

COMMUNICATING FOOD SAFETY:

Regional Media Training Program on Food Safety Reporting in CLMV

Dates: August 28–September 1, 2017

Location: Mekong Institute Residential Training Center, Khon Kaen, Thailand with Structured Learning Visits to agro-processing firms in northeast Thailand

RATIONALE

Food safety remains to be one of the most pressing concerns in many developing countries including Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV). In Southeast Asia alone, the World Health Organization (2015) estimates that more than 150 million people get sick while more than 175,000 die every year due to foodborne diseases.¹ Of these numbers, 60 million who fall ill and 50,000 of the total fatalities are children under 5 years old. At the same time, more than half of the world's typhoid fever and hepatitis A patients also come from the region.

In the same vein, smallholder farmers in the region still heavily rely on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The large volume of trade along the porous borders of CLMV—a considerable portion of which are informal in nature—also remains to be a major threat in managing food safety. Many private food entrepreneurs, mostly small and medium producers and processors, also lack the resources and capacity to adopt new technologies and practices that would ensure that their products are safe to eat.

In recent years, more and more people in the region are increasingly curious and concerned at how their food are grown, processed, sold, and prepared. This growing public recognition on the importance for proper food handling—from the moment seeds are sown or livestock are reared until the end-products reach consumers' kitchen—illustrates the need to further engage the public.

Recognizing the need to raise public awareness on food safety issues, the **Regional Media Training Program on Food Safety Reporting in CLMV** is designed as one of the key training programs to be delivered under Mekong Institute's Food Safety Project funded by the New Zealand Aid Programme. Enhancing consumers' knowledge and attitude towards safe food consumption was among the most salient needs identified during preliminary in-country visits and training needs assessments.

At present, mass media coverage on food safety issues in the region remains to be limited. As such, there is a need for extensive science-based coverage on local and transboundary issues on food safety. The main challenge among communication practitioners is how to make food safety-related issues more accessible to the public.

This five-day training program will allow participants to have a better understanding of regional and local food safety issues and current safe food promotion initiatives in their respective countries. The workshop seeks to serve as a venue for these journalists to discuss the best strategies to tackle these issues and make food safety-related stories more relatable and appealing to the general public. Through the presentations and discussions, the workshop hopes to provide the journalists new perspectives and ideas in handling food safety stories. By

¹ World Health Organization. (2015). *Burden of foodborne diseases in the South-east Asia region*. New Delhi, India: WHO. Retrieved from www.searo.who.int/about/administration_structure/cds/burden-of-foodborne-sear.pdf.

the end of the workshop, the participants are expected to share their ideas for possible stories that can be published or produced through their respective platforms.

OBJECTIVES

The training program targets to enhance the professional capacity of media and communication professionals in CLMV in covering food safety issues by providing a platform for mutual exchange of knowledge, experience, and skills.

Specifically, the course aims to:

- Strengthen participants' awareness and understanding of key food safety concepts, related global and local issues, and existing best practices in the region;
- Raise journalists' interest in covering food safety issues in their respective countries; and
- Foster collaboration among media practitioners and communication officers from relevant sectors by forming a regional network of food safety reporters.

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

Media practitioners working on any medium—including print, radio, television, and online—from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam will be invited in this training program. Priority will be given to editors and reporters assigned to cover issues related to science and technology, agriculture, public health, or industry and trade.

Communication officers from related national agencies (i.e., ministries of health, agriculture, trade, or commerce), international organizations, and non-government organizations working on food safety-related issues in the region are also welcome to apply.

Communication professionals working in non-English media can apply but must indicate their proficiency and willingness to write stories in English, which can later be translated in their local language.

At least five participants from each country will be invited. Applicants will be required to submit a story pitch covering a local food safety issue in their own country. After the workshop, the participants are expected to publish or produce at least two food safety-related stories through their respective media platforms.

COURSE CONTENTS

Module 1: Food Safety 101

The introductory module for the training program will focus on discussing basic food safety concepts, basic food safety management tools, and strategies in managing consumer awareness. Current food safety issues in CLMV will also be thoroughly discussed in this session. At the end of the module, an exercise in localizing global food safety news will be conducted.

Learning targets:

- Increase participants' knowledge and understanding of food safety concepts and food safety management tools;

- Enhance participants' appreciation of the media's vital role in raising public awareness on the importance of food safety; and
- Enrich participants' awareness on prominent regional and local food safety issues.

Module 2: Communicating Food Safety

This module provides information on the basic concepts and tools in risk communication. Moreover, there will be discussions on the challenges in food safety reporting and feasible ways to address these barriers. Another session will focus on tips in popularizing technical terms on food safety. Lastly, this session will provide participants the opportunity build their contact list through group discussions on possible sources of food safety information in CLMV.

Learning targets:

- Improve participants' awareness on tools in conveying science-based food safety stories; and
- Develop an indicative list of key persons and/or organizations to contact per each country when developing food safety stories.

Module 3: Structured Learning Visits

In this module, participants will visit agro-processing firms in northeast Thailand implementing functional food safety management systems. This provides opportunities for participants to learn from the sites' experiences on effective food safety practices.

Learning targets:

- Promote a better understanding of effective food safety management tools in Thailand; and
- Increase participants' awareness on possible angles/ideas for food safety stories based from the visits.

Module 4: Media Pitching Session

In the last module, participants will be asked to pitch their final story proposal. Each participant shall present their chosen food safety issue, story angle, list of possible primary and secondary sources of information, medium, and other pertinent details. The resource person and other participants will be asked to provide comments and other suggestions for each pitch.

Learning targets:

- Enhance journalists' critical thinking abilities and skills in developing food safety stories; and
- Map out food safety story ideas/proposal from each participating country.