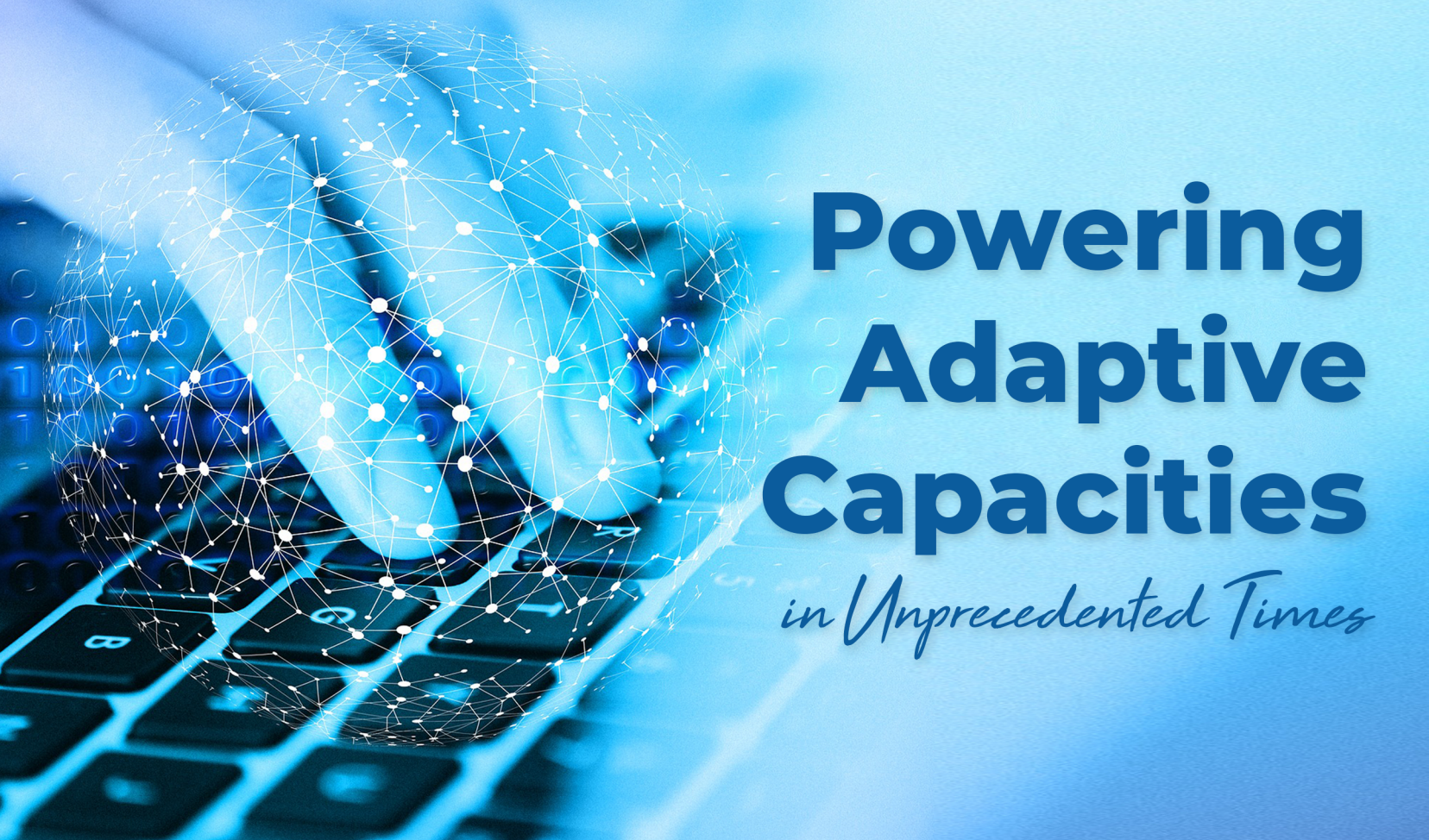


# MEKONG CONNECTION

The Newsletter of Mekong Institute

Q2-Q4 2020



## Powering Adaptive Capacities *in Unprecedented Times*

### MI INSIGHTS

## Mekong-ROK:

**A True Partnership for People,  
Prosperity, and Peace**

*By Madhurjya Kumar Dutta*

Nine years after its inception in 2011, the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation is considered among the most dynamic in the region for its commitment in delivering a systematic and pragmatic Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF) to deepen cooperation as outlined in the “Mekong-Han River Declaration for Establishing Partnership for People, Prosperity, and Peace.”

MI holds the privilege of being MKCF’s fund manager and implementing agency. Beginning in 2013, MI has been overseeing the implementation of 20 projects and providing technical support to Project Implementing Agencies in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Republic of Korea (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, trade and business.

*(continued on page 3)*



## A Year Like No Other

### Suriyan Vichitlekarn

In 2020, as the world navigated through a global health crisis, MI and its partners took action in helping GMS nationals respond to the new normal through our capacity building, research, and advocacy services.

Chief among these was the launch of MI's online activities, the first in our 24-year history. In transforming our tested face-to-face activities into digital platforms, MI delivered 37 trainings, workshops, forums, and consultations activities that reached 1,150 direct beneficiaries not only in the GMS but across the globe.

Each of these reinforced the merits of digitalization in cross-border trade, agricultural development, and smart tourism. MI's activities also enhanced skills of government officials and SMEs on policy innovation formulation and entrepreneurship development to help strengthen national and business resilience during this prolonged pandemic. More importantly, our tailored investments equipped government officials, policy makers, academics, business people, and private sector representatives with information, skills, and networks to map out socioeconomic efforts for the sustainable recovery of their respective sectors, with focus on protecting the marginalized and vulnerable in the areas of labor migration governance, Technical and Vocational Education and Training development, employability, and energy connectivity for holistic development support.

Through our commitment in bridging synergies and spotlighting complementarities, our dialogue-for-action events such as the PROSAFE hybrid forums were rolled out to identify concrete approaches in addressing food enterprises' strengths, fragilities, and opportunities to build back better a more inclusive food processing industry. By bringing together an array of officials from government, the agri-food sector, and food service industries representing Cambodia, Lao, PDR, and Vietnam, proactive steps in increasing food production outputs, adapting better business e-strategies, and strengthening health protocols were recognized.

These positive outcomes would not have been possible without the support of our GMS government and international development partners, whose trust and confidence in our work remained unassailable. As we continue to elevate our digital facilities and tap a growing pool of international and regional experts, we look forward to scaling new heights in continued partnership with them, as well as representatives of regional cooperation bodies—the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, MKCF, as well as international organizations such as Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Trade Facilitation Office (TFO) Canada, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB), among many others, in delivering development work that transforms people and communities for the better.

Much more remains to be done. After a rigorous year-long process of consultations and review, MI will be releasing the Strategic Plan 2021-2025 in the new year. We will also be celebrating 25 years of service to the GMS. These milestones will see the MI family working hand-in-hand with old and new partners in widening alliances to effectively and innovatively complete projects and activities that will build future leaders, source solution-finding methods, and expand public-private engagements to continuously address shared opportunities and emerging development trends.

Through this challenging but fulfilling journey in the coming year, we stand ready to deliver.

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*Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn was appointed MI's Executive Director on September 1, 2020. Recognized as a respected development leader and regional integration advocate, he holds over 15 years of experience in delivering innovative approaches and sustainable practices across his specialized areas of agriculture and rural development, public-private partnerships, and trade facilitation in the GMS and Southeast Asia. Mr. Suriyan assumed the reigns from Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, who served as MI chief from 2014 to 2020.*

(continued from page 1)

To date, seven projects were successfully completed and 13 more are in different stages of implementation.

Regional cooperation mechanisms such as the MKCF are critical for the integration and sustainable development of the region. MKCF's projects contribute to the facilitation of information exchange, promotion of collaboration in trade facilitation initiatives, creation of employment, and promotion of greater consensus and political cooperation. Ultimately, these projects improve the welfare and quality of life of people.

By helping strengthen the foundation for economic growth, social progress, and cultural development, ROK has provided US\$ 8,919,288 thus far in grants to projects that support national priorities of the five Mekong countries and shared benefits in the region. In 2019, ROK has also increased its annual contributions from US\$ 1 million to US\$ 2 million to the Fund.

Such cooperation was further cemented in 2019 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 summit-level consultative mechanisms with the Mekong region.

“Korea attaches great significance to its partnership with the Mekong region. It has a special place under Korean President Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy.” This statement of ROK Second Vice Foreign Minister Lee Tae-Ho resonates to this day because the Mekong region remains a major driver of larger regional growth with its abundant natural resources, biodiversity, and cultural riches. It also holds enormous economic potentials with an average growth rate exceeding 6%, a young and dynamic labor force, and a consumer market of 250 million people.



Through varying degrees, MKCF projects have not only fostered stronger collaboration among governments, the private sector, the academe, and non-government organizations in each Mekong country, these also deepened networking and synergy as evidenced by the steady rise of bilateral and multilateral partnerships between and among Mekong countries to advance Mekong-ROK partnership.

With the upgrade of MKCF's scale and scope, the Fund will support more catalytic and innovative initiatives in seven priority areas: culture and tourism; human resources development; agriculture and rural development; infrastructure; information and communication technology; environment; and non-traditional security challenges to narrow the development gap and further enhance regional connectivity. (continued on page 4)



**Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta** is MI's Director for Trade and Investment Facilitation. As the coordinator of MKCF, he is leading the MI team in reviewing, selecting, monitoring and evaluating, and reporting on MKCF projects. In support of the regional mechanism, Mr. Dutta is also involved in contributing to the MOFA-ROK action plan, which will see MI continuing its fund management responsibilities from 2020 to 2025.

(continued from page 3)

Beginning in 2020, MI has started work in sharing South Korea's experiences in rural development and technological change; advancing sustainability in areas such as forest conservation and water resource development; and promoting peace by moving beyond economic cooperation into other areas including people-to-people exchanges, culture, and tourism.

In the midst of these, MI remains resolute and dedicated to support the strengthening of Mekong-ROK cooperation for the advancement of practical cooperation that responds to the priorities and needs of the Mekong countries so the region may truly achieve lasting partnership, prosperity and peace. ■

## MKCF Projects 2016-2020



### Human Resources Development

Capacity Building Project on Development of Statistics

Building up a Tripartite Model among Academies, Industries, and Governments for Skills Development and the Acceleration of Industrialization in Vietnam

Strengthening of Border Liaison Office around the Mekong River

Training of Trainers on Certified Logistics Master (Phase 3)

Promotion of Safe Migration for Temporary Migrants to Thailand

Green Freight and Logistics Development in Mekong Countries

Capacity Building and Institutional Strengthening for Logistics Monitoring and Evaluation Database Development in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam

Sustainable Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region



### Agriculture and Rural Development

Comprehensive Training to Increase Efficiency of Rice Production

Demonstration of Model Community Forests to Promote Community Forestry Development and Improve Livelihood of Local Community

Soil, Water, and Nutrient Management for Increasing Farm Household Income in Drought Zones of Lao PDR



### Information and Communication Technology

Make Legal Arrangements, Laws, Legislations, and Regulations in Force in the Industry and Commerce Areas More Electronically Available and Accessible to the Public and Poor Districts in Lao PDR

Enhance the Capacity Building of Applying E-Commerce in Agriculture of Mekong Region

Development of Regional Cooperation Project Monitoring Data Center



### Environment

Building Electronic Origin Data Exchange System between Mekong Countries and Korea

Data Collection and Processing for the Cambodian Irrigation Schemes Information System and Sharing Information on Water Resources between the Mekong-ROK

Water Resource Management and Development on the Mekong River Linking with Catchment of the Tonle Sap Great Lake

Master Plan Establishment and Capacity Building for the Modernization and Advancement of Hydro-Meteorological Infrastructure in the Mekong River Basin in Lao PDR

Strengthen the Water User Organization for Irrigated Agriculture Development in the Mekong Delta

Water Data Utilization and Capacity Building in the Mekong Region

Guidelines and Certification for Green Buildings in Cambodia

Capacity Enhancement on Wind Energy Usage for Sustainable Rural Development in Myanmar

Capacity Building on Circular Economy, Resource and Energy Efficiency for Productivity, and Sustainability of Cassava Chain to High Value Products: Cassava Root, Native Starch and Biogas in Mekong Countries

Assessment of Heavy Metal Contamination in Soil and Water for Safety Crop Production in Myanmar

Developing of Climate-Related Disaster Hazard Zoning Map and Enhancing the Salinity Intrusion Monitoring Network in Can Tho City



### Non-Traditional Security Challenges

Sharing of Experiences, Best Practices, and Lessons Learned in Controlling COVID-19 Outbreaks Between ROK and Mekong Countries

# THE VALUE OF E-COMMERCE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

*By Soraya Ututalum and Hao Wen*



**“For businesses to survive during this pandemic, we must open our eyes to opportunities and venture forward armed with the right knowledge and tools.”**

This was Mr. Vandong Thorn’s rallying cry after a year of keeping his Hanchey Bamboo Resort afloat in the midst of a pandemic. Before COVID-19 hit the Kingdom of Cambodia, his eco-resort catered to foreign visitors eager to bask in the country’s picturesque forests and mountains. As an in-demand tourism trend, Mr. Vandong’s popular business employed 25 locals and provided regular revenue to 10 community enterprises in the remote district of Stueng Trang, Kampong Cham.

“Our business grew after we identified and understood our customer base. This allowed us to implement a targeted e-commerce business strategy,” he proudly said, attributing the 300-percent income spike to Mekong Institute’s (MI) sessions on “Rural E-Commerce Development in the Lancang-Mekong Countries.”

Supported by the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund of P.R. China, MI’s series of trainings on rural e-commerce development equipped 44 business representatives from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand to participate in broader markets and access business opportunities through a seven-step strategy of customer analysis, value propositions, channels, customer relations, revenue stream, market access, and cost structure.



“E-commerce allowed us to strategically market our unique local services in a global scale,” he said, “and MI has given us the solid foundation to benefit from this platform.” He added that exposure to the competitive tourism market has also improved Hanchey Bamboo Resort’s hospitality and pricing of eco-tourism products.

With the downturn of international travel, Mr. Vandong has again diversified his business, using MI’s tested framework.

“To maintain our operations, we had to continually evolve. We are now focused on attracting local visitors to join our mountain cycling, hiking, boating, and other outdoor activities,” he said, explaining that this business approach was borne from Cambodians’ demand for recreational sports after the temporary closure of local gyms.

“We charge small groups to exercise in our vast and open grounds in adherence with our government’s health guidelines,” he shared.

In addition, Mr. Vandong has been imparting his innovative strategy to young entrepreneurs hit hard by the pandemic. “Our type of work is people- and service-centered. While we cannot have face-to-face interactions for now, we can use e-commerce to continue our businesses by selling our products and services online.”

The skills Mr. Vandong gained from MI has also opened other avenues to monetize services.

Other than managing his eco-tourism resort, Mr. Vandong has been actively training business people on e-commerce. Using MI’s training module as a basis, he has reached over 100 people since 2019. In 2021, he is expected to teach 3,000 more through a privately-sponsored e-commerce roadshow in 80 districts across Cambodia.

“We have a long way to go to build a strong and sustainable e-commerce ecosystem in Cambodia, but I am confident that with the support of MI and the growing understanding of large companies on the merits of digitalization, we will realize this dream of a global, cashless, and open trade society where all Cambodians will benefit.” ■



**Ms. Soraya Ututalum** is MI’s Communications Coordinator beginning in 2019. She is responsible for the external communications management of the intergovernmental organization.



**Ms. Hao Wen** is MI’s Program Coordinator under the Trade and Investment Facilitation Department. She has been promoting e-commerce development among Lancang-Mekong nationals through trainings and one-on-one technical support.

To know more about MI’s work on e-commerce and SME development, please visit <https://cutt.ly/kj4yio8> and <https://cutt.ly/lj4yapp>.

# 2020: A YEAR IN REVIEW



**37**  
Capacity building  
events



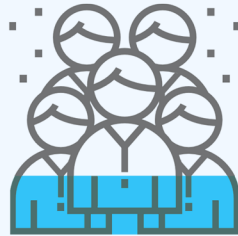
**98%**

of direct participants  
reported improved  
knowledge or skills

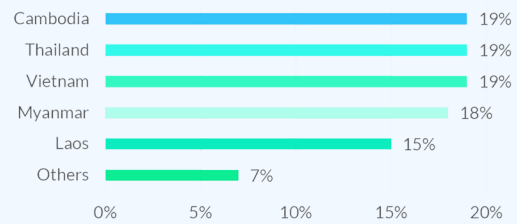
**29%**

of direct participants  
have applied knowledge  
or skills in local context

**1,150**  
Direct  
participants

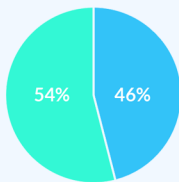


By Country



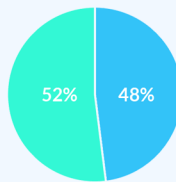
By Gender

Male Female



By Sector

Private Public

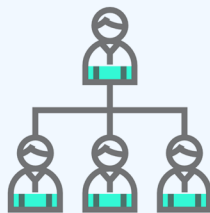


**67**

HCB events led by  
direct participants



**2,524**  
Indirect participants  
reached

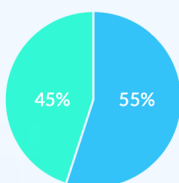


**100%**  
of indirect participants  
reported improved  
knowledge or skills



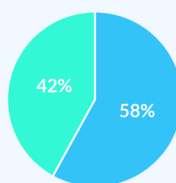
By Gender

Male Female

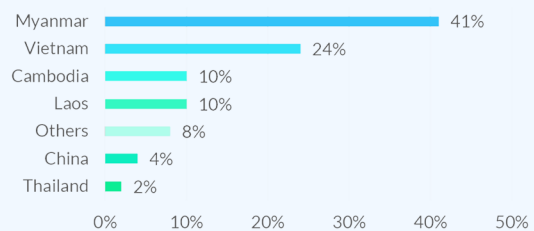


By Sector

Private Public



By Country



## Governing Board Approves MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025

High-level government officials from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as representatives from the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAP), ADB, Hue University, and Khon Kaen University (KKU)—who comprise MI’s Council and Steering Committee members—supported the release and implementation strategies of MI’s action plan for 2021-2025. The document lays the foundation in deepening regional cooperation and integration through capacity building, dialogue, and advocacy investments across the areas of agricultural development and commercialization, trade and investment facilitation, and sustainable energy and environment. The document also details MI’s elevated portfolio of services, which will bring together diverse knowledge and policy-enhancing support for the delivery of holistic services to the GMS. [Read more.](#)



## MI Supports Development of Myanmar Innovation Plan

With support from the Government of the People’s Republic of China, MI hosted a national e-training on “Capacity Building on National Innovation Plan Development” from November 9 to 13, 2020. About 12 government, academic, and private sector representatives attended the online training to strengthen research and development, smoothen coordination and linkages among stakeholders, and advance practical policies for the development of a strategic roadmap and master plan for science, technology, and innovation. [Read more.](#)



## MI and ROK Officials Reaffirmed Partnership

Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director, and the senior management team, welcomed H.E. Ambassador Lee Wook-heon of the Republic of Korea to Thailand and his delegation to the MI Headquarters on November 3, 2020. The officials discussed future ROK-MI collaboration and ways forward in delivering targeted efforts that will promote the efficient recovery of the subregion from socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19. [Read more.](#)



## 11<sup>th</sup> Economic Corridors Forum: MI Presented Results of the Monitoring of Early Harvest Implementation of GMS Cross Border Transport Agreement

Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta, MI Director of Trade and Investment Facilitation, presented the results of the monitoring report on “Early Harvest Implementation of the Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA)” at the 11<sup>th</sup> Economic Corridors Forum, which was hosted by ADB last October 28, 2020. [Read more.](#)



## Information Sharing is Key to Resilient Rice Industries

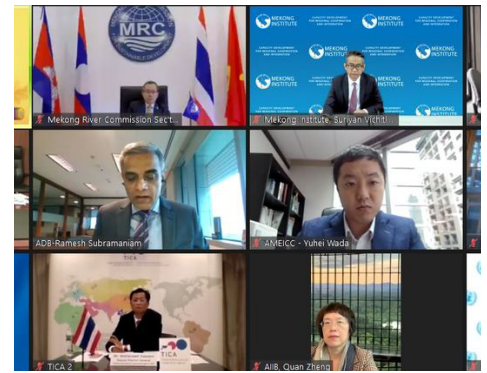
With support from LMCSF, MI and the Thailand Rice Department hosted the first blended online and onsite workshop on “Development of Rice Pest and Natural Disaster Monitoring Forecasting and Warning Center for Sustainable Rice Production under Climate Change in the Mekong-Lancang Subregion” for 36 government officials from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam at the MI Headquarters on October 27 and 28, 2020. This was the first activity under the project which aims to build resilient rice production industries across the subregion. [Read more.](#)





## MI Sets Partnership Approach for Concerted Economic Recovery

Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director, underscored the importance of investing in synergies to deepen regional engagement for effective COVID-19 initiatives at the virtual Development Partners' Meeting hosted by ADB last October 20, 2020. Held annually, the meeting brought together officials from GMS governments, development organizations, as well as representatives from the private sector and civil society to discuss GMS programs' response to the pandemic and the proposed GMS Strategic Framework 2030. [Read more.](#)



## Mekong Scholars completed MI Training on Managing Food Safety

Funded by NZAP, MI organized a PROSAFE regional training on “Managing Food Safety Along the Food Supply Chain” for 26 master’s and doctorate degree students from Cambodia, P.R. China, Myanmar, and Vietnam—who are based in Thailand—from October 19 to 23, 2020 at the MI Headquarters. As the first and only onsite MI training activity in 2020, strict measures were taken to safeguard the health and well-being of staff and training participants. This included a strong awareness and action-driven campaign on hand hygiene, temperature scanning, and social distancing. [Read more.](#)



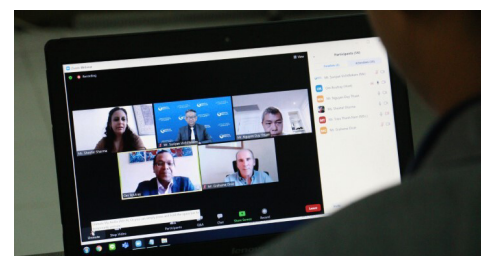
## Co-Benefits and Cooperation for Sustainable Agricultural Development

In support of World Food Day, Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director, called for deeper multi-country cooperation, broader public-private partnerships, and a more integrated policy framework to advance agricultural development in the Mekong region at a webinar hosted by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation and Pakistan Basmati Heritage Foundation on October 16, 2020. [Read more.](#)



## Digital Technology Can Scale Up Agricultural Development

Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director, was one of four speakers at a webinar on “Impacts of Digital Technologies on Food Trade in Southeast Asia” on October 7, 2020. Hosted by Source Trace and the International Rice Research Institute, Mr. Suriyan underscored the need to support digitalized trade facilitation of agri-food products to reduce trade barriers, lower transaction costs, and foster efficiency along the supply chains. [Read more.](#)



## MI and Think Tanks Call for Joint Recovery Efforts

Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, MI Executive Director, was one of several representatives who presented ways forward in deepening regional connectivity and economic integration through the Belt and Road Initiative at the SiLKS Road Think Tank Annual Meeting on September 29, 2020. With the common objective of enhancing policy consultations, information sharing, and regional coordination mechanisms, Mr. Suriyan highlighted the vital role of the GMS in deepening linkages in areas of mutual interest such as trade facilitation, transport, energy, green economy, and communications for sustainable and people-centered development. [Read more.](#)



## MI and Partners Launched R&D on Connective Energy Systems

MI, China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd., Yunnan Grid Co., Ltd., and other partners kicked off the “Key Technologies Research and Demonstration Application of Smart City Energy Network Cooperative Management and Operation Optimization Over One Belt One Road Countries” project last September 29, 2020. Set to run from 2020 to 2023, the project will deliver joint research, development, and demonstration activities to help integrate energy consumption and maximize energy potentials in the Belt and Road countries. [Read more.](#)

## ROK-MI Renew Partnership

MI and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea formalized their partnership at the virtual memorandum of understanding signing last September 28, 2020. This will see MI extend its role and position as MKCF’s fund manager and implementing agency from 2020 to 2025. Beginning in 2013, MI has been overseeing the implementation of 20 projects and providing technical support to Project Implementing Agencies in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and 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, trade and business. To date, seven projects were successfully completed and 13 more are in different stages of implementation. [Read more.](#)



## PROSAFE Food Safety Forums Pooled Coping Strategies and Promoted Public-Private Collaboration

MI rolled out four Food Safety Forums in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam to identify concrete approaches in addressing food enterprises’ strengths, fragilities, and opportunities to build back better a more sustainable and inclusive food processing industry in the time of COVID-19. Targeted towards government leaders, food enterprises, agri-food sector, food service industry representatives, the blended onsite and online forums were organized to present collaborative and proactive steps in increasing food production outputs, adapting better business e-strategies, and strengthening health protocols. Read the [Cambodia Feature 1](#) and [2](#), [Lao PDR](#), and [Vietnam stories](#).



## Diversification and Digitization Keys to SME Resilience

Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta, MI’s Director of Trade and Investment Facilitation, was one of four speakers who presented ways forward in strengthening the resilience of SMEs against a COVID-19 landscape at a webinar on “Supporting SME Internationalization in the New Normal” last September 15, 2020. Organized by ADB, Mr. Dutta highlighted the need to help SMEs access new markets in the region and tap on digitization practices as safeguards against risk of loss and to protect return of investments. [Read more.](#)



## Bridging the Gender Gap for Inclusive Growth Recovery

MI, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam, as well as with support from KOICA rolled out the “Market Access Through E-Commerce Promotion for Women-Led SMEs” project to help women entrepreneurs increase income and employment opportunities of women-led enterprises in the GMS through capacity building activities and research studies. Access the reports [here](#) and [here](#).



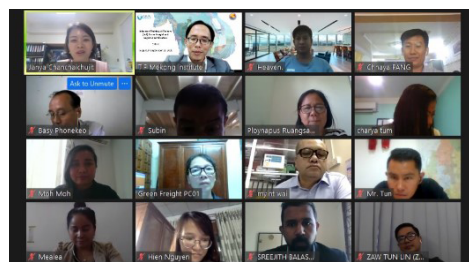
## MI and Partners Strategize Tourism Recovery

Under MKCF, project partners of the “Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region” project rolled out e-trainings to present proactive measures that will support tourism recovery and deepen collaboration between Mekong region countries and the Republic of Korea. In addition, a concluded photo and blog contest awarded GMS nationals who highlighted unique tourism attractions, practices, and potentials in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam across the categories of ecology, history, healing, food, and culture. Read the features [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).



## Innovative Green Freight and Logistics Training Highlighted Sustainable Development

MI rolled out the “Advanced Training of Trainers on Green Freight and Logistics Certification” training from August 24 to September 11, 2020. Supported by MKCF, 19 participants completed the online training to better promote efficient and environment-friendly freight and logistics practices in the Mekong region. [Read more.](#)



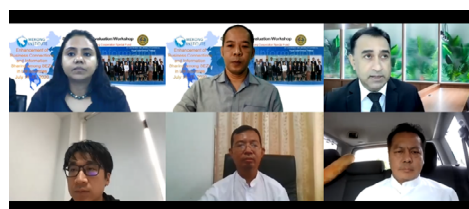
## MI Appoints New Executive Director

Mr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn was appointed MI’s Executive Director beginning on September 1, 2020. Recognized as a respected development leader and regional integration advocate, he holds over 15 years of experience in delivering innovative approaches and sustainable practices across his specialized areas of agriculture and rural development, public-private partnerships, and trade facilitation in the GMS and Southeast Asia. Mr. Suriyan assumed the reigns from Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, who served as MI chief from 2014 to 2020. [Read more.](#)



## Advancing SEZ Management through Information-Sharing and Business Linkages

To enhance regional coordination in the management and promotion of special economic zones (SEZs) across Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, MI completed a synthesis and evaluation e-workshop on the “Enhancement of Business Connections and Information-Sharing Among SEZs in Lancang-Mekong Countries” and an e-training course on “Measures for the Management and Promotion of SEZs” from July 14 to 17, 2020 and August 10 to 21, 2020, respectively. Both activities underscored the value of sharing SEZ information, company profiles, regulations, and products to help widen Lancang-Mekong countries’ networks with international investors, improve value chain linkages, modernize production bases, and create better livelihood for people. Access the reports [here](#) and [here](#).



## MI, BRRI, and SFIEC Partner to Advance Regional Cooperation

To contribute to the advancement of regional cooperation, MI, the Belt and Road Research Institute for International Cooperation and Development, and the Shenzhen Foundation for International Exchange and Cooperation have partnered the roll out field missions, information exchanges, and research studies for Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand nationals to broaden their understanding of the merits of cooperation mechanisms. [Read more.](#)



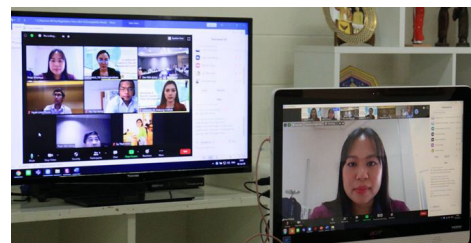
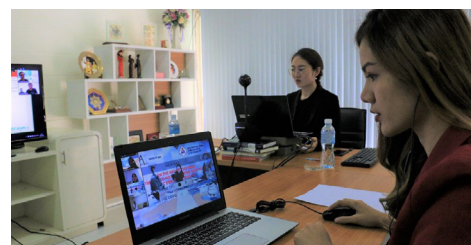
## MI, KKCOG, and KKFTI hosted 2020 Khon Kaen Web Forum to Revitalize Local Economies

MI with the Khon Kaen Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Thai Industries, Khon Kaen Chapter, hosted the first e-web forum on July 21, 2020. Under the theme “*Navigating New Norms: Revitalizing Economic Engines Amidst COVID-19*,” Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Consul General Liao Junyun, Mr. Kamolpong Sanguantrakul, and several high-ranking experts in economics, tourism, and agriculture presented ways forward in revitalizing the industrial supply chain, forming smart cities, and introducing innovative agricultural value chains and products to help spur sectoral economies in Khon Kaen Province amidst a COVID-19 landscape. The online forum was viewed by over 3,000 people across the GMS. [Read more.](#)



## MI Supports Rural E-Commerce Policy Development

After six rounds of the “*Rural E-Commerce Policy Development*” e-workshop from July 1 to 10, 2020, MI collated diverse feedback from 60 government and private sector representatives from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to help produce a comprehensive rural e-commerce policy framework for the benefit of entrepreneurs. Findings from the activity range from the (a) formation of a rural e-commerce advisory council; (b) creation of an enabling environment by regulating e-commerce activities, fostering fair competition, investing in rural infrastructure development, and providing capacity-building support for rural communities; (c) roll out of market-driven product and service development; (d) promotion of public-private partnerships, and (d) institutionalizing rural e-commerce development within the framework of Sustainable Development Goal 12 Responsible Consumption and Production. [Read more.](#)



## MI Expanded Services to Digital Platforms

In response to capacity building needs of GMS governments, business groups, the academe, and the private sector during the COVID-19 pandemic, MI shifted to online trainings and activities—a historic first in MI’s 24-year history. From July to December 2020, it rolled out e-trainings, e-workshops, and e-forums, covering the areas of e-commerce, trade competitiveness, SEZ management, food safety, labor migration, and digital connectivity. These activities were supported by LMCSF, MKCF, KOICA, the Government of P.R. China, and NZAP, among others. [Read more.](#)



## MI Official Speaks at 8<sup>th</sup> Mekong-ROK Business Forum

Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta, MI Director of Trade and Investment Facilitation, was one of several panel speakers of the 8<sup>th</sup> Mekong-ROK Business Forum via digital platform. Mr. Dutta underscored the value of public-private partnerships and capacity building initiatives of SMEs to facilitate the smooth and sustainable recovery of economies in the region. [Read more.](#)



For more MI news features, please visit [www.mekonginstitute.org](http://www.mekonginstitute.org)



“MI’s Strategic Plan encapsulates the GMS’ aspirations and commitment towards deeper connectivity, fair market competitiveness, and a greater sense of regional community.”

**Mrs. Nguyen Yen Hai**  
MI Council Chairperson  
December 17, 2020/Hanoi, Vietnam

Formulated through an extensive consultative process involving a wide range of GMS representatives, the Strategic Plan lays the foundation in deepening regional cooperation and integration through targeted capacity building, dialogue, and advocacy services to contribute towards socioeconomic growth and poverty alleviation.



“PROSAFE forums help us share government’s progress in stabilizing food supply chains, which can be built on by the business and private sectors for more holistic and long-term transformation.”

**Dr. Heng Bunkiet**  
Director of the Department of Drug and Food  
Ministry of Health  
November 25, 2020/Phnom Penh, Cambodia

In 2020, MI convened government leaders, food enterprises, agri-food sector, food service industry representatives in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam through its food safety forums. The hybrid activities presented collaborative and proactive steps in increasing food production outputs, adapting better business e-strategies, and strengthening health protocols.



“Representatives of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mekong-ROK Foreign Ministers’ Meeting extended their appreciation of MI’s contributions in deepening Mekong-ROK cooperation.”

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

MI extends its role and position as MKCF’s fund manager and implementing agency from 2020 to 2025. Beginning in 2013, MI has been overseeing the implementation of 20 projects and providing technical support to Project Implementing Agencies in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, and ROK. To date, seven projects were successfully completed and 13 more are in different stages of implementation.



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

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

Beginning in July 2020, over 100 e-training participants have spoken highly of MI’s expert resource persons, online facilities, and digital services, particularly the one-on-one guidance provided by MI facilitators to each representative from the Mekong region.

