

# MEKONG CONNECTION

The Newsletter of Mekong Institute

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## Converging Connections Cementing Connectivity

Over the past decade, the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) has witnessed unprecedented development in the transport and logistics sectors. For instance, the GMS road network has expanded by more than 200,000 km, inland road freight has increased twice as much, while the cross-border movement of vehicles, people, and goods had tripled. These advancements—linking production, trade, and infrastructure—have been integral in boosting integration and connectivity within and beyond the region.

As echoed in the Joint Mekong Forum-GMS Logistics Forum 2019, a robust transport and logistics network stands as a pillar of connectivity on which sustainability and inclusivity rests. “Freight and logistics are key components of our region’s sustainable growth because of the shared borders and interconnecting routes that offer geographic advantage,” said Dr. Watcharas Leelawath, Executive Director of Mekong

Institute, as he addressed the 300-strong crowd of logistics stakeholders. He also pointed out the timeliness of the theme, *Bridging Borders: GMS Connectivity for Inclusivity and Sustainability*, as Thailand assumes chairmanship of the ASEAN this year and puts emphasis on developing *seamless logistics* through “connecting the connectivities.”

Mekong countries have been pursuing regional integration and connectivity in more ways than one. Infrastructure developments—from completed Thai-Lao Friendship Bridges to the ongoing Vientiane-Boten railway—are clear indications of the strides to transform the GMS into a hub of cross-border trade, investment, transport, tourism, and social progress. All of which, according to Prof. Dr. Naoyuki Yoshino, Dean and CEO of the Asian Development Bank Institute, can benefit from the spillover effects of investments in infrastructure development. He continued by encouraging

private sector financing in infrastructure especially in the transport and logistics sectors and elaborated on how it can spur the growth of hotel and food businesses, start-ups along the roads, boost the tourism industry, and ultimately contribute toward inclusiveness of people and communities.

But paving the way for increased connectivity across the region remains a work in progress. Something that the Forum acknowledged by offering a multidimensional understanding of the landscape of GMS logistics, specifically the issues hampering its full potentials as well as corresponding strategies to overcome them. Accelerating the logistics industry as a driver of regional connectivity, as speakers and discussants reiterated, requires infrastructure to be accessible, border control procedures streamlined, and logistics capacities continuously strengthened through training and digitization.

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Dr. Watcharas Leelawath  
Executive Director

From abundant natural resources to diverse industry specializations, the six Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) countries play an integral part in building a robust regional network intertwined by trade and investment, multi-modal transport, supply chains, and other socio-economic linkages. With its strategic location, the GMS situates itself as a hub of connectivity encompassing physical, digital, institutional, and people-to-people.

A fundamental aspect of connectivity begins with the physical infrastructure. Through roads, bridges, railways, ports, air, maritime, and waterways, these transportation channels connect the countries, literally and figuratively. The Joint Mekong Forum-GMS Logistics Forum 2019, as recapped in this issue's banner story, stands witness to the consensus on the ever-growing importance of transport and logistics development in the region. While infrastructure projects within and between countries have substantially contributed to GMS connectivity, much can still be done in terms of streamlining and synchronizing transport networks. Physical connectivity must go beyond the mere addition of new infrastructures; it should equally ensure that existing infrastructure and logistics facilities are integrated, interoperable, and developed to its maximum potentials. This is possible by leveraging on various technological advances to drive productivity and efficiency. In this day and age, digital connectivity is constantly transforming human interactions as well as business transactions in the form of e-commerce and other online service platforms. Digital connectivity through the Internet and information and communications technology has been fueling knowledge generation and access for people across and beyond the region.

These "hard" infrastructure are underpinned by "soft" infrastructure, including policies, regulations, and institutional ecosystem as well as human capital. It is suggested that networks tend to be increasingly complex and interdependent as they evolve which require governments to continuously develop cross-sectoral policies, both at the national and regional levels. To do so, the government and the private sector alike are encouraged to harness synergies for promoting coordination and strengthening capacities that extend to people-to-people networks. Human capital – people's skills, knowledge, and innovative spirit – lends direction for wider, deeper integration that is built on responsiveness and inclusiveness.

In this regard, Mekong Institute continues to align its pipeline of projects and activities with the regional connectivity agenda. As connectivity enhances, the capacity needs equally evolve. And we find ourselves committed to transform the regional connectivity landscape through a multi-faceted approach. Addressing hard infrastructure, for instance, MI has tapped on digital technologies to promote rural e-commerce and special economic zones online platform in the Lancang-Mekong region. Further complementing this are efforts targeting the soft aspects – capacity building, knowledge sharing, information exchange, and intersectoral dialogues – all of which are anchored on RLED-EWEC Project's strategy of market systems development and cross-border trade facilitation.

Amidst these initiatives, the vital link between the various components of connectivity as well as the contribution of different sectors and stakeholders cannot be discounted. Trade, transport, and technological connectivity, although a priority in its own, should not be regarded as standalone strategies but rather as integrated mechanisms to foster greater innovation and competitiveness among economies and communities in the GMS.

# EMPOWE

# WOME

# ENRICH

# LIVES

Myawaddy Township spans more than 1,210 square miles which cover 50 villages within 15 village tracts. Characterized by its fertile topography, the township stands as the main producing area of maize in Kayin State accounting for around 65 percent of the total sown area in the country. In one of the villages of Ingyin Myaing in Palugyi village tract, a 47-year-old woman wears a hat of different kinds. Meet Daw Yee Win, a smallholder maize farmer, agro-input dealer, lifelong learner, and mother of three.



"I have 66 acres of upland on which I grow maize and cucumber," Daw Yee Win explains as she does a quick check of the fertilizer bags piled in front of her house. "I also grow black gram on patch of land where water is available all year round – one thing that I learned from Shwe Ingyin," she claims. Shwe Ingyin refers to the farmers group formed in 2018 through the facilitation of Mekong Institute's Regional and Local Economic Development – East West Economic Corridor (RLED-EWEC) Project.

*The RLED-EWEC Project is an initiative by Mekong Institute and supported by the Swiss Agency and coffee farmers in Quang Tri, Vietnam. For more information about the Project, visit: <http://www.mekonginstitute.org>*

# RING EN ING S



By joining the maize farmers group, Daw Yee Win along with 35 other farmers received capacity-building and skills development on improved cultivation, crop diversification, and integrated pest management, to name a few. They were also equipped with technical skills related to group management and operations, problem solving, bookkeeping, and cooperative development. “If all group members engage in collective action such as this, I believe our village can socially and economically advance at a faster rate and of wider scale to benefit everyone in the community,” she adds.

Like most smallholder farmers, Daw Yee Win was inevitably challenged by the lack of knowledge on market information and financial management, as well as limited access to quality yet reasonably priced farming inputs. She recalls how she used to purchase fertilizers on credit from Thai traders despite high interest rates: “Instead of enjoying the fruits of my labor, my earnings had to be redirected to paying off interest rates and loans. I could not even save enough money for my family. It was a really tough time as we didn’t have many options back then.” It was through the RLED-EWEC Project’s tripartite model that opportunities began to branch out – facilitating better access to preferential loans, reducing costs of agricultural inputs, and boosting quality and productivity. “Since I joined the group, I now acquire farming inputs on credit from Awba Company at much fairer credit terms and this has contributed to an increase in income,” she says which is also in part due to the know-how and techniques on efficient fertilizer application imparted by the Project. What used to be two bags of basal fertilizer for three split applications has been reduced to one-and-a-half bags for two split applications.

“That equates to a savings of 22,500 MMK (approximately \$14.79) per acre every year!” she delightfully adds. In turn, Daw Yee Win pays it forward to her fellow maize growers through her own dealership of Awba Agro-input Company in Ingyin Myaing village in the southern part of Myawaddy.



Moreover, smallholder farmers have been introduced to microfinance companies that lend lower interest rates for agricultural loans and were also provided with hand-pushed seeder to strike the balance between precision and efficiency for the next crop season. With improved livelihood and multiplied income, Daw Yee Win has rechanneled her earnings in preparation for her children’s education which, according to her, is of utmost priority. “I’ve always dreamt of sending my children to university however, I was always concerned about our finances. My youngest son is in Grade 11 and is set to take the matriculation exam soon. My worries have been replaced with excitement – thanks to Mekong Institute not only for assisting smallholder farmers like me but most importantly, for providing an opportunity of securing a brighter future for our children,” she concludes. ■

## CROSS-COUNTRY ACTIVITIES

- Business to Government meeting on cross-border trade facilitation (Mukdahan - Quang Tri - Savannakhet)
- National consultation workshops in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand as part of study on Regional Cooperation Mechanism on Priority Areas under the Mekong-Lancang Cooperation Framework
- Consultation workshop on Development of Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS) Transport Information Connectivity System (GTICS) between Tay Ninh Province and Svay Rieng Province
- Meetings with project stakeholders in Myanmar and Thailand as part of study on management and promotion of SEZs

### THAILAND

#### Trainings

- Food Safety Risk Management and Traceability in the Supply Chain
- Communication Skills 2 - Capacity Building for Regional Cooperation and Integration in Lancang-Mekong Region
- Communicating Food Safety
- Cross-border Trade Procedures of Agricultural Products
- Agro-product Packaging and Labeling
- Opportunity Insights on Cross-Border Transportation between Thailand and Myanmar
- Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand
- Food Safety Emergency Management in the Supply Chain
- Enhancement of Business Connections and Information Sharing of One-Stop Service Centers and Business Centers between SEZs in Lancang-Mekong Region

#### Workshops

- GTICS workshop
- Workshop on Power Market Construction and Development

#### Meetings, Forums and Other Activities

- 2nd Regional Consultation on Transboundary Cooperation Mechanism on Adaptation to Climate Change and Hydropower Development Projects
- Meeting with Thai officials on customs modernization
- Meeting with TICA on Annual International Training Courses

### LAO PDR

#### Meetings, Forums and Other Activities

- Structured learning visit to Lao Bao/Dansavanh Border
- Field assessment at Naphao International Border
- Meetings and company visit for market linkage promotion
- Meetings on contract farming and GAP standardization

### P.R. CHINA

#### Trainings

- Power Market Construction and Development

#### Meetings, Forums and Other Activities

- MIYS courtesy visit to Kunming

### MYANMAR

#### Trainings

- Integrated Pest Management
- Localized training on Good Hygiene Practices
- Food Safety Learning Event on New Product Labeling Guidelines for Processed Agri-food

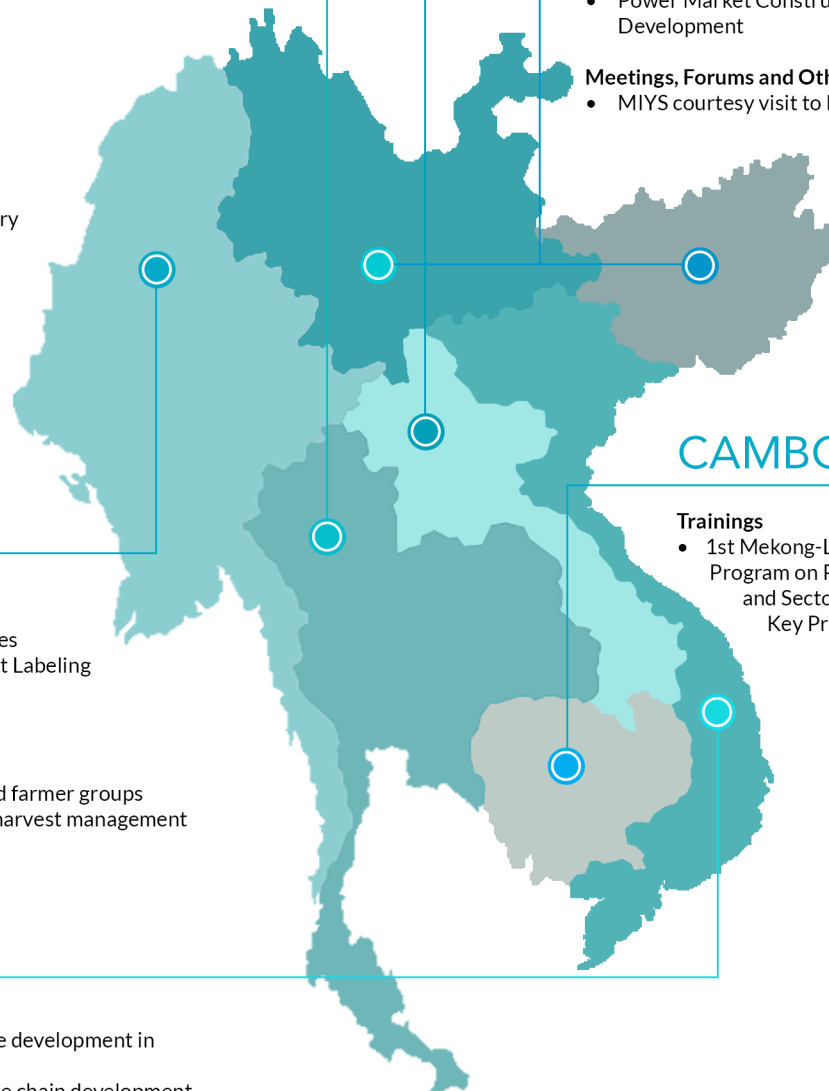
#### Meetings, Forums and Other Activities

- Food Safety Forum 2019
- Meetings with microfinance enterprises and farmer groups
- SLV for quality maize production and post-harvest management

### VIETNAM

#### Meetings, Forums and Other Activities

- Project site visit as part of rural e-commerce development in Lancang-Mekong countries
- Meetings with farmer groups on coffee value chain development
- Meeting with Quang Binh enterprises on import-export procedures
- Establishment of coffee farmer alliance



### CAMBODIA

#### Trainings

- 1st Mekong-Lancang Training Program on Project Management and Sectoral Development of Key Priority Areas



Attuned to this endeavor, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, former Minister of Energy and Chairman of the MI Steering Committee, emphasized in his speech the importance of harmonizing efforts on regional connectivity, as guided by the 4S: seamless, synchronized, smart, and sustainable. This was seconded by Mr. Zhang Guohua, Vice Governor of The People’s Government of Yunnan Province, P.R. China, who underscored coordinated planning and policy among logistics actors in the six countries of the subregion.

The collective voices at the Forum attests to the indispensable linkages between connectivity-inclusivity-sustainability and the interplay of transport, logistics, and infrastructure development. Inarguably, it calls for an impetus based on reciprocal advantages to fast-track an integrated GMS – a region of connectivities, a region of opportunities. ■

The first of its kind, this year’s Forum combined the reach and expertise of MI’s annual Mekong Forum and TCEB’s GMS Logistics Forum to offer a broader platform for engaging logistics actors in critical discussions on the subject of logistics and connectivity. The two-day forum featured sessions – including boosting border trade with streamlined frameworks, assessing the capacity needs of the region’s connectivity network, and transforming logistics processes with digital tech – which were complemented by the following side events:

**GMS Logistics Forum 2019 Business Matching**

The business matching hosted more than 40 logistics companies, SMEs and third-party logistics services and outsourcing businesses from the region. It offered a concrete platform for enterprises engaged in different types of logistics services such as transportation, warehouse distribution, and forwarder, among others, to discuss possible areas of collaboration for business expansion.



**The Trade Facilitation Office (TFO) Canada Dissemination Workshop**

The Trade Facilitation Office (TFO) Canada gathered policymakers, academics, and members of the private sector for a dissemination workshop on TFO’s initiatives and projects directed at enabling better trade opportunities and creating a conducive market environment for agro-food enterprises in the Mekong countries.



**OECD-MI-ADBI Joint Seminar on Water Infrastructure Challenges in the Mekong Region**

The joint seminar discussed water infrastructure in the Mekong region, the potentials of maritime shipping, and private financing for water supply by the use of spillover tax revenues, based on a new project prepared jointly by the OECD, Mekong Institute, and ADBI.



The Joint Mekong Forum and GMS Logistics Forum 2019 was organized by Mekong Institute and the Federation of Thai Industries-Khon Kaen Chapter and co-hosted by the Thailand Convention and Exhibition Bureau. The Forum was also made possible in collaboration with other partners, Thai Smile; The Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking (Thailand); Tourism Authority of Thailand; GMS Freight Transport Association; Regional and Local Economic Development-East West Economic Corridor Project; Asian Development Bank Institute; Trade Facilitation Office-Canada; and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre.

## PROSAFE Project Launches New Course on Food Safety Risk Management and Traceability

Mekong Institute (MI), with the support of the New Zealand Aid Programme, delivered a regional training program on *Food Safety Risk Management and Traceability in the Supply Chain* on July 1-12, 2019. Organized under the PROSAFE Project: Promoting Safe Food for Everyone, the new safe food course gathered 27 participants from food safety agencies and enterprises as well as academic institutions from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam (CLMV) to equip them with capacities on the management and risk-based approach to food safety issues, especially in the fruit and vegetable value chains.



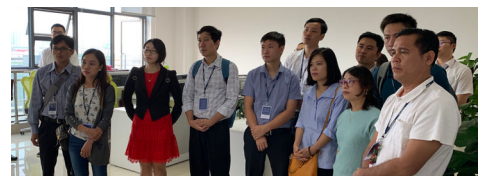
## Maize Growers Brush Up on Soil, Seed and IPM Knowledge

A training on soil, seed and plant protection was conducted on July 30, 2019 in Pha Lu Gyi Village in Myawaddy, Myanmar. Gathering 70 maize farmers from seven villages, the training intended to improve the knowledge of smallholder farmers on the proper management of maize production to help increase their product quality and market competitiveness. Experts from the Department of Agriculture discussed best practices along the value chain including Integrated Pest Management and how to effectively control Fall Armyworm which is a common problem among farmers in the Myawaddy region.



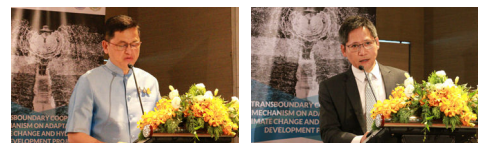
## MI-CSG Training Promotes Regional Power Connectivity

Mekong Institute, in collaboration with China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd. (CSG) / Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd. (YNPG), conducted a training program on *Power Market Construction and Development* on July 29 to August 9, 2019. About 30 technicians and middle management personnel from the national energy authorities as well as representatives from the power utilities in the Lancang-Mekong region joined the activity at YNPG Yixing Training Base in Kunming, China. Aside from developing participants' capacities, the training also encouraged cross-cultural communication and interactions through learning sessions on Chinese traditional calligraphy and dumpling making.



## Strengthening Synergies for Climate Adaptation in the Mekong-Lancang

Water resource experts from the six Mekong-Lancang countries attended the 2<sup>nd</sup> regional consultation on *Transboundary Cooperation Mechanism on Adaptation to Climate Change and Hydropower Development Projects* on August 6, 2019 in Bangkok. This event is the last of a series of activities planned under the project which was launched in October last year. The activity aimed to foster increased cooperation among Mekong-Lancang riparian countries to improve climate adaptation in the river basin.



## National Consultation Workshops Steer Direction for Efficient Coordination under MLC

MI organized a series of national consultation workshops in Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, in collaboration with the respective country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The national consultation workshops focused on having an in-depth understanding on coordination processes (i) of MLC programs at national and regional levels and (ii) between MLC programs and other regional and sub-regional cooperation programs. The workshops are part of an ongoing project on *Capacity Building for National Coordinator of Mekong-Lancang Cooperation*.



## Female at the Forefront: Fostering Gender Equality and Women Empowerment across Nations

MI organized an international training program on *Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand* on August 20 to September 2, 2019. The program hosted government representatives from 18 countries working in ministries and agencies related to education, planning and international relations, foreign affairs, social and economic inclusion, gender equality, women and children welfare and social development. In collaboration with the Thailand International Cooperation Agency, the training equipped participants with increased knowledge on gender equality initiatives and implementation as well as heightened appreciation of gender-sensitive planning and budgeting.



## SEZs and Connectivity: Strengthening Cooperation through Physical and Digital Connections

In collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce of Thailand, and with the support of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund, MI held a workshop on *Enhancement of Business Connections and Information Sharing between Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Lancang-Mekong (LM) Region*. The workshop discussed issues of coordination, cooperation and information-sharing mechanisms and one stop service centers in SEZs in the LM countries and fostered networking among participants for increased intra-regional cooperation. Around 24 representatives from government departments, specialized agencies and institutions related to trade and investment joined this activity on August 26-30, 2019 at the MI Residential Training Center.



## Readiness, Response, Recovery: PROSAFE Training Tackles Food Safety Emergency Management

Food safety stakeholders and regulatory officials from CLMV joined the regional training program on *Food Safety Emergency Management in the Supply Chain* held on September 2-13, 2019. Supported by the New Zealand Aid Programme, it intended to build capacities of stakeholders to strengthen their national food safety control systems for improved public health and increase their resilience to food safety emergency in the supply chain. The training is the eighth installment to a series of safe food courses organized this year under the PROSAFE Project.



## Second B2G Reinforces Cross-Border Landscape in Mukdahan, Quang Tri, and Savannakhet

MI's RLED-EWEC Project, with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, organized the second Business to Government (B2G) Meeting on Cross-Border Trade Facilitation between Mukdahan, Thailand, Quang Tri, Vietnam, and Savannakhet, Lao PDR. Held on September 9, a total of 123 representatives from public and private sectors in the border provinces reviewed the ongoing implementation of action plans and strategized further actions to fulfill commitments made during the first round. Discussions centered on regulatory-based concerns, operational services, and costs associated to import-export border procedures.



## Zeroing In on Power Market Construction and Development

MI, in cooperation with China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd. (CSG) / Yunnan Power Grid Co., Ltd. (YNPG), organized a workshop on *Power Market Construction and Development* on September 25-26 in Khon Kaen, Thailand. The workshop covered regional power grid interconnection and cross-border power trade practices as well as the current national situations of power market construction and future development plans in the Lancang-Mekong Region. Presentations during the plenary session focused on promoting the construction of regional electricity market, prioritizing optimal allocation of power resources, and maximizing prospects for efficient operation of the power market in the region.



# ALUMNI TESTIMONIALS



**Mr. Yanglao Yiale**

Lecturer, Faculty of Agriculture, National University of Laos

Activity: *Regional Training Program on Food Safety Emergency Management in the Supply Chain*

This is my third time to attend a training program at MI and it never fails to exceed my expectations. The activities included role play, group discussions, and field visit which made the training even more interesting and interactive. With the knowledge that I have gained, I intend to organize localized food safety trainings for SMEs and universities in my country. Thank you very much MI for this opportunity!



**Ms. Molly Auma**

Administrative Officer, Kampala Capital City Authority, Uganda

Activity: *International Training on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand*

I've learned many things from this training and I like how it gathered participants from 16 countries to share their ideas and experiences about issues in their respective contexts. I found the topic on gender responsive budgeting and planning very relevant – something that I can apply to my work. I hope MI continues to have regular training programs like this and I would love to participate again.



**Mr. Youssef Mazouz**

Head, Information Systems Development Department, Ministry of Family, Solidarity, Equality and Social Development, Morocco

Activity: *International Training on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment: Sharing Good Practices and Experiences of Thailand*

This is one of the best trainings I have attended from which I have learned promotion of women participation in political institutions and implementation of gender-sensitive budgeting. The resource persons are very nice and they have impressive backgrounds and experiences. MI has done a great job in organizing this training, not to mention how the staff has been very friendly and accommodating.

## MI CALENDAR

### OCT

**8** Food Safety Forum on Managing Food Safety Risks in the Agri-Food Chain

**10, 15, 16** RLED-EWEC Project Completion Workshops

**14-24** Regional Training Program on Communication Skill Capacity Building for Regional Cooperation and Integration in Lancang-Mekong Region

**15** PROSAFE Forum on Food Safety and Quality - A Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

**22** Food Safety Forum on Strengthening Public Sector Commitment in Promoting Food Safety in the Food Supply Chain

### NOV

**4-10** Strategic Management to Labour Migration in the Greater Mekong Subregion: Addressing the Challenges through Good Practices

**4-15** Regional Training Program on Postharvest Management System in Fresh Horticultural Produce

**7-8** 2nd Lancang-Mekong Business Forum

**25-6 DEC** Regional Training on Promoting Efficient Utilization of Resources and Sustainable Energy in the Lancang-Mekong Region



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