



MEKONG INSTITUTE

Capacity Development for Regional Cooperation and Integration

# MEKONG CONNECTION

The Newsletter of Mekong Institute  
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## MEKONG FORUM 2017: Meeting the Challenges of the New Geo-economics



*Mekong Institute partners and guests re-affirming their commitment to inclusive and sustainable development in the GMS.*

In less than half a decade, the world has already witnessed drastic changes in the global political and economic landscapes. The transfer of power in the White House has, for example, meant new economic and political policies unexpected from a country like the US, while on the other side of the globe, China has continued its rise as one of the most powerful countries in the world. These are changes that have significant repercussions for the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) as it also continues to pursue the goals of the ASEAN Economic Integration.

While the region has remarkably progressed in the last few decades, protectionist policies, for instance, can adversely impact the region's trade and investment interests. The call for cooperation among GMS countries becomes more pronounced in the face of these global challenges, and this call was the resounding message of the 2017 Mekong Forum held last July 14, 2017 in Khon Kaen, Thailand. Organized by Mekong Institute, this year's gathering brought together over 200 development practitioners, policymakers, business and civic leaders and academics to weigh in and offer their thoughts on how the new geo-economics is reshaping the GMS.

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## Let's Talk Food: Engaging the Media to Promote Food Safety



Food safety remains to be one of the most pressing concerns in many developing countries. The issue is often two-fold; one is related to the process of production and the other is concerned with the preparation, cooking and subsequent consumption of food. In Southeast Asia, the World Health Organization estimates that more than 150 million people get sick while more than 175,000 die every year due to foodborne diseases. Of these numbers, 60 million who fall ill and 50,000 of the total fatalities are children under 5 years old. On the production side, smallholder farmers such as those from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) still heavily rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The large volume of trade along the porous borders of CLMV, a considerable portion of which are informal in nature, also remains to be a major threat in managing food safety. Many agri-food entrepreneurs,

mostly small and medium producers and processors, also lack the resources and capacity to adopt new technologies and practices that would ensure the safety of food products for consumption.

### The Clamor for Safe Food

The demand for organic and natural food products, initially confined to high-income earners, has spread to the masses, and in its heels comes a more heightened interest and concern over how food is grown, processed, sold and prepared. This is a particularly relevant concern in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS).

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## Editorial



Dr. Watcharas Leelawath  
Executive Director

Dynamic forces in the world are shaping, transforming and rocking the status quo. These include the political tensions in the Korean Peninsula, the growing interest in protectionist policies and the rise of China as a global leader. Likewise, advancements in technology are coming out at an unprecedented rate, and there is a need to keep up or be left behind. These changes are significant for us in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) particularly with ASEAN’s continuing campaign for integration. The shifting dynamics of our socio-economic and political landscapes offer immense opportunities

that we can maximize but also risks that we need to avert.

In the face of these changes, it becomes even more important for us to heighten our cooperation and foster more pro-active collaborations, and this is a call that we echoed strongly during the Mekong Forum 2017 in July. Such collaborations, facilitated through enhanced connectivity, can help GMS economies to be more resilient and robust and increase our competitive advantage in the face of extreme nationalism and trade protectionist policies.

This call for pro-active collaborations has also underpinned MI’s activities in the past six months. MI’s training on Communicating Food Safety in August, for example, is a first for the Institute as it went beyond exploring the technical components of the subject of food safety to tackle something practical yet equally relevant – how to communicate the issue to critical stakeholders. It engaged for the first time journalists and media practitioners in our training, and has brought them into the fold of MI’s growing circle of stakeholders.

Likewise, we have also organized two training programs that put the spotlight on women capacity-building, one of MI’s cross-cutting themes. The Regional Training Program on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business in July and the International Training Program on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in September further emphasize our commitment to developing the capacity of all sectors in the GMS to achieve inclusive and sustainable development.

At the same time, our work in the RLED-EWEC Project is now moving to the next phase. We have already put in place the foundations for the adoption of the Quadripartite and Direct Linkage Models in our project sites in Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam, and have trained community leaders and project partners. We are looking forward with enthusiasm to the next stage as we strive to reach out to more communities in our project sites.

Pro-active collaborations are not limited to cooperation with existing partners. We also need to explore new forms and types of collaboration that will bring us closer to more stakeholders in the region and allow us to infuse varied and multi-faceted perspectives in our programs. This way, we will continue to be a resilient and dynamic institution in the GMS, ready for the challenges of the times.

## FROM RICE TO RICHES:

### Launching a Small Rice Empire in Khammouane

Mr. Chanthavy Thongmanichanh was all smiles when he greeted us at the entrance of their rice mill. He was wearing a gray pullover and a white hard hat when he ushered us into their small business empire. “I just finished work, sorry,” he said shyly as he brushed some dirt off his shirt.

The place has obviously just been renovated. There is a visible glow and gloss on the surface of the walls, and the place smelled faintly of fresh paint. A few more men greeted us on our way to the processing facility, and near the doorway was a small room serving as the management office. Inside was a woman in bright pink polo shirt, her back facing us. Mr. Chanthavy called her over. She turned. “Hi, I am Vanida,” she answered, smiling.

Vanida Rice Mill (VRM) started out as a small and humble business, built by Mr. Phetsamone Bouaphanthavong, Vanida’s father. A tiny lot, a roof, and tons of dedication was all it took for the mill to start operating. Managed by the members of Mr. Phetsamone’s own family, little by little the rice mill started to gain more and more customers—they began needing more and more rice farmers to supply raw materials, and after a while they found themselves exporting to neighboring Thailand and Vietnam. After marrying Ms. Vanida, Mr. Chanthavy, an architect by profession, got involved in the family business as well.



Mr. Chanthavy Thongmanichanh (left) and wife, Ms. Vanida (right), talking about the RLED-EWEC project and their partnership with Mekong Institute.

Now more than two decades later, their rice milling facility already attained its Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) certificate in hopes of expanding their business further, thanks to the help of Mekong Institute (MI).

### Coordinating Efforts

Three years ago, VRM decided to join the Regional and Local Economic Development – East West Economic Corridor (RLED-EWEC) Project of MI, with a goal in mind: to improve their production, the quality of their products, and their work efficiency. During those three years, the RLED-EWEC Project assisted VRM in accessing higher-value markets, and three years after, it stands as one of the most successful cases of the project in Khammoaune, Lao PDR.

RLED-EWEC has opened many windows of opportunity for farmers and rice mill owners like Vanida to build their business from the ground up. The project has encouraged VRM to produce organic and Good Agricultural Practices (GAP)-certified rice, equipped them with the knowledge on GMP requirements, helped explore export markets and spearheaded the foundation of a rice miller cooperative. Through the RLED-EWEC Project, VRM was likewise introduced to a host of other learning and development opportunities from MI. One of these is the course on Food Safety Management Tools organized by the Agricultural Development and Commercialization (ADC) Department of MI, under the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP)-funded Food Safety Project (FSP).

## FSP and the Road to GMP

On November 7, 2016, following the success of the Regional Consultation Workshop on Promoting Food Safety in CLMV in October 2016, MI kicked off its first-ever training workshop under the FSP. Coincidentally, the regional training workshop focused on Food Safety Management Tools in Food Manufacturing, a perfect opportunity for Mr. Chanthavy, Manager of Vanida Rice Mill, to learn more about GMP and all the tools he needs to finally get that coveted certificate.

His attendance to the workshop indeed bore fruit. On January 23, 2017, almost three months after the workshop, MI staff visited VRM to monitor their progress in getting their rice-milling facility GMP-certified, a commitment they made with ADC when they signed up for the FSP training workshop. The team was not disappointed; VRM was on track towards becoming the first-ever rice processing facility in Lao PDR to get a GMP certificate through the assistance of MI.



Mr. Chanthavy (left) explaining to Ms. Ngamnet Aektasaeng (right) and Mr. Paoloregel Samonte (not in photo) the changes Vanida Rice Mill has undergone since his participation in the FSP training course of MI.

A first glance at the area said it all: The vicinity of the processing facility was clean, all workers were wearing proper uniforms, and hazard areas were properly and adequately labeled. But these are all just external; the changes made since the end of the Training Workshop on Food Safety Manufacturing Tools organized by ADC under the FSP were much more impressive.

During the brief facility tour, Mr. Chanthavy pointed out the changes in the layout of the rice milling facility that they made following the FSP workshop at MI. Some of the changes include the addition of transparent plastic curtains in

the main entrance; the addition of a narrow space between the wall and the stacks of rice (to enable staff to inspect the surroundings of the rice stacks); the relocation of office and packaging rooms (office moved to front and packaging room moved to the back); the enclosure of the ceiling window (to prevent insects and birds from coming inside); and the repainting of the whole building.

A changing room located at the entrance of the packaging room, as well as a staff area outside the processing premises, were likewise built following MI's training. The whole revamp of the processing facility, he proudly stated, were based from the knowledge and suggestions he acquired during the FSP workshop. "We're positive in getting our GMP certificate around two months from now (March)," he said confidently. And indeed, the certificate was theirs come summer.



Mr. Chanthavy (right) describing the soon-to-be-built drying equipment located at the back of the processing house. The rice hulls are supposed to power the drying machine, creating a zero-waste system of rice processing.

## VRM's Vision

With a GMP certificate at hand, VRM is now gearing towards exporting their products to China and Brunei. Apart from opportunities to export, VRM is also looking forward to achieving a zero-waste system of rice processing. Mr. Chanthavy explained that the system will make use of rice hulls to power the drying machine. The rice hulls, when burned using the technology, will generate heat needed for drying—a process not only practical, but also sustainable.

When asked what made VRM a huge success, Mr. Phetsamone, Mr. Chanthavy's father-in-law, had a simple answer — "We had a vision." The vision has always been clear from the beginning—to not only produce for local consumption, but to break borders and export products to markets never before penetrated by local, Khammouane-produced rice grains. Powered by this strong vision, and a substantial amount of support from MI, Vanida Rice Mill—the first-ever RLED-EWEC and FSP project beneficiary in Lao PDR to attain a GMP-certified status—is surely looking forward to greater, better things ahead. ■



# MEKONG FORUM 2017

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The collective message was clear: There is a need to further explore complementarities and identify synergistic actions in order for the GMS to better position itself in the face of these global shifts.

In his keynote address, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of the Mekong Institute Steering Committee, underlined the value of expanding cooperation beyond the borders of the sub-region to extend to the whole of ASEAN, Asia and the world. There is much benefit to be derived, he noted, from country policies such as China's One Belt/One Road Policy. A more pro-active engagement in this initiative can bring exponential returns for the GMS in terms of infrastructural and human resource development.

Likewise, the suggestions offered by Mr. Datuk M. Supperamiam, former Malaysian Ambassador to the World Trade Organization, attempt to take sub-regional cooperation to further heights – strengthening of industrial collaboration through division of labor; exploring increased avenues of financial collaboration; and intensifying partnerships geared towards technological and research development.

Discussions revolved around the impacts of cooperation in the region, and trade and foreign direct investment strategies for the GMS countries in light of these global challenges. Comments and responses from other participants also touched on cross-cutting and equally crucial issues like social and environmental cooperation, and the ugly side of development cooperation such as the problem of human trafficking.

Echoing the sentiment that the region cannot remain static and complacent in the face of these political and economic changes, Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, Executive Director of Mekong Institute, emphasized that the three C's – cooperation, connectivity and competitiveness – should guide, now more than ever, the future actions of key players in the GMS. Cooperation must be pro-active yet practical and implementable; connectivity should be holistic, encompassing physical, software, business and people-to-people connectivity; and finally, competitiveness should be geared toward higher value-added product development. For its part, Mekong Institute will continue to be a key agency that will work to further tighten the link of the GMS countries and foster a greater sense of community. ■

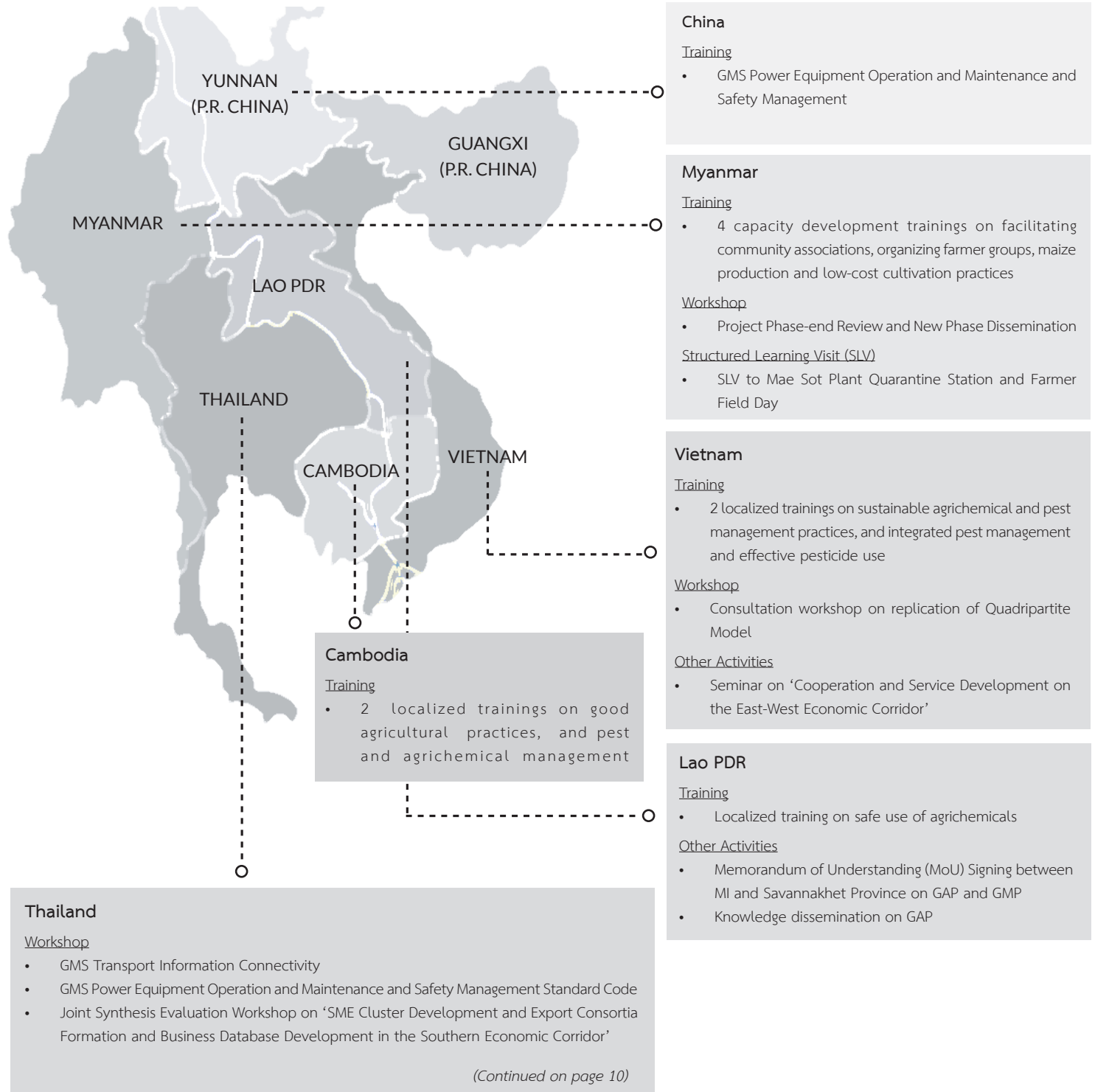
## SNAPSHOTS



## REGIONAL WORKS (April - September 2017)

### CROSS-COUNTRY ACTIVITIES

- National Workshops on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam)
- National Knowledge Sharing Forum on Food Safety (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar)



## Let's Talk Food: Engaging the Media to Promote Food Safety

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The growing public recognition of the importance of proper food handling—from the moment seeds are sown or livestock are reared until the end-products reach consumers' kitchen—illustrates the need to engage not just producers and sellers but also the rest of the public. Ironically however, mass media coverage on food safety issues in the GMS remains to be limited. While discussions on the subject certainly happen, these are often confined within the circles of farmers and producers, researchers and experts, and at best, a small portion of businesses and retailers. It is apparent that there is a need for extensive science-based coverage on local and transboundary issues on food safety. But the main challenge among communication practitioners is how to make food safety-related issues more accessible and interesting to the public.

### Coordinating Food Safety

Recognizing the need to raise public awareness on food safety issues, the Regional Media Training Program on Communicating Food Safety was designed as one of the safe food courses under the Mekong Institute-Food Safety Project (MI-FSP) supported by the New Zealand Aid Programme. Enhancing consumers' knowledge and attitude towards safe food consumption was among the most salient needs identified during preliminary in-country visits and training needs assessments.

In late August, 32 media professionals from the region participated in the five-day course. The program targeted to enhance the knowledge of the invited science communicators on the essentials of food safety and benefits of robust food control systems with discussions on food safety concepts and food safety management tools. Tackling also the media's vital role in raising public awareness on the importance of food safety, the training program consequently encouraged participants to strategize greater public awareness through their food safety story pitches.

The gravity of the issue of food safety is certainly not lost on the participants. Mr. Nay Aye Lwin, Deputy Director of the ICT and Quality Management Division, Department of Consumer Affairs, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar remarked that the training has broadened their knowledge on how to better implement activities relating to the promotion of safe food. A participant from Lao PDR, Ms. Chintanaphone Keovichith of Click I4DEVIC shared the same thoughts, further noting the importance of policy enforcement and the sharing of critical information between governments and organizations working to promote food safety.\*



*Participants of the Regional Media Training Program on Communicating Food Safety discuss story topics and angles.*

### From Talk to Action

Since returning to their respective countries, participants have worked on stories covering a wide array of local and regional food safety issues. To date, about 30 stories have been published and broadcasted on radio and television. Ms. Kong Meta of the Phnom Penh Post, for instance, covered a recent food poisoning incident involving more than 30 villagers in Kampong Thom Province. Vientiane Times, meanwhile, featured Ms. Viengdavanh Banphahaksa's story on the importance of hand washing especially among school children. In Myanmar, Mizzima News International ran a story on the dangers of consuming street foods written by Ms. Aye Chan Khaing. Mr. Duong Nam Hoang of Vietnam's Tin Tuc Newspaper wrote a feature on how to use QR codes in fresh produce sold in local supermarkets.

The training is just one of the many steps to fully engage media professionals in this quest for safer food. Beginning with fostering collaboration among media practitioners and forming a network of CLMV food safety reporters, MI's next step is to further engage these reporters by linking them with relevant government agencies and food safety actors in the region. This way, it is hoped that more stories on food safety will be accessible and available and its related issues given the due attention they deserve. ■

\*Participant quotes from an article written by Ms. Wah Wah Khaing, one of the training participants, published on Myanmar International TV, September 4, 2017.

## What Women Want: Extending Conversations on Women Empowerment

The past decades have seen the shifting of the spotlight on women and a more vocal acknowledgement of their roles as well as of the challenges and stories of their plight. And as the world moves at breakneck speed with advancements in technology, it becomes even more paramount to continue the push for women empowerment and gender equality. Indeed, it is not the time to sit back.

In many parts of the world there still exists a significant gap in gender disparity. The underutilization of women's potential persists both in developed and underdeveloped countries and perhaps more specifically in a region like the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). A 2011 report from the Asian Development Bank noted that while there are more women in the GMS now working outside of the home, the quality of female labor remains poor as a result of persistent factors like limited access to appropriate training, barriers in the family, and communes and workplaces that do not provide an enabling environment for the improvement of skills. In countries like Cambodia and Lao PDR, women still face a higher risk of unemployment during an economic crisis. Moreover, as borders open, cross-country collaborations strengthen and foreign investments trickle in, migration also becomes a given. Unfortunately, this has also resulted to an increase in cases of human trafficking especially of women from the countryside seeking a better life in the bigger cities.

### MI and Its Commitment to Women Empowerment

Conversations about women and their plight should continue, if not gain an even stronger voice. Extending the conversations too beyond stories of their challenges to touch also on success stories and good practices, can provide an inspiring and pro-active lens to the conversations.

Mekong Institute (MI) acknowledges this, hence why it has included gender equality and women empowerment as a salient theme that should cut across all its programs. Since its articulation in the Institute's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, MI has embarked on projects that strive to expand the conversations about women in the GMS, strengthen their capacities as a valuable sector and ultimately, enable their wider participation in the social, political and economic activities of the region. Two of these are the International Training Program on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand, and the Regional Training Program on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business. Facilitated by MI's Innovation and Technological Connectivity (ITC) Department and Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF) Department, respectively, these are programs that stress MI's commitment to the goal of inclusive development.

### A Gathering of Voices

The International Training Program on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand is a nod to the call to expand the conversations on women and more importantly, broaden the circle of participants in these conversations to also include other sectors



*Conversations from around the globe. Participants of the International Training Program on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment learning from and with each other. On the right, the group during the structured learning visit.*

and stakeholders. Organized with the support of the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), the training brought in 19 participants, a diverse group of men and women coming from Asia and the Pacific, Africa to as far as Southeastern Europe and Central America.

The two-week training, which ran from September 11-22, 2017, was designed to enhance appreciation on the general issue of gender equality; identify the factors that undermine the participation of women in the economic and political sectors; introduce gender mainstreaming tools and; capture and share good practices from Thailand's experience in promoting gender equality and women empowerment.

Building first on the participants' reports on the status of women in their respective countries, the discussions then introduced participants to the various international and regional agreements and programs that protect women's rights; case studies of successful women empowerment programs particularly in terms of improving women's participation and representation in economic activities and political decision-making; and finally, gender planning frameworks that can be used to design more gender-oriented development projects and policies. Central in all the discussions was the sharing of country experiences and lessons learned as a way to enhance awareness, expand perspectives, stimulate broader conversations and ultimately, provide the participants a better lens by which they can approach and address the issues concerning women. Since the training also served as an opportunity to showcase Thailand's initiatives

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## What Women Want: Extending Conversations on Women Empowerment

in promoting and protecting women’s rights, the discussions also highlighted experiences and lessons learned in Thailand’s work on women empowerment. Linking theory with on-the-ground lessons and insights, a structured learning visit was also organized to organizations and offices that work for and in the sector of women, such as the Office of Women’s Affairs and Family Development, and the Rattana Khon Kaen Vocational Training and Aid Center. Additional visits were also made to the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the Gender and Development Research Institute (GDRI).

### Taking Conversations a Step Higher

One of the most impactful ways though that women empowerment can be made more concrete is by enabling their increased participation in economic activities. Women entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important untapped source of economic growth. Women entrepreneurs create new jobs for themselves and others, and also provide society with various solutions to management, organization and business problems.

In the GMS, building women’s entrepreneurship is a matter of great import. In Cambodia, 55 percent of businesses are owned by women, while in Lao PDR and Vietnam, women-owned enterprises account for about 40 and 25 percent of the local businesses, respectively. Yet, challenges abound for these enterprises, hindering them from moving beyond a micro business to a small and medium-sized enterprise. These obstacles include limited exposure to innovative practices; few opportunities to upgrade their business and technical skills or gain access to business networks outside of family and friends; lack of capital for expansion; and low levels of confidence to take measured risks. Thus there exists a market failure discriminating against women’s possibility to become successful entrepreneurs. In order for the economic potential of women to be fully utilized, this market failure therefore needs to be addressed.

Such was the focus of the Regional Training Program on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business held from July 3-14, 2017, and sponsored by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The training program is part of a one-year action research project on “Making Trade Work for Small Producers in Southeast Asia’s Least Developed Countries,” an initiative that aims to support existing and prospective women entrepreneurs in developing their entrepreneurial qualities and enable them to expand their businesses for the regional and global market; promote women-led enterprises for export market in the GMS; and ultimately, promote the SME sector to boost business growth and employment generation.

With these goals underpinning the training program, 24 women-entrepreneurs from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam (CLMV) participated in the training. They were also joined by six representatives from various Business Development Services (BDS) providers in CLMV, including the Cambodia-India Entrepreneurship Development Institute (CIEDI), Lao-India Entrepreneurship Development Center (LIEDC), SME Development, Ministry of Industry of Myanmar, Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association (MWEA) and Ho Chi Minh

City Association for Women Executives & Entrepreneurs (HAWEE).

Zeroing in on how women entrepreneurs can develop their business capacities, discussions centered on topics such as business management, finance, marketing, sources of assistance, incentives, subsidies, and rules and regulations – information useful to the women entrepreneurs in setting up their business ventures. They were also supported in the preparation and implementation of an Export Market Plan for expanding their business for the export market. Likewise, as valuable partners of the sector, the BDS group was also taught how to build up their confidence to coach local SMEs for integration into the regional and global value chain.



*Empowering women as business owners. Women entrepreneurs in the Regional Training Program on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business learn ways to improve export competitiveness.*

Like the training on women empowerment, participants also examined case studies and were given the opportunity to visit two successful local exporting companies to learn about their best practices and challenges in exporting. Taking it a step further, the participants were also invited to showcase their products in the Mekong Forum 2017, which provided a fitting opportunity for the women entrepreneurs to build their business networks and gain regional and international insights that they can use in the development of their export market strategy and plan.

### Conversations Gaining Ground

The thrill of high hopes is palpable. Upon return to their respective countries, participants of the International Training on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment are expected to design a gender-sensitive project that reflects the lessons and concepts they learned, and indeed, there is a well of knowledge



that the participants can draw from. Already, Thailand's idea of a women's community training center has sparked inspiration in Ms. Meach Softeary, a participant from Cambodia. "This is something I can apply in Cambodia...a place for [women] to come together and share best practices." Ms. Eleni Fausitina Poesse from Tonga remarked about how she is looking forward to bringing back the lessons from the training to her own work. "In Tonga, we have just started [on women empowerment work], but in Thailand they are more advanced, and I learned a lot and I want to bring it back to Tonga to practice."

Feedback on the Regional Training Program on Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business has been equally encouraging. Participants praised how the training had increased their knowledge and skills on entrepreneurship development tailored for regional and global markets. Two months after the training, the participants had already successfully organized four national workshops as part of their action plan implementation. These workshops were held in Yangon, Myanmar; Vientiane, Lao PDR; Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam, and in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, allowing for the sharing and transfer

of knowledge on business management and export to over 100 other women entrepreneurs. This is certainly not the last for the participants of the training. In November, they are expected to join the "Investor Forum and Business Matching 2017" in Bangkok, a gathering being organized by MI to further promote business linkages between the women entrepreneurs and prospective investors. Likewise, upon completion of their action plan implementation, they will gather again for a Synthesis and Evaluation workshop to share their experiences and lessons learned and discuss ways forward.

MI's commitment to the work of building up human resource capacity in the GMS certainly extends well to smaller and less privileged sectors such as women. Indeed, as the region continues to strive for a more sustainable and inclusive development, there is even greater impetus to focus on developing the capacities and potentials of the sector of women. And as the conversations on women and gender empowerment continue to gain ground, MI is looking forward to adding its voice and more importantly, providing the venue for such critical conversations to take place. ■

## MI Highlights

### MI Holds Training on Rural Energy and Energy Efficiency



Mekong Institute (MI) hosted a two-week regional training on Affordable, Sustainable and Innovative Technology-Based Energy for Mountainous Rural Area at the MI Headquarters. The People's Government of Yunnan Province sponsored the training, which was held from April 24 to

May 5, 2017. Twenty-five participants from the six GMS countries collaborated to enhance their capacities, specifically on rural energy and energy efficiency and its promotion. The training highlighted good regional practices and promotion of sustainable energy production and consumption.

### MI Signs MoU with Alibaba.com and UTCC



MI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Alibaba.com, Hangzhou, China and the University of the Thai Chamber of Commerce on promoting market access of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the GMS. The event was held on April 26, 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand. The MoU was signed by Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, Executive Director of MI; Mr. Zhe Wu, Country Manager of Alibaba.com; and Dr. Sauwanee Thairungro, Associate Professor and President of UTCC. The three parties will co-organize capacity building programs and activities to increase the awareness and knowledge of the GMS members on e-commerce platforms.

### MI Takes Part in the Belt and Road Forum



MI participated in the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation held in Beijing, China on May 14, 2017. Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, MI's Executive Director, presented as one of the founding members of the Silk Road Think Tank Network (SiLKS). Representatives from more than 130 countries attended the event that

aimed to stimulate trade and economic growth along the ancient Silk Road. In line with the event was the third SiLKS Annual Meeting held on May 16. Dr. Watcharas Leelawath spoke as a panelist and expressed MI's willingness to strengthen collaborative efforts with the other members to achieve sustainable development of regional and global economies.

### HTW Chur Switzerland Visits MI to Explore EWEC Project



The HTW Chur Switzerland Delegation visited MI on June 13, 2017 to explore the Institute's initiatives and advocacies. The delegation was headed by Ms. Barbara Haller Rupf, Director of Further Education, Institute of Tourism and Leisure, University of Applied Science HTW Chur.

The visit led off the discussion on MI's efforts, particularly the initiatives of the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) Project. Mr. Nguyen Hung Cuong, Director of the EWEC Project, explained the Project's objectives and its partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC).

## MI Highlights

### Seoul National University Partners with MI



Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, MI Executive Director, together with the team of Trade and Investment Facilitation Department, organized a meeting with the representatives of Seoul National University. The meeting was held on July 19, 2017, at the MI Headquarters to

advance the parties' collaborative efforts. Several points have been considered, such as supporting the research work on Mekong countries being conducted by Prof. Taeyoon Kim from Seoul National University.

### International Training Program on Green Freight and Logistics Development



MI, with support from the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), organized the international training program on Green Freight and Logistics Development on August 21, 2017 in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The training aimed to address the importance of 'green' in the freight and logistics industry

by enhancing the knowledge and skills on logistics operations and services of the agencies involved in the transport and logistics sector. About 20 senior and mid-level government officials from South Asia, Southeast Asia, the African states, Pacific Islands, and Central America, joined the training.

### MI Celebrates 21 Years of Strengthening the GMS



Members of the MI family, together with participants attending the in-house training programs, celebrated the Institute's 21st anniversary on August 28. MI marks more than two decades of promoting and putting forward regional development and cooperation. As part of this

momentous event, MI donated books and publications to Khon Kaen University.

### MI Hosts Khon Kaen Business Forum



As part of continuing efforts to promote innovation among SMEs, MI organized the Khon Kaen Business Forum on September 25-26, 2017. Over 180 One Tambon One Product (OTOP) stores, SMEs, startups and experts attended the event. Discussions centered around topics such as eco-

innovation for Thailand 4.0, entrepreneurial education, e-commerce application, research and development activity and intellectual property rights.

## REGIONAL WORKS (April - September 2017)

### Thailand

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#### Training

- Affordable, Sustainable and Innovative Technology Based Energy for Mountainous Rural Area
- Assuring Food Safety through Pest and Agrichemical Management
- Energy Efficiency Policies in the Greater Mekong Sub-region
- Trade Events Promotion
- Agri-food Inspection and Audit
- Promoting Women Entrepreneurship for Export Business
- Food Safety Risk Analysis
- Raising Public Awareness for Safe Food Consumption
- Food Safety Management Tool in Food Manufacturing
- Green Freight and Logistics Development
- Communicating Food Safety
- Energy Cooperation in the GMS

- Effective and Coordinated Information Management System to Facilitate Investment and Business in the GMS
- Gender Equality and Women Empowerment
- Training cum Business Networking on 'Sustainable Transport and Logistics Planning and Management'
- Training of Trainers on Certified Logistics Master (Phase III)

#### Other Activities

- Mekong Forum 2017
- Khon Kaen Business Forum
- Regional Consultation on 'Enabling Regulatory Environment Facilitating Cross-Border Trade along the GMS East-West Economic Corridor'
- Business Networking on 'Sustainable Transport and Logistics Planning and Management'

#### Structured Learning Visit (SLV)

- SLV cum Business Matching for SME owners and BDS providers

## Alumni Testimonial



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**Dr. So Phat**  
Vice Chief, Surveillance Bureau  
Communicable Disease Control Department,  
Ministry of Health, Cambodia

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The contents of this training, especially the best practices from the different offices and countries are truly beneficial and helpful to our work in the Ministry. We learned updated information on food safety, and I realized that we have common issues on food safety but each country has a different approach, different ideas and solutions. So the things I learned in this training, I hope to implement in our country.

The methodology of the training – the lectures, exercises and writing activities – also helped me appreciate the delivery of the content. It is very good for people who are older, who need information to be repeated often, and to help in the transfer of knowledge from theory to practice. Also, when we arrived here, everything has been properly provided – from transportation, accommodation, to the support services. I really appreciate them, and I hope to attend more trainings in MI in the future.



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**Ms. Phan Thi Kim Nhung**  
Senior Programme Officer  
Vredes Eilanden Country Office (VECO), Vietnam

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The topic of the training program is timely and relevant because food safety is an urgent issue, a pressing concern especially in Vietnam. It is important to improve consumers' awareness on food safety because it can also lead to a positive impact on production. One of the most valuable lessons I learned from this training and which I hope to adopt or practice in my work are the five steps in communicating food safety. The training materials are all very clear and well-prepared. Everything is organized. I also like it here [in Khon Kaen University]. The environment is quiet, peaceful, no pollution; and we have a spacious room at MI.



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**Mr. Sonexay Komxaysana**  
Deputy, Agriculture Section  
Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, Lao PDR

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This course is really important because not many people know about food safety. Access to information about the subject is also limited and the communication of information has not been effective. This course therefore taught me more about the subject and how to communicate it.

It's my first time in Mekong Institute, and I think MI has done very well. The lecture was very clear, and the course coordinator and the MI staff were all friendly and took proper care of us. The environment was also very good. The place is quiet, safe and clean.



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**Ms. May Than Chit**  
Official  
Food Science and Technology Association, Myanmar

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I had once attended an MI training 14 years ago, and I think the main difference is that the training method is now more modernized. There is also a new building, and the conference room is spacious and big. MI is known in the CLMV for their training programs, and I am very happy to be able to join this training.



## MI Calendar (October - December 2017)

October	Technical Assistance and Action Plan Implementation: Sustainable Transport and Logistics Planning and Management
October 5 - 6	Symposium on Global Food Safety: Production, Health and Market
October 5	Trade Event: Cambodia - Vietnam Business Matching
October 7	Trade Event: Cambodia - Thailand Buyer Seller Meet
October 16 - 27	Regional Capacity Building Program on Labor Migration Management in the Greater Mekong Sub-region
October 17	Training-Workshop on Food Safety Risk Analysis and Agri-Food Inspection and Audit
October 23	Trade Event: Cambodia - Vietnam Business Matching
October 19 - 20	Mekong-ROK Business Forum
November	Trade Event: Dawei - Thailand Trade Mission
November - December	Study on Access to Finance for SMEs in Freight Transport and Logistics Sector
November 2	National Knowledge Sharing Forum on Food Safety, Vietnam
November 13	Project Steering Committee Meeting of SEC-JAIF Project
November 13	Investor Forum cum Business Matching
November 15-16	Synthesis and Evaluation Workshop on Promoting Women Entrepreneurs for Export Market
December 4 - 8	Modular Training Program on Enhancing the Utilization of FTAs by SMEs
December 11 - 15	Regional Training Program on Enhancing Trade Competitiveness for Regional Integration



## Contact Us

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