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Work-from-home policy extended to May 8, 2020

With guidance from Thailand’s Ministry of Public Health, Mekong Institute (MI) will reopen its office on May 11, 2020. While MI continues to practice social distancing guidelines to stem the spread of COVID-19, its 53-member staff are working remotely to coordinate with partners, reschedule trainings and workshops, and adjust work plans to meet 2020 project deliverables by the end of the year.

Yunnan Provincial Government gives 5,000 masks

In a gesture of solidarity and goodwill during the COVID-19 pandemic, the People’s Government of Yunnan Province gave 5,000 face masks to MI staff and training participants last April 23, 2020. “Yunnan Province has long been committed in working with MI to promote Lancang-Mekong cooperation,” His Excellency Zhang Guohao, Vice Governor of Yunnan Province said. “We are here to help MI in our capacity as partner so we can jointly overcome this health crisis.” [Read more.](#)





FUNDED BY
THE MEKONG-REPUBLIC OF KOREA
COOPERATION FUND

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Sustainable and Smart TOURISM DEVELOPMENT in the Mekong Region

BACKGROUND

The Mekong region is among the world's most visited travel destinations, having welcomed more than 70 million tourists in 2018 alone. As the tourism industries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand are helping promote economic growth, generate employment, and foster peaceful societies, their governments are increasing efforts to pursue a more balanced, collaborative, and sustainable tourism development.

In support of this, the project aims to create "smart cities" to strengthen the five countries' capacities in meeting the fast-rising and highly competitive tourism inbound market. Implemented by Mekong Institute with support from National Tourism Organizations and local destination management companies of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, the three-year project will introduce smart tourism tools, techniques, and technologies through learning exchanges, structured learning visits, information-sharing, and adoption of best practices. Such investments are geared to expand small entrepreneurial businesses and deepen cultural interconnectedness and appreciation among and between cities in the Republic of Korea and the Mekong region countries.

DURATION

2020 to 2023

PROJECT COMPONENTS



Facilitate **Smart Tourism Development** in Mekong Countries



Enhance Korea-Mekong **Hospitality Training and Mentoring**



Establish **Historical and Cultural Town Twinning** between Korea and Mekong Countries



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

FORGING REGIONAL ENERGY CONNECTIVITY

The six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries—who enjoy cultural similarities and economic complementarities—stand at a crossroads concerning their shared energy future and heavy reliance on fossil fuels for transport and electricity. They have high potentials for sustainable energy sources, particularly the People's Republic of China (P.R. China) who leads in renewable energy generation. However, these countries struggle to meet global renewable energy deployment standards as energy resources are unevenly distributed among them and the quality of their power transmission infrastructures are varied.

By balancing climate change opportunities and challenges, GMS countries have taken on the gargantuan task of sharply reducing their dependence on carbon-based energy sources. Since 1992, Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand have been working towards regional electric power system inter-connectivity to boost energy security, bring down electric costs, and enable greater amounts of renewable energy to be integrated into power grids, while also opening wider investments for companies in the power sector.



In support of this, Mekong Institute (MI) and the China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd. (CSG) rolled out the **Capacity Building on GMS Power Grid Interconnection** project from 2015 to 2020. Implemented by MI with the Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd., the project advances energy efficiency and renewable energy by promoting power connectivity across the subregion.

MI and CSG's "power fellows," are strengthening cleaner power connectivity in the GMS.

In parallel with national energy plans of the six countries, MI's implementation strategies includes pro-active identification of challenges, problems, potential energy infrastructure areas, and

mobilization support; design of tailored activities through stakeholders' consultations; coordination with line ministries; and the creation of knowledge networks to develop solutions by tapping on each country's technical strengths and linking GMS energy policy officials with global experts.

Through MI's facilitation of trainings and workshops, conduct of research studies, formation of a communication platform at the managerial and technical levels for GMS officials in the power sector, and bridging of bilateral agreements on technology transfer, MI has been supporting the comprehensive use of renewable energy; clean technology development; power supply security; and sustainable power interconnection in the subregion.

The project's 410 training and workshop participants, referred to as MI and CSG's "power fellows," are strengthening cleaner power connectivity in the GMS. They are part of an extensive interdisciplinary and multi-institutional web of change drivers that propel synergies of strengths among partners and the development of scalable energy innovation tools. This is so GMS countries can ultimately deliver efficient devices and systems to meet global renewable energy benchmarks and achieve technological readiness to sustain clean energy.



Ms. Jian Wang is a Program Coordinator under MI's Innovation and Technological Connectivity Department. She leads programs and projects that enhance capacities, strengthen institutions, and promote evidence-based policies that support clean energy systems and power connectivity across the GMS.

MI rolls out sustainable and smart tourism development project

With support from the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund, MI has rolled out the **"Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region"** project to help facilitate smart tourism development, enhance Korea-Mekong hospitality training and mentoring, and establish historical and cultural town twinning between Korea and Mekong countries. The 2020-2023 project aims to strengthen Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand's capacities in building "smart cities" by introducing smart tourism tools, techniques, and technologies. [Read more.](#)

MI promotes regional connectivity through its 410 "power fellows"

In celebration of Earth Day last April 22, 2020, MI's Innovation and Technological Connectivity Department featured its **"Capacity Building on GMS Power Grid Interconnection"** project as one of MI's contributions to positive climate action. Supported by China Southern Power Grid Company, Ltd. (CSG) and co-implemented with Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd, MI advances energy efficiency and renewable energy in the Greater Mekong Subregion through its 410 "power fellows" who continue to strengthen cleaner power connectivity in Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand. [Read more.](#)



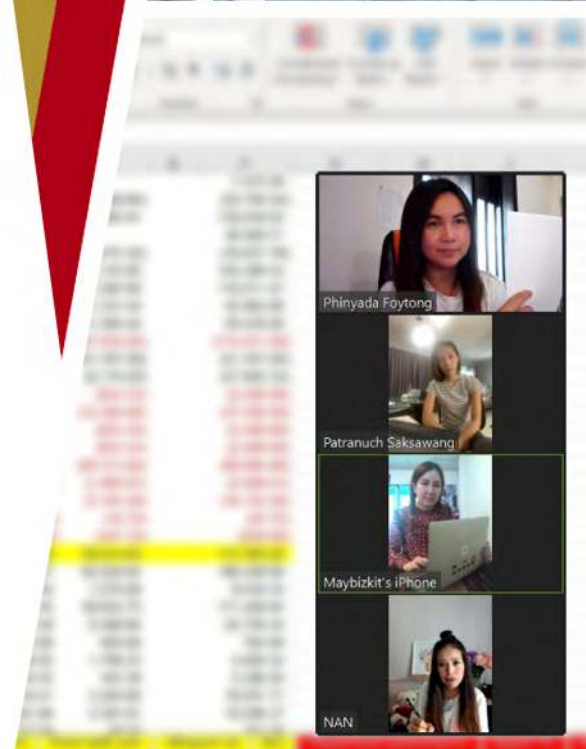
THE EVOLUTION OF MI'S **FINANCIAL** MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Ms. Phinyada Foytong or P'Mameaw, as she is fondly called, has been with MI for 18 years. As the Finance Manager, she has witnessed the evolution of the Finance Department's services from bookkeeping to implementing an integrated and specialized financial management system that is at par with transparency and reporting requirements of governments and international development organizations. The system has also progressed that it now provides accessibility to MI staff working remotely, helping ensure that project commitments will be completed by the end of 2020.

Get to know P'Mamaew and her contributions in positioning MI as a trusted development partner in the Mekong region.

How has MI's financial services evolved?

Our financial management growth was a gradual but steady transformation. During the early years of MI, we were simply record keeping incoming and outgoing project expenses. When MI was elevated as an intergovernmental organization, we started setting up an integrated financial management system that went beyond bookkeeping to meet the exacting standards of our expanding international and regional partners. Today, we have stringent financial processes and protocols in place that promote strategic planning, faster decision-making, transparency, and immediate access to real-time information to our senior management, Council Board, Steering Committee, and partners.



Has the COVID-19 pandemic affected MI's finances?

In adherence to social distancing guidelines, MI's trainings, workshops, meetings, and official missions were postponed. This affected our scheduled operating expenses for the first quarter, which has now been allocated for release in July 2020 when project activities will resume. Overall, our financial position, including our liquidity, is healthy due to the proactive measures set in place by our senior management.

What financial measures were implemented to ensure that MI operation is uninterrupted?

In 2020, MI has committed to roll out 13 long-term, eight short-term, and five one-off projects. To ensure their efficient and smooth implementation when the social distancing guidelines are lifted, we have been working with project officers in the planning, budgeting, and forecasting of expenses through our online finance system during this work-from-home period. The flexibility and accessibility of our integrated but secure system has made working remotely an easy experience for everyone.

We also continue to transact with our vendors through MI's online payment system, which has been active for the last three years. This ensures that the local companies we patronize are paid on time so they, too, can support their employees during this health crisis.

What are you most proud of about the contributions of the Finance Department to MI operations?

We are a small team of four people in our department. Their strong background in accounting and wide experience in supporting international projects such as the ones MI implement have made us proactive and creative in anticipating and responding to the needs of our partners and colleagues.

What are the Finance Department's plans to strengthen its internal and external services?

There is always room for deeper growth and higher learning. Our team goal is to meet international standards in financial management because we want to further enhance the quality of our financial information and harmonize finance management policies and operational practices to strengthen MI's development effectiveness.

