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MESSAGE



Mrs. Nguyen Yen Hai
Council Chairperson



MI stood alongside the GMS in helping deliver cohesive recovery strategies.

Addressing COVID-19 as One

COVID-19 ignited a global health emergency, not seen in the modern world. In racing to mitigate the spread of the virus, save lives, and respond to the unprecedented socioeconomic disruptions it unleashed, countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) understood that there could be no bystanders.

People from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam demonstrated what is possible when countries band together in enforcing health protocols, cross-border restrictions, and information-sharing policies, while moving to provide safety nets to protect people's livelihood, employment, and general way of life.

In prioritizing closer regional coordination, GMS government officials, development partners, business groups, and the private sector have underscored the value of deploying cohesive recovery strategies to circumvent the full reversal of hard-earned development gains.

Through the course, Mekong Institute (MI) stood alongside our cause. Despite operational challenges, the intergovernmental organization acted swiftly in reframing its capacity building, research, and advocacy services to digital platforms. This action resulted to nearly 4,000 GMS nationals having a more solid understanding of navigating through the new normal by optimizing opportunities from digitalization, e-commerce, and online marketing strategies.

More importantly, MI facilitated broader public-private engagement to source country-tailored solutions from the prism of those gravely impacted.

In bringing together GMS leaders, experts, business owners, employers, workers, academics, and students, MI spotlighted policies, innovations, facilities, and support packages needed to help small- and medium-sized businesses, the tourism and hospitality sectors, communities, and the marginalized better cope as production, consumer consumption, goods, and services scaled down.

Much more is needed from us to transcend the ramifications of COVID-19 and fortify our pandemic preparedness. Deeper development synergies, more evidence-based studies, and technologies, as well as institutionalized information exchange are necessary to ensure that our regional investments truly address priority needs on the ground.

These will require more concerted planning, collective action, and more broad-based participatory dialogues so efforts remain aligned with our shared priority of building forward better a stronger subregion.

While at times the challenges may seem insurmountable, given the unabated variances of the crisis, I am confident that by continuing to work in committed partnership, the GMS will come out of the dark tunnel—stronger, resilient, and more responsive.

MESSAGE



Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee
Steering Committee Chairman



MI's Strategic Plan can serve as a complementing roadmap in GMS recovery efforts.

Looking Towards the Future

Amidst the turmoil brought on by the pandemic, MI completed its Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

Looking to the future, the intergovernmental organization will reinforce its resources, networks, and convening power to equip more GMS nationals to lead positive change in their countries by helping increase agricultural commercial production, strengthen food systems, make more efficient trade and investment facilitation, and promote the broader adaption of sustainable energy and environment practices—which include the timely focus on risk preparedness and management.

Much has changed since MI was formed in 1996. In meeting challenges and opportunities with creativity and mettle, MI has earned the regard of GMS governments, international development partners, and stakeholders as a key partner in helping advance socioeconomic growth.

MI's progress reflects the steadfast ownership of the six GMS countries who have nurtured MI from a training institute to a development-delivering vehicle. It also speaks of MI's agility in transforming ideas into actions, which is attributed to the contributions of previous executive directors, including Dr. Watcharas Leelawath who concluded his six-year service in August 2020. With the appointment of Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, we foresee MI's work to scale even higher in empowering GMS nationals, fostering genuine dialogues, and forging committed partnerships for more aligned and inclusive regional efforts.

While the impacts of COVID-19 reverberate around us, gains accomplished thus far give much room for hope. Standing on a foundation of mutual trust and shared aspirations, Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam have shown pragmatic ingenuity in suppressing the spread of the virus and shielding the vulnerable through emergency safety nets.

However, given the severe socioeconomic consequences of the pandemic, a steep and arduous path is upon us before we can fully restore economies and hard-won development gains. This raises the call for GMS stakeholders to consider accelerating digitalization and increasing investments in technological innovations to drive meaningful recovery and resilience.

This is where MI's Strategic Plan can serve as a complementing roadmap in our efforts. MI's capacity development services, particularly its multilateral approach to sourcing workable solutions, can help the GMS establish a range of skills and perspectives required to craft and implement long-term strategies to realize robust agricultural production, facilitative trade and investment, responsive social protection measures, and a greener environment through smart technologies.

The last two years have been a game changer. It presented digital solutions that permanently reshaped how we live and work. In adapting to this new normal, we must leverage these opportunities to harness our long-term regional development agenda, strengthen efficient public deliveries, and enhance market competitiveness for us to jointly build forward a truly inclusive, progressive, and resilient future for the GMS.

MESSAGE



Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn

Executive Director



Finding our way forward from the pandemic will be the mission of our time.

A Steady Partner During Challenging Times

This document captures how MI straddled the micro and the macro: helping address immediate needs of GMS countries, while working hand-in-hand with regional and international partners to source long-term solutions for the recovery of the subregion.

2020 has not been an easy year for the GMS, including MI. At the peak surges of the pandemic, our operations were stymied, disrupting scheduled activities under 24 programs and projects that were designed to enhance capacities, bridge partnerships, and inspire concerted actions through our reputed face-to-face trainings, workshops, and forums.

As with countless other organizations around the world, COVID-19 also impacted our revenue streams, requiring decisive belt-tightening measures in our operations. In the face of constraints, the MI team displayed ingenuity as it swiftly adjusted to the new norm to mobilize commitments to our 12 partners and 3,674 beneficiaries.

While the hurdles were numerous, opportunities were also rife. In shifting to online platforms, we delivered a new form of service wherein capacity development remains accessible and uninterrupted, despite uncertain times.

In placing premium on shoring better understanding and, thereby, response to the impacts of the pandemic, our 37 completed trainings, workshops, and consultations highlighted coping strategies to help GMS stakeholders, particularly small businesses, restore economic activities and services while border closures, quarantine measures, and restricted mobility were enforced.

In anticipation of long-term needs, we have also doubled down on our research efforts and regional dialogues to aid in pinpointing policies and systems necessary to initiate the holistic recovery of the agricultural and trade and investment sectors.

By driving information-sharing, joint solution-finding approaches, and public-private collaboration at the regional, national, and local levels, MI—in collaboration with partners—brought to the fore wider concurrence to increase investments in digital infrastructure and facilities; broaden capacity building support to help more GMS nationals adapt to technologies; identify alternative supply and consumer markets to stimulate demand; and deploy safety nets to protect communities and the marginalized for the effective revitalization of economic engines and stronger preparedness against future global crises.

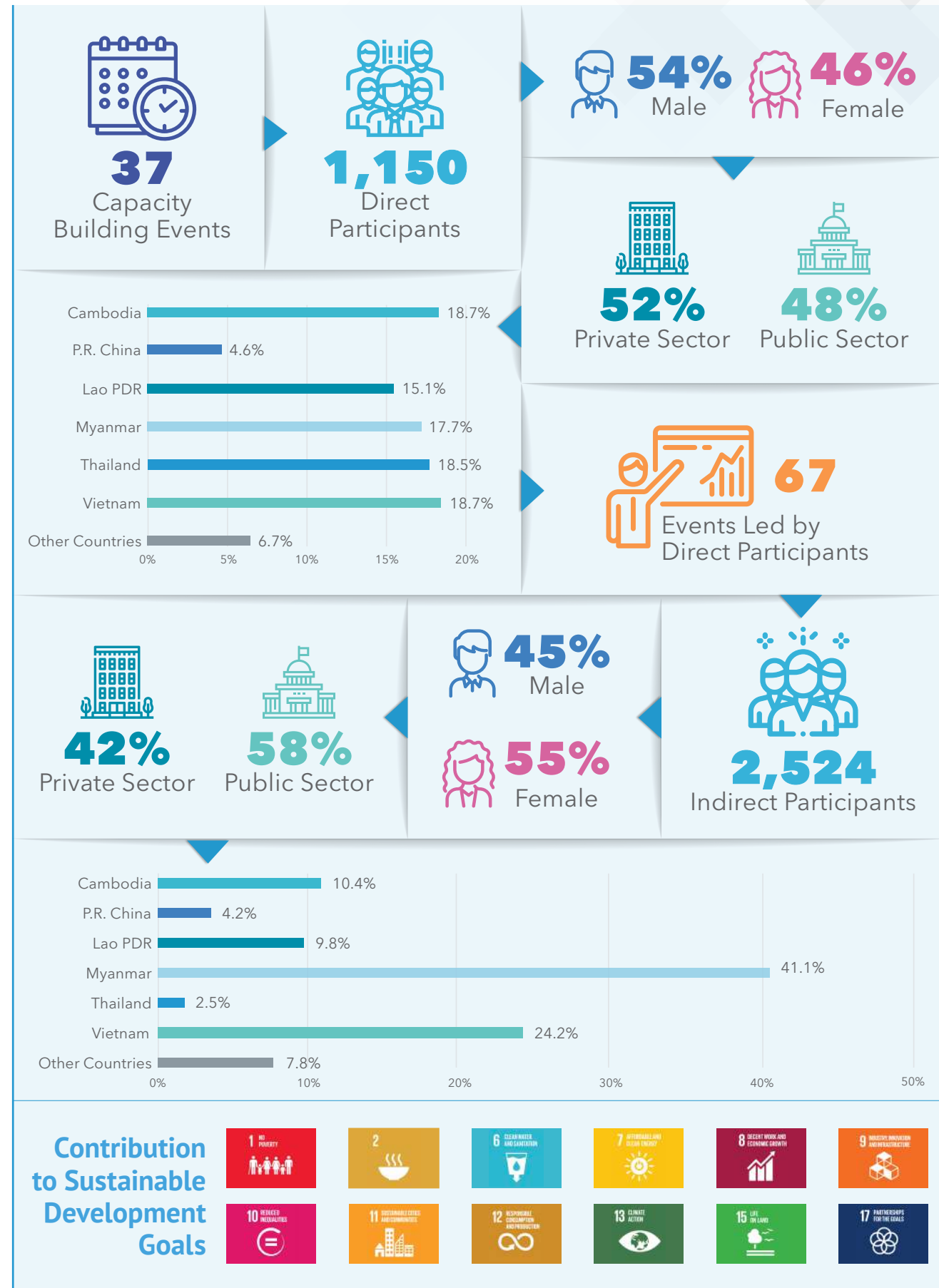
Through the course of the turbulent year, the confidence of GMS governments and partners in our work made it possible for us to deliver results. These have in turn created new collaborations with other organizations equally committed in allaying the complex and interwoven scale of emerging development needs.

Finding our way forward from the pandemic will be the mission of our time. In this, MI has escalated its services and platforms to widen engagement in generating new ideas, more comprehensive solutions, and better innovations that represent the GMS context. This will help equip more leaders and champions with the skills, tools, and information needed to transcend the immense challenges ahead, so we may realize a prosperous, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future.

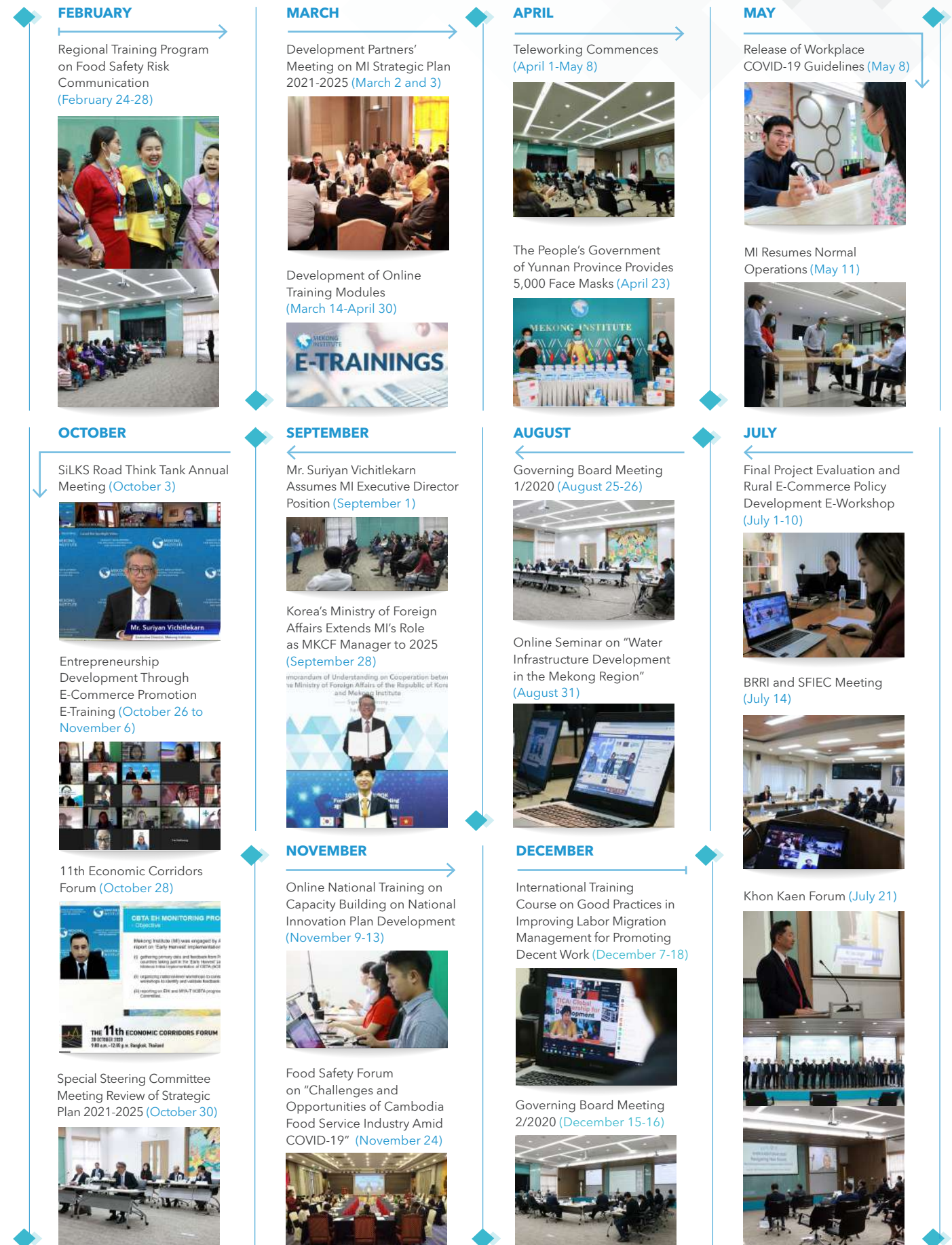
ABBREVIATION AND ACRONYMS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ADB	Asian Development Bank
CBEZ	Cross-Border Economic Zones
CBTA	Cross-Border Transport Agreement
EZ	Economic Zone
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
LMCSF	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund
MKCF	Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund
MI	Mekong Institute
MIYSP	Mekong Institute Young Scholars Program
NZAP	New Zealand Aid Programme
P.R. China	People's Republic of China
PROSAFE Project	Promoting Safe Food for Everyone Project
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SME	Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprise

2020 PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE



2020 ACTIVITIES AT A GLANCE



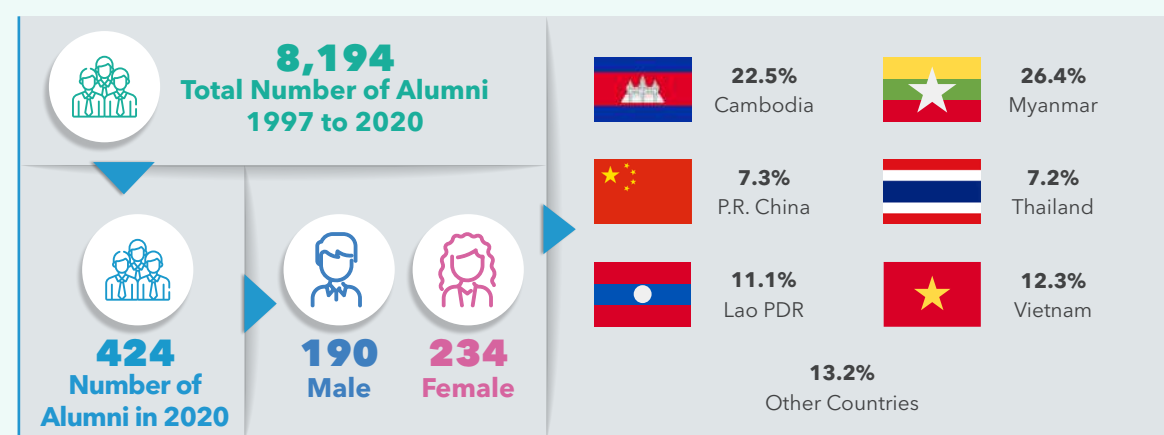
INTRODUCTION



2020 was a year of unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the GMS and MI.

As the world navigated through a global health crisis that has strained health systems, spurred widespread lockdowns, and disrupted economic flows, MI stood at the forefront to help GMS governments and nationals navigate the new normal through its capacity building, research, and advocacy services (see **Figure 1. Number of MI Alumni and Country Representation (1997 to 2020)**).

Figure 1. Number of MI Alumni and Country Representation (1997 to 2020)



In realizing these, MI displayed keen adaptiveness in delivering program commitments. Chief among these was the launch of online activities—a first in its 24-year history. In shifting its tested face-to-face trainings and dialogues into the digital platform, MI was able to complete 37 trainings, workshops, forums, and consultations under 24 projects, which have benefitted an estimated 3,674 direct and indirect beneficiaries (see **Annex 1. 2020 Programs and Projects**).



MI rolled out online forums to find broad-based solutions and approaches to expedite cohesive and effective socioeconomic recovery strategies in a pandemic climate.

◆ ◆
MI delivers comprehensive modules, practical experiences, adaptive technologies, and guided support for retentive online learning.



Ms. Heuangkhamse Douangmany
 Founder and Managing Director,
 Her Works, Vientiane, Lao PDR/
 November 5, 2020

Cognizant of the need to strengthen resiliency, while helping build socioeconomic safety nets, MI redirected its activities to help GMS stakeholders better understand and respond to the impacts of the pandemic. Specifically, MI and partners helped government, business group, and private sector representatives identify measures for industries to craft and implement coping and recovery strategies. These efforts, which underscored the power of information-sharing, joint solution-finding approaches, and public-private partnerships, helped foster coordinated and cohesive actions at both the regional and national levels.

Under agricultural development and commercialization, MI pooled strategies and bridged networks to help the agri-food industry cope against disrupted local food supply and demand chains, reduced consumer consumption, as well as limited access to food, raw products, and maintenance services. The recommendations were generated from 357 representatives of government agencies, business groups, and the private sector in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Thus, ensuring that solutions reflected the sociopolitical landscape of the countries.

MI and the Thailand Rice Department also took steps to enhance the sustainability and competitiveness of rice-based production industries in the Mekong region. Preliminary planning with Mekong representatives were initiated to set the foundation in building a unified regional response to pest outbreaks and natural disasters, as well to harmonize rice production standards and systems in Lancang-Mekong countries.



MI and Thailand's Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC) formalized their partnership on January 24, 2020 to strengthen rice production practices and technologies in the Lancang-Mekong region.

In the area of trade and investment facilitation, MI focused on upskilling GMS nationals, particularly women entrepreneurs, on e-commerce and current e-business strategies, while helping the tourism industry better adapt to smart technologies and innovative practices to boost its competitive advantage for when inbound tourism is re-opened in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam.

In addition, MI helped advance innovation technology and connectivity as it completed four trainings to help incorporate science, technology and innovation (STI) policies into national roadmaps and master plans for more efficient government services, higher market productivity, and overall economic transformation.



PADDLING EPONG BOAT
Activity



PAD MHEE KORAT
Local Taste

Training participants of the “Smart and Sustainable Tourism Development in the Mekong Region” project were trained to develop advertising materials and optimize social media platforms to generate international interest towards their tourism services and products.

In the area of energy, MI along with several international partners formalized an agreement to jointly provide platforms for technical exchange, as well as deliver capacity strengthening support to deepen regional power collaboration from 2020 to 2023.

With the view of narrowing the divide between labor recruitment supply and demand, MI and the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) held activities to build a more competitive Cambodian, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnamese workforce, while highlighting practical measures in labor protection management against a pandemic landscape.



MI sets common understanding of global STI principles and practices, which will help Myanmar form a strong innovation policy plan.



Dr. Thanzin Han
Director, Department of Research and Innovation, Ministry of Education, Yangon, Myanmar/November 15, 2020

Simultaneously, efforts were made to institutionalize deeper information sharing among Lancang-Mekong nationals to boost intra-regional trade through networking and business-to-business activities. The updated data, which are stored in MI’s Economic Zone, GMS Economic Corridor, GMS Logistics, and the Lancang-Mekong

Business Forum Databases, feature trade policies and regulations, as well as business products and services. To date, over 3,000 government, business group, and private sector representatives have accessed these sites.

More systematic inter-country coordination was also facilitated with the release of seven research studies and reports, as well as the development of a web-based Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. These evidence-based documents detailed recommendations to advance regional connectivity and strengthen GMS SMEs’ market competitiveness (see **Table 1. 2020 MI Research and Study Reports**). The M & E system, on the other hand, was designed to help the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Secretariat and Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) better track progress and measure results of over 270 LMC projects on connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water resources, agriculture, and poverty reduction.

In testament to MI’s growing reputation as a key partner in shoring regional and national synergies, the Government of the Republic of Korea extended MI’s position as fund manager and implementing agency of the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF) from 2020 to 2025. To date, MI oversees the implementation of 20 projects¹ worth nearly US\$9 million, while providing technical guidance to PIAs in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Republic of Korea (ROK) on project implementation.

¹ Of the 20 projects, seven were completed and 13 are in different stages of completion.

² With support from AOTS, the study presented focus areas, priorities, progress, and achievements of 14 cooperation mechanisms, as well as their respective implementation processes, to strengthen operation and development synergies. The document also included recommendations of emerging development trends and needs the Government of Japan can consider contributing to in the areas of infrastructure, transport connectivity, sustainable management of water resources, among others, to deepen Mekong-Japan cooperation.

³ The study was conducted under the “Market Access Through E-Commerce Promotion for Women-led SMEs” project, which is supported by the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

Table 1. 2020 MI Research and Study Reports

“Survey on Regional Cooperation Frameworks in the Mekong Subregion”
“Connectivity Issues for Enhancing Coordination among Mekong-Lancang Countries”
“Market Access Through E-Commerce Promotion for Women-Led SMEs”
“Baseline Study on Women-Led SMEs”
“Innovation for Water Infrastructure Development in the Mekong Region”
“Survey on Regional Cooperation Frameworks in the Mekong Subregion” ²
“Export to Korea Study Report” ³



On September 28, 2020, MI and ROK’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs renewed their partnership. This will see MI extend its role and position as MKCF’s fund manager and implementing agency from 2020 to 2025.

Addressing the need to stabilize financial standing in the current climate, MI secured a project under Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) on “Research and Recommendations on Consumer Awareness Campaigns on Food Standards and Safety in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam” in 2021,⁴ while negotiations are in progress with representatives from the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund to implement the “Promotion of Crop Insurance in ASEAN through Public and Private Partnership” project.⁵ In addition, MI continues to pursue public-private collaborations as it worked with 12 development partners and established 14 partnership agreements with various government ministries, universities, and institutions.

Table 2. 2020 Development Partners

 New Zealand Aid Programme	 Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund	 Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund
 Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd.	 Korea International Cooperation Agency	 Republic of Korea
 P.R. China	 People's Government of Yunnan Province	 TFO-Canada
 Thailand International Cooperation Agency	 Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau	 Business for Social Responsibility-New York

Institutionally, a change of MI leadership was formalized on September 1, 2020 when Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn was appointed the ninth Executive Director after a rigorous screening process of 97 applicants from February to May 2020. Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, who started his service in 2014 ended his term on August 31, 2020.



During the transition, both chiefs oversaw the review of the intergovernmental organization's performance from 2016 to 2020 and finalized the Strategic Plan 2021-2025. On the former, MI met its program targets of instilling food safety consciousness, strengthening small-and medium-sized enterprise (SME) development, promoting stronger economic corridors and cross-border trade, as well as expanding GMS energy and technology cooperation (see **Figure 2. 2016 to 2020 Performance Highlights**). Lessons learned from the five-year assessment were also taken into account to strengthen the operational and program direction of MI's action plan in the next five years (see **Page 8**).

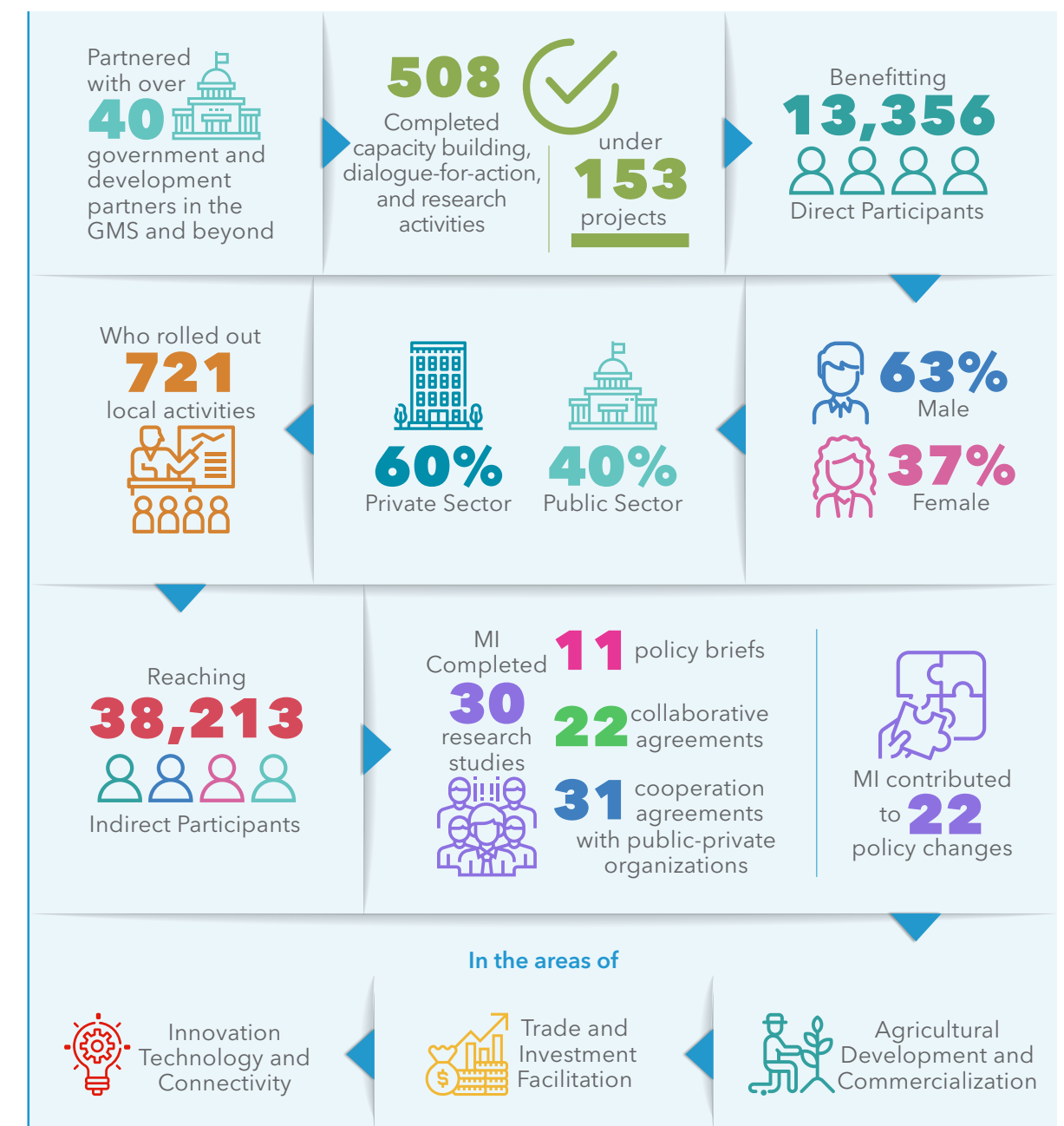
⁴ The project is part of GIZ's Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Value Chains in ASEAN (ASEAN AgriTrade) and Consumer Protection in ASEAN (PROTECT) Program. The objectives of the research is to map and assess regional/ASEAN good practices and effective consumer campaigns on food standards and safety that have succeeded in realizing behavioral changes on the part of consumers. The paper will also present recommendations on how to adapt and replicate these efforts in CLMV.

⁵ Should the partnership be formalized, MI will work with Thailand's Department of Agriculture as the project implementing agency. This project aims to build stakeholders' capacity in establishing and strengthening regional collaboration on crop insurance development/improvement and promotion through the exchange of knowledge and experiences via a variety of regional cooperation platforms.

With the public release of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 scheduled in January 2021, MI will be implementing programs in partnership, providing advisory service, and delivering research for policy advocacy to further regional cooperation and integration. MI also jumpstarted the planning for its 25th anniversary.

After the concurrence from Governing Board members during the December 2020 meeting, the commemoration campaign from January to December 2021 will spotlight achievements and lessons learned, as well as honor pioneers, longstanding partners, and outstanding alumni. It will also deploy activities to highlight shared interests and broaden strategic public-private alliances.

Figure 2. 2016 to 2020 Performance Highlights



THE MI APPROACH

At its core, MI works towards the creation of a more integrated, prosperous, and harmonious GMS. As such, it harnesses human capital through a modular training approach to expand skills and expertise of GMS nationals so they can strengthen institutions, enhance governance, and deliver more efficient services to its people (see **Figure 3. MI Modular Training Approach**). It also links institutions, people, and markets among and between countries to expand competitiveness, ease trade flows, generate economic growth, and stimulate social development for a more cohesive and stronger subregion.

MI has consistently displayed flexibility and creative innovation as evidenced by the 16 new training curricula developed and the eight modules refined to fit the technical requirements of training participants in 2020 alone. These qualities are similarly adapted in MI's delivery of other services for optimum project impact. Overall, MI's development process is anchored on three core characteristics:

1. Regionally-Focused, Nationally-Led

MI's initiatives and interventions complement each GMS country's national agenda with regional frameworks and strategies to ensure sustainability of development outputs. It also supports regional cooperation mechanisms by institutionalizing information-sharing, dialogue exchanges, and project coordination among and between GMS countries for deeper collaboration.

2. Iterative and Adaptive

Given the changing contexts and needs of the GMS, MI has invested time and effort in reviewing its programming and operations to improve delivery and strengthen the competencies of stakeholders in responding



MI employs several approaches to strengthen development synergies. One of these is the convening of regional and national stakeholders through dialogue-for-action platforms.

to emerging challenges. Beginning in 2016, it has institutionalized its monitoring and evaluation practices by adapting a results-oriented approach to regularly gauge the quality of project design, the efficiency and effectiveness of implementation, and the evaluation of project impact and sustainability.

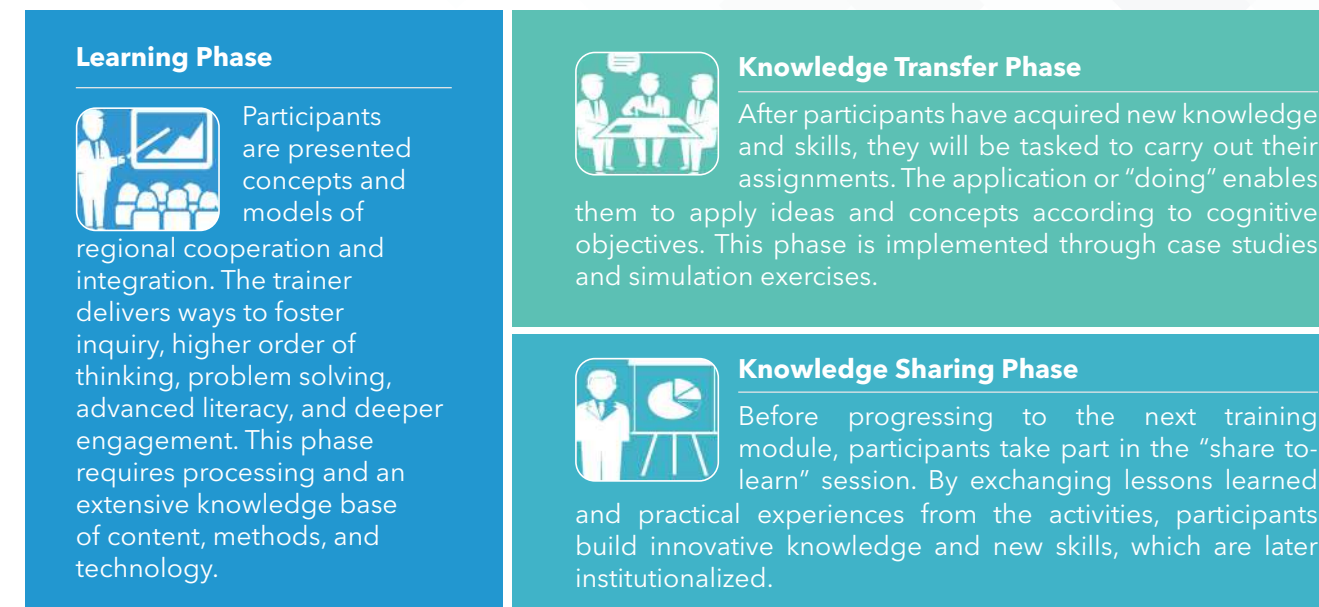
3. Inclusive

MI's inclusive approach entails improving the ability and opportunity of people who are disadvantaged on the basis of their identity to take part in development processes. At MI, this is enacted by promoting and measuring engagement by gender and nationality, ensuring equitable participation of women and minorities in MI's trainings and project planning and implementation.



MI was also invited in region-wide activities to broaden discussions on the subregion's priority development areas and progress, as well as impart its technical expertise in the areas of agricultural development, trade and investment facilitation, and innovation technology.

Figure 3. MI Modular Training Approach



PROGRESS VIS-À-VIS OUTCOMES

Development work is characterized by non-linear dynamics. To push progress and achieve gains, a systems approach is necessary to spearhead durable constructive change amidst uncertain times. In carrying out this principle, MI re-adjusted activities to meet objectives of its 24 projects, while addressing prevailing needs of target participants. Overall, the 37 online, hybrid, and onsite activities reinforced the (a) merits of adapting to digitalization, (b) need to identify new supply and consumer markets to boost intra-regional trade, (c) necessity in upskilling the CLMV labor force, and the (d) urgency for cohesive policies to re-activate the region's socioeconomic activities, and, more importantly, to increase preparedness against future global crises.

In addition, research studies and project reports detail country-specific findings and recommendations that will fast track the rebuilding of resilient industries. Supplementing these evidence-based documents, MI's training courses and forums prioritized building common understanding of best practices to help governments, business groups, the private

sector, and communities better respond to the pandemic in the immediate- and long-terms. These findings are currently being collated to build a knowledge base of coping strategies for submission to government and development partners.

While these initiatives gave rise to steady gains, the process also highlighted areas of improvement for MI to enhance its program deliveries and operations. MI's next steps are to explore alternative activities that will maintain the quality of its trainings, particularly in engendering network building, which were observed to not be as solidly cemented among participants in digital platforms compared to face-to-face interactions.

Internally, MI will reassess online products and systems to remain competitive in an inundated e-services market by prioritizing its recruitment of thematic specialists with tested online teaching experience, as well as increasing investments on high caliber digital equipment and facilities.

The following pages highlight MI's cumulative progress and deliverables in 2020.

RESPONSIVE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT



Box 1. MI and the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP)

The New Zealand Government was one of MI's three founders. This long-standing partnership was further cemented in 2016 when NZAP worked with MI to deploy regional food safety trainings in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV). With the successful implementation, the PROSAFE project was borne in 2018. Designed to deliver a coordinated approach to knowledge and skills development, PROSAFE strengthens food safety capabilities of agri-food supply and value chain stakeholders. Apart from addressing country-identified training needs, the project also bridges collaboration between the public and private sectors to build a food safety culture in CLMV.

Despite logistical constraints brought on by the pandemic, MI completed ten PROSAFE activities in 2020 (see Table 3. 2020 PROSAFE Activities).

These collectively convened 357 government officials, SME representatives, academics, researchers, and media to increase compliance of domestic and international food safety requirements and standards, as well as to employ solutions to mitigate impacts from the limited movement of workers, changes in consumer demands, closure of food production facilities, restricted food trade policies, and financial pressures in the food supply chain.



During the three onsite PROSAFE trainings at the MI Headquarters in Khon Kaen, Thailand, MI staff prepared health guidelines and protocol to keep participants safe.

Table 3. 2020 PROSAFE Activities

Date	Activity	Location
February 24 to 28	Onsite Regional Training Program on Food Safety Risk Communication	Khon Kaen, Thailand
March 9 to 13	Onsite Regional Training Program on Postharvest Safe Food Handling	Khon Kaen, Thailand
September 22	Hybrid Food Safety Forum on Challenges and Coping Strategies for Food Enterprises in the Time of COVID-19	Phnom Penh, Cambodia
October 19 to 23	Onsite Regional Training Program on Managing Food Safety Along the Food Supply Chain	Khon Kaen, Thailand
October 28	Hybrid Food Safety Forum on Challenges and Coping Strategies for the Agri-Food Sector in the Time of COVID-19	Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
November 10	Hybrid Food Safety Forum on Food Safety for Market Access: Bringing Lao Flavors to the World	Vientiane, Lao PDR
November 24	Hybrid Food Safety Forum on Challenges and Opportunities of Cambodia Food Service Industry Amid COVID-19	Phnom Penh, Cambodia
November 26	Hybrid Training Workshop on Postharvest Safe Food Handling of Fresh Fruits and Vegetables	Lam Dong, Vietnam
December 4	Hybrid Training Workshop on Food Preservation, Packaging and Labeling for Food Safety	Vientiane, Lao PDR
December 7 to 11	Hybrid Regional Training Program on HACCP Application in Food Processing	Khon Kaen, Thailand



MI's PROSAFE trainings address our priorities of helping SMEs be more competitive.



Mr. Phutthasone Phomvisay

Director, SME Service Center, Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Vientiane, Lao PDR/ March 8, 2021

Figure 4. Coping Strategies for the Agri-Food Sector

Strategies for a Resilient and Competitive Agri-Food Sector in Lao PDR
For rapid economic recovery and to strengthen food supply chains

- ACCELERATE** implementation of food safety measures along the agri-food supply chain for deeper consumer trust.
- BROADEN** private sector involvement in agri-food policy and standards development to facilitate implementation and compliance with food safety and quality requirements.
- ENHANCE** capacities of the private sector representatives to diversify and provide business development services.
- EXPAND** access to national and regional SPS/TBT and trade facilitation technical support for more efficient cross-border trade.
- INCREASE** agri-food enterprises' access to affordable financing to scale up production and market access.
- STRENGTHEN** trade promotion, market intelligence and import-export support for wider participation in regional and international markets.

Logos: MEKONG INSTITUTE, PROSAFE, Food Safety Forum, Food Safety for Market Access: Bringing Lao Flavors to the World, November 10, 2020 | Vientiane, Lao PDR

Of note was the launch of the PROSAFE Food Safety Forum Series. In leveraging Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam's progress in food safety control systems, the four dialogue-for-action events pooled concrete approaches in addressing strengths, fragilities, and opportunities of food enterprises, the food service sector, and other stakeholders to build back better a more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive agri-food industry in the time of COVID-19 (see **Figure 4. Coping Strategies for the Agri-Food Sector**).



In facilitating these multi-sectoral exchanges of information, MI bridged public-private networks. The forums allowed government and business representatives to share investments and progress made in stabilizing food supply and value chains, which can be built on by other sectors for more holistic and long-term impacts. From the discussions, solutions such as prioritizing production of in demand food products to minimize operating costs were meted, as well as commitments to institutionalize food safety practices through local knowledge sharing activities. These positive outputs also include the ongoing collaboration between the Cambodian government and MI to develop a food safety guideline for food deliveries. When completed, the guideline will further strengthen food hygiene, sanitation, and handling from retailers and food service establishments to consumers.



"PROSAFE forums helped us share the government's progress in stabilizing food chains, which can be built on by the business and private sectors for more holistic and long-term transformation.



Dr. Heng Bunkiet

Director, Department of Drug and Food, Ministry of Health, Phnom Penh, Cambodia/ November 25, 2020

Overall, PROSAFE delivered the following: (a) 19 food safety trainings completed by PROSAFE alumni in their home countries, which have benefitted 700 indirect participants, (b) improved Good Hygiene Practices inspection procedures for restaurants and cafeterias in Cambodia, (c) integration of food safety into the course curricula and materials in Vietnam's Hanoi University of Science and Technology, (d) improved packinghouse and processing facilities inspection procedures by Myanmar's Yezin Agricultural University and Food Science and Technology Associations, (e) application of new food safety practices in eight SMEs in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Vietnam, as well as (f) increased public awareness on food safety strategies via features published on local newspapers and broadcasted in TV across the CLMV (see **Figure 5. 2020 PROSAFE Performance Highlights**).



At a hybrid PROSAFE training in Vietnam, MI and SME leaders helped 30 SMEs improve the quality of their food products by introducing packaging and labeling techniques, new technologies, as well as storage and distribution requirements to increase their competitiveness in the local and regional markets.



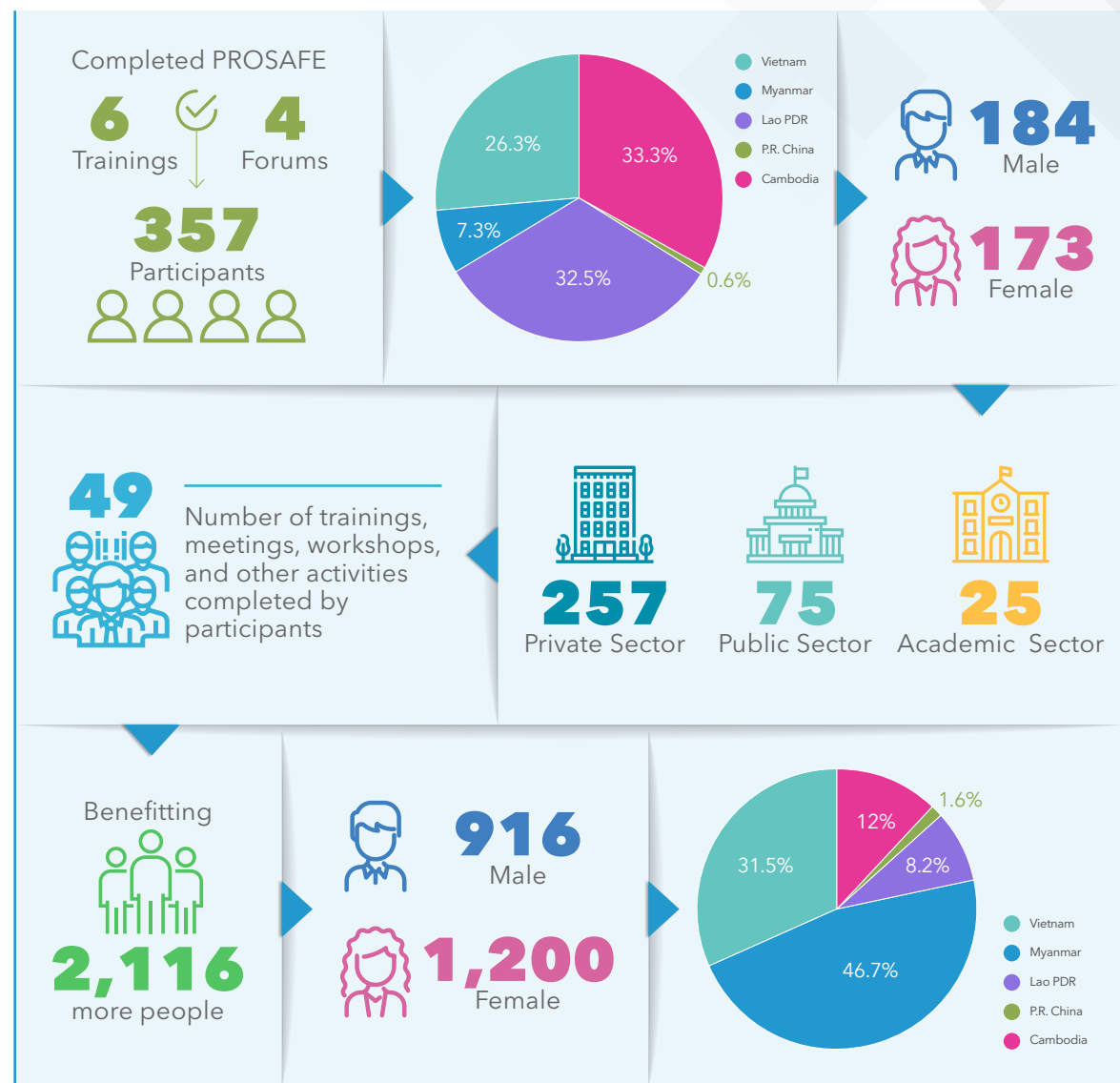
"We help our food, tourism, and hospitality services remain competitive and dynamic. One way is to ensure that we apply and comply with food safety and health standards with help from organizations such as MI for the steady recovery of our industries."



Mr. Arnaud Darc

CRA President, Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of Thalias Hospitality Group, Phnom Penh, Cambodia/November 25, 2020

Figure 5. 2020 PROSAFE Performance Highlights

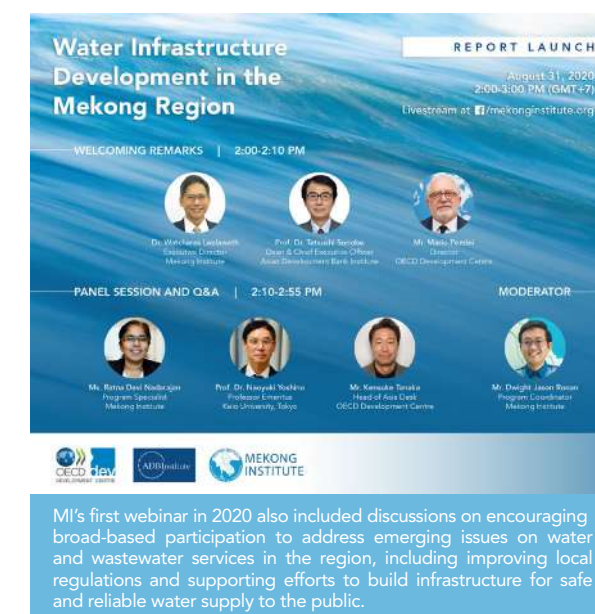


Given MI's command of the food safety landscape in the region, it initiated a research study on "Post-Pandemic Response for Food Systems in Lancang-Mekong Region." With support from the Government of P.R. China, MI has formed a research team to investigate the consequences of COVID-19 on the production, storage, transport, trade, processing, retailing, and consumption stages in selected agricultural commodities. Validated results from the study, which will be shared to government officials, policy makers, and researchers in 2021, will present interventions and recommendations to strengthen post-pandemic resilience and sustainability of food systems in Lancang-Mekong countries.



To further holistic and balanced development, MI completed training materials for the "Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Training Program on Project Management and Sectoral Development of Key Priority Areas." The documents, which were submitted to the National Secretariat of Cambodia for Mekong-Lancang-Cooperation, will serve as the baseline module in broadening the promotion of water resource cooperation, cross-border economic cooperation, and agricultural development in the region.

In line with efforts to raise awareness of the vital link between agriculture and the environment, a webinar to support the "Innovation for Water Infrastructure Development in the Mekong Region" report was launched. The OECD Development Centre, Asian Development Bank Institute, and MI presented emerging issues on water and wastewater services in the region, including recommendations to strengthen local regulations, financing, and infrastructure needs for safe and reliable water supply to the public. The discussion also covered nature-based solutions and digital tools to enhance the resilience of communities against natural disasters and other hazards.



RICE SYSTEMS AS FOREARMED AND HARMONIZED



Box 2. MI and MOAC

As Asia's veritable rice bowl, the Mekong region produces 44 percent of the world's rice. However, rice industries in Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam have become increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As such, Thailand's MOAC and MI have partnered to bring forth stronger cooperation by establishing a mechanism to exchange knowledge and experiences to promote sustainable agricultural practices and boost rice trade in the region. The two projects are supported by the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund.

Following the memorandum of understanding between Thailand's MOAC and MI on January 23, 2020,

MI and the Thailand Rice Department completed the inception workshops for the "Development of Rice Pest and Natural Disaster Monitoring Forecasting and Warning Center for Sustainable Rice Production under Climate Change in the Mekong-Lancang Subregion" and "Development and Implementation of Common Rice Product Standards in Mekong Lancang Sub-Region" projects.



A regional early warning system will empower us to advance the sustainability of our rice production.



Dr. Payorm Cobelli
Director, Rice Protection Research Group, Division of Rice Research and Development, Thailand Rice Department, Khon, Kaen, Thailand/October 28, 2020

The activities, which were considered important junctures, opened avenues for government officials from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to exchange information on rice production technologies, innovative studies, and best practices on pest control and disaster management strategies, as well as rice production standards.

As part of the overall mission of fostering an inter-country culture of information sharing on rice production planning and management, findings from the discussions will feed into an artificial intelligence warning system—the first in the Lancang-Mekong region. The system will be deployed in 2021 to help governments, rice industries, and communities make better informed decisions and take appropriate mitigating actions before a pest outbreak or natural disaster.



Through this agricultural decision support system, we will effectively help Lao rice producers better cope with climate uncertainties.



Dr. Thavone Inthavong
Director, Research Centre for Climate Change Resilience in Agriculture, National Agriculture and Forestry Research Institute, Vientiane, Lao PDR/November 4, 2020

To date, MI and the Thailand Rice Department are working with focal persons from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to detail (a) existing rice product standards, (b) guidelines and implementation approaches, and (c) challenges and gaps. The project aims to harmonize standards for greater international market access.



MI helps institutionalize information sharing of best rice production systems and practices for sustainability and greater market access.



Mr. Narawoot Piyachoatsakulchai

Director of the Rice Product Development Division, Thailand Rice Department, Khon Kaen, Thailand/November 11, 2020



REGIONAL SYNERGIES FOR SHARED PROGRESS



The "Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region" project website presents GMS photos, which were collected from the MI-facilitated photo and blog contests. Over 50 GMS nationals submitted their entries.

Box 3. MI and MKCF

MI holds the privilege of being MKCF's fund manager and implementing agency. Beginning in 2015, MI has been overseeing the implementation of 20 projects and providing technical support to PIAs in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the ROK. These have strengthened capacities in applying information communication technology for market expansion, designing greener growth models for economic and environmental advancement, improving water resource management, facilitating a regional agriculture value chain, and deepening regional cooperation through education, skills development, as well as trade and business. As of December 2020, seven projects were successfully completed and 13 more are in different stages of implementation.

MI's ability to leverage regional networks to deliver impactful results has been gaining steady traction within and outside the GMS.

On September 28, 2020, the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MI renewed their partnership to advance Mekong-ROK Cooperation. This will see the latter extend its role as MKCF's fund manager and implementing agency for the next action plan of 2020 to 2025.



MI Executive Director Mr. Suriyan Vichitkarn and the senior management team welcomed H.E. Ambassador Lee Wook-heon of the Republic of Korea to Thailand and his delegation at the MI Headquarters on November 3, 2020. Beginning in 2015, MI has been a strong partner of ROK, serving as fund manager of MKCF and as implementing agency of several Korea-funded projects.

Nine years after its inception in 2011, the Mekong-ROK Cooperation remains among the most dynamic in the region for its commitment in delivering systematic and pragmatic support to the seven priority areas of culture and tourism, human resources development, agriculture and rural development, infrastructure, information and communication technology, environment, and non-traditional security challenges, as outlined in the "Mekong-Han River Declaration for Establishing Partnership for People, Prosperity, and Peace."

Such cooperation was further cemented when the Mekong-ROK Partnership was elevated to summit level. This historic milestone positioned ROK in the same realm as Japan and the People's Republic of China as being the only countries that have the highest consultative mechanisms with the Mekong region.

Through capacity building activities, MI played a role in ensuring MKCF projects have not only fostered stronger collaboration among governments, the private sector, academe, and non-government organizations in each Mekong country, but that these will

deepen networking and synergy long after the conclusion of projects. These efforts are now being reflected by the steady rise of bilateral and multilateral relations between and among Mekong countries to advance Mekong-ROK Partnership.



Representatives of the 10th Mekong-ROK Foreign Ministers' Meeting extended their appreciation for MI's contributions in deepening Mekong-ROK cooperation.



Mr. Park Jae-Kyung
Director-General, ASEAN and Southeast Asian Affairs Bureau, ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 28, 2020/Seoul, Korea

In 2020, MI formalized six project agreements and disbursed funds under the fourth MKCF call, which are expected to be completed between 2022 and 2023. This progress sets seven projects as completed and 13 more in different stages of implementation. (Table 4. 2020 Selected MKCF Projects).

Table 4. 2020 Selected MKCF Projects⁶

Country	Title	Proponent	Objectives	Priority Area
 Cambodia	Data Collection and Processing for the Cambodian Irrigation Schemes Information System and Sharing Information on Water Resources Between Mekong and ROK	Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology	To develop a nationwide information system referencing all irrigation and water management infrastructures	Information, Communication and Technology
 Lao PDR	Soil, Water, and Nutrient Management for Increasing Farm Household Income in Drought Zones in Lao PDR	Department of Agriculture Land Management, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry	To create the best soil, water, and nutrient management model farms in drought areas	Agriculture and Rural Development
 Myanmar	Assessment of Heavy Metal Contamination in Soil and Water for Safety Crop Production in Myanmar	Land Use Division Department of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation	To assess occurrences of heavy metal and their amount in specific regions; enhance food safety production for export market; increase awareness on heavy metal contamination in resources	Environment
 Vietnam	Developing of Climate-Related Disaster Hazard Zoning Map and Enhancing the Salinity Intrusion Monitoring Network in Can Tho City	Can Tho Climate Change Coordination Office	To improve capacities in responding and adapting to saline intrusion and natural disasters of local governments and communities	Environment
 Thailand	Sharing of Experiences, Best Practices, and Lessons Learned in Controlling COVID-19 Outbreaks in ROK and Mekong Countries	Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University	To share evidence-based management and appropriate innovative tools and interventions on COVID-19	Non-Traditional Security Challenges
 ROK	Building Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES) between Mekong Countries and Korea	Korea Customs Service	To build EODES with low rate of transmission error between customs authorities in Korea and Vietnam	Information, Communication and Technology

⁶ As of December 2020, the Myanmar project proponent is awaiting formal approval from MOFA ROK, which is scheduled to be released in early 2021.

To further promote MKCF's catalytic and innovative activities, MI also directly implemented two projects in 2020.

Under the "Green Freight and Logistics Development in the Mekong Region" project, MI exposed 19 government officials from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to green technologies and certification standards. MI also introduced modern concepts in logistics business analytics to underscore the value of synthesized data for more efficient and user-driven business operations. Results from the trainings and findings from the project evaluation report will be submitted to the project working group in 2021.



MI underscores the value of collectively strengthening our logistics supply chain, while protecting our environment.



Mr. Subin Pongpanmeesuk
Marketing and Sales Manager, BP Supakij, Bangkok, Thailand/ September 9, 2020

To push forward the "Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region" project, MI rolled out an e-training course on smart technologies and online marketing approaches to help 75 government, business, private sector, and university representatives find alternative ways of maximizing tourism opportunities during COVID-19. Specifically, MI's online sessions identified connective value chains and digitalization strategies to help the tourism industry better absorb impacts of prolonged international travel bans, safety protocol restrictions, limited accessibility to supplies, and reduced consumer consumption.



MI helped me better understand the power of online marketing strategies to better draw in targeted clients.



Mr. Pongpoonat Sail Rungrueng
Owner, Keun Rang's Farmstay, Pattaya, Thailand/November 18, 2020

In addition, the MI and ROK project teams launched the project website, as well as Facebook and Instagram pages to highlight tourism attractions, practices, and tourism potentials in the Mekong region, as part of efforts to attract tourism exchange in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and ROK when travel restrictions are lifted.

To help promote multi-dimensional connectivity in managing COVID-19 recovery efforts, MI also took an active role in the preparations of the "Post-Pandemic Economic Recovery of ACMECS Countries" regional program, which is set to launch in January 2021. With request from the Government of the Republic of Korea and Embassy of Korea in Thailand, MI developed the project concept paper, which details project format and application guidelines, to serve as a template for dissemination by ACMECS members to relevant government agencies in their respective home countries.

An orientation training for selected proponents on project proposal development, including budget formulation according to MKCF and ACMECS guidelines will follow.

INCLUSIVE TRADE AND INVESTMENT



Box 4. MI and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC)

Beginning in 2018, MI has implemented over 15 LMC projects. The bulk of these are centered on making more efficient trade and investment facilitation. Through capacity building activities, dialogue platforms, as well as information tools and systems, MI underscores the importance of implementing cohesive approaches to boost intra-regional trade activities for sustainable economic growth.

With support from the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund (LMCSF), MI deployed trainings and workshops, as well as developed

evidence-based papers and systems to help governments and the business sector attract and facilitate foreign investments, strengthen economic zones, integrate SMEs into regional value chains, promote export-oriented growth, and generate employment against a pandemic climate (see **Table 5. 2020 LMCSF Projects Implemented by MI**).

Table 5. 2020 LMCSF Projects Implemented by MI

1. Development and Implementation of Common Rice Production Standards in the Mekong-Lancang Subregion
2. Development of Rice Pest and Natural Disaster Monitoring, Forecasting, and Warning Center for Sustainable Rice Production under Climate Change in the Mekong-Lancang Subregion
3. Joint Development of Cross-Border Special Economic Zones⁷
4. Upgrading Border Facilitation for Trade and Logistics Development⁸
5. Action Research on Rural E-Commerce Development in Lancang-Mekong Countries⁹
6. Capacity Building for National Coordinators of Mekong-Lancang Cooperation¹⁰

Under the “Enhancing Trade Competitiveness of Goods and Services: Issues in a Post-Pandemic World” workshop, MI drew country-specific recommendations on ways forward to mitigate economic impacts of cross-border emergencies and in widening access to information and communication technologies so governments and business communities in the Mekong region can optimize economic gains. Several of the findings included investments in the digitalization of cross-border facilities to minimize people-to-people contact, development and accessibility of one-stop trade information sites, and increased capacity building investments, particularly in upskilling SMEs to better adopt to e-commerce marketing strategies.

⁷This project is implemented in partnership with Thailand’s Ministry of Commerce.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰This project is implemented in partnership with Thailand’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



MI connects people from Lancang-Mekong countries to share best practices in strengthening trade facilitation.



Ms. Nwe Nwe Khin

Deputy Director, Road Transport Administration Department, Ministry of Transport and Communications, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar/August 4, 2020



MI’s SEZ e-training will help us strengthen our research on skilled labor, capital, and resource movement.



Ms. Mai Thi Chau Ha

Economic Researcher, International Cooperation Division, Danang Institute for Socio-Economic Development/Danang, Vietnam, August 17, 2020

MI also continued to institutionalize information-sharing among Lancang-Mekong representatives to strengthen the effectiveness of SEZ management. Through a series of workshops and an e-training, MI pooled updated business and trade regulations, requirements, as well as business profiles, products, and services from 53 government and business sector representatives.

The verified trade and business information are now available in MI's Lancang-Mekong Economic Zone database (www.lmezs.com) to foster wider networking and business-to-business activities. To date, the site has been accessed by over 3,000 visitors from 51 countries, with the following countries holding active viewership: Thailand, P.R. China, Japan, India, Singapore, the United States of America, Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Myanmar.



MI's e-training provides a deeper understanding of trade competitiveness strategies in the new normal.



Dr. Somdeth Bodhisane
 Researcher, Economic Research Institute for Industry and Trade, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Vientiane, Lao PDR/
 August 4, 2020



By helping to unify SEZs, MI strengthens trade and investment facilitation between Cambodia and other countries.



Mr. Hector Ho
 Assistant to the Chairman and Business Development Manager, Phnom Penh Special Economic Zone PLC, Phnom Penh, Cambodia/August 11, 2020



MI pooled findings from 95 participants and 10 key informant interviewees in six online workshops from June to July.

In addition, MI completed the "Rural E-Commerce Policy Development" policy paper to help governments develop more informed policies and stronger investments to boost intra-regional trade through digital approaches. The paper—which specifies the need for infrastructure investments, capacity building support, and enabling policies—will serve as a roadmap for prime movers in the public and private sectors to adopt coordinated strategies in cementing rural e-commerce in the region.

MI also rolled out a series of workshops and interviews on "Rural E-Commerce Policy Development for Thailand." About 95 government and private sector representatives forwarded their analyses and recommendations to help produce a comprehensive rural e-commerce policy framework for the benefit of rural entrepreneurs in the country. The activities were part of MI's "Action Research on Rural E-Commerce Development in Lancang-Mekong Countries," which is implemented in collaboration with Thailand's Ministry of Commerce.

From the prism of strengthening regional and national synergies for more impactful LMC projects, MI recommended the (a) establishment of an information sharing tool to keep government officials and private sector representatives abreast of multiple LMC projects; (b) enhancement of communication mechanisms

and channels for continued feedback across the regional and national levels; and (c) advancement of capacity building support of LMC representatives, particularly in Information, Communication, and Technology in the completed "Connectivity Issues for Enhancing Coordination Among Mekong-Lancang Countries" report.¹¹



These findings—which were culled by MI through rigorous research and online consultations with over 60 Mekong country nationals from June to December 2020—were analyzed based on the progress of ongoing LMC and other projects of regional frameworks on railways, roads, waterways, aviation, ports, as well as cross-border e-commerce and other digital technologies to institutionalize deeper connectivity for the seamless and more efficient movement of people, goods, and services across the region.

MI also developed a region- and country-wide M&E web-based system to better track progress and results of over 270 LMC projects on connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water



MI held an online training course from August 10 to 17, 2020 to help 41 officers from LMC PIAs to design and manage the web-based platform. The centralized M & E system was requested by Mekong region government officials during the MI-facilitated "Project Management and Evaluation of Subregional Development Projects" training last June 2019 so they could better manage, monitor, and assess the multitude of LMC projects.

resources, and agriculture and poverty reduction. The user-friendly system—which was tailored according to the baseline requirements of each Mekong-Lancang country—will provide the LMC Secretariat and PIAs timely project performance feedback to reinforce good practices and re-direct course correction, if necessary.

To further cement connectivity on an operational level among government agencies, MI brought together 36 officials from the ministries of foreign affairs representing Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. The online sessions oriented them on policy, regulatory, and institutional issues and mechanisms for harmonization. The activities also exposed them to various negotiation skills and methods to shore consensus in meeting objectives of the Mekong-Lancang Framework and Mekong-Lancang Cooperation's Five-Year Plan of Action (see **Figure 6. Objectives of the Capacity Building for National Coordinators of Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Project**).

¹¹ The report can be accessed at <https://cutt.ly/onm2UoR>.

Component 3 - Develop Capacities of the National Agencies on Policy Development and Negotiation Skills

Outcomes of the E-Training Program

- Over 36 participants representing government officials from MOFA and related lines of ministries of six LM countries participated in the training.
- The training enhanced capacities of the MLC related government agencies on priorities and processes for conducting effective negotiations conducted as part of the MLC Framework.

E-Training on Enhancing Negotiation Skills of the LMC Coordinating Agencies
September 14-25, 2020

Results from the MI online workshops were consolidated into a final report for submission to governments of Mekong-Lancang countries.

Figure 6. Objectives of the Capacity Building for National Coordinators of Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Project

1. Increase awareness and knowledge of key ministries on issues concerning connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water resources, as well as agriculture and poverty reduction
2. Enhance capacities of national agencies for the effective coordination of regional cooperation mechanisms
3. Build a common platform of information among development partners and Mekong-Lancang countries
4. Prioritize policy, regulatory, institutional, and legal issues, including mechanisms for harmonization
5. Enhance public and private sector cooperation to meet objectives in the areas of production capacity, economy, and trade
6. Update progress and document best practices to enhance the public's awareness of the LMC

Building on MI's ongoing work to further inclusive cross-border activities, MI submitted its transport and trade facilitation report, as well the MYA-THA IICBTA Corridor Handbook to the Asian Development Bank. The documents detail consolidated findings, challenges, and recommendations from data gathered in Thailand, P.R. China, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. Among MI's recommendations to increase efficiency in land-based trade are to (a) strengthen informational awareness among officers at border checkpoints on the Cross-Border Trade Agreement-Early Harvest program, (b) develop standards utilization guidelines for cross-border officials and transport operators, and (c) establish different transport and vehicle regulations in GMS countries.



CONNECTIVE DEVELOPMENT THROUGH INNOVATION TECHNOLOGY



Aligned with advancing connectivity through digitalization at the regional and intra-government levels, MI underscored the merits of incorporating science, technology and innovation (STI) policies into national roadmaps and master plans for more efficient government services, higher market productivity, and overall economic transformation.

Supported by the Government of P.R. China, MI presented global STI concepts and phased approaches to strengthen research and development, as well as systems to deepen coordination and linkages among public-private stakeholders to 46 government, academic, and private sector representatives from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam.



A comprehensive national innovation plan will open more private sector partnerships and research opportunities for our country's quality education.



Ms. Le Truong Ngoc Han
Lecturer, GIS and Natural Resources, Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources, Nong Lam University, Ho Chi Minh City/November 20, 2020

Introduction of Partners

Mekong Institute
Mekong Institute is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) founded by the six member countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).
Advantages
Cross-border facilitation, regional collaboration platform, public-private partnership and capacity building for power connectivity

University of Birmingham
Birmingham hosted or participated in a number of European Energy Internet projects.
Advantages
Cutting-edge theories and key technologies in transnational power market operation and coordinated dispatch

MI, China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd., Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd., and seven other universities, research institutes, and business enterprises have partnered to strengthen connective multi-energy systems in the Mekong region for efficient and reliable energy source and use.

In the area of energy, MI, China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd., Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd., and seven other universities, research institutes, and business enterprises have partnered to strengthen connective multi-energy systems in the Mekong region for more efficient and reliable energy source and use. Under the "Key Technologies Research and Demonstration Application of Smart City Energy Network Cooperative Management and Operation Over One Belt One Road Countries" project, MI will provide platforms for technical exchange, as well as deliver capacity strengthening support to deepen regional power connectivity and collaboration from 2020 to 2023. This is in line with MI's commitment to advocate for green and clean energy for better footprint, cost efficiency, and a healthier environment.

Furthermore, continued efforts to strengthen intra-country relations through cross-cultural communications and free trade zone development were reflected at the completed "Capacity Building for Regional Economic Integration and Free Trade Zone Development in the Lancang-Mekong Region" training which was supported by the People's Government of Yunnan Province. The online activity introduced concepts and practices of FTZ development, with focus on P.R. China's pilot programs to equip the 35

government officials in crafting policies and packages that will attract foreign investors, collaborators, and buyers, thus generating higher employment and foreign exchange.



MI provides opportunities for us to work with other LMC countries. These help facilitate stronger trade and investment.



Mr. Ros Chantrea Rangsey
Council for the Development of Cambodia, Cambodian Investment Board, Department of Public Relations and Promotion of Private Investment, Phnom Penh, Cambodia/October 14, 2020

Given the scale and scope of development projects in the Lancang-Mekong region, a review of development deliveries are essential to ensure more directed investments and stronger impacts in the coming years. Funded by the Government of P.R. China, MI completed the desk review, online survey, and online interviews for the study on "Impacts of Projects Supported by the Chinese Government for Lancang-Mekong Development" from October 2020 to January 2021. The final report, which covers projects from 2016 to 2020, will highlight achievements, narratives, as well as thematic and operational recommendations for future P.R. China-supported projects.

RESILIENCY IN A PANDEMIC CLIMATE



International and national measures in flattening the COVID-19 curve laid bare socioeconomic fragilities in the GMS.

To broaden social protection systems, MI highlighted conceptual and practical approaches to shape sustained recovery, spearhead efficient progress in ensuring the well-being of GMS nationals, and harness collective efforts from all sectors. Through broad-based participatory activities, MI also helped mitigate impacts on the disadvantaged, marginalized, and vulnerable in the immediate term, while helping build safety nets to fortify GMS investments in setting a sustainable path towards socioeconomic recovery.

Foremost was helping governments and business communities set viable steps to protect small businesses by helping them secure financial liquidity and adapt to structural reforms brought on by the current economic climate. As such, MI exposed 38 senior officials representing governments, academic institutions, as well as financial and business associations from 23 countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands, and Africa to innovations in applying Thailand's "sufficiency economy concept" into microfinance. The two-week online training course presented policies and mechanisms for micro- and small businesses, who do not have ready access to traditional banking systems, to access credit lines for the resumption of income-generating activities.



Over 100 women-led SME representatives and government officials from trade promotion and business development organizations in the CLMV participated in four national workshops in Ho Chi Minh, Yangon, Vientiane, and Phnom Penh from November 26 to 28, 2020.



For a well-rounded purview, MI also included officials from trade support organizations in the training to harmonize understanding of regional market trends and re-align support services to SMEs.

In line with MI's ethos of multiplying impact through knowledge transfer, several participants from the training organized workshops in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Collectively, over 100 SME representatives were briefed on the basics of digital commerce and how this approach can reactivate supply and value chains even when COVID-19 health guidelines and travel restrictions remain enforced.



MI taught us e-commerce strategies and helped us network with other CLMV entrepreneurs, so we can sell our products in the global market.



Ms. Kyi Cin Shwe
Managing Director, Amazing Oasis Co., Ltd., Mandalay, Myanmar/November 2, 2020

MI also contributed to bridging the gender divide by helping women entrepreneurs sustain their businesses through e-commerce. With support from KOICA, MI provided practical sessions to enhance their managerial and e-marketing skills, as well as to broaden their networks for their entry in international markets.



With MI, my goal is to help other women shift their businesses to e-commerce so they can maximize opportunities.



Mrs. Ratha Chea
Founder and CEO, Khmum Technology Company, Ltd., Phnom Penh, Cambodia/ November 30, 2020

In addition, MI consolidated potential markets for selected products and business strategies to help women-led SMEs from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam better compete in international markets, particularly those in ROK. A baseline study in the CLMV was also completed to establish data on employment and current export and import products. It also detailed recommendations in scaling up export production, increasing the participation of women-led SMEs in regional value chains, as well as addressing non-tariff measures and issues in technology adoption and digital literacy.



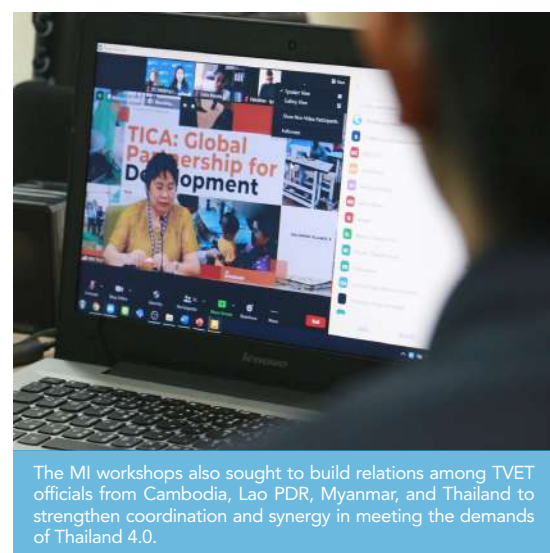
Building on these gains, MI was tapped by TFO Canada to develop a research study and an open source database to widen women entrepreneurs' participation in international markets. Following the MOU signing with TFO Canada in September 2020, MI will lead the data collection in Vietnam and Cambodia, which are the two GMS countries involved in the study in the first quarter of 2021. In addition, MI will build a "Women in Trade Knowledge Platform" to make accessible company profiles, products, services, as well as trade policies and regulations to foster ease of doing business with GMS-based SMEs.

¹² The report can be accessed at <https://cutt.ly/onm2UoR>.



Five dedicated and hardworking MI alumni rolled out a national workshop in Lao PDR to help small- and medium-sized business owners, particularly women, adapt to technology so their businesses can thrive in a pandemic landscape. Supported by KOICA and MI, the activity raised awareness on the value of e-commerce development and engaged stakeholders to help strengthen national export supply chains for the enhanced competitiveness of Lao PDR businesses in domestic and overseas markets, particularly in the Republic of Korea.

To prepare for the surge of employment demands in the GMS, MI and TICA rolled out four workshops under the "Improving Institutional Capacities for Promoting Employability in the Greater Mekong Subregion" project to help ready the CLMV labor force to the needs of prospective Thailand investors who may relocate their production sites to the four countries due to Thailand's aging population and high production costs. In the collaborative online sessions, MI facilitated discussions among 40 participants from the ministries of labor, education, and industries, as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training institutes, and private sector associations.



The MI workshops also sought to build relations among TVET officials from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand to strengthen coordination and synergy in meeting the demands of Thailand 4.0.



MI provided a platform for government and recruitment agencies to discuss best practices that will help strengthen labor migration governance for the protection of migrant workers.



Mr. You Chidara
Assistant to the Chairman,
Administration Division, Manpower
Association of Cambodia, Phnom
Penh, Cambodia/December 4, 2020

Labor mobility was heavily affected by restrictions brought on the pandemic. To showcase Thailand's approaches and challenges in promoting decent work for migrant workers, 25 international participants were selected to complete the December 7 to 18 training program on "Good Practices in Improving Labor Migration Management for Promoting Decent Work." The sessions focused on strengthening the social benefits, compensation, and justice systems by highlighting the impacts of COVID-19 on the welfare of migrant workers.

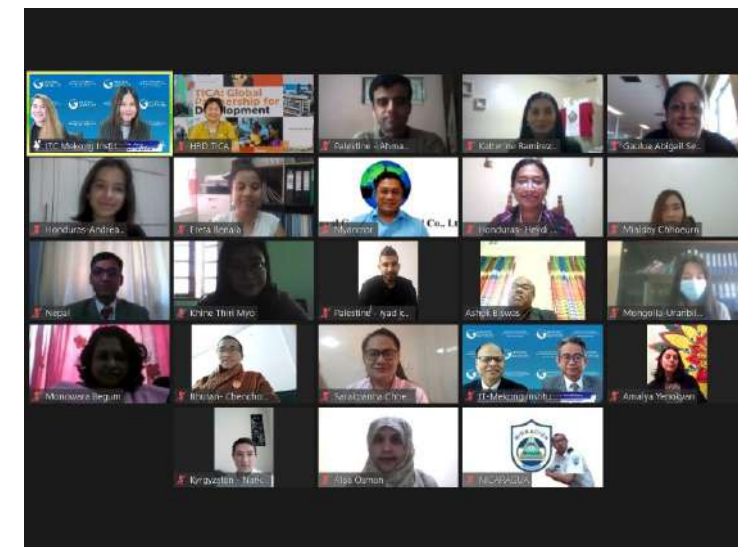
With the mission of helping rejuvenate the workforce by facilitating safe and regular migration through stronger regional cooperation, MI and TICA re-convened 30 GMS nationals to share lessons learned and progress of their efforts in strengthening strategic labor migration management at a synthesis and evaluation workshop. From November 23 to 25, ways forward on widening common understanding of prevailing labor movement issues, strategies to enhance pre- and post-departure orientation programs, and return and reintegration services, as well as possibilities in developing zero-cost migration policies in the subregion were documented by MI. The final report was submitted to TICA in early 2021.



MI helped us better analyze, identify, and exchange information with others to enhance labor migration management.



Ms. Nguyen Thi Le Quyen
Official, Section of Employment
Policies, Department of
Employment, Ministry of Labor,
Invalids and Socio Affairs, Hanoi,
Vietnam/November 30, 2020



The two-week sessions on "Good Practices in Improving Labor Migration Management for Promoting Decent Work" included participants from government ministries, human rights agencies, and non-government organizations.

ENHANCED POLICIES, PROCESSES, AND OPERATIONS



In parallel with efforts to complete project commitments, MI deepened collaborative engagement as it worked with 12 development partners to roll out 37 activities in 2020.

It also sealed 14 new agreements with various government ministries, private institutions, and universities to pool resources and align strategic support in fortifying the GMS cooperation and integration agenda. (see **Table 6. Formal Partnership Agreements in 2020**).



MI and Thailand's Creative Economy Agency formalized their partnership to support the revitalization of creative industries in Northeastern Thailand through the launch of the "Isan Creative Festival" on March 20 to 28, 2021 in Khon Kaen, Thailand.

Table 6. 2020 Partnership Agreements

Partners	Date
Lao National Chamber of Commerce and Industry	January 20, 2020
Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives	January 23, 2020
Mahidol University International College	January 24, 2020
The Institute of ASEAN Studies	February 27, 2020
GMS Freight Transport Association	February 28, 2020
Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd.	May 1, 2020
The Belt and Road Research Institute and Shenzhen Foundation for International Exchange and Cooperation	June 30, 2020
Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund	July 20, 2020
Korea International Cooperation Agency	July 21, 2020
Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Centre for Responsible Business	September 1, 2020
Foreign Affairs Office of the People's Government of Yunnan Province	September 15, 2020
Trade Facilitation Office Canada/ Bureau de Promotion du Commerce Canada	September 18, 2020
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea	September 28, 2020
Creative Economy Agency	December 15, 2020

Internally, MI transitioned to a new leadership. Dr. Watcharas, who was the executive director beginning in 2014, ended his term on August 31, 2020. Under his helm, MI actively promoted its services to an international audience, broadened collaboration with representatives of regional cooperation mechanisms, and launched several dialogues to spotlight solutions and strengthen development synergies in service of the GMS.

In the handover of responsibilities, Mr. Suriyan mobilized the review of the Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and secured the Governing Board's approval of MI's action plan for 2021-2025 after three rounds of technical revisions.



At the end of the Governing Board Meeting in August 2020, Dr. Watcharas was presented a plaque of appreciation for his six years of service to the GMS, while MI Council and Steering Committee members look on.



From September to December 2020, Mr. Suriyan conducted 10 courtesy meetings with key partners to strengthen the alignment of development investments in the GMS. This includes high-level meetings with the Ambassadors of Canada, Germany, New Zealand, and the Republic of Korea.

In addition, Mr. Suriyan completed a series of courtesy meetings with GMS government representatives, ambassadors, and international development partners in Bangkok and Khon Kaen to initiate possible areas of collaboration in implementing programs and projects in the Strategic Plan, as well as to foster regular feedback between MI and key partners to ensure synergy of development efforts.

The new Executive Director also presented at three high-level activities, which included the ADB Development Partners' Meeting and International Rice Research Institute webinar. The activities served to highlight MI services, as well as its thematic expertise.

The following are other institutional progress areas completed by MI in 2020.

REVIEW OF MI PERFORMANCE 2016 TO 2020

MI met its targets in the last five years (see **Page 14**). To strengthen its operational and program deliveries, the performance report also included lessons learned and

recommendations, which were considered in the finalization of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 and MI Operations Manual (see **Table 7. Lessons Learned from 2016 to 2020 MI Performance**).

Table 7. Lessons Learned from 2016 to 2020 MI Performance

1. Enhance online capacity building techniques and facilities to keep pace with the competitive market.
2. Reinforce the joint delivery of MI and international and national experts/resource persons to expose GMS nationals to international best practices in the regional context.
3. Develop more innovative project designs to better address emerging development areas such as sustainable environment.
4. Develop an organizational Results Framework to better monitor results and impacts, as well as to adjust relevant programs and activities when necessary.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2025

The MI Strategic Plan was finalized on December 17, 2020, after an extensive consultative and review process involving GMS officials, development partners, the private sector, alumni, as well as MI Council and Steering Committee members, the senior management team, and technical staff from March to December 2020.



MI's Strategic Plan encapsulates the subregion's aspirations and commitment towards deeper connectivity, fair market competitiveness, and a greater sense of community.



Mrs. Nguyen Yen Hai

MI Council Chairperson and Deputy Director General, Foreign Economic Relations Department, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Hanoi, Vietnam/ December 17, 2020

The five-year action plan will see the intergovernmental organization elevate its contributions to meeting Sustainable Development Goals and helping align regional cooperation frameworks' priorities with each GMS country's national agenda. As such, MI will be working hand-in-hand with governments and development partners to increase agricultural commercial production and strengthen food systems; boost wider access to international markets and cross-border trade; and facilitate broader adoption of power grid connectivity, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and climate-smart technologies in agricultural and trade initiatives, while addressing issues of social



After several series of revisions, a special Steering Committee Meeting was held on October 19, 2020, where members from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam reviewed the final version of the Strategic Plan 2021-2025.



inclusion and vulnerability, digital economy and innovation, and labor mobility to cement holistic and sustainable development impacts in the subregion and beyond.

It will also lay the groundwork for institutional strengthening. In 2021, MI will open the Sustainable Energy and Environment Department and Greater Mekong Community Affairs Department. Tapping MI's extensive regional networks and expertise, the former will help address transboundary environmental issues, while the latter will reinforce the intergovernmental organization's communications and M&E services, as well as deploy a partnership building and resource mobilization unit to strengthen outreach and diversify sources of institutional funding. Overall, the updated programmatic and operational direction will set the progression for MI to become a center of excellence in human resources development, a regional think tank, and convener for dialogue and collaboration.



Mr. Liao Junyun, Consul General of P.R. China in Khon Kaen was one of seven high-level dignitaries who presented during the Khon Kaen Forum. All keynote speakers discussed how Khon Kaen Province can be a key player in regional and global markets.

In place of the annual Mekong Forum, MI launched an online event to highlight the economic and technological potentials of city nodes in economic corridors.

In its first series, MI with the Khon Kaen Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Thai Industries hosted the first hybrid Khon Kaen Forum, where high-level government officials, policy makers, and business leaders presented recommendations in building pandemic-resilient agri-tech value chains, assessments of investors' needs in high-technology industries, and approaches in reshaping manufacturing supply chains to help stimulate the province's economy against a pandemic climate.

REGIONAL ONLINE FORUM

Reflective of MI's position as a regional sounding board, MI organized several online forums in 2021 to collate global and regional strategies that would foster unified measures in restoring a more resilient socioeconomic landscape for the GMS.

Given the positive feedback from the event, which drew in over 3,000 online visitors, iterations of this solution-finding dialogue will be organized in the following years, with focus on strengthening connectivity of GMS economic corridors to spur intra-regional trade.



On July 21, 2020, MI launched its first online Khon Kaen Forum under the theme "Navigating New Norms: Revitalizing Economic Engines Amidst COVID-19." Over 3,000 GMS and non-GMS nationals accessed the live Facebook feed.

GOVERNING BOARD MEETINGS 2020

The adaptiveness and flexibility MI displayed in delivering 37 activities in 2020 were made possible through the guidance of the Council and Steering Committee. During the two sets of hybrid Governing Board meetings, high-level members approved MI's shift to online platforms and rescheduled onsite activities such as the annual Lancang-Mekong Business Forum and GMS Logistics Forum.



In the December 2020 Governing Board meeting, high-level members committed to continue to support MI's efforts in helping strengthen the socioeconomic recovery of GMS governments through capacity building, research, and advocacy initiatives.

Another key decision of the Governing Board was the appointment of Mr. Suriyan as MI's Executive Director. Selected from a pool of 97 GMS and non-GMS applicants, Mr. Suriyan held the strongest background, having had over 15 years of experience in international and regional development work, with expertise in the areas of sustainable agriculture, public-private partnership, and regional and subregional cooperation initiatives.

Members of the Council and Steering Committee also formally recognized Vice Governor Liu Hongjian from the People's Government of Yunnan Province and Deputy Director General Mr. Kingphokeo Phommahaxay from the Government of Lao PDR as new council members. Mr. Ke Yousheng, Permanent Representative of P.R. China to UNESCAP; Mrs. Arunee Hiam of TICA; and Mr. Nguyen Viet Ha

of Vietnam's Ministry of Planning and Investment were also welcomed as Steering Committee members representing P.R. China, Thailand, and Vietnam, respectively.

COMMUNICATIONS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

In 2020, MI continued to enhance its communication activities to better translate MI's program progress, as well as disseminate information of its widening services. Statistically, these efforts have produced 431 press releases, news features, infographics, and collaterals across the GMS. The dissemination has generated an annual average of 17,256 views on the official website, reached 487,534 people on Facebook, and collected 36,196 impressions on Twitter.

MONITORING AND IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT

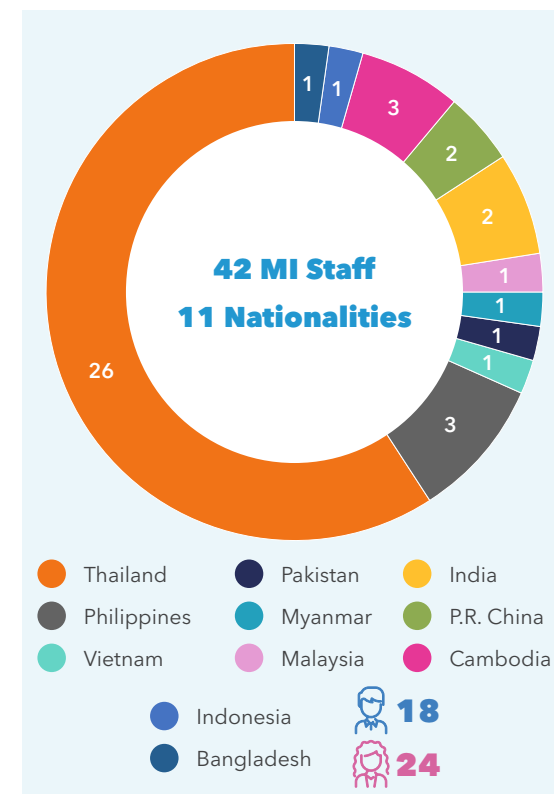
As part of MI's expanded development services, it completed two evaluation reports for the TICA and JICA Triangular Programs on Palestine and Myanmar. In addition, MI started development of an internal M&E web-based system to strengthen systematic tracking and assessment of project outcomes and impacts. This was initiated to contribute to MI's strategic planning, informed decision-making, more efficient use of resources, and higher degree of reporting transparency to GMS governments and international development partners.

ADMINISTRATION

Staffing remains fairly distributed according to gender and GMS country representation (see **Figure 7. MI Staff According to Country Representation**). Capacity enhancing opportunities such as entrepreneurship support, evidence-based policy making, and monitoring and evaluation were provided to selected staff for the enhancement of quality technical support and services to partners.

Given unforeseen circumstances brought on by the pandemic, MI also revised its Operations Manual to include COVID-19 protocol and risk management guidelines, as well as updated hiring and management policies.

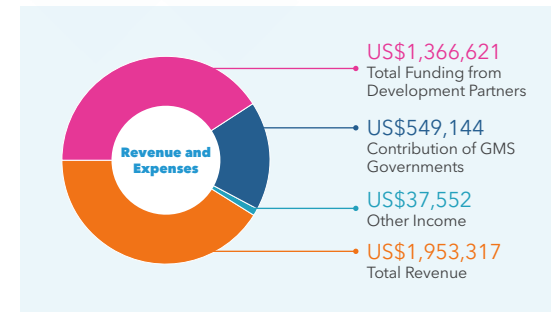
Figure 7. MI Staff According to Country Representation



FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

MI closed 2020 with a total revenue of US\$1,953,317, achieving 97 percent of the approved budget of US\$2,010,602. The amount marks a 52 percent decrease from 2019. On the other hand, GMS country contributions tallied to US\$549,144, while partners' input to MI revenue totaled US\$1,366,621, including other income of US\$37,553. In addition, total expenses reached US\$2,340,519 (see **Figure 8. Summary Statement of Revenue and Expenses from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021 and Annex 2. Financial Highlights of 2020**).

Figure 8. Summary Statement of Revenue and Expenses from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2021



MOVING FORWARD

MI is slated to roll out 17 long-term, eight short-term, and three customized projects in 2021. These 28 projects and activities, which will contribute to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, mostly cover ongoing activities from the previous year.

Through these, MI will be working with 14 development partners (see **Table 8. 2021 MI Development Partners**).

Table 8. 2021 MI Development Partners

Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund
Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund
Korea International Cooperation Agency
Government of the Republic of Korea
Trade Facilitation Organization Canada
Thailand International Cooperation Agency
New Zealand Aid Programme
Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau
Business for Social Responsibility-New York
Government of the People's Republic of China
People's Government of Yunnan Province
Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd.
GIZ Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund ¹³

ANNEX 1. 2020 PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

NZAP	Promoting Safe Food for Everyone (PROSAFE)
	Green Freight and Logistics Development in Mekong Countries
MKCF	MKCF Fund Management
	Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region
	Joint Development of Cross-Border Economic Zones
	Upgrading Border Facilitation for Trade and Logistics Development
	Lancang-Mekong Business
	Rural E-Commerce Development in Lancang-Mekong
LMCSF	Capacity Building for National Coordinators of Mekong-Lancang Cooperation
	Development and Implementation of Common Rice Production Standards in Mekong-Lancang Subregion
	Development of Rice Pest and Natural Disasters Monitoring, Forecasting and Warning Center for Sustainable Rice Production under Climate Change in Mekong-Lancang Subregion
YNPG	National Key R&D Program of Strategic International Cooperation in S&T Innovation on "Key Technologies Research and Demonstration Application of Smart City Energy Network Cooperative Management and Operation Optimization Over One Belt One Road Countries"
KOICA	Market Access Through E-Commerce Promotion for Women-Led SMEs
ROK	ROK-ACMECS Projects
	Capacity Building on Technology and Innovation Policy Development
	Impacts of COVID-19 on Food System in the Lancang-Mekong Region
P.R. China	Study on China's Way on Utilization of Technology to Tackle COVID-19 Pandemic
	Study on the Impact of Projects Supported by Chinese Government for Lancang-Mekong Regional Development
People's Government of Yunnan Province	Capacity Building for Regional Economic Integration and Innovation for Free Trade Zone Development in the Lancang-Mekong Region

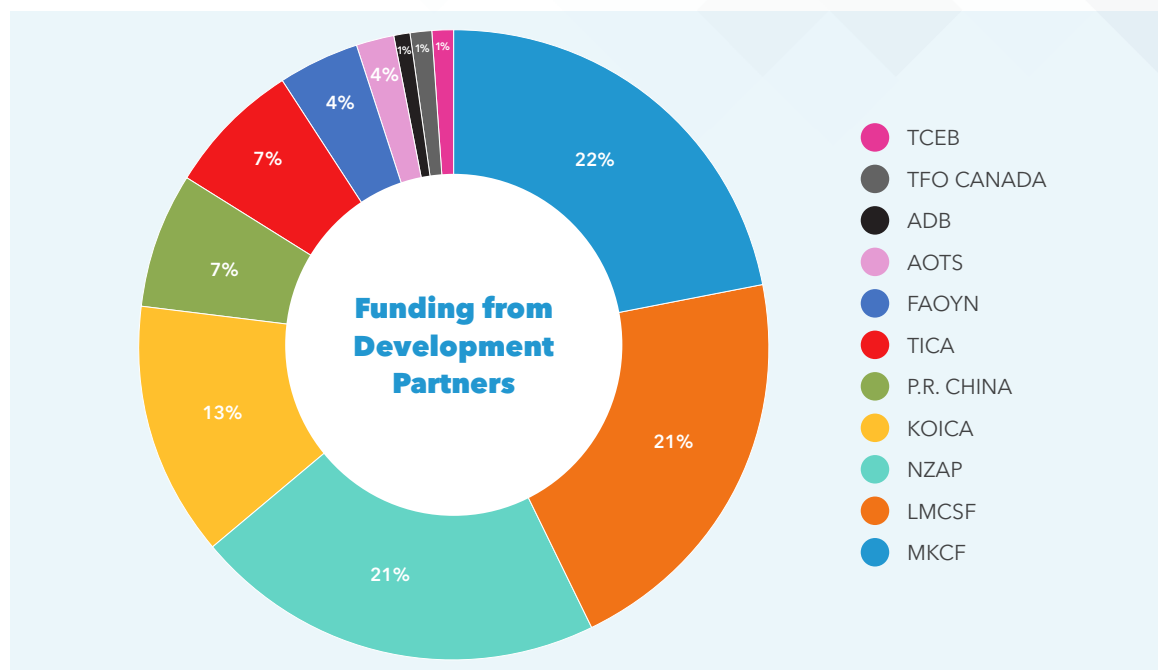
¹³ Negotiations are in progress with Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund representatives. Please refer to **page 14**.

TFO-Canada	TFO: Women in Trade Knowledge Platform
	Strategic Management to Labor Migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Addressing the Challenges through Good Practices
	International Training Course on Sufficiency Economy in Microfinance for SMEs Development
TICA	Improving Institutional Capacities for Promoting Employability in the Greater Mekong Subregion
	International Training on Good Practices in Improving Labor Migration Management for Promoting Decent Work
TCEB	GMS Logistics Forum 2021
Business for Social Responsibility- New York	Consultancy on Incentives for Green Freight Certification in Vietnam

ANNEX 2. 2020 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

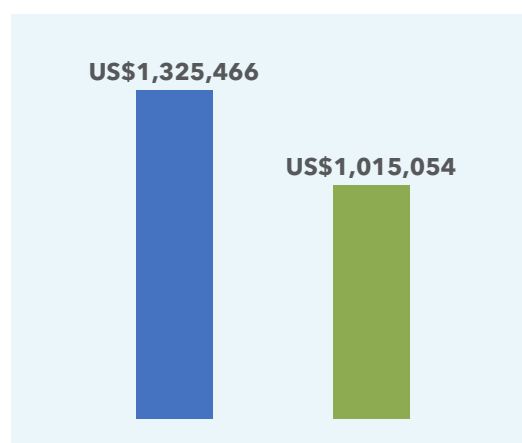
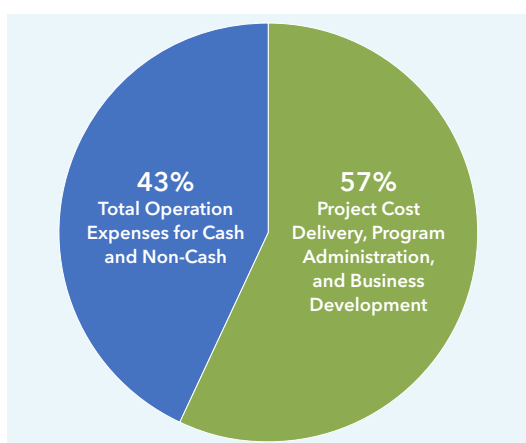
Revenue	US\$	
A. Funding from Development Partners	2020	2019
Long-Term Project		
Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund (LMCSF)	286,950	993,471
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)	-	687,524
New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP)	285,659	609,539
Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF)	304,669	160,326
Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)	175,243	-
Yunna Power Grid Co., Ltd. (YNPG)	-	31,093
Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)	42,416	10,047
Trade Facilitation Office (TFO), Canada	12,790	-
Total Long-Term Project Revenue	1,107,728	2,492,000
Short-Term and Customized Activities		
The People's Republic of China (P.R.China)	99,369	335,985
Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)	52,859	175,515
The People's Government of Yunnan Province, P.R. China (FAOYN)	57,294	137,030
The Association for Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnerships (AOTS)	23,871	-
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	16,500	28,672
Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)	9,000	64,956
Thai Beverage Logistics Co., Ltd. (TBL)	-	77,057
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MFAIC), Cambodia	-	52,074
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH	-	21,897
Others Development Partners		53,356
Total Short-Term and Customized Activities	258,893	946,542
Total Funding from Development Partners	1,366,621	3,438,542
B. Contribution from GMS Member Countries	549,144	520,705
C. Other Income	37,552	91,870
Total Revenue	1,953,317	4,051,117

Proportion of Funding from Development Partners for 2020



Expenses

	US\$	
	2020	2019
Project Cost Delivery, Program Administration, and Business Development	1,325,466	3,002,443
Operation Expenses	777,165	848,839
Net Earning or (Deficit) Before Non-Cash Operation	(149,314)	199,835
Non-Cash Operation Expenses	237,889	95,857
Total Operation Expenses for Cash and Non-Cash	1,015,054	944,696
Net Earning or (Deficit) for the Year	(387,203)	103,978





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