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■ TRAINING/WORKSHOP/SLV ACTIVITIES

MI Training Highlights Use of Free Trade Agreements to Boost SME Growth



The modular training program on *Enhancing the Utilization of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) by SMEs*, organized on December 4-7, 2017, emphasized the importance of utilizing FTAs to expand trade opportunities for small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the Greater Mekong Subregion.

Delivered with the support of the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), 28 participants from relevant government agencies, Chambers of Commerce and Industry, business associations, SME exporters and business development service providers joined the training. Participants were introduced to emergent trade issues in the GMS, trade opportunities for SMEs and procedures for utilizing FTAs. [Read more.](#)

MI Delivers Training on Enhancing Trade Competitiveness for Regional Integration



Mekong Institute (MI) conducted a one-week training on *Enhancing Trade Competitiveness for Regional Integration* on December 11-15, 2017 at its residential training center in Khon Kaen. Twelve government officers and staff from relevant ministries from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Thailand joined the training that elaborated on four major topics: trade policies and free trade agreements; Singapore customs model; green logistics for sustainable development; and economic zone development. A structured learning visit to the silk production and trade cluster in Sala Mai Thai, Chonnabot District, Khon Kaen also introduced the participants to the local specialty and cluster model. The training was organized with the support of TICA and the Singapore Cooperation Programme.

■ TRAINING/WORKSHOP/SLV ACTIVITIES



MI Supports Consultation Meeting on Food Safety Management Regulations in Vietnam

The Plant Protection Department (PPD) of Vietnam's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), with the support of MI, gathered 45 representatives from relevant offices for a consultation meeting on the revised version of the national regulations on food safety management in Vietnam.



The meeting sought to solicit comments and feedback on the revised draft of the regulations. Three alumni in the MI-Food Safety Project were part of the team that revised the regulations. Mr. Nguyen Dinh Thong and Ms. Luong Thi Hai Yen developed a section on risk management, while Ms. Tran Thi Phuong Hoa wrote a section on food safety management systems. Among the agencies present were the General Department of Vietnam Customs, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, line agencies under the MARD, provincial PPD offices, as well as food processing and exporting companies.

■ EWEC (SDC) PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Myanmar Field Office Holds Training on Farmer Group Formation

The RLED-EWEC Myanmar Team conducted a training on the *Formation and Strengthening of Farmer Groups* on November 25 and 26, 2017 at the Htee Meh War Khee and Min Let Pan villages, respectively. Fifty-eight farmers from Htee Meh War Khee and 50 farmers from Min Let Pan attended the training organized together with Awba Group Company.

A representative from the Yangon Region branch of Awba Group shared steps and regulations in the formation of a farmer group, lessons learned, and challenges in strengthening local farmer associations. The project model encourages the formation of farmer groups in the villages to help facilitate direct trading of maize with local traders and easier access to loans; and encourage more active participation in the EWEC Project's tripartite models.



EWEC Myanmar Project Steering Committee Members Meet



Members of the EWEC Myanmar Project Steering Committee (PSC) met for its second regular meeting on December 20, 2017 in Hpa-an Township. In attendance were the three PSC members from Kayin State, Mr. Than Naing, Minister for Planning, Finance and Municipal Department; Mr. Saw Myint Oo, Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation Department; and Mr. Tint San, Director for the Department of Consumer Affairs. Joining them were three staff members from the Myanmar EWEC Field Office.

The committee discussed updates and progress of ongoing activities, as well as challenges and issues for the project beneficiaries, such as loan limitation for farmers. Mr. Than Naing also introduced the project committee members to the manager of the local financial department overseeing microfinance institutions for community development.

■ EWEC (SDC) PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Second Workshop on Rolling Out Business Linkage Organized for Local Governors

A second installment of the workshop on *Rolling Out Business Linkages* was organized on December 22, 2017 at the Inn Gyin Myaing Village, targeting local governors this time.

Governors from 10 departments in Kayin State were oriented on the domestic market development for maize, documentation on transportation services to domestic markets, and negotiating tax exemptions for maize farmer groups. Participants from the Department of Trade, Department of Internal Revenue, Department of Agriculture, and Department of General Administration also explained procedures in checkpoints including those along the trade zones, as well as mechanisms for smoother transport of products to domestic markets. A similar training in November was organized for local brokers and traders.



Cooperation Agreements Lay Ground for Roll Out of Market Linkage Models in Quang Tri



Building on the achievements of the first phase of the RLED-EWEC Project in Vietnam, Mekong Institute signed cooperation agreements with partners in Quang Tri for the roll out of the project's market linkage model that will target new crops in other areas in the province.

The linkage models have been used to boost the coffee sector in Huong Hoa district in the project's first phase. By adopting the models on other crops, it is hoped that farmers will be able to increase their income by enabling them to sell their products directly to processing companies at a higher price. The quadripartite linkage model can also help farmers reduce their production costs by accessing loans with preferential interest for the purchase of fertilizers at factory prices.

Khon Kaen University Students, Lecturers Visit EWEC Project Site in Quang Tri

Sixteen students including two lecturers from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University (KKU), Thailand visited the EWEC project site in Quang Tri on December 25-26, 2017.

The visit was part of MI and KKU's continuing cooperation program, and aimed to introduce the KKU delegation to the RLED-EWEC Project of MI in Quang Tri as well as explore cooperation opportunities between KKU and Hue University - Quang Tri Campus. The group visited the Huong Phung commune, one of the largest Arabica coffee plantation areas in Huong Hoa district, where the students joined the local farmers in pruning coffee trees.



■ OTHER ACTIVITIES

MI Stakeholders Meet for 2nd Governing Board Meetings for 2017

Members of the Steering Committee and MI Council met for the second Governing Board Meetings for 2017 last December 18 -19 in Bangkok. MI reported to the Steering Committee and Council members its project accomplishments for the year and presented the plans and targets for 2018. Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of the Steering Committee, and Mrs. Suphatra Srimaitreephithak, Chair of the MI Council, presided over the meetings.



MI Meets with Israel Ambassador to Thailand

Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, MI Executive Director, met with H.E. Mr. Meir Shlomo, the new Ambassador of Israel to Thailand on December 20, 2017 in Bangkok. The two discussed potential opportunities for collaboration between MI and Israel to forward growth in the Greater Mekong Sub-region.

ROK Official Visits MI

Mr. Yoon Chusok, Counselor from the Embassy of the Republic of Korea visited MI on December 8, 2017. The MI team, headed by Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, Executive Director, discussed with him MI's current cooperation project with the Government of Korea and potential future collaborations. Mr. Chusok expressed his appreciation for the warm welcome and the work of the Institute particularly with the Mekong-ROK Cooperation Fund.



■ UPCOMING ACTIVITIES

Activity	Date
Training on Basic Accounting for SMEs in Freight Transport and Logistics Sector	January 8
Training on Basic Logistics Management	January 8 - 12
Synthesis and Evaluation Workshop: Capacity Building on GMS Power Grid Interconnection Project	Last week of January



MEKONG INSTITUTE

123 Mittraphap Road, Muang District
Khon Kaen, 40002 THAILAND

Tel. : +66(0) 43-202-411 to 2;

+66(0) 43-202-268 to 270

Email: information@mekonginstitute.org

Website: www.mekonginstitute.org