s advisory services will gradually become the main source of MI revenue. It will also explore with GMS governments the possibility of increasing each country’s annual contributions.

Increasing political risks in the region. Political dynamics in ASEAN affect the GMS, which can stall economic growth prospects in the region.

For risk mitigation: MI will closely monitor potential risks and make necessary adjustments to its projects and interventions on trade and investment facilitation. In addition, MI will prioritize partnerships with ASEAN initiatives in addressing development challenges in the region.

Evolving trade negotiations shift trade and investment climate. With changes in trade negotiations among major countries, the demand for imports from GMS economies may be affected. This will require GMS governments to take proactive steps in anticipating different sources of supply and value chain markets, as well as changing market demands.

For risk mitigation: MI will closely monitor this new climate and provide suggestions to GMS governments in responding to this new environment.

Different levels of development in the GMS. GMS countries are at different levels of development and reflect disparities in income and social capital. The region is also experiencing various patterns in its growth rates across different sectors. Politically, differences in governance systems among GMS countries could pose challenges to regional cooperation and lead to weak governance of transboundary issues. Moreover, although there are several regional cooperation frameworks and many active development partners, limited synergies among these frameworks and the absence of a singular development vision for the region can impede the steady integration and cooperation among GMS countries.

For risk mitigation: MI will capitalize on its role as an intergovernmental organization and convene GMS governments, development partners, and the private sector to foster mutual understanding and win-win solutions to address transboundary challenges.

Increasing climate change risks, especially storms, typhoons, floods and droughts. Extreme floods are a regular source of hardship for livelihoods and economies in the GMS. The costs to countries, particularly Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam, in terms of loss of life, damage to infrastructure and economic losses from floods and droughts are significant. In addition, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam are facing great risks of rising sea level, resulting to losses in the coastal delta and ecosystems.

For risk mitigation: MI will work to bring attention to and mitigate these risks through its sustainable energy and environment program.

⁸ <https://greatermekong.org/adb-assesses-economic-impact-covid-19-outbreak-gms-countries>



DELIVERING RESULTS OF THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2021-2025



MI will continue to evolve its approaches to effectively deliver results of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Below are some indicative directions that serve as starting points.

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Rapidly increase annual revenue for smooth operations and activities. MI will develop a five-year financial plan to set the background for annual planning. After the closing of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 implementation, MI should have an increase in annual revenue between 30 to 50 percent of US\$ 3.5 million.

Keep and maintain the reserve fund margin. MI will implement and put the reserve fund margin on the annual budget between 3 to 5 percent and the reserve fund should be managed, monitored, and deposited into separate bank accounts after the annual financial report is closed and audited. It will make sure that the reserve fund is able to cover the operations for at least 18 months, should unforeseen situations occur.

Strengthen incentives for mobilization of funding.

MI will revisit its internal operating procedures and mechanisms to create and strengthen incentives for departments and staff in the mobilization of funding. Based on the financial plan for 2021-2025 and annual plans, MI will consider to assign indicative levels of funding mobilization for each program department. The remuneration policy of staff will be made on the basis of fulfilled assigned levels of fund mobilization.

Steadily increase contributions of GMS member countries.

In the next five years, MI will discuss with GMS governments options to increase country contribution to MI. The increase in funds will position MI to better deliver tailored support to GMS governments in responding to emerging trans-boundary development areas, thereby solidifying its progression as a regional think tank for the GMS.

Promoting broader partnerships and diversifying resources. MI has been driven by the availability of funding from development partners, which to a large extent determined the focus of its activities. Although funding from development partners has supported MI to continue to deliver services, heavy reliance on this revenue source is not feasible for the long-term. From 2021 to 2025, MI will develop a financial strategy that will enable the intergovernmental organization to independently cover its recurrent and staffing costs. Expanding its advisory services is seen as a key avenue to diversifying funding sources and, therefore, increase MI's financial stability.

Strengthening accountability and good governance in financial management. MI will also strengthen its internal operating procedures and mechanisms for accountability, as well as joint planning between program and support departments in project design and implementation. It will also continue to organize regular audits and business reviews to safeguard efficient and effective implementation and ensure good governance in financial management.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING AND COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Streamlining Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL), and Communications and Knowledge Management (CKM). MI has maintained two separate departments of MEL and CKM. Streamlining inter-linkages between M&E and knowledge management (KM) has been a trend in management for many years. M&E makes impact stories, case studies, good practices, and lessons learned available for knowledge sharing. In other words, M&E feeds in-house inputs for KM. In addition, M&E, knowing the sources of data, could verify knowledge products before publication. To further enhance synergy between M&E and CKM functions, MI will explore options to incorporate M&E and CKM perspectives in the design and implementation of projects and research activities.

Strengthening M&E. The success of this Strategic Plan 2021-2025 implementation depends partly on whether MI could track results in a timely manner according to the Results Framework that will be developed to assess the progress of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. To meet that demand, MEL work needs to be strengthened. At the organizational level, MEL should be responsible for (a) the design of M&E systems for all projects implemented by program departments; (b) capacity development of project management teams on M&E and KM; (c) coaching of project management teams in implementing specific project M&E requirements; and (d) evaluation. In this setting, daily M&E work will be left to program departments who will manage the projects directly.

Communications and knowledge management to support internal and external operations. CKM is integral in supporting MI's short-, mid-, and long-term strategic direction and operational efficiency. It aligns messaging, creative content, products, and campaigns with MI's mission and objectives. In the promotion of the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, CKM will work with senior management and program departments to (a) promote advocacies and policies rooted on MI's evidence-based research studies and knowledge management systems, (b) reinforce MI's visibility and institutional reputation as a leading and credible partner in development by highlighting project impacts, as well as international, regional, and national engagements in the GMS and beyond, and (c) support and maintain partnership expansion and networking by developing and disseminating communication materials and tools to foster resource mobilization, marketing of MI technical services and products, as well as outreach.

Overall, MI's phased communication strategies and plans in the next five years will inform, persuade, motivate, as well as build common awareness and understanding of MI's contributions to staff, partners, beneficiaries, alumni, and other stakeholders.

OPERATIONALIZING THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025



Develop MI action plans to reinforce accountability and transparency. To deliver the goal, objectives, result areas, outcomes, and other strategic guiding principles of this Strategic Plan, MI will continue to develop action plans, which will be the basis for the annual evaluation of MI's programmatic and operational performance against targets.

Foster deeper internal synergy and cooperation. Institutionalized teamwork is an important operational outcome of MI from 2021 to 2025. This will be achieved by a combined set of activities, which will include any of the following:

1. Hold regular senior management meetings that will be attended by the Executive Director and program directors to continuously review operations and foster information exchange
2. Support regular research and case study writing and a seminar series to encourage cross-area collaborations among MI staff and external specialists or experts
3. Set up a proposal writing task force to promote knowledge sharing across departments
4. Conduct an MI annual performance review workshop



CONCLUSION



As an intergovernmental organization that represents and serves the GMS, MI delivers capacity development for regional cooperation and integration. As such, it will continue to mobilize its services and networks to advance the core tenets of the ASEAN Community Building, South-South Cooperation, and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

These will see MI accelerate deeper synergies at the regional and national levels by working in partnership with governments, development partners, and prime movers of regional framework mechanisms to fulfill the shared mission towards harmonious development, common prosperity, and inclusive economies for the improved well-being of people in the region.

In realizing this mutual mission,

opportunities abound for MI to consolidate its existing expertise and become a center of excellence in human resource development and research; a regional think tank on GMS transboundary development; and a trusted partner of GMS governments, development partners, the private sector, and civil society.

This Strategic Plan 2021-2025 sets the direction for MI to begin that transformative path.

From 2021 to 2025, MI will continue to develop its strengths in ADC and TIF, while expanding its core expertise to SEE. MI also commits to mainstream the three cross-cutting themes, including social inclusion and vulnerability, digital economy and innovation, and labor mobility in operating program areas for impactful development. These will be realized through the following strategies: (a) implementing projects in partnership; (b) providing advisory services; and (c) conducting research for policy advocacy.

Transforming this Strategic Plan 2021-2025 into action against a pandemic landscape will have its fair share of challenges that MI is ready to face. MI will need to diversify its funding sources to become more financially viable, consolidate its human resource and enhance internal systems and processes, and explore adjustments in its operations and structure to meet commitments mapped out in this Strategic Plan. Some directions and suggestions are indicated in this document to guide that process but MI will have to tap its full resources, networks, expertise, and manpower to ensure the successful realization of this mission.

In closing, this Strategic Plan 2021-2025 is best considered as a living document. The Strategic Plan will be monitored and reviewed annually, as well as at the mid-term and end of 2025 to ensure that MI maximizes opportunities and transcends challenges that might emerge during the course of this Strategic Plan.



MEKONG
INSTITUTE

Principles

At its core, Mekong Institute is guided by the following principles in delivering all aspects of its work:

Contributing to **inclusive and equitable agricultural growth** for the improved way of life of all



Reinforcing **efficient and productive industries and people** through equitable access to digital economy and innovation



Establishing **food safety culture** as a public health priority



Harnessing **participative and responsible societies** by enhancing the ability, opportunity, mobility, and dignity of the marginalized and disadvantaged



Enabling a **fair trade and investment environment** that actively engages and benefits a broad range of actors in the value and supply chains



Amplifying evidence-based studies and dialogue-for-action platforms for **sustained multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral engagement**



Supporting the **just transition to green economy** for resilient and environmentally sustainable societies



Fortifying **regional development collaboration and actions** by implementing programs and supporting policies that foster ownership and regional identity



Helping create **balanced energy and environment management** for long-term sustainability



Strengthening development impacts by helping align priorities of regional mechanisms and frameworks for **a stronger, more harmonious, and prosperous subregion**



MEKONG INSTITUTE


123 Mittraphap Road, Muang District
Khon Kaen 40002, Thailand

+ 66 (0) 43 202 411 to 2

+ 66 (0) 43 204 041 to 2

www.mekonginstitute.org

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