



Turnarounds and Takeoffs:
Speeding Up Competitiveness
and Connectivity in the GMS

PROCEEDINGS



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The early 2000s saw the rise of the economies in Southeast Asia, moving up countries like Thailand from being a low middle income to an upper middle income economy, and bringing in a host of technical and financial aid to countries like Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam. Yet dynamic changes taking place across the globe demand a growth pace that is faster than usual. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, for instance, brings with it the transformation of systems, promising immense improvements in efficiency but at the same time, demands people and organizations to readily adapt technologies.

There is heavy challenge on the countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) to be agile and ready to compete. Breakthrough technologies that will build up the competitiveness of industries are needed in order for economies in the region to successfully compete with advanced economies offering high-skilled innovation. The development of human resource capacities in the region is critical to address issues of skills mismatch.

It is against such backdrop that Mekong Forum 2018, with its theme, “*Turnarounds and Takeoffs: Speeding Up Competitiveness and Connectivity in the GMS*”, was organized. The Forum aimed to organize a more coherent understanding of the factors and conditions that limit the GMS’s growth momentum; explore ideas by which innovation can strengthen competitiveness; and deliberate on how countries in the region and beyond can better come together under the banner of development cooperation to improve connectivity and work toward a common direction of regional prosperity.

This year’s Forum brought in some 270 participants from government agencies in the GMS, the academe, business and civil society and development agencies working in and outside the region. This annual gathering of opinion leaders and development experts and practitioners featured two keynote speeches, a special address, and 14 presentations organized along the Forum’s three sessions: **Session 1 – Examining the Growth Momentum Challenges; Session 2 – Scaling Up Competitiveness with Innovation; and Session 3 – Harnessing Development Cooperation for Stronger Connectivity.**

Speakers brought attention to the potentials and benefits that can be obtained from technologies such as Internet of Things and the AI economy, and at the same time, underscored the critical factors and conditions that can propel economic growth and advancement. These include creation of strategic policies that will support the creation of an enabling environment for innovation to prosper; leveraging on frameworks of collaboration to streamline initiatives; and increasing investments that will strengthen infrastructure for connectivity and build human resource capacities. Discussions also brought to light the importance of integrating environmental development in the broad goal of regional growth. Disaster risks and climate change adaptation must be highlighted as part of the pursuit of inclusive development.

Intergovernmental agencies such as MI play a pivotal role in bringing together multiple stakeholders from the GMS countries. By offering key stakeholders with a platform for collaboration and cooperation, the regional goals of economic advancement and sustainable and inclusive growth can be realized.

ACRONYMS

ACMECS	Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEC	ASEAN Economic Community
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CBTA	Cross-border Trade Agreement
CLMV	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam
CSEZs	Cross-border Special Economic Zones
EEC	Eastern Economic Corridor
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-region
ICT	Information, communication and technology
IoT	Internet of Things
MI	Mekong Institute
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium enterprises
ODA	Official development assistance
ODI	Open Development Initiative
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
R&D	Research and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEZs	Special Economic Zones
SME	Small and medium enterprises
STI	Science, Technology and Innovation
TCEB	Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau





OPENING

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS, KEYNOTE SPEECHES

WELCOME REMARKS

Dr. Watcharas Leelawath
Executive Director, Mekong Institute



Mrs. Suphatra Srimaitreephithak, Chair of the MI Council; Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chair of the MI Steering Committee; His Excellency Mr. Zhang Guohua, Vice Governor of Yunnan Province, P.R. China; Mr. Kensuke Tanaka of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), our distinguished speakers, development partners and friends and colleagues in the GMS and beyond, good morning to all of you.

It is my honor to welcome you to Khon Kaen and to Mekong Forum 2018. Today's event is a landmark initiative of Mekong Institute since we first began hosting it in 2011. Over the years, Mekong Forum has become a major occasion and event for development actors in the Greater Mekong Sub-region to come together, exchange ideas and insights, and arrive at collective decisions geared toward achieving the development goals and aspirations of the people in this region.

Beyond being an avenue for discussions and networking, Mekong Forum is MI's "ear" – a way for us to listen to what the collective voice of our stakeholders in the GMS are saying, and use these to help us in crafting more strategic programs, in designing capacity building initiatives that truly respond to the needs of the GMS people, and in fostering dialogues with our development partners.

Cognizant of the heightened emphasis on the role of innovation in today's dynamic world, it is only timely and proper to bring the discussion on this subject right on the doorstep of us who live in the GMS. Our theme for this year's Mekong Forum – *Turnarounds and Takeoffs: Speeding Up Competitiveness and Connectivity in the GMS* – is grounded on the premise that innovation, hand in hand with cooperation and collaboration, can drive competitiveness and foster increased connectivity among people and communities, and in turn, drive forward a faster growth momentum and development for us in the region.

We in the GMS have enjoyed steady growth compared to decades past. Yet, as the rest of the world continues to transform and evolve, we cannot also remain complacent. The challenge to be competitive remains high, the call to leverage on technology to design innovative and out-of-the box solutions and drive efficiency in our processes remains strong. Most of all, the need to foster increased connectivity and strengthen our collaborations is ever present.

The discussions today will strive to answer how we can respond to these challenges and needs. It is my hope that we come away from today's event with a more coherent understanding of what others are already doing out there and more importantly, of what else we can do. Hopefully, we will derive ideas and insights on how we can better work together and strengthen our development partnerships and cooperation in the region.

This event in itself is a testament of collaboration among partners, and so I wish to extend my most sincere appreciation to our co-organizers of this year's Mekong Forum:

- Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau (TCEB)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- Open Development Initiative (ODI)
- Thai Smile Airways; and
- Tourism Authority of Thailand.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to our keynote and special address speakers – Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, His Excellency Mr. Zhang Guohua and Mr Kensuke Tanaka – as well as to all our session speakers and moderators. We want to thank all of you today for making the time to join us in this event – your attendance and your insights are what make every Mekong Forum a success.

Thank you very much, and I wish us all productive and meaningful discussions.

OPENING REMARKS

Mrs. Suphatra Srimaitreephithak
Chairman, Mekong Institute Council



Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of the Mekong Institute Steering Committee; Dr. Somsak Jungtrakoon, the Governor of Khon Kaen Province; Mr. Zhang Guohua, the Vice Governor of Yunnan Province; excellency, distinguished speakers and guests; colleagues; partners in development, a pleasant morning to you all.

On behalf of Mekong Institute and their partners, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to Mekong Forum 2018. I am very honored to stand here as the Chair of the Mekong Institute Council and in another capacity as the Director General of Thailand International Cooperation Agency or TICA. TICA is one of the institutes instrumental in Mekong Institute's mission. MI and TICA are partners in development, sharing common goals, and complementing each other.

Mekong Forum is the annual gathering of leaders and development professionals and experts, serving as a milestone event of Mekong Institute. The gathering has steadily drawn a large crowd for the past few years not just because of the intense networking potential it presents but because it has continued to usher an avenue for an exchange of views on relevant and stimulating topics.

This year's theme 'Turnarounds and Takeoffs,' is one that resonates very well with us who work in the development sector. The dynamic nature of our world today puts technology at the forefront, mostly a challenge to be more innovative in the way we do things. As actors in the development agenda, we are asked: *What out-of-the-box solutions can we offer to achieve the objective of social and economic growth?* So, we are going to find the answer today together.

Concurrent to this, is the call for us all to further synergize and harmonize our efforts. The value of cooperation cannot be discounted. In fact, we already have a number of cooperation dialogues on which we can anchor our efforts.

One of these is the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy or ACMECS. It was created in 2003 on the partnerships of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. The ACMECS builds on our bilateral and regional cooperation programs. We are committed to bring about broader social progress aligned along these goals: to promote complementarity and collaboration rather than competition; seamless ACMECS to develop our transportation and infrastructure links; next is synchronized ACMECS Economies to harmonize trade and investment and encourage financial cooperation; and lastly,

smart and sustainable ACMECS to develop our human resource capacities and promote the use of technology.

This year, in fact, Thailand has proposed the ACMECS Fund as a financing mechanism to enable the realization of our cooperation projects under this strategy. Besides ACMECS, we also have other cooperation frameworks that also offer immense potentials and opportunities. Among these are the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation framework, the Mekong-Japan Cooperation, the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation, the Lower Mekong Initiative, the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation, and the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program.

All of these frameworks put the Mekong region and its development at the center. There is a challenge for us to coordinate to make these frameworks coherent toward complementarity, and not duplicity.

Today's event promises to expound on how we can work together and harness our innovation spirit to fast track regional growth and development. With your active participation and presentations, we hope to bring home a wealth of ideas, experiences and promising collaborations. Indeed, this occasion is an excellent opportunity to enhance our networks, but also more importantly, explore ways by which we can work more closely with each other and deliver collective leadership and action.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Executive Director Dr. Watcharas and the Mekong Institute team. Their diligent work and tireless commitment to make this gathering possible is greatly appreciated.

Last but not the least, I would like to express sincere gratitude to all of you who have come to join us at the sixth Mekong Forum today. We are all partners in development, whether you are from the GMS countries, from other countries in Asia or other parts of the globe.

Our discussion today will bring us solid ideas and creative approaches to how we can speed up and propel to greater heights the development of the GMS. There is a saying that I like very much, and it is very well-known among the development partners. It says: *"If you want to go fast, walk alone. But if you want to go far, walk together."*

Thank you very much.

OPENING REMARKS

Mr. Salanroj Sutaschuto

*Director, Domestic MIC Department
Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau*



Good morning.

Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Chairman of the MI Steering Committee; Mr. Zhang Guohua, Vice Governor of Yunnan Province; Mrs. Suphatra Srimaitreephithak, Chairman of MI Council and Director General of Thailand International Cooperation Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Mr. Somsak Jungtrakoon, Governor of Khon Kaen Province; members of the press; ladies and gentlemen.

We at the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau are again playing a supporting role in the Mekong Forum for the second year now. Although the Bureau's core responsibility is to make Thailand a global meeting and exhibition destination, we also do not forget to focus on the activities that will help country development.

The Mekong Forum is a great chance for Khon Kaen, one of the fast regional centers of meeting and exhibition destinations that we support at the Convention Bureau. Our support is part of our commitment to promote the East-West Economic Corridor and the Thailand 4.0 Development Strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I think we all realize that this year's Forum takes place at a very crucial time. While recognizing the potentials of our region, we also see more uncertainties arising around the world that affect us. With the number of experts from inside and outside of the GMS sharing their insights in this Forum, I believe that the Mekong countries will be in a good place.

I would like to thank you all for your participation.

KEYNOTE SPEECH 1

Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee

Chairman, Mekong Institute Steering Committee
Former Minister of Energy and Minister of Commerce,
Thailand



Turnarounds and Takeoffs: Speeding Up Competitiveness and Connectivity in the GMS

Good morning to all of you. I am very pleased to be here again.

The Mekong Forum this year is about a new development paradigm. It is about innovation, as the title says. I think all of us agree that the subject is appropriate but the timing is somewhat unfortunate because it is taking place just 10 days after the dam disaster in Lao PDR. I was saddened – I think all of us were by the incident, and some may question the relevance of this year’s subject, whether it is too much or too far.

My view is that, the incident raises the question about the natural resource-driven strategy as practiced by resource-rich countries. If we believe that innovation-driven growth strategy is an alternative, then we should pay even more attention to the subject of this year’s forum and question that development model of natural resource-driven growth strategy.

So the title of this year’s Mekong Forum “Turnarounds and Takeoffs: Speeding Up Competitiveness and Connectivity in the GMS” is most appropriate based on that innovation-driven growth strategy. I say this because I think 2018 is a crucial year, the year that we see the real direction of changes – how each country, GMS countries included, manages the changes to determine the future wellbeing of the country and its people.

The title suggests that the GMS countries should aim at taking off and should do that by enhancing competitiveness and connectivity. This may be considered as a new takeoff because in the last decade and a half, the GMS countries have had a certain degree of takeoff. During the last 17 years, the GDP of all our countries increased many times. Thailand’s GDP did not increase much because we were bigger than the others at the beginning of this period.

But why do we have this thought?

GMS Economy



I have seen continuous changes in the economic development of all Asian countries based on the western way of industrialization. How an economy performs depends on how the country adopts and adapts industrialization. Even the rapid technological development in digital technology since 1990s has been considered a part of industrialization.

But now things are not the same anymore.

The world is experiencing technological changes in the form referred to as disruptive technologies, technologies that allow us to do a new way of old things and to create new things. When we talk about automation, it was actually Industry 3.0. Now we’re talking about Thailand 4.0, Industry 4.0. What this means are the Internet of Things and AI economy – these are the latest developments.

Examples of these are numerous: photo-taking; movie and video viewing in different ways; music listening; goods and services shopping; transportation services such as Uber and Grab; accommodation using AirBnb; office and space working goes with auto-piloting; renewable energy production, etc.

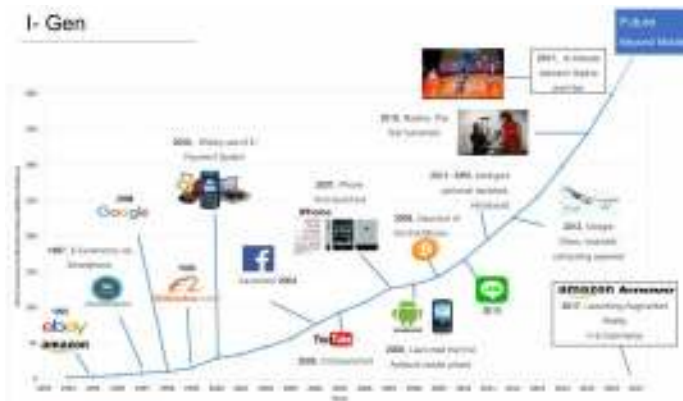
The disruptive technologies have come about because of two very important developments: exponential growth of computer power for data storage; and the invention of smartphones. Now unlimited amount of data could be stored without any server. You can rely on the cloud and data analytics. The introduction of iPhone has enhanced the accessibility and creation of data, thus the development of big data.

Because of the invention of iPhones, smartphones create data. Wherever you go, they know where you are. Machines can now learn and sense and feel and act more and more by themselves. It is a union of man and machine - the creation of humanoid from human and android and cyborg, from cyber and organism. This process is referred to as singularity.

Machines and devices have become more and more intelligent, capable of doing and sensing. This is referred to as artificial intelligence - AI. It can also mean augmented intelligence, when man is equipped with machine and devices. Thus, what we have is a world that has entered AI economy.

So what does this all mean for mankind in the GMS? Are we going to be taken over by machines?

I-Gen



The evidences have already shown that disruptive technologies have had a real cost reduction effect. Goods and services can be made more available, affordable, and also acceptable. It is an ongoing process of dematerialization, demonetization, and democratization. You use less material, you use less money, and it is available to anybody.

As we are all aiming for the Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs, we should now consider seriously and constructively the power of disruptive technology. We should turn around and look at our development with the perspective of these technologies and to consider the potential of a takeoff or another takeoff.

How do we attempt at taking off?

A New Take-off

This forum makes two propositions about taking off: connectivity and competitiveness. In the area of connectivity, we have been working over the last decade on the hardware and software size, emphasizing physical and institutional aspects of connectivity. We should continue to do that. We, then, should emphasize two



very important infrastructures for the new economy – digital infrastructure and energy infrastructure.

We need digital infrastructure because it is basic to AI economy, and energy infrastructure is entering a period of real revolution. Now, we can invest in solar energy for one megawatt costing less than coal or gas power. It is everywhere now. And the cost of wind power, though not as fast as solar, is also coming down. Solar should be the source of power – that is what nature gave us.

Competitiveness is about how people and enterprises perform in the marketplace. The country's competitiveness ranking is the result of that performance. In the AI economy, competitiveness is determined by the adoption and progressive invention of AI. China

Smart Undertakings



has demonstrated this very well. Other GMS countries are also entering the era of AI economy at different degrees.

The AI economy involves human resource development and the appreciation of modern disruptive technologies. The aim is to make human resources and their undertakings smart, meaning, capable of doing things and solving problems using AI. These are examples of smart undertakings: smart entrepreneurs, SMEs and start-ups, smart agriculture, smart tourism; smart medical services, smart education, smart cities, smart security.

The endless applications of AI technology make our living very smart, and these smart undertakings should be subject to the country's potential.

Among the GMS countries, Thailand is facing the transition cost of moving from industrial economy to AI economy. This is very difficult for us because not only do we have to learn but also to unlearn and then to relearn, which has shown to be a very challenging task.

A classic case is the radio frequency. We have treated the use of it as luxury, meaning that we have to charge commission fee. This is how we have treated frequency in the past. When you do that, the concessionaire translates the fee into our fee. This is also market capitalism. But in the AI economy, frequency should be treated as utility so whoever charges the lowest price gets concession. So now, we are witnessing the collapse, bankruptcy of media companies, television, who have been given licenses at high cost. So for us in order to really move in this AI economy, considering it as a means of new taking off, we should consider this regulatory regime.

Programs and activities at MI are now moving toward the application of modern and disruptive technology. So, MI is ready to work with the GMS countries in the development of human resources to be capable of making the best use of AI to help the countries develop the AI economy.

The takeaways that I would like you to consider. First, commit yourself to solar power. This is definitely going to be the best source of power generation. Second, with this power, you can use it to power AI economy. If we do the regulatory regime for AI economy properly, we can do this new takeoff. We turn around to look at these things, and use them for our taking off.

Thank you very much for your attention, ladies and gentlemen.

KEYNOTE SPEECH 2

H.E. Mr. Zhang Guohua

Vice Governor, The People's Government of Yunnan Province, P.R. China



Enhancing Regional Competitiveness for a Bright Future

Your excellency Mr. Somsak Juntrakoon, Governor of Khon Kaen
Members of Mekong Institute Council

Ladies and gentlemen

Friends,

Good morning.

It is my great pleasure to join you here in this beautiful, attractive and vibrant province of Khon Kaen in the 2018 Mekong Forum. On behalf of the delegation of Yunnan Provincial Government, I would like to express my warm congratulations on the convening of the forum, and my sincere thanks goes to the Mekong Institute for your thoughtful preparations and arrangements for this forum.

Nurtured by the same river and blessed with affinity and complementary economies, our six Lancang-Mekong countries are good neighbors, good friends and good partners in the most dynamic region in Asia and beyond. Over the years, China and its partners in Mekong region have followed the global trend of peaceful development and cooperation for win-win situation. Our cooperation is action-driven like a bulldozer instead of simply talking the talk. We make full use of the platforms built for regional cooperation and roll up our sleeves to carry out projects.

We have translated consensus into concrete actions to continue our efforts to deepen mutually-beneficial cooperation. By doing these, our cooperation has generated fruitful results, strengthened all countries' competitiveness and made contribution for peace, prosperity and stable development in the region.

Ladies, gentlemen and friends, it is recognized that all governments of Lancang-Mekong region have attached great importance to improving national competitiveness and taken positive measures. The Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018 by the World Economic Forum shows that Lancang-Mekong countries moved up in competitiveness ranking but the positions are still behind.

We commonly face the challenges that supply of the infrastructure especially the critical ones are insufficient. The high-quality and high-skilled labor is inadequate. Innovation transforming rate is still low and government efficiency and performance need to be improved. The forum this year is themed "Turnarounds and Takeoffs: Speeding up Competitiveness and Connectivity in the GMS" and it finds the bottlenecks to be tackled by the Lancang Mekong countries in their development.

In this connection, I would like to propose four recommendations for your reference.

- **Firstly, open development to improve the quality of economy.** Chinese President Xi Jinping declared to the world that China would never shut its door of opening. On the contrary, China

opening up will go deeper. In recent years, Lancang-Mekong countries have realized a rapid economic growth by implementing opening-up policy. In an increasingly fierce environment of global competition, and Belt and Road initiative gathering momentum, we should stick to open development, improve the capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship, and inject vitality into the market to make a larger cake of common interest and improve the quality of economy.

- **Secondly, synchronized development to lift the level of our connectivity.**

Empirical evidence has shown that connectivity should be always the priority area of cooperation. We should continue to strengthen coordination and cooperation, and pay more attention to improve the institutional environment to enable acceleration of regional comprehensive transport infrastructure development. We should work together to implement the MOU of Early Harvest of the GMS Cross-Border Transport Agreement (CBTA), so as to promote factors flowing in a more efficient and convenient manner.

- **Thirdly, innovative development to stimulate the human resource development.**

As the only intergovernmental human resources development and training organization in the region, Mekong Institute satisfies the demand of regional cooperation projects' execution. We should work together to invest more resources to build MI into a stronger and more capable platform to guarantee intellectual support for regional economic integration.

- **Fourthly, inclusive development for promoting regional win-win cooperation.**

Over the past years, the Lancang-Mekong countries have engaged in the exploration of inclusive development and reached a lot of consensus. We should integrate the ideal of inclusive development into regional cooperation to accelerate the economic integration and expand areas for cooperation, consolidate friendship and enhance mutual trust. Our hope is that every people have the chance to embrace opportunity. The fruits will be enjoyed and benefited to a wider range of people in the region.

The greater development of the six Lancang-Mekong countries requires us to put concrete actions. Let us continue to uphold the spirit of openness, inclusiveness and harmonious development to be committed on the path of regional cooperation, improving our competitiveness and connectivity and writing a new chapter of building a community of shared future for Lancang-Mekong countries.

Finally, I wish the Mekong Forum a complete success. Wish all of you good health and best of everything!

Thank you.

SPECIAL ADDRESS

Mr. Kensuke Tanaka

Head of Asia Desk, OECD Development Centre



Growth Outlook Dynamism in Mekong Region

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and distinguished guests.

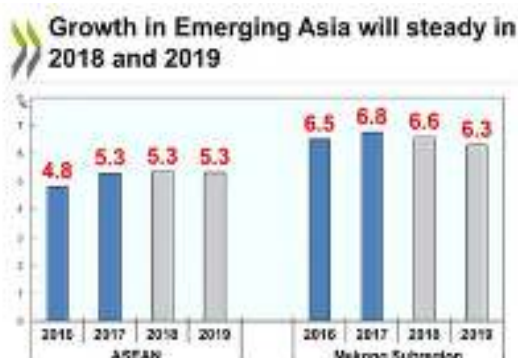
Firstly, I would like to thank the Mekong Institute in particular Executive Director Dr. Watcharas for this excellent opportunity. We are pleased to share our views in today's event. The OECD is a policy-based international organization that provides policy analysis suggestions to policymakers. I hope our insights and views will serve as a good base and background for the discussions today.

My presentation is based on our regional economic outlook called *The Economic Outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India*. We produce this economic outlook twice a year and this was actually released two weeks ago in Paris so in this sense, we are happy to provide fresh information today.

I would like to touch on two issues. One is on economic outlook and risks, especially economic strengths. Then, I would also like to touch on key policy challenges especially focusing on competitiveness and connectivity particularly the structure of policy. I would like to touch on infrastructure, FDI, human capital, energy, digitalization, innovation, SME, agriculture, and tourism. I think these are key elements for growth in the region.

Growth Rate

We think that the growth in the region will be steady this year and next year. But in terms of the growth momentum of the Mekong Region, including China, growth rate is even stronger at 6.6 percent this year and 6.3 percent next year. In other regions, the growth momentum is much slower, so I would say that emerging Asia especially the Mekong region is still an engine of growth.



Among the ASEAN-5 economies, we think that Vietnam will lead the growth in the region at 6.9 percent this year and 6.6 percent next year. Private consumption and the businesses in Vietnam contribute to growth, while for Thailand, we think that growth will reach 4.0 percent, thanks to the consumption and export. When it comes to the CLM countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar), growth is going to be even stronger. It is 7 percent this year and next year, mainly due to the infrastructure and construction activity, and to some extent tourism and some country FDI. For China, the growth momentum is also stronger -- 6.7 percent this year. Household consumption is strong, that is the big picture we think for the region.

Engines of Growth

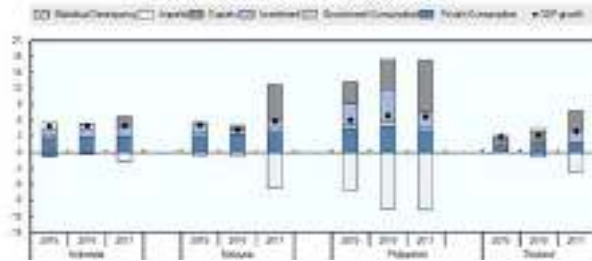
When you ask the growth momentum and growth model in the late 80s and 90s, most of the emerging Asian countries consider the export of goods. But now, the engine of growth is slightly changing to the domestic demand. Investment and private consumption are steady. Export is still an important element of growth but is somehow weakening recently. This is due, to some extent, to the tension or tariff increase that hurt the business arrangements in emerging Asia.

Some of the optimism in capital markets has also softened. Mekong region countries recorded negative increases of the stock market. If you look at other indicators like credit transfer, we can slightly see that the level is relatively low but we see some of the increasing trend. When it comes to inflation trend, overall the region is facing increasing inflation. This is due to the increase of oil prices and some key commodities. But at the moment the level of the increase for some countries is relatively high so some countries in the region need to be carefully monitored.

In terms of monetary stance, last year most of the Southeast Asian countries had relatively low interest rate. Now most of the countries are on an interest rate hike stance. This is, to some extent, related to the inflation pressure and also the domestic reasons that have strengthened the growth momentum. The interesting situation now is that most of the emerging countries are in an interest rate hike stance while at the same time, providing liquidity to the market. In the case of the Mekong region, the situation is slightly different. The credit growth is relatively strong for some countries like Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar.

Trend 1: Domestic demand mainly drove GDP growth

Contribution to real GDP growth in selected ASEAN economies, 2015-17 Percentage points



Risks to the Outlook

- **Rising interest rates especially in the US.** As I mentioned, most of the Southeast Asian countries now face an interest rate hike while at the moment providing liquidity, while some countries are facing relatively weak amount of depreciation pressure and at the same time, increasing inflation pressure. The countries in the region are facing the challenge of how to conduct monetary policy, especially in the case of the Mekong region, with its relatively high level of dollarization, and relatively weak financial market. These are the moments that need healthy monitors.
- **Infrastructure implementation.** 10 years ago, the gap between plan and implementation was huge and this affected the negative impact of the growth. Now, the difference between emerging Asian countries is very close. Infrastructure is one of the upside risks.
- **Trade.** Some of the uncertainties in the market related to the trade tensions and the interest rate hike, the tariff hike of some of the countries, affect the relatively weak business situation. However since the region still has 5-6 percent growth, they can make use of this strong domestic growth momentum to strengthen export.

Policy Challenges on Competitiveness and Connectivity

- **Infrastructure.** Infrastructure is one of the causes of the growth momentum in the region. The challenge will be two elements. First is access. Some of the Mekong countries are relatively lower in terms of access to water, road and electricity.

In terms of the policy, there is a need for more comprehensive perspective on infrastructure. In the past, some of the projects were accessed mainly by the financial feasibility, but the countries in the region need a more focused perspective on the external factors or external externalities, social and environment impacts as well.

Another point is infrastructure financing. In general, the region has broadened its financing option. For instance, there are plenty of ways to introduce new tax system for the infrastructure financing. The market-based infrastructure, for instance, infrastructure bond amount is

increasing, but compared with EU and OECD economies, the amount is still very limited. In general, broadening financing option is still important in the region.

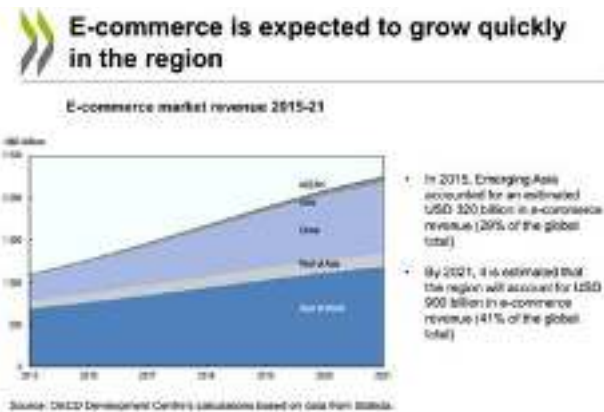
Next point I want to touch on is the building up of the local government capacity to implement the infrastructure investment. In the case of Vietnam, there is a huge disparity in terms of the access in the transportation infrastructure in the urban area and rural area. A similar kind of situation is also happening in most Mekong region countries. How to strengthen the capacity of the local government to implement the infrastructure including the responsibility is another challenge.

The importance of well-coordinated development strategies and infrastructure plan must also be pointed out. Most of the Mekong region and the Southeast Asian countries have a so-called “idea plan” or “five-year or medium term plan” but the infrastructure plan is sometimes not very coordinated with the national medium-term plan, therefore there are infrastructure projects that are conducted in an inefficient way. I think this set of coordination between the development strategy and infrastructure would be also an important element for the infrastructure to be more effective.

- **Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).** In general, FDI is very strong in most of the emerging Asian countries especially in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar. But when it comes to the FDI regulatory environment, most of the emerging Asian countries are still relatively higher compared to the OECD average so the countries in the region still have a lot of room to attract more FDI.
- **Human capital development.** In terms of access to education, Mekong region countries achieved quite well in the last 10-20 years but the next challenge is the quality of education. Compared with OECD average, ASEAN countries are lagging behind especially in science and mathematics, subjects that teach important skills for skilled laborers. In the education system, the quality of curriculum and teacher education needs to be strengthened.
- **Renewable energy.** Most of the renewable energy is basic hydropower, and in some countries, solar, wind and other renewable energy sources are quite untouched. There is a lot of room to strengthen the renewable energy especially in terms of solar and wind. Likewise, the Mekong region still has a lot of room to strengthen to invite the green field FDI for further growth momentum. At the same time, the policymakers should also broaden the policy option to encourage renewable energy.

- **Digitalization.** Digitalization has increased more than double or three times in the last 15 years. But there is still a huge disparity in the region. For instance, Singapore and Malaysia are at 80-90 percent, but Lao PDR is still 20 percent. This might be a challenge in the harmonization of digitalization in the future. This means that there is a lot of room for the government to encourage digitalization.

E-commerce is widely and quickly used in the region. It is estimated that by 2021, the region will earn USD 200B in revenue, about 40 percent revenue of the global trade, so e-commerce is another important area for growth in the region. However, at the productivity level, the productivity gains vary per country. This could be related to education or the mentality of the manager. For instance, some of the managers of the firm do not allow their staff to be sent to ICT trainings, which is not a good policy in the long run. This kind of policy issues need to be discussed in the context of how to use digitalization more effectively.



A related issue is the kind of ICT to be used by firms. Broadband website is still the technology widely used, while advanced ICT like EMR, cloud or supply chain management is not. The challenge is how the firms can more effectively use the high or relatively advanced ICT. This is again related to human capital development.

- **Agriculture.** Recently employment in agriculture is relatively weakening and this may be due to the younger generation not being attracted to the agriculture sector anymore. Enhanced productivity and effective use of modern technology and digitalization can be keys for agriculture development.
- **Tourism.** Tourism is still a very important engine of growth. However the challenge of tourism in the region is that most of the countries are now focused on eco-tourism or green tourism. This is one of the good strategies but at the same time, green tourism is relatively a low value-added sector. The challenge is to enhance or increase the value-added of the tourism sector in the region.

I hope these background information will be further discussed in the following sessions of the forum.

Thank you very much.



SESSION I

EXAMINING THE GROWTH MOMENTUM CHALLENGES

The growth leap in the GMS has been substantial as compared with decades past. But in a world driven by dynamic transformations and technologies coming out at breakneck speed, there is a recognized need to speed up the growth momentum. The session explored the prevailing conditions, factors and challenges that limit GMS economies from advancing at a speed that meets the fast-changing needs of the region and the world.

Development experts from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam pointed out a number of factors that have contributed to the growth momentum in the GMS countries including designing policy initiatives to encourage investments, improving quality of higher education to address skills mismatch, and strengthening resource-based sectors, among others.

However, there remains a strong challenge among the countries in the area of infrastructure development to better enhance connectivity; and innovations in enterprises including capacitating SMEs to improve their business competitiveness and enable their integration into regional and global value chains.

Dr. Sthabandith Insisienmay
Director General
 Center for Macroeconomic Policy and
 Economic Restructuring, National Institute of
 Economic Research, Lao PDR

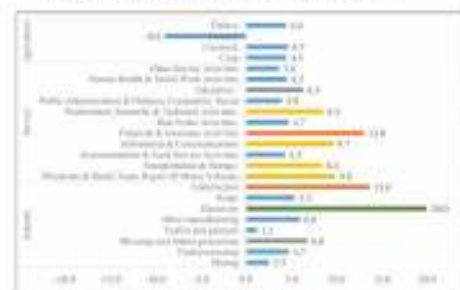


Lao PDR is a small country with a total population of 6.5 million people. Surrounded by much bigger markets, the country is strategically located in the middle of the GMS. It translates its geographical feature of being landlocked to the potential of being land-linked.

The socio-economic development of Lao PDR has notably progressed, making it among the top growing economies in the region. From being a low income country, Lao PDR advanced to being a lower-middle income country in 2011. Ultimately, it aims to further upgrade its status to a higher-middle income developing country by 2030, while equally improving its Human Development Index (HDI) by reducing poverty rates to at least half its current state. Inevitably, these long-term achievements are not without challenges.

- Between 1993 and 2013, poverty rates have declined from 46 percent to 23.2 percent but it is worth noting that many are still vulnerable to fall back into the trap. Therefore, provision of social protection is also a critical issue.
- Other issues include low level of infrastructure development; high cost of transportation; lack of strong economic resiliencies to internal and external shocks; and country's potential and advantages are not efficiently utilized, among others.

Average Growth Rate (%) by Sector during 2013-17



Socio-Economic Development Progress



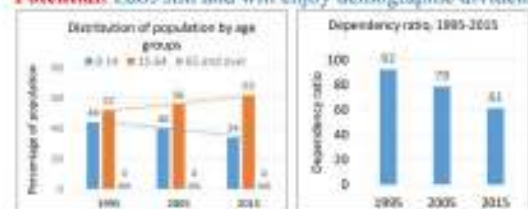
Potentials and Challenges for Future Growth

- Being in the middle of the GMS, if managed well, can lead to a potential inland logistic hub. Alternatively, it also poses a risk of limited economic growth due to lack of absorption capacities.
- Untapped potentials in the cultural and ecotourism sectors are yet to be utilized. Efficiency and sustainability require a strategic infrastructure development; good management of natural resources; and closer cooperation among neighboring countries in terms of industrial estate and township development.
- Diversifying source of growth beyond resource-based sectors and enhancing innovation and technology transfer, particularly in the agriculture sector, can help the country achieve inclusive growth.
- Focusing on human resource development is crucial for both education and skills development to enable people to adapt and utilize modern technology in fueling socio-economic growth.

Key Development Issues in Lao PDR

- Despite high growth, the economic structure in Laos remains very traditional. Around 60-70% of its population is engaged in the agricultural sector, which contributes a lesser share of GDP compared to other sectors (industry and services).
- Disparities in productivity are also observed. Lao PDR is a resource-rich country, with the energy and mining sectors sharing a bigger bulk in terms of GDP, however, very few of the population are engaged in these industries.
- Current drivers of growth are from resource-based sectors that contributed as much as 20 percent to the growth during the country's booming period in 2005-2006. However, there has been an on-going debate in terms of its sustainability.
- Exports are concentrated in primary, low value-added products (agriculture, wood, and garment); around 70 percent of exports come from the mining and electricity sectors.
- Lao is still dependent on external finance for growth – 60 percent from FDIs and roughly 15 percent from ODAs. The bulk of the FDI comes from its top three main investors, namely China, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Potential: Laos still and will enjoy demographic dividend



Challenge: How to maximize the benefit of demographic dividend
 → Human resource development is crucial both education and skill development

Dr. Tran Toan Thang

Director

Department of World Economy and Integration, National Center for Socio-Economic Information and Forecast, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vietnam



Vietnam situates itself as a bustling economy with an annual growth of 7 percent over the last decade. The growth model of Vietnam is based on resource expansion, which covers labor, technologies, privatization, and institutional capacities. A number of success stories and lessons learned are worth pointing out in the Vietnam experience.

- Vietnam has been addressing the bottleneck of skills mismatch by transforming the quality of higher education to meet the labor demands and skills standards in the country. Consequently, the matching process has demonstrated lesser time in terms of applicants trying to land a job related to their background.
- The government also implemented labor and economic reforms that enabled sound environments for business and investments. Accordingly, there has been a noticeable growth of the private sector in Vietnam.
- Vietnam is quite successful in attracting FDI, most of which are labor-intensive jobs due to the low labor costs in the country. Due to this, the country has shifted its focus from agriculture to manufacturing. Although it may be beneficial at first glance, age limit requirement is an emerging issue. Most manufacturing companies prefer to hire within the 20-35 age bracket, creating underemployment for older age brackets.
- In some instances, FDIs seem to work isolated within the economy resulting to a negative spillover effect on the domestic market (competition in terms of export and input markets). On this note, the government strategized to link FDIs and the domestic sector by means of supporting and developing local industry capacities. Such is the case with Samsung.
- Trade also serves as a key factor in Vietnam's economic development with more than 20 percent of export growth recorded in 2017. Conversely, the country's import growth is at the same rate of its exports. This raises the issue of "import to export."
- In terms of competitiveness, Vietnam faces the need to improve on infrastructure, innovation, and technological readiness. As such, the country encourages institutional reforms including business and trade reforms, FDI and domestic linkages, and private investments to further propel Vietnam's growth and development.

Dr. Pisit Puapan
 Senior Expert on Macroeconomic Policy
 Fiscal Policy Office, Thailand



Unlike its neighboring countries, Thailand's growth and development sets a different story. Despite its moderate growth over the last decade, Thailand has been growing below its potentials as reflected in its GDP. Nonetheless, the country has well-demonstrated its economic resilience amidst several crises including issue of political instability during the past year. From 4 percent growth rate in 2017, Thailand is gradually recovering with a 4.8 percent growth rate in the first quarter of 2018.



The country's economy is back on track as far as achieving its potential growth rate in the coming years. The highlights of Thailand's growth and development – where it was, is, and will be – are summarized as follows:

- Growth prospect in Thailand has been driven by trade and export (goods and services) with countries such as China and Japan. The current account is in surplus, meaning, the country exports more than it imports. In 2017, the current account surplus was 10 percent of the overall GDP.
- Tourism is another driver of growth. The service sector (hotel and restaurant industries) accounts for a considerable share of the country's GDP. The transportation sector has also been growing strong, with air transport reflected as one of the highest generators.
- The economic fundamentals of Thailand remain strong with over \$200B in national reserve. Debt is only above 40 percent of GDP compared to other advanced economies with higher debts.
- While Thailand has enjoyed low rates of inflation and unemployment, the Thai Government has also taken initiatives to ensure that growth is inclusive. For instance, the Ministry of Finance is ushering two policies: 1) to promote better income distribution throughout the country; and 2) to encourage greater investments in the country.
- Inter-ministry collaboration is also in place for social welfare programs that target low-income households. With a low-

income registration program, a database has been created to efficiently identify the poor so that the government can channel support directly to them. To date, the program is benefitting 11.4 million people in terms of subsidized transportation and household expenditures. The program also aims to upgrade their income-earning capacities by providing occupation training and job matching services.



- Thailand is challenged by the lack of infrastructure, which explains the government's major investments in this area. In terms of logistics, Thailand has established the Eastern Economic Corridor (EEC) as its flagship special economic zone. Located in Rayong, Chachengsao, and Chonburi, the government's concentrated efforts are expected to translate into results within the next five years.

The EEC's core areas are infrastructure; business, industrial clusters and innovation hub; new cities and communities; and tourism. It is expected to facilitate and attract investment in 10 targeted industries namely: food for the future, agriculture and biotech, medical and wellness tourism, smart electronics, next-generation automotive, medical hub, digital, biochemical, aviation, and robotics. These 10 targeted industries serve as a strategy to revitalize Thailand's industrial capacity and er



- Lastly, despite its fiscal capacity, the Thai government calls on the private sector's expertise and involvement in infrastructure investments and financing. Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) can leverage Thailand's growth, and eventually, facilitate connectivity throughout the region.

Dr. Htein Lynn

Director

Trade Development Division, Myanmar
Trade Promotion Organization, Ministry of
Commerce, Myanmar



Overall, most GMS countries have remained at a low level of development in terms of GDP, technology, infrastructure, financing, and human resource development compared to the ASEAN region or other parts of the world. While the GMS is faced with development challenges, the region remains up float in tapping growth potentials and opportunities.

- Among the major obstacles in the GMS is strengthening institutional quality and business competitiveness to enable deeper integration into both regional and global value chains. There is a need to initiate programs geared toward promoting regional connectivity by:
 - creating favorable conditions for cross-border trade;
 - developing logistics facilities as well as improving its procedures and management;
 - facilitating trade and investment; and
 - encouraging the private sector's participation.
- The GMS is the only region in Asia that has the most comprehensive pact on accelerating cross-border transport and has also created a regional integration window especially for CLMV. Against this backdrop, the region can translate this into opportunities that may foster deeper integration and infrastructure connectivity. To do so, GMS countries should bolster cooperation on transport and trade facilitation, agricultural exports, and tourism.
- There is a need to generate synergies and complementarities between the GMS programs and other regional and global initiatives (AEC, the Belt and Road Initiatives, Mekong-Lancang Cooperation, CLMV Cooperation, and other regional cooperation frameworks).
- All member countries have ratified the GMS CBTA, and have agreed on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the Early Harvest Implementation of CBTA, thereby allowing seamless subregional movement of commercial vehicles and containers.
- The GMS should further prioritize channeling capacities and support to MSMEs and women-led enterprises as the region's economic drivers in the coming years.



Q & A | SESSION 1

Moderator: Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta

Director of Trade & Investment Facilitation Department, Mekong Institute

Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta

The future workforce or the human resources development and the training must keep pace with the technology adoption rates. It is well understood that operating the future, manufacturing goods, as well as services will require different skillsets from that of the current workforce. What suggestions would you like to put forward to the GMS countries in identifying such skill sets and repositioning them to cater to the growing demand of the new skills for the workforce?

Second question is related to research and development (R&D). To keep pace with the level of technological change, R&D is crucial for the enterprises. But in the region, 98-99 percent is SMEs so it might be quite difficult for them to keep pace with the trend of technological change. What suggestions will you put forward to the national institutions in terms of national policies to support enterprises and for R&D institutions to cater to the needs of the growing demand?

Dr. Pisit Puapan

In terms of workforce development in Thailand, the Ministry of Finance is trying to work on this. One is by creating educational financing loan programs for the low-income groups. That is our direct responsibility in terms of educational policy in Thailand that we create educational loan programs for the low-income families.

But looking to the future, we need high technology and high knowledge workforce in the future. So, I think the issue is how we can harness the technology. The Internet has opened up the new door to learning opportunities. In Thailand we need to work to upgrade people's access to the leading university, leading technology. In the EEC, we have invited a leading university, an engineering school to set-up a campus in the area. I think this is one of the pilot projects. If the GMS can attract leading educational and research institutions to set-up their operations in our region, I think we can learn from these new institutions. So, basically, workforce of the future would need to have access to technology.

But I think the important point in Thailand, in my personal view, is the language barrier. The general population is not familiar with English or the Chinese language. These are the barriers because most of the cutting-edge knowledge are written or spoken in English. This is one of the foundations and one of the areas that we have to work on.

As for your second question on R&D, the Ministry of Finance is trying to give tax incentives for R&D, triple deduction for R&D spending by the private sector. But R&D comes after the development of the workforce. Until you have a high knowledge workforce, you cannot hope to have R&D and the commercialization of R&D.

Dr. Tran Toan Thang

There are two issues. First is the forthcoming activity of development. We all know that Industry 4.0 is coming, and Vietnam's cheap labor cost is undermined because of that and what the government does now is try to transform the economy. First, try to reform higher education, introducing different states of production rather than focusing only on manufacturing.

The second point is relating with the strategy of FDI attraction. We no longer attract whatever is coming but we focus on the economy and the companies that can generate the supporting industries because we hope that when you get the technology transfer from the flow of FDI, the strategy of FDI changes. We also have a strategy for domestic deployment that is focused on robotics or some other things related to 4.0 revolution.

But it is really challenging for Vietnam. Take the case of Uber and Grab. The government now is trying to generate the legal framework so that it makes the new generation of taxis in sync with the traditional ones, or at the very least, they do not compete or drown out the traditional ones.

As for the question about R&D, we all know that developing countries or countries like Vietnam do not expect much when it comes to R&D development particularly from the government. It seems that we fail with the investment in the R&D institution owned by the government. And we are now changing the idea where we think that R&D development can be subject to the private or the firm or business sector.

The role of the government is to provide incentives in some cases. And we know that R&D is not in the small firms, but it is not also in the very big firms because the big firms have little motivation for reform. So we try first to get the technology transfer from FDI sector and from outside, at the same time, the innovation development.



Dr. Sthabandith Insisienmay

In Lao PDR, when we talk about the skill development, you have to think about how to provide appropriate skills that are related to this era, the advancement of technology. Continuing education is the first thing that we have to do. But we have to think about the new skills that come with the new era as well. So for this, there is quite a disparity in terms of skills between countries or even within the country so one policy that we can encourage is to promote the technological transfer because many developing countries are trying to attract FDI but we know that we are not quite successful in trying to encourage them to transfer technology, which is key to improving skills as well as the productivities of people.

We also need to think about the skill that can come with the new business. For example, we try to encourage people to invest not for the big business, but to provide the platform for the small business to work with technology and develop these skills.

As for R&D, I think that developing countries just need to utilize the existing technology. I think this is more important; of course, for the advanced economy this [R&D] is very important.

Dr. Htein Lynn

Regarding the development of skills, the Ministry of Education of Myanmar is now working together with the Singapore training schools to provide a program for upgrading the skills especially of the younger generation. We are also liberalizing the opening up of private education centers in Myanmar for learning.

Likewise, research and development is very important. Without research and development, we cannot explore new products and services and cannot compete with the region. This is why we are trying to conduct research activities for potential sectors. For instance, which potential products must be promoted in the region, what trade promotion activities. This is one of the activities that I would like to highlight. In the manufacturing sector, we are working with foreign investors who transfer the technology. This is why Mekong Institute plays a very important role in providing the technology and further cooperation within the GMS countries.

Mr. Krit Kraichitti

Former Thai Ambassador to Malaysia

I have three points to raise. The most important element for promoting the GMS or Mekong countries' development is economic cooperation, certainly, infrastructure development. We already have very good road network linking China, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand. Certainly many agreements have been implemented concerning the development of road networks, infrastructure, transportation networks, and CBTA or cross-border transport agreement, which up to now still has not been implemented. Buses and trucks have to stop at the border and reload the goods and passengers.

So, I suggest, for the East-West Economic Corridor to begin with, maybe the transportation company, buses and trucks can do the tri-venture. The problem is that the transportation sector of each country is not yet prepared to open-up their business to other developing countries. I think we should think more regional than national.

Dr. Tran Toan Thang

We emphasize a lot about cooperation among countries because in reality it is weak. One reason is the benefit that one country gets from such kind of connection. For Vietnam, for instance, we look into its benefits to Vietnam.

I think that PPP is one thing that we have to think about, but even PPP in Vietnam has a lot of problems. I think we need some sort of investigation about the motivations of infrastructure builders rather than the government's motivation because from my point of view, I do not think the government is the only one telling what is enough to boost connectivity, but the private sector too.



Mr. Clemens Grünbüchel

Policy Coordinator, Stockholm Environment Institute

I would like to steer the discussion to the SDGs. All of the Mekong countries have subscribed to the SDGs so from the discussions that I heard here, everything is geared toward economic growth – opening borders, connectivity, facilitation of trade, etc. Everything is geared toward economic growth, and we are assuming that economic growth will bring more welfare to our populations, which is a good thing.

However, economic growth also comes with additional resources and additional energy. If you look at the ASEAN State of the Environment Report, Thailand, for example, will be dependent on fossil fuels for at least the next 50 years. So even though the energy mix is slightly changing with more alternative fuels coming in or more alternative energy coming in, we will still remain dependent on fossil fuels, meaning, continuing CO2 emissions with continuing effects on the climate. I think that this is also part of our welfare. Not only economic growth, but also resources that we can conserve for future generations, as well as the environment that affects us directly in terms of health and quality of life.

I would have liked to hear when we talk about challenges, a little bit about resources and how we deal with environment in a regional way more than just the international way. Thank you very much.

Dr. Pisit Puapan

I think the way that we are trying to invest in infrastructure upgrading will also indirectly contribute to better, efficient resource use in Thailand. I think all of you who have been to Bangkok would agree that most of our time spent on the road is spent on traffic. The Ministry of Transport showed data on the per kilometer usage of road, comparing it to rail transport. I think Thailand is trying to promote the shift of our transportation to more efficient ways.

The government is trying to think of how we can use technology to better and efficiently use our resources, be it time or energy. We can also see the world is shifting to the digital economy, and I think this can help make better use of our resources. The agenda now is trying to use the technology to make things more efficient.

Mr. Quan Anh Nguyen

Program Specialist, Mekong Institute

I have a question for Dr. Tran on the case of Vietnam. You talked about the economic growth and FDI, the linkage between the FDI enterprise and the domestic SME.

We want to learn more from you about how the country can promote the spillover effect with the technological support from the FDI to the domestic company to increase their productiveness. You also mentioned about the strategies for the domestic development. Can you specify in detail what strategies are in place and what are not yet in place?

Dr. Tran Toan Thang

We all know firm's profit maximization. The linkage is good if they get profit from that kind of linkage. In the case of Vietnam, there are two reasons that explain the poor linkage. One is the underdevelopment of the private sector – the private sector is young. The second is because we are near the cheap source of input, I mean, China. Most FDI firms in Vietnam import from China with very cheap resource so that explains why they do not focus on developing the domestic linkages. Of course, the government has some programs to support industries, some promotion in terms of foreign investors in supporting the industries.

We also try to encourage the FDI firms to act on the strategy by developing their network of suppliers in Vietnam. So far, we have been developing the new strategy for FDI attraction and we hope it will fix this. But it is not in the short-term; something in the long-term.



SESSION II

SCALING UP COMPETITIVENESS WITH INNOVATION

Innovation has been identified as one of the cornerstones to advance entrepreneurship and competitiveness and catalyze economic progress. This session presented initiatives and mechanisms that drive the development of innovation that will improve products and systems, and enable people, enterprises and organizations to be efficient, agile and high-performing.

The session discussants also underscored critical points that underpin the promotion of innovation in the region including citizen-centric design of science, technology and innovation policies that allow for multi-sectoral representation and participation; increased openness and attitude towards collaboration; equal emphasis on local community engagement and inclusive growth that targets small players such as SMEs; and attention to interconnected challenges especially in the areas of human resource development and capacity building.

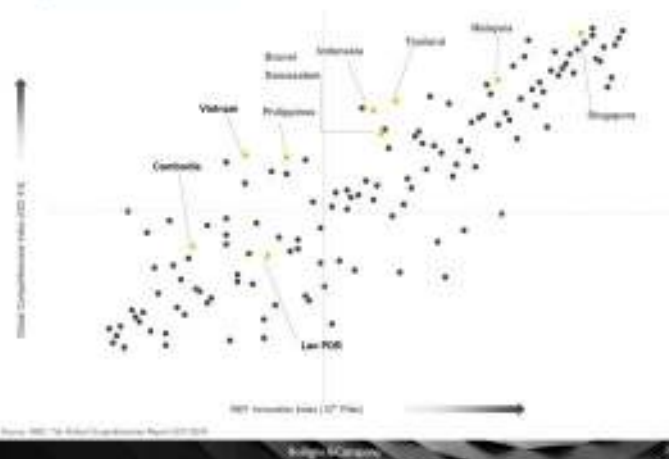
Dr. Rachda Chiasakul
 Partner and Managing Director
 Bolliger & Company (Thailand) Ltd.



What will the future be like? Exciting? Challenging? Or fearful?

A good number of people have embraced the digital age with innovative, out-of-the box solutions such as start-ups and new technologies; while others are apprehensive about ensuring proper regulations and sustainability of such transformations. But what rests at the core of these varying viewpoints is the necessity of adapting to rapidly changing dynamics and environments to ensure competitiveness is at par with innovation.

Competitiveness VS Innovation



Amidst Industry 4.0, the key drivers for scaling up competitiveness and innovation are divided into four main categories:

Policy

- Underscores the importance of providing grants and incentives as supporting mechanisms in implementing policies
- Highlights monitoring and evaluation as a crucial part of policy design and process
- Promotes citizen-centric design that engages all stakeholders for an even representation and participation

Technology

- Requires an area of focus – whether physical technology, digital technology or biotechnology – in order to identify how to scale up innovation
- Entails identifying and assessing the implications of these new technologies in relation to what is being aimed for

Skills and talents

- Calls the need for continuous, lifelong learning even after formal education has been completed
- Emphasizes human resource development as key to maximize talents and capabilities, especially when dealing with crisis

Openness

- Encourages openness in terms of economic opportunities (free flow of goods, services, and investments), innovative collaboration (business-led collaboration and commercialization of R&D), and openness to disruption for better, cheaper, and faster value creation

Drivers for scaling up of innovation



As of now, ASEAN countries are doing relatively well in terms of competitiveness, but with the evolution from GCI to GCI 4.0, countries must be equipped with technological readiness to fully utilize innovation capacities for more efficient, agile, and high-performing economies.

Ms. Marta Pérez Cusó

Economic Affairs Officer

Technology and Innovation Section, Trade,
Investment and Innovation Division,
UNESCAP



As ESCAP's works are mainly focused at addressing economic, social, and environmental policy-level issues, the organization recognizes and promotes the importance of carefully crafted science, technology and innovation (STI) policies. Correspondingly, there had been a growing awareness among policymakers on the critical role that innovation plays in economic growth and competitiveness. This increased awareness must be translated into actions through tailored policies that promote STI-specific goals for each country. In doing so, ESCAP's efforts and initiatives are concentrated on the following:

- First, the need to develop opportunities and capacities to carefully design STI policies and other related economic and social policies are dependent on increasing awareness on STI policy issues and other critical areas, promoting inter-governmental dialogue, and providing technological assistance and advisory services across the Asia-Pacific region. It is also necessary to review and examine how existing investment and economic policies support, rather than undermine domestic innovation efforts so that these policies generate positive externalities.
- Second, the digital economy is an area that will definitely provide opportunities for increased competitiveness in the GMS, thus, ESCAP and other development partners have been working to promote capabilities in the digital economy with focus on e-commerce. Considering the varying capacities of GMS countries in terms of access and affordability of ICTs, availability of payment mechanisms and delivery infrastructure, this requires a holistic approach in developing countries' capabilities for the digital economy. An initial step is to conduct rapid e-trade assessments; followed by ensuring that the recommendations from these assessments are put into place by the different stakeholders. The facilitation of cross-border e-commerce and a new framework on cross-border paperless trade are among ESCAP's focus areas in the GMS.
- Lastly, promoting competitiveness through innovation also relates to the ultimate goal of achieving the SDGs and promoting inclusive growth. Three different yet complementary approaches have been identified:
 - Promoting social enterprises and investments by advising governments to provide enabling environments for them as well as conducting research on the state of social enterprises with the idea of providing information to be able to carefully design policies
 - Supporting women-led enterprises by setting up innovative financial and funding mechanisms and by encouraging the use of ICTs in their firms
 - Exploring different approaches that can better promote inclusive growth by promoting SMEs participation in e-commerce platforms, by promoting inclusive businesses or by promoting innovation and technological capabilities of SMEs

Dr. Jeong Hyop Lee

Senior Advisor

Science Technology and Innovation Policy
Institute, King Mongkut's University of
Technology, Thailand



ASEAN countries have very good potential in terms of abundant natural resources, young populations, and thriving markets. Unfortunately, these potentials are not fully utilized to benefit the majority in the region. Harnessing science, technology and innovation in order to address the challenges, while it seems very promising, may not always be the most feasible solution. As countries approach the digital economy, issues of low market affordability, limited resources and infrastructure, and lack of human capacities, surface. These realities draw critical and honest assessments on how far ASEAN countries can go in terms of the digital economy.

- The emphasis on AI economy has been echoed countless times; however, this cannot be deployed in ASEAN countries mainly because of low affordability. The AI economy requires a strong foundation to begin with, meaning, so-called IoT networks are very important in order to accommodate complex networks of data, analytics, and servers. These IoT networks are extremely expensive that even Thailand, being one of the richest countries in the region, will still find difficulties accomplishing it.
- Once you have the IoT network in place, this will result to a sharp increase in productivity levels that may disrupt the economy. Given that most economies are ideal for domestic markets, the same market size coupled with high productivity levels will eventually lead to massive unemployment. Thus, careful consideration is necessary to ensure that the spillovers of this kind of technology will not cause more harm than good.
- Before even aiming toward AI or digital economy, countries should start from a very specific condition. It is imperative to address interconnected challenges such as developing human resources, boosting local industries, ensuring proper coordination, all of which have direct bearing on digital transformation. It is also worth noting that such tedious process has no one solution to it.
- Therefore, capacity development is very crucial in addressing these issues and challenges. For instance, on-the-job training for planning and implementation has been launched in Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Thailand. With demonstrated effectiveness, the Institute aims to institutionalize it in the coming years.
- Recommendations on creating an ASEAN open innovation and entrepreneurship platform can be very beneficial for two reasons: 1) engaging various stakeholders from within and outside the region to collaborate on addressing the issues of low affordability; and 2) enabling technologies from outside the region to promote local industries and facilitate job creation.

Dr. Chuthatip Maneepong
Strategic Advisor, Thailand
Open Development Institute,
an East West Management Institute project



One of the important illustrations of inclusiveness is how local communities can engage in development and benefit from it. Behavior change is critical to solve problems, and social innovation entails not only the use of technology but also the change in behavior among stakeholders that will lead to new ideas and practices to respond to the problem.

Community innovation

The problem

- Almost all problems are complicated, context-dependent & cross-boundary. No one individual or organization alone can solve most problems effectively.
- Solving problems without changes to underlying causes, often necessitating changes in human behavior is just a reaction to symptoms to the problem.

The Solution

- When people change, social innovation emerges.
- Social innovation is not necessarily high cost or high technology, but often affordable involving locally responsive technology often based on local wisdom and participation.

OPEN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE
AN EAST WEST MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE PROJECT

A number of examples of these engagements are highlighted.

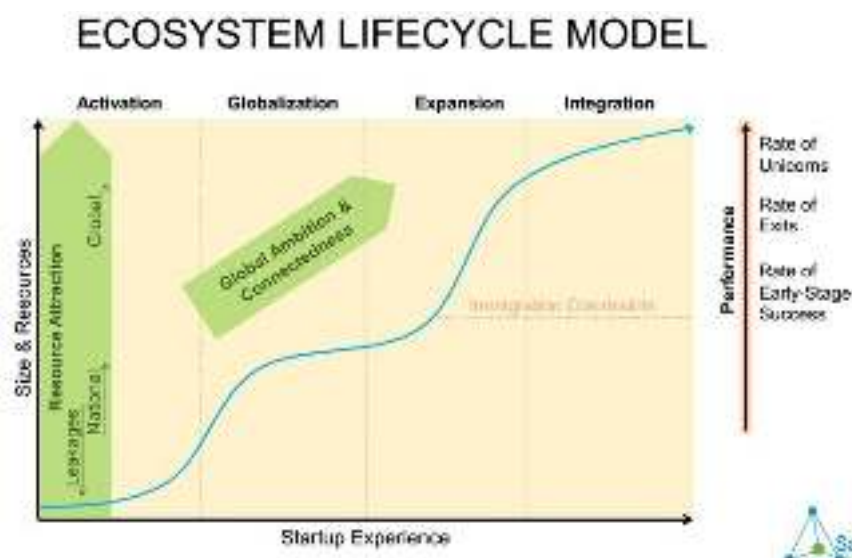
- Changing the local practice of slash-and-burn agriculture of a local community in the northern part of Thailand. The change in postharvest practice has resulted into a decreased incidence of haze, which negatively affects tourism and health in the area, and has improved the air quality and paved the way for reforestation.
- Explorations of alternative options in renewable energy and the introduction of the concept of a circular economy following community engagement to preserve an area that had been originally tapped as a site for a coal power plant.
- Engaging local communities to be active players in sustainable special economic zones (SEZs). The participation of local groups needs to start from planning and design, backed with evidence and information. Data that can be useful in planning and tracking the development of SEZs is shared to provide local communities with information on its effects and benefits, environmental and social responsibilities as well as local resources that can be built into the supply chain in the SEZs.
- Linking organic and high quality produce with e-commerce sites such as Alibaba to raise the price of produce and improve competitiveness.

Ms. Nguyen Phi Van
Chairwoman
Saigon Innovation Hub, Vietnam



An essential element in ecosystem building is bringing together all stakeholders and encouraging them to talk the same language and unify otherwise fragmented efforts. It is also important to create an ecosystem that works for local stakeholders and not simply imported from Western contexts.

The process of building such an ecosystem begins first with an activation phase where various stakeholders promote and talk about the concept of innovation. The second phase is globalization or essentially, strengthening connectivity by creating partnerships with other ecosystems both in the region and the world. This is followed by the stages of expansion and integration.



As a social actor, the Social Innovation Hub is focusing on four key areas: education (EdTech), agriculture (AgriTech), tourism and healthcare (MedTech, BioTech and CleanTech), and cluster development (emerging Tech). It has leveraged on global strategic alliances with international partners for IoT startup and innovation ecosystem development and startup investment ecosystem establishment, among others. It has also developed initiatives to advance social impact, education, culture, and policy in the area of innovation. Its most recent initiative is the Runway to the World, a global startup exchange program with seven other organizations in and outside the GMS.

Q & A | SESSION 2

Moderator: Ms. Maria Theresa S. Medialdia
Director of Agricultural Development and Commercialization
Department, Mekong Institute

Dr. Kyriacos Koupparis

Regional Science, Technology & Innovation Advisor

United States Agency for International Development-Regional Development Mission for Asia

All of you mentioned that innovation is a multi-stakeholder approach and there is no silver bullet. There are also so many different elements within the economy that need to be changed or amplified in order to develop an innovation ecosystem.

Is there a framework that you have in mind, given the limited resources that each of these countries have, that you would apply in order to prioritize where you make a policy change or where you make an investment? How do you go about prioritizing where to begin to address the innovation issue?

Dr. Jyeong Hyop Lee

As I discussed, there is one framework to accommodate your question. But we have also heard that Lao PDR wants to diversify the natural resource-driven and hydropower economy to accommodate and diversify their industry. Similarly, we can think about Myanmar. Myanmar proposed infrastructure connectivity, openness, and trade facilitation. But the country has only begun to grow its natural-resource driven strategy, foreign direct investment and construction and telecommunication network. The domestic consumer goods are very expensive, at least, 140 percent compared to products in Thailand. When you open your economy, your consumer goods market will be intensified and will be dominated by foreign companies.

So, the question is that, what is the framework condition of each specific country? And considering the disruptive technological changes and major industry stakeholders emerging from different sectors, how they can position in this transition? Then, they can articulate their own specific policies and strategies, and then this strategy and policy should not be that kind of political propaganda.

We promote digital economy or we just promote bio-economy but the business should include diagnosed basis and possible scenario. The whole country as a system must want to achieve this goal, and then this goal should inform each stakeholder of their roles. There will be coordinated implementation. This kind of policy design and implementation is the basic framework to accommodate your question but the specific planning and implementation schemes are very different country by country.

Ms. Nguyen Phi Van

As someone who has been with the ecosystem at the city level, I would say that ideally, it should be the policymaking environment at the bottom of the foundation, and the PPP infrastructure like test beds, incubators and accelerators and education in between where the government works with the private sector. At the top of the iceberg would be the corporates, the SMEs, and also the unicorns or the start-ups that are going to turnaround the whole ecosystem.

In an ideal environment, the government should be the foundation and should push everything forward. In our environment, it takes too long; it takes too much to influence the government to create programs and policies to develop the ecosystem. So, we do it the other way around. We actually start from the top and we work with corporates and SMEs and also with incubators and accelerators in the city to foster the culture and the environment for start-ups to thrive.

By doing this, we are trying to create quality start-ups wherein investors from international markets could invest in, also by accelerators from international markets. In the end, some of our start-ups may be taken out of Ho Chi Minh City and Vietnam and be registered somewhere else but that is okay because that would turn around and influence the government to change their policy of investment. That is where our approach is at the moment.

Dr. Rachda Chiasakul

When we have to prioritize, we have to look at a matrix that considers the impact, feasibility and applicability of the project. I think it would also be good to divide it into function, geographical area, and also sector. Then all policies can be aligned and all prioritization from each sector should come out. On sector base, I think if we take stock of all stakeholders, and count every person in the value chain especially when we talk about SMEs, I think prioritization would go toward more number of farmers involved, more number of SMEs involved, and wider and deeper value chain. That is what I think.





Dr. Chuthatip Maneepong

I also would like to echo the same thing but I would like to highlight one thing that Dr. Narongchai also mentioned. For example, when you talk about energy, you try to increase the production of electricity but as part of turn around, why do we not think about energy saving instead? That is one way.

The other way is, I do believe that we need to customize to benefit the local community and the local government, too because these people are the real actors, real beneficiaries of development. So, they need to have a voice; they need to have a say. So, in that sense, we need to see it in terms of holistic or integrated innovation. Otherwise, we will get into a kind of vicious cycle wherein national policies can adversely affect other sectors.

Mr. Krit Kraichitti

Former Thai Ambassador to Malaysia

I think the issue at hand is about PPP that you have been mentioning. I think we should highlight about the civil society participation in whatever project that the government is undertaking. Environmental problems at the moment are serious, for example. So I fully agree with you all that collaboration is needed between the government and private sector, the civil society and the people, to tap the participation in whatever government project we have. We should not only go for trade and investment as a benefit of economic growth, but we also need to take into account the other results of these projects.

Mr. Nopharat Kruengmee

Surin Environment Natural and Resource Volunteer Protection Network

I am worried because, as has been discussed, the world is uncertain and volatile. I think that the majority of the people in the GMS countries cannot adapt in the modern world. How can we solve this problem? I think GMS countries should contribute more and more for the majority of the people in the GMS especially in terms of agriculture.

Dr. Ajirapa Pienkhuntod

College of Local Administration, Khon Kaen University

My question is directed to Dr. Chiasakul. I think you addressed a key issue that we are facing in this region – whether we are ready for innovation and technology transformation. In your talk, you mentioned that it is very important to unlock the potential and make sure that we are ready for it by giving some incentive.

Can you please expound a little bit on the incentive that you think is appropriate to make sure that the policy we design will lead to inclusive growth for the whole region, not just for the elite groups or some particular people who have the resources to enjoy this innovation or digital economy?

Dr. Rachda Chiasakul

The easiest incentive would be grants and scholarship for building of skills and human resources. But I think you are talking about investment incentive to big companies. I do believe that many of the incentives will be given to projects that collaborate, that have more public-private partnership. Some of the very interesting incentives like 10-year or more grants can really stimulate the investment in technology because you need a lot of big investment in technology and R&D. So, I think what you are concerned about is money going to subsidized, big companies – it is real. But in a big way, some of those incentives given to companies have quite a huge impact when it comes to some of the projects that we are looking at.

Guest

I love all this discussion about innovation and how it is going to drive technology advancements and other economic developments. Much of that depends, especially e-commerce, on banking systems, financial management systems that are tracked electronically. So, my question is, in this growth towards technical advancements and innovation, where are the policy and legislation implementation processes? Were they developed to actually think about digital security and data protection?

Dr. Jeong Hyop Lee

Data security can also go along with this digital technology industry. You are concerned about this kind of security but when there is market demand, there will be protection. If you are using credit card, you use it without any suspicion because there is a security system. Mobile banking and others will also develop the same trust and security system so you do not have to worry about it.

A man with grey hair, wearing a dark suit, a light blue striped shirt, and a red patterned tie, is speaking into a microphone. He is looking slightly to the right. In the background, another man with glasses is partially visible, looking towards the speaker. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

SESSION III

HARNESSING DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION FOR STRONGER CONNECTIVITY

Ideas and solutions are not confined to geographical and political barriers, and if growth must be pursued, then an open and conducive space for sharing information, network, strategies and lessons learned must be encouraged. The final session of the Forum brought together partners from intergovernmental organizations and regional agencies to offer insights on how development cooperation can be harnessed to promote a broader sharing of technology, spur growth and foster increased connectivity of peoples and communities in the GMS.

Given the needs of the region, investment has been largely directed to improving hard and soft infrastructure, including digital infrastructure; and promoting spatial strategies that leverage on the various areas and frameworks of collaboration that can advance not just national priorities but the overall regional welfare. The consensus, it appears, is that development agencies are present to offer technical assistance but a major driving force is the strong engagement of national and sub-national governments and sectors directly involved in the implementation to realize envisioned results and impacts.

Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki

Country Director

ADB-Thailand Resident Mission



The new Strategy 2030 of the Asian Development Bank identifies seven priority areas, one of which is enhancing connectivity and competitiveness in support of regional cooperation and integration.

The Hanoi Action Plan 2018-2020, which the GMS country members have committed to in March this year, outlines several priority areas including working on spatial strategy on economic pointers. This focus on spatial strategy comes in light of the current reality that while the individual countries remain a focus, there is also increased attention given to economic corridors and how neighboring countries can work on their spatial strategies.

A good illustration is the sector of GMS tourism. Tourism is important for all countries in the region. In 2016, a strategy was adopted that emphasizes two important principles: one, that tourism should generate benefits for more than one GMS country, and two, the promotion of secondary destination development.

It is in these aspects of regional cooperation that the work of intergovernmental agencies is pivotal. There are many frameworks and collaboration initiatives, with many of them almost identical. The key is how to translate them into implementation. On this part, there is a need to look at the ground reality and craft concrete actions to be implemented.

Similarly, many actions have concentrated on and stemmed from the capitals of the countries but it is worth pointing out that there are other areas that can be worked out with the involvement of local community and sub-national governments. It is important that in the process of going forward, the involvement of entities and peoples who are directly involved in the implementation of the strategies should be made a key priority.

Dr. Saranyu Viriyavejakul

Vice President
Neighbouring Countries Economic
Development Cooperation Agency, Thailand



NEDA's programs are primarily centered on the provision of financial and technical assistance, such as concessional and long-term loans for the former, and the conduct of training, detailed design offerings and feasibility studies for the latter. While the work covers a wide range of sectors, the concentration has mostly been on the infrastructure sector and urban development.

Some of the most impactful initiatives were the development of the road connection of Thailand to China via Lao PDR, connecting the North-South economic corridor; and the subsequent construction of the 4th Thai-Lao PDR Friendship Bridge. Both had contributed to improved connectivity and enhanced trade for Thailand and Lao PDR. Tourism has bloomed, with the influx of tourists rising to six times than usual since the construction of these roads.



Other ongoing initiatives of NEDA include:

- Construction of the road linking the Dawei Special Economic Zone and the Myanmar-Thailand border
- Development of the Stung Bot Border Crossing facilities and access road to National Road No. 5
- Improvement of National Road No. 12 connecting Thailand to Lao PDR, Vietnam and China

Dr. Kyriacos M. Koupparis

Regional Science, Technology & Innovation Advisor
USAID-Regional Development Mission for Asia



USAID's overall framework in its work on digital economy and innovation in the region is underpinned by the Agency's clear acknowledgment and appreciation of the impact of technology in economies and how it can be used to catalyze development. The framework underscores three critical points:

- Digital infrastructure and government policy – emphasizes enabling countries to expand affordable internet access and address related issues such as privacy and security.
- Enabled institutions – focuses on enabling public and private institutions to identify, develop and deploy immigrated digital solutions, including getting feedback on what works and what does not to better understand the needs of citizens.
- Empowered individuals – addresses key issues such as digital literacy and gender disparity in terms of access to ensure that citizens have the knowledge, tools and skills to fully participate in the digital economy.

Key regional initiatives include:

- **IGNITE** (Inclusive Growth in ASEAN through Innovation, Trade and E-commerce) – a project that targets the three focus areas of trade facilitation, digital financial services and innovation.
 - Trade facilitation involves work on the ASEAN single window and reducing non-tariff barriers and helping SMEs identify their needs and reach their potentials.
 - Digital financial services is aimed at increasing availability of ASEAN member states to relevant, affordable, and secure digital financial services particularly in relation to e-commerce.
 - Providing enabling environment for the use of science, technology and innovation for economic growth to develop human capital for the 20th century. This involves enabling the private sector, government and academia to align their incentives and research outputs and encourage their commercialization so they can drive economic growth.
- **COMET** (Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training) - a five-year project oriented around the idea of workforce development for the 21st century. It supports universities and vocational schools across the Lower Mekong countries to adapt their curriculum and teaching approaches to better meet private sector demands.

Mr. Jerome Pons

Head of Cooperation Section

Delegation of the European Union to Thailand



Connectivity is about regional integration. Given the composition of the European Union, this means that connectivity is at its core. Likewise, the EU acknowledges that it can play an integral role in contributing to the enhancement of connectivity in the GMS.

The Union works in different ways with middle income and low income countries, both of which are present in the GMS, and so while it does not have a regional program, it does support the individual countries through its bilateral programs especially in Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR and Vietnam. For Thailand and China, which are both upper middle income countries, support comes in through the promotion of regionalization. In Thailand, for instance, this is most reflected in the EU's support to the ASEAN Integration initiatives.

The European Union engages in policy dialogue, technical assistance and the sharing of EU expertise. Much importance is placed on all aspects of connectivity particularly transport, energy, digital network and people-to-people connectivity. Currently, it is developing a policy document that will further define its engagement in connectivity in Asia including the GMS.

Recognizing that regionalization is the best way forward, there is high emphasis on finding global solutions to global issues by working together. One of the initiatives is to partner with international banks that have the capacity to provide investment to countries so they can undertake their connectivity-related projects.

Overall, EU sees itself as a facilitator and enabler of connectivity. The Union respects the ownership and leadership of regions and countries, but it is willing to facilitate regionalization and regional cooperation by leveraging on its expertise in infrastructure and investment, and helping reduce risks and uncertainties.

The Union's link to sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) is also one of its strong assets. It can provide technical assistance to countries in the areas of environmental impact assessment and social acceptability of projects and connectivity investments, to guarantee that countries can deliver on their SDG contributions.

Mr. Paul Stephens

Deputy Head of Mission

Australian Embassy Bangkok and Permanent Representative to UNESCAP



Southeast Asia is a priority for Australia, and this commitment is reaffirmed with Australia's participation in the ASEAN Special Summit. The Sydney Declaration also further reinforces Australia's work in the area of infrastructure development. The government has committed to invest in the provision of technical assistance to Southeast Asia in infrastructure projects, with half of this concentrated in the Mekong Region.



- Mekong Business Initiative, a project that connects SMEs, young entrepreneurs and women-led businesses to international markets.

Recognizing that connectivity needs are broad, the New Zealand government works with partners like the Asian Development Bank in various infrastructure initiatives including:

- Hard infrastructure investments such as the construction of the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge
- Identification of demand in cross-border transport to address issues like congestion in border crossings and inefficiencies in logistics in cross-border transport. There is a strong support to the creation of a single stop inspection site to streamline clearance procedures and make it easier and faster for vehicles to clear borders.

At the ASEAN level, infrastructure development is an integral part of regional connectivity and economic integration, and Australia has been a strong supporter of this with its involvement in the ASEAN Masterplan on Connectivity for 2025, adopted in 2016. Other region-wide initiatives also include the ASEAN-Australia Infrastructure Cooperation Program; and the ASEAN-Australia Smart and Sustainable Cities Initiative, which aims to integrate future cities that are smart, sustainable and integrative.

Development cooperation to boost connectivity is essential but it is important to remember that many activities require full commitment including the will power for their implementation. For this reason, the support of the government and relevant stakeholders is critical.

Q & A | SESSION 3

Moderator: Dr. Watcharas Leelawath

Executive Director, Mekong Institute

Dr. Jeong Hyop Lee

Senior Advisor, Science Technology and Innovation Policy Institute, King Mongkut's University of Technology

For Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki:

You mentioned translation for implementation and institutional coherence. Can you elaborate more on how to translate for implementation? Do you have any frameworks or methodologies, or certain specific examples for this translation? Likewise, institutional coherence cannot be done automatically. How can ADB intervene to achieve this institutional coherence for countries?

For Dr. Kyriacos Koupparis:

You mentioned about innovation environment. How can human resource, the government and private sector get along to achieve certain forms of innovation? In the GMS countries, each sector does not help each other because their capacities are poor and low, so the private sector works with outside organizations and the government works with broader country agencies. With this reality, how do you make possible this innovation environment in the GMS?

Also, you mentioned about curriculum for 21st century. How do we make sure the kind of human resources that we need for the GMS? The world is very uncertain and complex so how do we design curriculum to meet this uncertain future?

Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki

These international collaboration programs are mechanisms to apply some pressure to certain governments which are not averse to introduce changes. But what is necessary is a champion in a particular government.

In the case of cross-border transport facilitation agreement, for instance, the agreement was fully ratified in 2015, but it took a long time for it to get ratified. I think it's fair to say that in some countries there were very strong champions who pushed for the issue. Had it not been for those champions, it would not have moved. In Thailand, it was the Minister of Transport who was very keen to move it to the implementation phase, and he attended almost all the senior committee meetings. He was really committed and that made a lot of impact on many other things.

Dr. Kyriacos Koupparis

I agree that it is a challenge getting people to talk together but I will say that in my limited time throughout the region, I have encountered a lot of private sectors and startups that are willing and eager. I also encourage the governments to open up a dialogue with their own counterparts and stakeholders in their own country.

As a donor, we encourage private sector participation in a lot of design work and project activities because we fully acknowledge that the public sector does not have all the answers, and for a lot of what we are talking - competitiveness and connectivity - it is going to be private sector-led by and large. It behooves us then to be forward-leaning to the private sector, both to engage their expertise and also to leverage on their immense resources. The reality is that FDI is by far a much larger contributor in a lot of countries.

As for the second point regarding 21st century skills and curriculum, that is an equally hard and important task. Someone mentioned earlier at looking at each country and the comparative advantage in terms of what they can and cannot do. I think that also applies to what skills we are imparting on our students.

There is no one-size-fits-all answer, but there are certain key skills that will be relevant in the 21st century, whether that is related to science, technology, engineering, math or communication skills. There have been a lot of discussions that humans are good with creativity, coming up with ideas, engaging in collaboration - factors that we will have to focus even more on. At the end of the day, we do need to take advantage of the comparative strengths between each country and also look at some of the common denominators that are required in 21st century.





Mr. Krit Kraichitti

Former Thai Ambassador to Malaysia

My first involvement with Mekong projects was the construction of the first Mekong bridge, the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge. I would like to express our appreciation to ADB for supporting the infrastructure development and road network linking the six countries of the Mekong.

We already have infrastructure, but what we need to move on is to lift the barrier for border transport. We have also been working with India, and I would like to make a request if the road from the Thai border to Myanmar and to India can also be supported. We have a cooperation agreement with India under the ACMECS and the Mekong-Ganges. ADB is in a position to help support the improvement of the road network between Thailand, Myanmar and India, the trilateral road highway.

Secondly, with regard to the cross-border transport agreement, now that it has been signed, I would like to see the road network in the GMS countries to be seamless like the EU. The problem right now is that buses and trucks still have to stop at the border. Cargo would have to go through the border checkpoint. What I would like to see is for the border obstacles to be removed soonest.

Thirdly, about the trade investment promotion, I believe that government partners also help in facilitating trade investment. We have the Mekong Business Council, which has worked with MI to also help build up the website and networking among business people. It could be something that could directly affect all sectors. I believe information is the key to the success of trade investment promotion and facilitation. I would like MI to further build on the strong networking mechanism for the business sector of the GMS countries.

As an adviser to the Thailand and Vietnam Business Councils, I suggest that we create a website with the information about the directory of our business in all sectors so that the business sector in our country can do the business matching on their own. If the government supports all these investment projects, it will give the investors the confidence that they can benefit from all these measures and protect their investment.

These are what I would like to see with Thailand as the hub of connectivity in the Mekong.

Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki

The ADB is just one of the development partners, and we have been working with many other partners that are present here.

In March when the GMS Hanoi Action Plan was adopted, there was also a regional investment framework that lists out all the necessary investments over the next five-year period. I think that going forward, each country will be taking up those proposed plans for investment projects, and if there is any extra support in terms of financing or technical support, it may be approached to many other organizations.

In the first round, I talked about the importance of involving local community. Having new infrastructure would take time but in the meantime, given the existing infrastructure, the question to ask is, How much good use could you make? This would be very important and in this, a lot of capacity building would be necessary.

Mekong Institute is uniquely positioned to provide the necessary capacity building, not only to the central level organizations but the businesses, sub-national level governments and industry organizations so they can think about better ways of utilizing these investments.

As for the road network linking Thailand, Myanmar and India, I think that the countries involved in the improvement of that highway should be fully committed, and they would be the ones initially to come up with the plans for developing the highway. Financing would come later. The precondition would be for the three countries to be fully committed – and this applies to any other projects especially cross-border projects.



Mr. Nopharat Kruengmee

Surin Environment Natural and Resource Volunteer Protection Network

I would like to offer my idea a bit about our body being like a blood vessel and if there is no proper circulation, we will get sick. Our world is the same. Therefore, the six important rivers – Yellow River, Yangzi Jiang River, Mississippi River, Amazon River, Ganges River, and Mekong River – have not been flowing normally. The earth faces the problem of disaster and a deteriorating ecosystem. Before the construction of the dams in the north of Thailand, the flow rate of the Mekong River was about 700 million cubic meters per second. But after the construction, the flow rate was lower at 310 million cubic meters per second. I am concerned about it even though they claim it is safe. I think we should have the good governance to control these kinds of things. I wish we can create a project to pull water from the Mekong River to nourish our people in the region of Thailand.

Dr. Watcharas Leelawath

Environmental issues are one of the important emerging issues, and we are thinking for the next Mekong Forum to discuss about the SDGs and assessment of the SDGs in the GMS countries. We want to see how the countries in the Mekong Region are doing in regard to the SDGs and what we can do.

Mr. Hans Guttman

Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

Disaster pushes people back into poverty and causes bankruptcy of companies that are affected. My question then is broader, cutting across all three panels.

How do we handle disaster risks in a situation that can prevent and disrupt takeoffs? In the first panel, we talked about economic development but it was also pointed out, for example in Lao PDR, that you have a lot of people who are just above the poverty level and even medium-sized disasters can push them back to poverty. Vietnam has one of the highest levels of hazards particularly hydro-metereological climatic related hazards in the world. Thailand is reminded of the 2011 flooding. The question now is, how is disaster risk reduction and climate resilience fitted into the policies, mechanisms and promotion of all of these innovation being put forward?

In the second session, the question is, is risk management included there? In engaging communities, how is resilience to disaster being discussed and not just the opportunities for development to make sure that such development can be sustained, not disrupted?

Finally, in the third session, we talk about interconnectivity and information sharing particularly. If you look at disaster management and disaster risks, sharing information is one of the most crucial issues in an interconnected world. But sharing experiences to be able to cooperate pertinent to the issues is also important.

My humble proposal is that maybe in an upcoming forum some of these aspects are considered in order to sustain and secure the development gains that we are all working toward.

Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki

Regarding disaster risk, I think all of us are trying to figure out what are really the necessary institutional mechanisms and financing to address climate change. From the side of ADB, we have committed to provide climate financing, but what we have seen in the recent past would probably make us further rethink and review it. I cannot say anything different but for sure climate resilience will become a focus in our engagement with the countries in the region.

Mr. Jerome Pons

I think as development partners, we need to take into account the risk of disaster. With EU for instance, every project and program we approve includes an assessment of the risks and the different types of risk classes. In terms of capacity building, we do have a number of initiatives. I believe we have more and more initiatives to provide technical assistance, training on disaster risk management, mitigation preparedness. EU just finished an agreement with China a few weeks ago to have regular humanitarian aid and preparedness. We are engaging with more partners to make sure that we are ready when something happens. However, this is not only the solution. This is a very challenging issue yet I think we are trying to work on it the best we can.

WRAP-UP & WAYS FORWARD

Dr. Watcharas Leelawath

Executive Director, Mekong Institute

Mekong Institute remains strong in its commitment to enable human resource capacity building and facilitate policy dialogue that will contribute to lasting changes and impacts in the GMS. For this purpose, advancing collaborations with development partners is an integral part of the Institute's work, particularly in initiatives that align with the areas of agricultural development and commercialization, trade investment and facilitation, and innovation and technological connectivity.

The Mekong Forum is a venue for MI to hear the voices of all stakeholders – the private and public sectors, policymakers and development partners – to enable it to design and craft programs and strategies that are responsive and relevant to the needs of the GMS countries and the demands of the times.

The presentations and sessions featured in the Forum have offered compelling insights and propositions on how the countries in the region can come together to strengthen the region's position in the world and bring about economic progress. The recognition of innovation and connectivity as factors for growth is an important takeaway. When properly harnessed, these can result to improved competitiveness, and eventually result to sustainable growth.

The quote at the closing of Mrs. Suphatra Srimaitreephithak's speech lends much inspiration: If we want to go fast, we walk alone; if we want to go far, we walk together.



...and Connectivity in the GM
August 3 | Khon Kaen, Thailand



SPEAKER PROFILES

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee
Chairman, Mekong Institute Steering Committee
Former Minister of Energy and Minister of Commerce, Thailand

Dr. Narongchai, a Thai economist/technocrat, is known for his continuous involvement in the economic development of Thailand in many capacities, and in ASEAN and APEC affairs. He had a number of appointments in the Thai Government, including as Advisor to several Thai Prime Ministers, as a former Minister of Energy and Minister of Commerce, a Senator, and a member of the National Legislative Assembly.

He has worked on ASEAN and APEC affairs all along, being an initiator of AFTA and the APEC Leaders Meeting. He has also served as the Chairman of Steering Committee and Vice Chairman of the Council of Mekong Institute.

In the private sector, Dr. Narongchai is on the Board of several publicly listed companies including MFC Asset Management Pl., Ananda Property Development Pl. and the Brooker Group. In January 2016, he was reappointed to be an Independent Non-executive Director of AIA Group Limited, Hong Kong.

Dr. Narongchai served as a member of the Board of many Thai public institutions including the National Economic and Social Development Board, Board of Investment, Bank of Thailand, Securities and Exchange Commission of Thailand and the Insurance Commission. He was also a Chairman of the Export-Import Bank of Thailand.

Having graduated with a Ph.D. in economics from the Johns Hopkins University, Dr. Narongchai has a keen interest in education and research. He is the founding member of the Thailand Development Research Institute, Chairman of the Khon Kaen University Council, and Chairman of Mekong Institute Steering Committee.



H.E. Mr. Zhang Guohua
Vice Governor, The People's Government of Yunnan Province, P.R. China

H. E. Mr. ZHANG Guohua, Vice Governor of Yunnan Province, P. R. China and Council Member of Mekong Institute representing China, was born in November in 1964 with a BA of Biology from Nanjing Normal University. From August 1987 to January 2018, Mr. ZHANG Guohua was working in Jiangsu Province as Deputy Party Secretary of Suzhou Municipality, Mayor and later the Party Secretary of Kunshan City, Mayor of Nantong Municipality and Party Secretary of Xuzhou Municipality. He was elected as Vice Governor of Yunnan Province in January 2018. Mr. ZHANG Guohua has been taking leadership role for a long time, during which he has accumulated abundant experience in the areas of foreign affairs, commerce, economic zone management, enterprises development and youth affairs.

SPECIAL ADDRESS SPEAKER



Mr. Kensuke Tanaka
Head of Asia Desk, OECD Development Centre

Kensuke Tanaka is the Head of the Asia Desk of the OECD Development Centre (in France). He initiated and is in charge of several publications including the biannual OECD flagship publication "Economic Outlook for Southeast Asia, China and India", which comprises assessment of the macroeconomic situation and the regional integration process as well as an analysis of key structural policy challenges in Emerging Asia. This publication started from 2010 and is now regularly presented at the occasion of the ASEAN/East Asia Summit. He also constructed the Medium-term Projection Framework (MPF) in 2009 based on a DSGE model approach to serve the forecasts for the Outlook.

Then in 2012, jointly with Asian Development Bank, he started the "Revenue statistics for Asian countries", which provides comparable statistics of Asian countries on fiscal revenues and discusses fiscal policy changes in Asia. More recently, he published "Road and Rail Infrastructure in Asia: Investing in Quality" in 2018, focusing on externalities of infrastructure investment in selected Southeast Asian countries.

Between 2010 and 2013, he constructed the leading and composite economic indicators called Asian Business Cycle Indicators (ABCIs) and released the quarterly bulletin "This Quarter in Asia". He also led a project to create Narrowing Development Gaps Indicators (NDGIs) with the ASEAN Secretariat in 2012.

In addition to analytical work, he initiated the policy dialogue network called "OECD-AMRO-ADB/ADBI-ERIA Asian Regional Roundtable on Macroeconomic and Structural Policies", which is held annually to provide an opportunity for five different international organizations to discuss hot issues in the region.

Before joining the OECD Development Centre, Mr. Tanaka was a Programme Manager at the OECD, Centre for Co-operation with Non-members, mainly in charge of Southeast Asian economic issues. He published "Shaping policy reform and peer review in Southeast Asia" in 2008. Previously, he worked at a public research institute and taught Monetary and Financial Economics in France (Sciences Po) as well as in Japan (Yokohama College of Commerce) and held lectures at various universities in Southeast Asia. He wrote articles in the fields of macroeconomic, public policy, regional integration and development in Asia.

SESSION 1 SPEAKERS



Dr. Sthabandith Insisienmay

Director General

Center for Macroeconomic Policy and Economic Restructuring, National Institute of Economic Research, Lao PDR

Dr. Sthabandith Insisienmay obtained his Ph.D. in economics from the Kyoto University in Japan in 2008 and a Master's degree in Economics of Development from Australian National University in 2001. He started working with the National Economic Research Institute (NERI), Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) since 2012. Since 2016, the institute has been separated from the MPI and has become an independent government think tank named National Institute of Economic Research (NIER). He currently holds the position of Director General of the Center for Macroeconomic Policy and Economic Restructuring of NIER.

He has engaged in several research projects covering various economic issues including those related to economic integration, quantitative analysis, financial development and the impact of the natural resource sector. He was also the team leader of Lao PDR's Macroeconomic Model Development Working Group and has supervised the development and use of the model for macroeconomic monitoring and forecasting. His previous works also contributed to the formulation of Lao Vision 2030 and 10-year national socio-economic development strategy (2016-2025). His on-going research works are on the issues of poverty dynamic and inequality, internal population migration, illicit financial flow and regional connectivity through highways and trains.



Dr. Tran Toan Thang

Director

Department of World Economy and Integration, National Center for Socio-Economic Information and Forecast, Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vietnam

Dr. Tran Toan Thang obtained his master's degree in development economics in NLH University, Norway in 2003 and a Ph.D. in economics in Essex University in the UK in 2013. He has 20 years of working for the Central Institute for Economic Management (CIEM), a think tank in Vietnam. He moved to work for the National Center for Socio-Economic Information and Forecast (NCIF) in early 2017 as the Director of the World Economy Department.

His research interests focus on macroeconomic issues such as economic growth, foreign direct investment, international trade and preferential trade agreements.



Dr. Pisit Puapan

Senior Expert on Macroeconomic Policy

Fiscal Policy Office, Thailand

Dr. Pisit Puapan is currently Senior Expert for Macroeconomic Policy under the Fiscal Policy Office, Ministry of Finance, Thailand. In his current position, he is responsible for economic review, monitoring, forecast and macroeconomic and fiscal policy analysis under the Ministry of Finance. He regularly meets with IMF, credit rating agencies and international investors to hold policy discussions and dialogues on behalf of the Ministry.

Since joining the government in 1998, he has been delegated to work on various assignments within the Ministry. His first assignment was with the Public Debt Management Office responsible for bilateral loan negotiation. In 2001, he performed analyses on financial sector and trade liberalization under the ASEAN and APEC frameworks. He was the primary official responsible for the implementation of ASEAN+3 Bilateral Swap Arrangement (BSA) under the Chiang Mai Initiative. During 2003-2005, Dr. Pisit was assigned to Government Expenditures Policy Section, Bureau of Fiscal Policy, and handled the preparatory process of the Thai government's annual budget.

SESSION 1 SPEAKERS



Dr. Htein Lynn

Director

Trade Development Division, Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization, Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar

Dr. Htein Lynn holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the Yangon Institute of Economics, where he also obtained his Ph.D. in economics in 2005 in partnership with Gottingen University. After an academic career at the Yangon Institute Economics and Yangon University of Economics, Dr. Htein Lynn joined the Ministry of Commerce in 2006 and more specifically the Directorate of Trade where he worked as deputy director of the Market Information and Research Teams.

From 2009 to 2012, he was Deputy Director of the Minister's Office and in 2012 of the Trade Training Institute. In 2013, he was appointed Director of the ASEAN and Regional Organizations Division, and in 2015 Director of the Strategic Trade Promotion Organization. He is currently heading the Trade Development Division of Myanmar Trade Promotion Organization. Dr. Htein Lynn has published several papers on entrepreneurship as well as the links between small and large scale business in Myanmar and economic partnership in East Asia.



Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta

Director

Trade and Investment Facilitation Department, Mekong Institute

Mr. Madhurjya Kumar Dutta is currently the Director of Trade & Investment Facilitation Department at Mekong Institute (MI). Prior to joining MI, he served as Research Director of the Economic Institute of Cambodia and Adviser of Cambodia India Entrepreneurship Development Institute (a bilateral project of Governments of India and Cambodia). He was conferred as Honorary Advisor to the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training, Cambodia through a royal decree by the Prime Minister and the King of the Kingdom of Cambodia.

Mr. Dutta has over 20 years of experience in private sector development in South Asian and South East Asian countries. His key areas of interest are entrepreneurship, SME development and trade facilitation. He has designed and implemented several multilateral capacity development projects on SME and Trade Facilitation in the GMS including the Private Sector Development in the East West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and SME Competitiveness in Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) funded by Japan; Trade Facilitation Project in the North South Economic Corridor (NSEC) funded by China; Integration of CLMV Economies into AEC funded by New Zealand; and Certified Logistic Master Program funded by the Republic of Korea, among others.

He has also served as consultant to various agencies such as UNESCAP, ADB, World Bank, GIZ, UNDP, IFC, ILO, USAID, IFAD, OXFAM, World Vision, Chemonics International etc., on SME policy development, value chain, tourism, investment feasibility, green business, and private sector innovations.

Mr. Dutta earned his master's degree from the Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi and a Master of Science in Regional Development Planning and Management from Technical University of Dortmund, Germany. He also holds an advanced diploma in regional development planning.

SESSION 2 SPEAKERS



Dr. Rachda Chiasakul
Partner and Managing Director
Bolliger & Company (Thailand) Ltd.

Dr. Rachda Chiasakul is a Partner and Managing Director of Bolliger & Company (Thailand). During the past 16 years, she has been advising various government organizations and multinational corporations mostly in ASEAN on various regulatory, strategic, and trade issues. From September 2014 to November 2017 she served as advisor to the Minister of Commerce, and as a specialist attached to a member of the National Legislative Assembly.

Dr. Rachda has worked closely with many ministries related to economic policy making in Thailand (e.g., Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Industry, and Ministry of Digital Economy and Society). Notably, Dr. Rachda has led numerous projects on FTA feasibility studies, policy and regulatory impact analysis, strategic planning toward ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and strategic planning toward digital economy. Prior to joining Bolliger & Company, she was Director of Advisory Group of Bryan Cave (Thailand). She had also represented the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), serving clients in many leading multinational organizations including international and national oil companies and leading Thai banks. She is specialized in strategic advisory, operational, and organizational management. She has a Ph.D. and master's degree in development planning from Hiroshima University, Japan, and a bachelor's degree in economics from Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.



Ms. Marta Pérez Cusó
Economic Affairs Officer
Technology and Innovation Section, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division,
UNESCAP

Ms. Marta Pérez Cusó is Economic Affairs Officer at UNESCAP. She has over 15 years' experience with the United Nations in science, technology and innovation (STI) policies and in information and communication technology policies.

Marta supports governments in Asia-Pacific to achieve sustainable development goals through technology and innovation. She advises governments on technology and innovation policies. Marta leads UNESCAP's programme on inclusive technology and innovation policies.

Previously, Marta worked for UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) where she coordinated several national Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Reviews, including those of Thailand, Peru and El Salvador. Her work was also closely linked to the development of science, technology and innovation capabilities, particularly policy-making capacities, in developing countries. Earlier, she was a major author in UNCTAD's Information Economy Report.



Dr. Jeong Hyop Lee
Senior Advisor
Science Technology and Innovation Policy Institute, King Mongkut's University of
Technology, Thonburi, Thailand

LEE, Jeong Hyop received his Ph.D. in economic geography from the Seoul National University. He is now a senior advisor of the Science Technology and Innovation Policy Institute (STIPI), Thailand. Before he joined STIPI, he worked for the Science & Technology Policy Institute (STEPI) and the Korea Information Society Development Institute (KISDI) in Korea. He has actively engaged in various planning and evaluation committees in Korea. A few of the major programs he was part of were the Enterprise City Program of the Ministry of Construction & Transportation, the Techno-park Program of the Ministry of Knowledge Economy, the Research Hospital and the Medi-Cluster Program of the Ministry of Health and Welfare, the S&T and ICT Globalization Committee of the Ministry of Science, ICT and Future Planning and the University Reform Committee of the Ministry of Education. He has also served as a full time advisor for the Korean Presidential Committee.

Dr. Lee also has various consulting experiences for developing countries. He helped the Vietnam Ministry of Science and Technology prepare a five-year S&T plan, and provided a master plan of industrial technology centers for Egypt's Ministry of Industry and Technology. Dr. Lee has experience working with various international organizations such as OECD, the World Bank, APEC, and UN agencies. He has initiated a three-year consulting project on innovation system diagnosis and STI strategy development for least developed countries from 2012 in partnership with the Asian and Pacific Center for Transfer of Technology (APCTT), UNESCAP. He has also worked with ASEAN countries to develop strategic STI roadmaps to address global challenges such as water (Indonesia), food (the Philippines), green energy (Vietnam) and other issues. Lastly, he has cooperated with the African Network of Drugs and Diagnostics Innovation (ANDI) to develop STI strategies to overcome neglected diseases in Africa.

SESSION 2 SPEAKERS



Dr. Chuthatip Maneepong

Strategic Advisor, Thailand

Open Development Initiative, an East West Management Institute project

Dr. Maneepong has extensive skills in policy advocacy, service delivery, legal tactics and frameworks including participatory organizational analysis and needs diagnostics in Thailand, the Greater Mekong Sub-region and across Southeast Asia. In 2016, she represented Member & Focus Point, The Access Initiative (TAI) and the World Resource Institute (WRI).

Between 2013 and 2014, Dr. Maneepong was Thailand representative in the NGO Major Group of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and of the NGO Major Group of United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). She has worked on several assignments of the European Union on civil society organizations (CSOs) engagements in the implementation and/or monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including the Strategic Engagement plan of CSOs in Achieving Thailand's SDGs supported by EU Delegation. More recently, she has led an initiative to strengthen the capacity of CSOs in engaging in SDG implementation and monitoring. At present, she is a team leader on Data to support SDG 16 in Thailand to research and provide case evidence of data development on special economic zone projects, an initiative that seeks to provide detailed data and information related to SDG progress in Thailand for the East West Management Institute.



Ms. Nguyen Phi Van

Chairwoman

Saigon Innovation Hub, Vietnam

Ms. Nguyen Phi Van holds a MBA from Australia with a major in marketing communication. Her experience spans over 20 years as a senior executive in ecosystem development, brand, retail, and franchise development across global emerging markets in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe. She is also board advisor at the Asia Pacific Chief Marketing Officer Council (CMO), SME development advisor to various governments, and chairwoman of Saigon Innovation Hub. Ms. Phi Van is 2015 award winner of Retail Leadership presented by Asia Retail Congress, and 2017 award winner of 100 Top Great Retail Minds presented by World Retail Congress. She is also the author of four books, "Franchising – The Short Route to Global Markets", "Cross The Rice Field, Reach The World", "Global Citizen Handbook - Version 4.0", and "Go Global: An MSME's Guide to Global Franchising."



Ms. Maria Theresa Medialdia

Director

Agricultural Development and Commercialization Department, Mekong Institute

Ms. Maria Theresa S. Medialdia is the Director of the Agricultural Development and Commercialization Department of MI. She joined the Institute with more than 20 years of experience in development work, research, project management, training, and teaching in various disciplines including supply chains and marketing, industrial organization, farming systems/sustainable agriculture, community development, impact assessment, project monitoring and evaluation, and socio-economics.

Prior to joining MI, she worked as University Researcher and Affiliate Assistant Professor at the University of the Philippines Los Baños and was on secondment to the International Rice Research Institute and the Philippines' Department of Agriculture for several years. She has worked in the US, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines as researcher, trainer, facilitator, technical adviser, and consultant with various international organizations such as the ADB, JICA, FAO, GIZ, the European Commission, IDRC, and the World Bank.

She obtained her bachelor's degree in agribusiness from University of the Philippines Los Baños, master's degree in agricultural economics from University of Kentucky, USA, and post graduate diploma in Executive Program in Management from Maastricht School of Management, The Netherlands.

SESSION 3 SPEAKERS



Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki

Country Director

Asian Development Bank-Thailand Resident Mission

Mr. Hideaki Iwasaki is ADB's Country Director for Thailand, overseeing its country operations in Thailand and selected sectoral initiatives of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) program, covering Cambodia, People's Republic of China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. He joined ADB in 2002.

Until his transfer to the current position in June 2017, Mr. Iwasaki was director of ADB's Southeast Asia Transport and Communications Division and oversaw ADB's transport sector operations in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam, and GMS's transport programs.

Prior to this he had a short stint in Myanmar in 2012-2013 as a member of the ADB team to reestablish its operations in Myanmar. Earlier Mr. Iwasaki was involved in transport sector operations in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

Before joining ADB, he worked for the Government of Japan for 12 years, initially with the Ministry of Construction and later with the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism and was involved in policy development and program administration in transport and urban/regional development.

Mr. Iwasaki has master's and bachelor's degrees in urban planning from the University of Tokyo, Japan, and a master's degree in transportation engineering from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, USA.



Dr. Kyriacos M. Koupparis

Regional Science, Technology & Innovation Advisor

United States Agency for International Development-Regional Development Mission for Asia

Dr. Kyriacos Koupparis focuses on building and strengthening networks that promote the integration of science, technology and innovation into development programs in order to accelerate social impact around the world. He currently serves as USAID's regional innovation expert and provides direct technical support to USAID missions, U.S. embassies and government officials in the Asia region, while liaising with multilateral bodies and foreign government representatives to promote the use of technology for social good. He has worked at USAID and the Department of State for the last six years where he gained experience with open innovation, prizes and challenges, human-centered design, ICT4D, and science partnerships. He worked in 15 countries throughout Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia. Dr. Kyriacos holds a Ph.D. and a Master in Biomedical Sciences from the University of California, San Francisco. He is a graduate of the Management of Technology program at UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business and has a Bachelor of Science (Honors) in Chemistry from Wayne State University.



Mr. Paul Stephens

Deputy Head of Mission to Thailand

Australian Embassy Bangkok and Permanent Representative to UNESCAP

Mr. Stephens is a senior career officer with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia. He commenced as Deputy Head of Mission Bangkok in July 2018. His most recent previous position was Assistant Secretary, South East Asia Regional Branch (2016-2018). He has also served in senior roles in Europe Division, Americas Division, Corporate Management Division and in International Division of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Mr Stephens' overseas experience includes Ambassador in Stockholm (2009-2013), First Secretary later Counsellor UN New York (2002-2005), and Third Secretary Brasilia (1995-1998).

Mr. Stephens has a Master of International Relations from Deakin University, Graduate Diploma in Communications from the University of Canberra and a Bachelor of Arts from the Australian National University.

SESSION 3 SPEAKERS



Dr. Saranyu Viriyavejakul

Vice President

TNeighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency

Dr.Saranyu Viriyavejakul graduated from the US Military Academy (Honors), with Masters of Science from Stanford University and UCLA, and with Doctor of Science from Mahidol University. A recipient of the Royal Thai Government Distinguished Officers Award, he was distinguished alumnus of Chulachomkiao Royal Military Academy and distinguished graduate of Faculty of Environment and Resource Studies, Mahidol University. Dr. Saranyu was Guest of Honor for several national television and radio programs. As Defense and Military Attaché to the US and Canada, he was Co-founder and Dean of Washington ASEAN Defense Attaché Association. He serves as Speaker, Adjunct Professor and Visiting Professor for several universities, such as Georgetown University, US National Defense University, US Center for Strategic and International Studies, US Service Academies Global Summit, and Chinese Academy of Social Science. Dr. Saranyu held key positions at the Thai Senate, House of Representatives, National Legislative Assembly, National Reform Council, National Reform Steering Assembly, National Economic and Social Advisory Council, Provincial Electricity Authority, and Federation of Thai Industries.

Currently, Dr.Saranyu is Vice President, Spokesperson, and CIO of Neighbouring Countries Economic Development Cooperation Agency (Public Organization), responsible for the economic development cooperation with seven Neighboring Countries. He is in charge of the Policy and Planning Bureau, Second Project Operation and Management Bureau (Cambodia, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka), Administration Bureau, and Engineering Division.



Mr. Jerome Pons

Head of Cooperation Section

Delegation of the European Union to Thailand

Mr. Pons is currently the Head of Cooperation for Thailand, Malaysia, China, Mongolia, India and Bhutan of the European Commission. From 2012 to 2016, he was Section Head for the Economics and Social Affairs for the South Pacific-Fiji. His other positions with the Commission included Head of Political Section – Azerbaijan in 2009-2012, Development Policy Officer – Belgium in 2007- 2009, and Advisor for Economic and Social sectors – Malawi in 2003- 2009.

Prior to joining the European Commission, Mr. Pons worked for 10 years with international and non-governmental organizations in the fields of development, good governance and humanitarian assistance in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Mr. Pons has a master's degree in banking and international finance and a post graduate diploma in development economics.



Dr. Watcharas Leelawath

Executive Director

Mekong Institute

Dr. Watcharas Leelawath is currently serving his second term as the Executive Director of Mekong Institute.

Prior to joining MI, he was the Deputy Executive Director of the International Institute for Trade and Development in-charge of planning, supervising and conducting research projects, training programs and various capacity building activities. He was also Assistant Professor of Economics at the University of Minnesota, Morris, USA where he taught International Economics and Mathematics for Economists.

He is a trade economist with a strong interest in trade and development cooperation issues in the Greater Mekong Sub-region and ASEAN frameworks, and has extensive research experience in the fields of International Labor Migration and Regional Economic Integration. Dr. Leelawath has written several papers presented in local and international conferences, has published several articles on trade-related topics and has co-authored a book entitled "Economics and Trade in Goods: An Introduction." He has also provided his expertise in a number of capacity building activities organized by ITD, ADB, UNESCAP, WTO and Thailand International Cooperation.

Dr. Leelawath earned his bachelor's degree from Chulalongkorn University, and his MA and Ph.D. in economics from the University of Kansas, USA.

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