MEKONG INSTITUTE

ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

2023

www.mekonginstitute.org

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACMECS	Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADC	Agricultural Development and Commercialization
AEM-METI	AEM-Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry
AIF	Agrinnovation Fund in ASEAN
AMEICC	AEM-METI Economic and Industrial Cooperation Committee
AMS	ASEAN Member States
ANGA	ASEAN Negotiating Group for Agriculture's
AOTS	Association for Overseas Technical Cooperation and Sustainable Partnerships
APRACA	Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN-CRN	The ASEAN Climate Resilience Network
ATR	ASEAN Trade Repository
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CBPTA	Cross Border Paperless Trade Agreement
CD	Capacity Development
CERS	China Energy Research Society
CIKD	Center for International Knowledge on Development
CKM	Communications and Knowledge Management
CLMV	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam
CLMVT	Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand
COP28	28th Conference of the Parties
CPF	Career Progression Framework
CSG	China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd.
DAC:	Development Assistance Committee
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DOA	The Department of Agriculture
ECOS	Environmental Coalition on Standards AiSBL
EDRI/LMERC	Lancang-Mekong Energy & Power Cooperation Research Center
EOI	Expressions of Interest
EOP	End-of-Project
FAOYN	People's Government of Yunnan Province of P.R. China
FTA	Free Trade Agreements
GAP	Good Agricultural Practice
GDI	Global Development Initiatives
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

GMCA	Greater Mekong Community Affairs
GMP	Good Manufacturing Practice
GMS	Greater Mekong Sub-region
GMSKN	Greater Mekong Subregion Knowledge Network
GS	General Service
GXPG	Guangxi Power Grid Co., Ltd.
HACCP	Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resource Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IGO	Intergovernmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPDET	International Program for Development Evaluation Training
IT	Information Technology
KKU	Khon Kaen University
KKUIC	Khon Kaen University International College
LFM	Logical Framework Matrix
LM	Lancang-Mekong
LMC	Lancang Mekong Cooperation
LMCSF	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Special Fund
MAPSTA	Mekong-Australia Partnership Short Term Awards
MCU	Mekong Cooperation Unit
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MI	Mekong Institute
MI-CDM	MI Capacity Development Model
MKCF	Mekong – Korea Cooperation Fund
MOAC	Ministry of Commerce
MOC	Ministry of Commerce
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MSIT	Ministry of Science and ICT
MSMEs	Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises
NREF	Norwegian Retailers' Environment Fund
NZAP	New Zealand Aid Programme
OAE	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PIAs	Project Implementing Agencies
POI	Point of Interest

PR	Public Relations
PROSAFE	Promoting Safe Food for Everyone
P.R. China	People's Republic of China
RBM	Results-Based Management
RF	Results Framework
ROK	Republic of Korea
SB	Subsidiary Bodies
SDG	Sustainable development goal
SEE	Sustainable Energy and Environment
SMEs	Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
SOP	standard operating procedure
SP	Strategic Plan
STEPI	Science and Technology Policy Institute
SUP	single-use plastics
TICA	Thailand International Cooperation Agency
TIF	Trade Investment and Facilitation
TOR	Term of reference
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNOSSC	United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEF	Water-Energy-Food

Executive Summary

This report describes the progress of the annual work plan 2023 and the performance of MI from January to December 2023. Progress of key program activities and the results achieved during the reporting period are described in the report and presented according to the Regional Development and Cross-Cutting themes of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025. Several program departments have addressed more than one thematic area and contributed to the overall results of MI towards GMS development. The institutional strengthening part has been described separately, contributed by the operation units (OED, Finance, HR, General Services, Procurement, MEL, CKM, and PRM). The activities under MI's Flagship Program and MI's contribution to broader GMS Cooperation Frameworks were also briefly described in the report.

In 2023, 31 projects were implemented by the MI program departments one operation unit. Among the implemented projects, 11 were long-term projects, 12 were short-term projects, and the rest eight were one-off activities. ADC implemented eight projects, TIF implemented 11, SEE implemented 11, and one project was implemented by the Finance unit. The program departments collaborated in joint implementation of three projects in 2023.

Due to the improved Covid situation, ADC department continued to organize onsite events, while TIF and SEE departments implemented both onsite and online events. Based on the real-time update of the newly developed MEL system, overall, 78% of the planned activities were implemented by programs and operations as of December 2023 (including the forecasted activities).

During Jan-Dec 2023, 46 Capacity Development (CD) events organized by MI, where 1530 direct participants attended from the GMS countries and outside. Among the direct participants who attended MI's events, 50.5% were male, and 49.5% were female. Disaggregating the participants according to their sectors, 63.2% were from the public sector, and 36.8% were from the private sector. MI's direct participants organized 262 CD events that generated 12,282 indirect participants of MI. Among the indirect participants, 42.7% were male, and 57.3% were female. Disaggregating the participants according to their sectors, 16.3% were from the public sector, and 83.7% were from the private sector.

MI's total revenue was US$ 2,797,479, achieving 71% of the target budget for 2023 as of October 31, 2023. This includes total revenue from long-term projects (US$ 1,760,733), short-term projects (US$ 370,188), customized activities (US$ 212,695), GMS countries' contributions (US$ 437,177), and other revenues (US$ 16,686). On the other hand, total MI expenses amounted to US$ 2,772,976, covering expenses from project and program delivery (US$ 1,926,909) and operation expenses (US$ 792,089). Mi's non-cash operation expenses amounted to US$ 53,979. MI recorded net earnings of US$ 24,503 as of October 31, 2023.

1. Introduction

Mekong Institute (MI) is an intergovernmental organization (IGO) founded by the six-member countries of the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS), namely Cambodia, P.R. China (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Mekong Institute was established under the Memorandum of Understanding between the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and the Thai Department of Technical and Economic Cooperation (presently known as Thailand International Cooperation Agency - TICA) in August 1996. MI provides, implements, and facilitates integrated human resource development (HRD), capacity-building programs, and development projects related to regional cooperation and integration. MI works with and through various local government authorities, development partners, and local organizations to deliver, implement standardized and customized learning programs, workshops, seminars, policy consultation, and research and development projects.

This annual performance report covers the key highlights on MI's actual achievements from January-October and forecast of November-December 2023 covering two main focuses of the Results Framework (see Annex 1) of MI Strategic Plan 2021-2025: MI's Contribution to GMS Development and Institutional Strengthening of MI in delivering the results, as well as MI' Contribution to Broader GMS Cooperation Frameworks.

In the middle of this year, MI has completed half of the period of the implementation of its Strategic Plan 2021-2025. During August-October 2023, a Mid-term Review (MTR) was conducted jointly by an independent consultant and MI's MEL unit with additional technical support of Khon Kaen University International College (KKUIC). Tie findings and recommendations of the MTR are provided in a separate MTR report, that complements this Annual Performance Report 2023.

2. Key Progress of MI Activities during Jan-Dec 2023

During the first half of the year, 31 projects were implemented by the MI program departments one operation unit. Among the implemented projects, 11 were long-term projects, 12 were short-term projects, and the rest eight were one-off activities. ADC implemented eight projects, TIF implemented 11, SEE implemented 11, and one project was implemented by the Finance unit. The program departments collaborated in joint implementation of three projects in 2023.

MI's new web-based MEL system regularly tracks the progress of activities and provides monthly updates MI teams. Based on the real-time update of the system, overall, 78% of the planned activities were implemented by programs and operations as of December 2023 (including the forecasted activities to be completed by Dec 2023).

Figure 1: Progress of MI Activities as per Annual Work Plan 2023
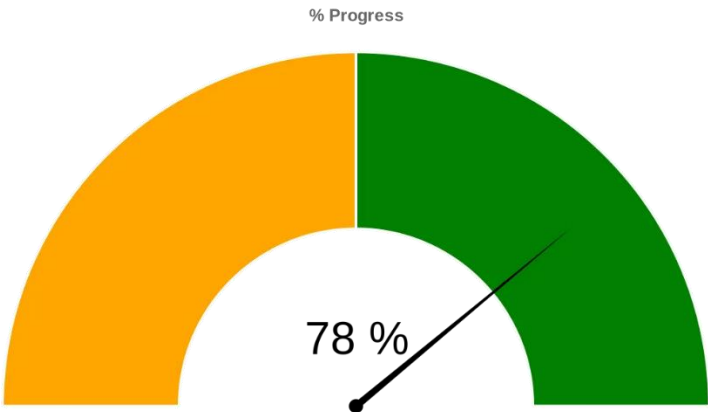
**Progress of MI-wide Activities
(Programs and Operations)**
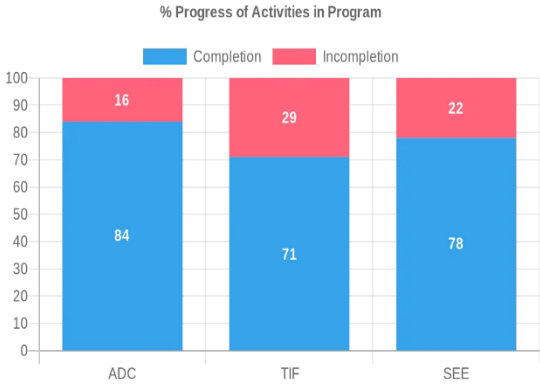
Progress of Program Activities

Progress of Operation Units' Activities

3. MI's Contribution to the GMS Development

This section briefly describes the capacity development events conducted and key results achieved in the last six months under the Regional Development and Cross-Cutting Themes by MI's program departments. During Jan-Dec 2023, 46 Capacity Development (CD) events organized by MI, where 1530 direct participants attended from the GMS countries and outside.
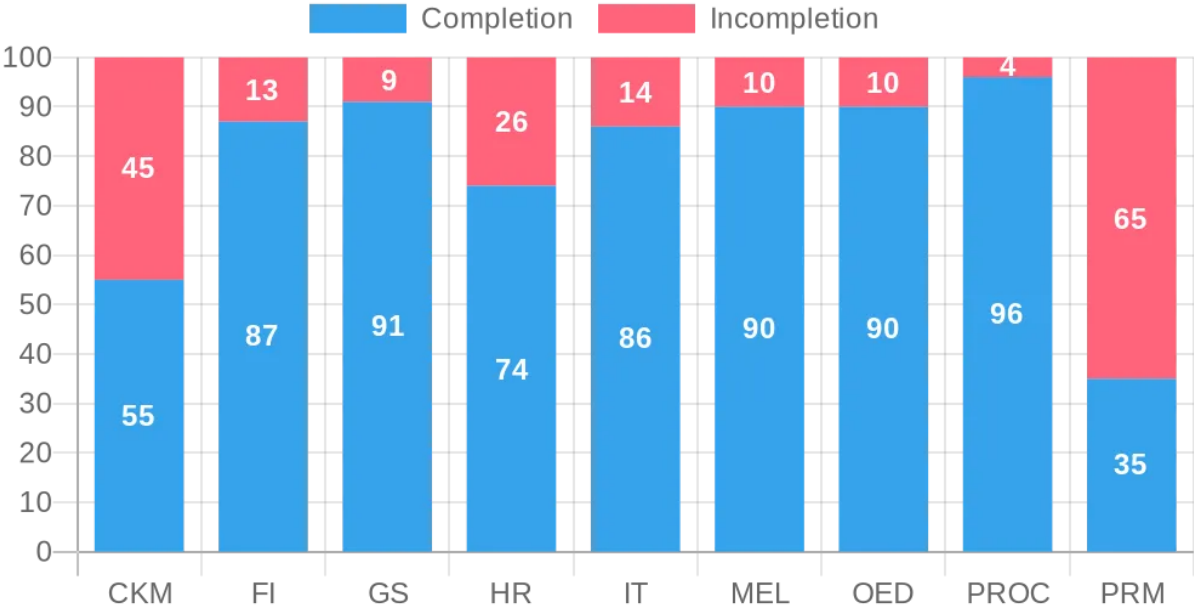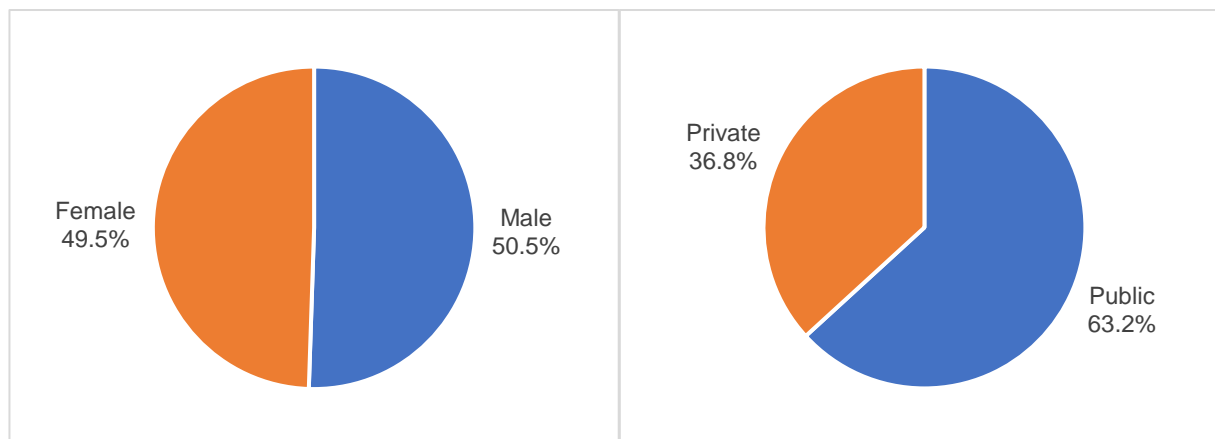
Figure 2: Distribution of MI's direct participants by sex and sector

Among the direct participants who attended MI's events, 50.5% were male, and 49.5% were female. Disaggregating the participants according to their sectors, 63.2% were from the public sector, and 36.8% were from the private sector.

MI's direct participants organized 262 CD events that generated 12,282 indirect participants of MI. Among the indirect participants, 42.7% were male, and 57.3% were female. Disaggregating the participants according to their sectors, 16.3% were from the public sector, and 83.7% were from the private sector.

3.1. Regional Development Themes

Based on the percentage of completion of activities under each of the projects, the following table presents the average percentage reflecting the progress of projects under the regional development theme. Please see Annex 3 for the details list of activities and their implementation status as of December 2023.

3.1.1. Agricultural Development and Commercialization

Key Progress during January-December 2023

I. Promoting Safe Food for Everyone

To effectively address regional and local food safety challenges and promote the implementation of food safety standards that meet both regional and international market requirements, MI organized eight food safety training programs under the Promoting Safe Food for Everyone (PROSAFE) project. These training sessions were attended by 228 food safety stakeholders from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV).

In celebration of World Food Safety Day, MI, in collaboration with partner organizations, hosted a series of events as part of the PROSAFE Project, with a primary focus on the theme "Food Standards save lives" in CLMV. A total of six food safety forums were organized, with five of them conducted on-site in CLMV, and one taking place as a webinar in Myanmar. These events garnered participation from nearly 700 representatives from both the public and private sectors.

Additionally, MI organized eight workshops, with a total of 293 attendees actively taking part. The workshops were designed to not only enhance the participants' understanding on food safety but also to foster stronger networking among food safety stakeholders throughout the entire value chain.

Two **assessment studies on "Climate Change Impacts and Food Safety Challenges in Agriculture" and "Food Safety-Food Loss Nexus in Support of the Development of Sustainable Food Systems in the GMS"** were conducted to gain valuable insights into the intersection of climate change, food safety challenges in agriculture, and the complex relationship between food safety and food loss.

MI developed a compendium of food safety issues in CLMV to serve as a comprehensive source of information, consolidating valuable data on major food safety issues in CLMV.

MI also developed PROSAFE project impact stories showcased the project's tangible benefits and successes and impact stories of the project alumni and published MI's website and social media pages. The stories not only increased the visibility of the project but also engaged a wide variety of audiences, from stakeholders to the general public, on the project outcomes in a more relatable and understandable manner. Twelve PROSAFE food safety champion videos were developed to acknowledge their hard work and dedication as PROSAFE alumni. Their success stories were designed to inspire and motivate others to take action or adopt better food safety practices. A video of PROSAFE project: Achievements and Milestones was also developed to summarize the harvested outcomes from the project.

II. Development and Implementation of Common Rice Production Standard in Mekong-Lancang Sub-region

The Rice Department of Thailand and MI jointly conducted the **end-of-project (EOP) evaluation workshop** in Bangkok to identify the project's outcomes and the factors that influenced the accomplishment of project targets. A total of 29 CLMV representatives from project partners attended this workshop. The workshop yielded valuable lessons learned for other related projects in the future.

III. Development of Rice Pest and Natural Disasters Monitoring, Forecasting and Warning Center for Sustainable Rice Production under Climate Change in Mekong-Lancang Sub-region

MI organized an **end-of-project workshop** in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, to showcase the achievements and outcomes attained by the project in its three years of implementation; 28

participants from CLMV attended the event. The workshop also included a presentation on the impacts of climate change in the agriculture sector to increase the partners' knowledge.

IV. Sustainable and Smart Agricultural Supply Chain Development in Mekong Countries

MI's three program departments jointly implemented the MKCF project and contributed to the agricultural supply chain development initiatives.

One assessment study was conducted on Smart Technology for Agriculture Production Supply Chain in Mekong Countries to assess the opportunities and challenges producers encounter in adopting smart technologies, especially for smallholder farmers in CLMVT. As a continuation of **training on "Smart Renewable Energy Technologies for Agricultural Supply Chains in the Mekong Region,"** three online supplemental knowledge workshops were organized on Solar Water Pump for Smallholder Farmers, Small and Micro-scale Applications of Biomass, and Drones and their Application in the Agricultural Sector; 68 participants attended the workshops. A **Training Synthesis and Evaluation workshop** was organized in attendance of 50 participants to understand the outcomes of the trainings conducted under the project and to know the status of the action plan implementation by the project participants. An independent end-of-project assessment study was conducted by an external consultant at the end of the project. Moreover, an end-of-project evaluation and dissemination workshop was conducted to share the success, challenges, and lessons learned of one and half year project implementation; 42 attended the workshop.

Under the project, seven business plans and five case studies were developed by the project participants on smart agricultural technologies. Besides, a policy brief was developed on advancing agricultural digitalization in the Mekong countries.

V. Knowledge Management in Agriculture Development

MI and Asia-Pacific Rural and Agricultural Credit Association (APRACA) have a long-term partnership to implement a 3-year project to support knowledge management for agricultural development. In 2023, a training program on greening the value chain will be organized to disseminate not only the crucial impacts of climate change on agriculture and food systems but also the existing green finance, which may support adaptation initiatives in the region. In the first half of the year, MI and APRACA closely worked in the development of a training curriculum for the training program.

VI. Promoting Climate-Smart Agriculture Technologies and Innovation in Lower Mekong Countries

The DFAT-funded one-year project is a critical component of MI's ongoing efforts to promote the adoption of climate-smart agriculture initiatives in Lower Mekong Countries, specifically Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam, and Thailand (CLVT). The primary objective of this project is to facilitate the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices and minimize the adverse impacts of climate change in these targeted countries.

In pursuit of this goal, a series of four national consultations were conducted to thoroughly assess the practicality of implementing existing climate-smart agriculture practices in the region. Sixty-nine participants from CLVT attended the workshops. These consultations played a pivotal role in the determination of the feasibility of replicating successful initiatives. Notably, key findings from these consultations underscored the disparities in the stages of technology adoption across the Lower Mekong countries. This variation can be attributed to the localized nature of agriculture, the diversity in socio-economic conditions, and the distinct challenges that these countries face in the wake of climate change. Most of these innovative approaches have been centered on enhancing crop productivity, although there are limitations in the use of advanced technologies, particularly those related to the internet. Successful climate-smart agriculture technologies adopted in the agricultural value chain encompass a spectrum of strategies, including crop diversification, conservation agriculture, water management, solar drying technology, green energy-powered transportation, and e-commerce.

To further bolster these initiatives, two regional training programs were thoughtfully organized, accommodating a total of 56 participants. These programs aimed to equip agricultural practitioners with the requisite knowledge and skills essential for the effective implementation of climate-smart technologies across the agricultural supply chain.

This comprehensive approach signifies MI's commitment to fostering sustainable and resilient agriculture practices in the Lower Mekong region, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of addressing the challenges posed by climate change in these countries.

VII. Assessment of the Post-pandemic Response for Food Systems in the Lancang-Mekong Region

With Support from the China Government, MI is conducting an assessment of the Post-pandemic Response for Food Systems in the Lancang-Mekong Region". The study's results will be shared among researchers, government officials, policymakers, and other stakeholders to provide a framework that will be useful in enhancing the post-pandemic resilience and sustainability of the food systems in LM countries.

VIII. Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Value Chains in ASEAN (ASEAN AgriTrade)

The ASEAN-German Cooperation Project, "Promotion of Sustainable Agricultural Value Chains in ASEAN" (ASEAN AgriTrade), was initiated with the objective of improving the framework conditions for the implementation of sustainability standards in agricultural value chains within the ASEAN region, with a focus on climate-relevant aspects.

Under the auspices of the project, twenty-nine (29) projects were initiated through the Agrinnovation Fund in ASEAN (AIF) to support innovative ideas in CLMV countries, aimed at enhancing agricultural practices across the ASEAN region. The Project is implemented both at the regional/ASEAN level and at the national level in CLMV countries.

As part of these efforts, MI has developed a policy brief titled "Leveraging Investments through Public Private Partnerships: Agrinnovation Fund in ASEAN (AIF)". This policy brief aims to

provide credible insights into improving cooperation between the public and private sectors, drawing on lessons learned from the implementation of the AIF. The information and recommendations will be invaluable for stakeholders in ASEAN who aspire to implement similar initiative funds through public-private partnerships.

Key Results Achieved

- 216 localized training courses were conducted by the project alumni for 10,749 beneficiaries on food safety awareness and communication, food safety management, managing food safety along the supply chain, traceability in the food value chain, food safety and hygiene, IPM, and packaging.
- 19 regulations were developed and update for example, Cambodia CCF issued inter-ministerial prakas (proclamation) between MOC and Ministry of Economic and Finance on Transitional Penalty for those who violate food safety law, sub-decree Requirement and Procedure for Traceability and Food Recall, guideline for food labeling. Lao Department of Livestock and Fisheries alumus drafted freshwater farm standards. Vietnam Nafiqad developed a guidance for fishery processing plants/ Traders on the food safety-related document requirement of imported countries and their alert information and amended circulars on inspection and certification of food safety eligibility of agro-forestry-fishery food producing and trading businesses and developed actions to non-compliant products and list of qualified exporter.
- 41 informative and instructive press releases, articles, or news stories related to food safety were published/broadcasted by mass media and contributed to enhancing public awareness of the topic.
- 80 MSMES have effectively upgraded their business practices, processes, and facilities by establishing a traceability system, enhancing their hygiene practices, improving their facilities, refining their packaging methods, improving labels and implementing necessary measures to comply with GMP and HACCP requirements. These advancements have enabled these small and medium-sized enterprises to operate at a higher standard, resulting in improved productivity and growth.
- Nine academic institutions developed/improved their curricula and lectures:
  Cambodia: i) Royal University of Agriculture revised its Postharvest Technology topic and ii) Mean Chey University included smart technologies into subjects under the Faculty of Science and Technology and Faculty of Agriculture and Food Processing,

  Lao PDR: iii) National University of Lao PDR integrated HACCP and Managing Food Safety topics into Food Processing and Preservation subjects, and iv) Souphanouvong University revised its curriculum on Food Safety Management.

  Viet Nam: v) The Viet Nam National University of Agriculture added the "Heavy Metal Contamination in Food Crops and Associated Health Risk Assessment" topic to their lab course "Global Environmental Risk Analysis", vi) Can Tho University of Technology updated its Physical Chemistry lectures, vii) Ho Chi Minh City University of Food Industry updated Postharvest subject, viii) Nha Trang University integrated National

Strategy for Food Security topic in the Product Development subject, and ix)Tra Vinh University integrated/improved its curriculum on Post Harvest technology.

- Two alumni established smart technology demonstration farms, including a greenhouse with dripping irrigation technology in an organic melon farm in Viet Nam, and an automatic irrigation system in a mushroom farm in Cambodia.
- One alumnus integrated climate-smart farming technology into Cambodia's National Climate Change Priority Action Plan in Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishery.

Sustainable and Smart Agricultural Supply Chain Development (action plans implemented by MI's direct participants)

- Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Awareness of the Use of Renewable Energy Resources in Agricultural Sector, Myanmar was organized where 25 participants joined from different ministries and private sectors joined the workshop. The workshop managed to bridge the understanding among different stakeholders to strengthen coordination for scaling up proven RE technologies applications in agriculture.
- National Workshop on Solar Cell Utilization for Small-scale Farm, Lao PDR, brought 32 government officials, private solar SMEs, and farmers to exchange views on solar cell markets, the promotion of SMEs in agriculture, and cost-benefit analysis for farmers to use solar technologies in agriculture.
- Case Study on Solar Water Pump for Irrigation of Smallholder Farmers project, Cambodia was conducted by a Solar Green Energy Company in Batheay Commune, Kampong Cham province, aimed to assess the market situation for solar water pumps, analyze project impacts (benefits and barriers), and evaluate its economic viability.
- Training Program on Unmanned Aerial Vehicles and Agricultural Application, Thailand, gathered 25 farmers. The training provided a venue for discussing traditional and modern agricultural technology practices.
- Workshop on Potentials and Challenges for Applying Drone Technology in Agriculture in Mekong Delta was organized in Viet Nam where 37 participants (30 farmers and the remaining from My Long Bac commune government staff, agricultural extension center, Women union, and Agridrone company) joined the workshop. The invited representative from the Agridrone company introduced the application of the T20P drone in agriculture and its prices.

3.1.2. Trade and Investment Facilitation

Key Progress during January-December 2023

I.   Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region

Sustainable and Smart Tourism **Curriculum Package** was developed in collaboration with Jeonju University for target groups - i. Private tour and travel operators, ii. Tourism promotion agencies iii. Tourism enterprises (hotels, restaurants, entertainment centres, souvenir shops, local crafts etc.) iv. Creative artist/performers v. travelers vi. Investors vi. Tour and travel operators and guide vii. Tourism media/ social media influencers vii. Universities/hospitality education and training centres among others.

A mobile application called "Mekong Heritage" was developed. The Mekong Heritage app was launched at the Plaza hotel in Seoul during the exchange program. The app featured point of interest information of over **500 businesses** in five Mekong heritage cities/provinces. The app has been registered in both google and apple stores and is available for download. However, the content, design and features are under continuously updating and refining process.

POI Data Collection in CLMVT for the content of the above Mekong Heritage app**.** A total of five local country teams, consisting of 3-4 persons each, were formed and trained to carry out the field data collection in each selected heritage provinces. Mekong Institute developed the online data management system to collect and store multi-media data, and to remotely monitor the quality of data being collected in real time.

Five roadshow events were held in World Heritage cities of CLMVT, namely Ayutthaya, Siem Reap, Luang Prabang, Hue, and Bagan. These events provided a platform for local businesses to showcase their products and services, while also allowing the project team to gain valuable insights into their needs and opportunities. A total of 180 stakeholders from the public and private sectors, including tourism and commerce departments, attended these roadshows.

A three-day international exchange program was organized in Seoul, Republic of Korea and this facilitated knowledge exchange, strengthened relationships among the heritage cities, and laid the foundation for future collaborations. A total of 60 private and public key stakeholders from the five heritage cities of Mekong region, Seoul city, and Jeonju city in Korea joined the program. The program also identified barriers and investment opportunities with recommended action items for strategic investment plans in each heritage city of the Mekong region. This served as the starting point for the upcoming investment forum of project.

Multiple Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed between the heritage cities of the Mekong region and Seoul city, as well as Jeonju city, that seek to establish a robust mechanism for future collaboration and cooperation in the realm of sustainable and smart tourism development in each city by promoting the exchange of expertise and best practices, foster cross-cultural understanding for people-to-people connectivity, and celebrate the unique cultural aspects of each city.

Additionally, an MOU was signed between TVET Institutes in the Mekong region and Jeonju University. The MOU signing between the TVET institutions in cultural heritage travel destinations aims to improve the labor market and quality of tourism products, contributing to sustainable development and the growth of the local economy in the Mekong countries.

Five investment forums are currently being implemented in selected heritage cities in CLMVT to convene key government stakeholders, private sector associations, business innovators, and potential investors to promote sustainable tourism, address the specific needs of these provinces, facilitate the exchange of cutting-edge technology, and foster mutually beneficial partnerships. The forums highlight the presentation of investment opportunity profiles in the provinces developed the project team. Representatives from tourism sector of

each selected sites shared their vision for transforming heritage sites into inclusive and accessible tourism destinations. The activity is expected to reach a total of approximately 140 participants by the end of November 2023.

Project Evaluation: The project on 'Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Region' completed its three year and nine months duration in December 2023 and the final project evaluation is conducted for the activities implemented during April 2020 to November 2023. Based on the results of the final project evaluation, the project assessment against the OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria, develop success stories, country-wise case study, compendium of smart tourism technologies in the tourism value chain and tourism ecosystem, policy paper brief to address the smart / innovative tourism development in Mekong countries linking to the creative industry in the tourism sector are identified. A total of more than 60 project stakeholders from CLMVT are expected to be the respondents of the project evaluation.

II. Lancang- Mekong Business Forums

MI, in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce (MoC) of the Royal Government of Thailand and the Foreign Affairs Office, the People's Government of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, P.R. China organized the **5th Lancang-Mekong Business Forum** in Nanning and Pingxiang, P.R. China with the theme "Promoting Agribusiness and Investment in Processed Food Sector." The three-day event offered a range of activities to establish business linkages, exchange information on innovation and technology in the processed food sector, and boost investment through collaboration among businesses from Guangxi, P.R. China and other Lancang-Mekong countries. Industry leaders and experts shared experiences through business seminar and panel discussion to the estimated 100 participants from LM countries during the first event in Nanning. Furthermore, processed food enterprises and investors can share situational updates and network business deal opportunities by participating in the business matching and product exhibition. Besides, a field trip to the agro-food processing companies, Special Economic Zone and logistics Park in Nanning and Pingxiang will be arranged on the second and third day for a group of 50 selected delegates.

III. Facilitating Cross Border Trade through Synchronization of Rules and Regulations in the ACMECS

Mekong Institute (MI), with the support of Government of Republic of Korea (ROK), is tasked to deliver specific activities to support the implementation for ACMECS-ROK Regional Branding Project on Facilitating Cross Border Trade through Synchronization of Rules and Regulations in the ACMECS during May 2023 to April 2024.

Upon the approval the "ACMECS-ROK Regional Branding Project" from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea through the Embassy of Republic of Korea to Thailand. MI informed the project proponents in ACMECS countries to prepare and arrange the project launch including opening a bank account, revising workplan, due diligence assessment, update the project team members, and sign the fund disbursement agreement. Mekong-ROK Cooperation Fund (MKCF) Management Manual (updated version February 2023) was used

as a guideline of the project agreement and arrangement between MI and the PIAs. Four meetings were conducted with the project's development partners, ACMECS focal points, PIAs and the PIAs' collaborating partners from ACMECS member countries. Most of each meeting attendees were representatives and the PIAs' project team members with an average of 20-27 people per meeting. The meetings were- i) Preparatory Meeting on Facilitating Cross Border Trade through Synchronization of Rules and Regulations in the ACMECS, ii) Project Inception Meeting on Facilitating Cross Border Trade through Synchronization of Rules and Regulations in the ACMECS, in Bangkok, Thailand, iii) Quarterly progress report meeting, and iv) Mid-term progress report meeting.

IV. International workshop on "Trade Negotiation for ASEAN Members

An online workshop was organized involving 37 participants from eight ASEAN Member States and India. The workshop focused on exploring techniques, strategies, and approaches to trade negotiation. To provide a hands-on learning experience, the participants engaged in a negotiation simulation exercise. This exercise aimed to simulate real-world trade negotiations, allowing participants to apply the knowledge and skills they had learned in a practical setting. By actively participating in the negotiation process, the participants gained valuable insights into trade negotiation dynamics and enhanced their abilities to navigate complex negotiations effectively.

V. Rapid assessment study to identify key logistics channels and infrastructure to determine trade and investment facilitation needs in LMC

The survey sought to assess the role of the frameworks in tackling global challenges, identify potential gaps in their approach and used the findings to propose sustainable and scalable co-creation projects aligned with the Mekong-Japan Economic Co-Creation Vision. The study methodology is aligned with the study objectives to identify on temporary global challenges, evaluated the impact of these key global challenges on the Mekong region and Mekong Regional Cooperation Frameworks& Development Partners addressing such challenges in their program and activities thereby identify any gaps and Issues to propose for ASEAN Japan cocreation vision.

MI organized a weeklong regional training on "E-commerce Policy Development and Implementation Strategies for SMEs Development" funded by the AEM-METI Economic and Industrial Cooperation Committee (AMEICC). The modular training sought to equip government officials and key stakeholders from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Thailand (CLMVT) with the necessary knowledge and network capacity to create a conducive e-commerce ecosystem that enhances SMEs' competitiveness in the global market. Catering to 25 participants representing relevant government agencies and private sector associations in CLMVT, the activity offered an immersive learning environment enriched by case studies, interactive discussions, and practical examples, zeroing in on the intricacies of e-commerce policy and strategy formulation and its direct impact on SMEs. The training emphasized the significance of embracing e-commerce in today's global economy. E-commerce is transforming trade and business strategies globally, offering Mekong countries

the opportunity to enhance international market access for businesses, particularly SMEs, without costly physical investments.

VI. Study on Challenges and Opportunities of Cross Border Paperless Trade

A desk study was conducted to provide significant potential inputs for promoting paperless trade practices in the participating countries and contributes to developing the Cross Border Paperless Trade Agreement (CBPTA), which aims to establish regional norms and support countries in promoting best practices. This study examined the factors influencing the patterns, such as economic structure, digital infrastructure, geography, regulatory climate, and trading partners. Additionally, it explored the popularity of specific measures, including ePhyto and TRACES, eTIR, COOs, manifest exchange, NSWs/ASW, eCOOs, eSPS, and the role of free trade agreements (FTAs) in facilitating paperless exchange.

VII. E-commerce Policy Development and Implementation Strategy for SME Development in CLMVT Countries

During the E-commerce Policy Development Program, a series of targeted activities were executed, designed to enhance the e-commerce landscape within the CLMVT region.

An **Assessment Study on E-Commerce Policy Development** was undertaken as the inaugural activity of the program. The study focused on global best practices in e-commerce, analyzing key markets and international regulations. This activity laid the groundwork for informed policymaking, impacting the strategic direction of the subsequent modules.

A hands-on **Modular Training** program was conducted, focusing on critical aspects of e-commerce such as cross-border trade, legal frameworks, and market entry strategies. Participants were equipped to support SMEs in leveraging e-commerce for growth. The training curriculum was developed tailoring for policymakers and relevant market actors; the curriculum aimed at strengthening the regional SMEs' position in global e-commerce through knowledge transfer and skill development.

National workshops were organized, where the knowledge and strategies developed during the training were disseminated to a wider audience, including SMEs and trade officers. The aim was to foster a supportive ecosystem for e-commerce at the national level. Besides. **Synthesis and Evaluation workshop** was organized as the final activity of the program, which served as an integral platform for participants to consolidate their learnings and assess the efficacy of the implemented action plans. This event facilitated a critical review of the program's activities, allowed for the sharing of best practices, and identified challenges and lessons learned from the national workshops.

Key Results Achieved

Sustainable Tourism

- **Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region project** implemented by the TIF department, created an opportunity to strengthen the

cooperation and linkage between the Republic of Korea and the countries in the Mekong sub-region via twinning activities between historical and cultural cities.

- The newly designed Mekong Heritage mobile app under the project has created a platform that will gather a database of travelers, which local authorities and heritage site management could use to improve, develop, or diversify their products and services.

- International exchange programs and the signing of MOUs between Mekong heritage cities and Korean cities have initiated a framework for sustained collaboration. These agreements have laid the groundwork for the continuous exchange of expertise, cultural understanding, and tourism best practices. The MOUs have paved the way for heightened cooperation across different sectors, promoting comprehensive approaches to tourism that leverage technology, infrastructure, and cultural heritage. Moreover, the MOU signed between TVET Institutes and Jeonju University is a promising development for enhancing the labor market and improving the quality of tourism products. This is poised to bolster local economies and contribute to the broader goal of sustainable development.

- The series of roadshow events provided the local businesses in each location a platform to network and revive their business connection in post-pandemic as well as to showcase their products and services. In the meantime, this also allowed the project team to gain valuable insights of the businesses' needs and opportunities.

- After joining **the training program on Promoting Resilient and Sustainable Tourism for Post-COVID-19 Recovery** in the Lancang-Mekong Countries, organized by the SEE department in September 2022, participants produced country-wise video clips that promoted sustainable tourism in the target areas. MI also supported consolidating all video clips to promote them as regional sustainable tourism promotion materials. The video was uploaded to YouTube in February 2023 and received over 175 viewership to date. Furthermore, one participant also applied the knowledge acquired from the training to implement the EU SWITCH-Asia SUSTOUR project, which is expected to benefit 300 persons in Vientiane, Luang Prabang, and Vangvieng in Lao PDR. Another participant undertook one case study on Natural and Cultural Tourism of Kaeng Lawa Wetlands to alleviate Poverty at Ban Chee Kok Kho, Ban Phai District, Khon Kaen Province, Thailand. Moreover, the training participants also conducted knowledge sharing meetings on Promoting Resilient and Sustainable Tourism; 5 co-workers joined in Cambodia and 36 indirect participants benefitted from the knowledge-sharing sessions in Lao PDR.

E-commerce Policy Development

- The CLMVT countries observed the development of shared e-commerce standards and protocols, stemming from collaborative efforts initiated during the training and workshops, to reduce trade barriers and facilitate smoother digital transactions. The countries have utilized the knowledge gained to implement more comprehensive e-

commerce regulations that align with international best practices, fostering an environment that is conducive to SME growth and cross-border trade.

- Initiatives for Improvements in consumer protection, data privacy, and transaction security, as promoted through the program, resulted in increased consumer trust and confidence in the e-commerce market. Besides, ongoing exchange of insights and strategies among the CLMVT countries, established through the program's networking opportunities, is leading to a culture of continuous learning and adaptation in the face of e-commerce trends and global market demands.

3.1.3. Sustainable Energy and Environment

Key Progress during January-December 2023

I. **Triangular Cooperation Project on Sustainable Development in the Lower Mekong Basin based on the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus**

MI continued the implementation of a five-year project of Triangular Cooperation on Sustainable Development in the Lower Mekong Basin based on the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus (RoK-UNOSSC Facility Phase 3) from September 15, 2021, to December 31, 2025. The project is supported by the Republic of Korea (RoK) 's Ministry of Science and ICT (MSIT) in collaboration with the United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation (UNOSSC), the Science and Technology Policy Institute (STEPI), the Mekong River Commission (MRC). It intends to strengthen access to water, food and energy for vulnerable communities in the Lower Mekong Basin (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam) by strengthening development approaches and management in these sectors. MI participated in i) First Thai National Stakeholder Consultative Forum, ii) P-LINK Work Review and Planning Workshop, iii) The Viet Nam Follow-up Consultations, iv) Internal Preparatory Meeting of 2nd Regional Consultative Forum, v) the 2nd Regional Consultative Forum, and vi) Thailand National Pilot Site Visiting.

TOT Workshop on Advancing WEF Nexus Pilot Implementation in the Lower Mekong Basin: MI provided the initial capacity-building program under the 5-year Triangular Cooperation for Sustainable Development in the Lower Mekong Basin, focusing on the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus. The project deepened 17 participants' understanding of the national pilot's design and indicators. Following this event, a follow-up online workshop is planned for April 2024. This online follow-up workshop will serve as a platform to facilitate connections between the advancements and outcomes of national pilot projects.

II. **Consultancy Service on ASEAN-CRN Secretariat Facilitator to support for ASEAN-CRN and ANGA (2022-2023)**

MI carried on with the consultancy service facilitating the ASEAN-CRN Secretariat (2022-2023). Commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the project is being implemented by GIZ in collaboration with the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Member States (AMS). This year, MI delivered four capacity-building events under this consultancy work-

- ASEAN Negotiating Group for Agriculture's (ANGA) virtual workshop for the Joint Submission to the Sharm el-Sheikh Koronivia Joint Work Implementation Program in developing TOR of "Sharm el-Sheikh Joint Work on Implementation of Climate Action on Agriculture and Food Security" to be submitted to UNFCCC to enhance the understanding of the members in climate information services, ago-insurance in accessing loss and damage funds, and carbon neutrality strategies in agriculture,
- ASEAN-CRN Knowledge Exchange Event and Partners Meeting, and
- The 8th virtual Annual Meeting of ASEAN-CRN to support the demands and needs of ASEAN agriculture and land use sectors and to contribute towards the implementation of the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework.
- ANGA Preparatory Meeting for Subsidiary Bodies (SB) 59 at the COP 28.

Besides, MI managed the ASEAN-CRN's website (https://asean-crn.org/) and social media platforms to support the Network's data, communication, and knowledge management. MI also conducted **a study on "Sustainable Mechanism and Institutionalisation of the ASEAN Climate Resilience Network (ASEAN-CRN)**."

III. Forum on Accelerating Innovation through Energy Technology Cooperation in the Greater Mekong Subregion

Transformative Pathways towards Low Carbon Development in the Energy Sector (Breakout Session of the Mekong Forum 2023): The international experts and country experts from P.R. China, Myanmar, Thailand, and Lao PDR shed light on pathways, opportunities, and challenges toward achieving SDG 7 and cultivating a low-carbon future. The shared needs encompassed capacity building, innovation and technology, resource allocation, and collaborative partnerships.

IV. Upstream Single-use Plastic Reduction Solutions for Khon Kaen's Street Food Complexes

Supported by the Norwegian Retailers' Environment Fund (NREF), MI has partnered with the Environmental Coalition on Standards AiSBL (ECOS) to implement a project to address a prevalent issue of single-use plastics (SUP) in Khon Kaen province and to combat the regular practice of food packaging and serving using single-use plastics by adopting the city as a case model.

The project inception meeting was held in March and the subsequent signing of the contract with partner ECOS was undertaken. A series of planning meetings followed to discuss project implementation details and delineation of responsibilities between the partners. An initial meeting with the Modindeang market inside the Khon Kaen University (KKU) campus, one of the project's pilot sites, was held to introduce the project to its management and seek their cooperation. In June, a SUP expert from ECOS conducted a preliminary assessment of the SUP situation in Khon Kaen province through meetings with local government officials and market administrators of the two pilot markets, Modindaeng and Ton Tann. During the visit to the markets, interviews were conducted with market vendors and clients using guiding questions, and direct observation was likewise used as one of the data collection approaches.

These activities laid the groundwork for the project, fostering collaboration, gathering information, and setting the stage for further progress in addressing the SUP issue in the province.

One technical dialogue was organized for 30 stakeholders to introduce effective measures to reduce single use plastic consumption in local street food vending complexes and increase the packaging reuse rate.

V. Promoting Greater Energy Connectivity for Equitable Development and Growth in the Lancang-Mekong Region

With the support of the People's Republic of China, MI and China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd. (CSG) are jointly implementing the project on Promoting Greater Energy Connectivity for Equitable Development and Growth in the Lancang-Mekong Region". This project aims to foster sustainable energy solutions, enhance regional cooperation, and contribute to the socio-economic advancement of the LM Region.

MI and Guangxi Power Grid Co., Ltd. (GXPG) organized the **regional training on "Promoting Greater Energy Connectivity for Equitable Development and Growth in the Lancang-Mekong Region"** in Nanning City, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, with the structured learning visits.

Energy Connectivity Accelerates Green and Low-carbon Energy Development and Regional Economic Growth Research Report Launch and Discussion Workshop: To leverage the synergies between the BRI, LMC, and GDI, with the support of the People's Republic of China, China Southern Power Grid Co., Ltd. (CSG), Mekong Institute, China Energy Research Society (CERS), Lancang-Mekong Energy & Power Cooperation Research Center (EDRI/LMERC) are jointly implementing the projects on "Promoting Greater Energy Connectivity for Equitable Development and Growth in the Lancang-Mekong Region." and "Capability Enhancement on Low- & Zero-carbon Industrial Park Energy System in Lancang-Mekong Countries".

Key Results Achieved

- To respond to the Decision of the COP Presidency during its 27th Session, ANGA considered for joint submission. With the support from GIZ AgriTrade and MI, the Network collected the views and produced "the Draft Joint Statement on Koronivia for submission to UNFCCC". The draft was circulated by the ASEAN Secretariat to be reviewed by all member countries in early April, 2023. To develop the regional views, the participants also consulted and get approval from their relevant ministries. In the events, MI also facilitated matching support from development partners with needs from ASEAN Member States (AMS) in areas of incorporating climate actions in agriculture, which would contribute to achieving low emission agriculture in ASEAN. These are expected to contribute to enhancing strategic and context-specific cooperation between the AMS and the key development partners such as FAO, GIZ, SEI, etc.

- Through social media platforms, MI contributed to increasing visibility of ANGA that joined the successful First Informal Expert Dialogue on the Joint Sharm el Sheikh Work Program on implementation of climate action in agriculture in FAO, Rome on October 30-November 3, 2023.
- The Department of Agriculture (DOA), Thailand requested MI to act as the interim ASEAN-CRN Secretariat until the department is ready to take over the Secretariat role. MI is engaging with the development partners to mobilise funding and resources.
- Two alumni from Bhutan attending the Affordable and Clean Energy Development training conducted in May 2022 reported that they had applied the knowledge acquired in existing projects, initiated a new project, and developed a policy recommendation.

3.2. Cross-cutting Themes

3.1.4. Digital Economy and Innovation

Key Progress during January-December 2023

I. AI-based Monitoring, Forecasting and Warning System for Natural Disasters and Rice Pest Outbreak

MI has completed the development of the AI system for monitoring, forecasting, and warning of rice pests and natural disasters. Now, the countries can enter more data online to keep the system learning for more accuracy of the forecasting results. Moreover, an AI-Based System manual was also developed for the country partners to use as guidance to utilize the system.

II. Scaling-Up Digital Connectivity for MSMEs in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-Pandemic Resilience

Training on Scaling-Up Digital Connectivity for MSMEs in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-Pandemic Resilience: The regional training program was attended by twenty-five representatives from the governments of Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The program aimed to identify digital technologies and solutions that can be successfully scaled up in the LM Countries and promote feasible policies and strategies that could best support scaling-up digital connectivity in the MSMEs sector. The program also focused on showcasing public and private sector initiatives to support MSMEs and discussing how governments and development partners can further engage with the private sector to pave the way for a quicker economic recovery.

Research on Scaling-Up Digital Connectivity for MSMEs in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-Pandemic Resilience (June-December 2023): Digitalization is transforming the global economy, creating new revenue and value opportunities. However, significant knowledge gaps exist in this domain, hindering governments' ability to support effective digital scale-up. This research aimed to identify scalable digital technologies in the LMC, along with success factors, opportunities, and challenges. The findings will inform the Expert Dialogue to enhance post-pandemic resilience in the LM Countries.

Key Results Achieved (from action plan implementation of MI direct participants)

- An online **national workshop on Scaling-up MSMEs in Thailand using Digital Transformation** was organized, which objective to enhance awareness regarding the benefits of digital technology transformation for small, medium-sized, and community enterprises in Thailand. Notably, 73% of the participants were female entrepreneurs. The workshop also featured a pitching competition designed for MSME owners. As a result, three MSMEs were recognized and awarded digital transformation support of up to 10,000 baht each. The recipients of these awards included: Mr. Chana & Mrs. Ponpunsa from the "Fruit, Vegetable & Herbs Planting Development Community Enterprise" in Lampoon Province; Mr. Chonlatep from the "Love-Planting Herb, Community Enterprise" in Tak Province; and Mrs. Jongrak from "Mee-Gin Farm" in Khon Kaen Province.

3.1.5. Social Inclusion and Vulnerability

Key Progress during January-December 2023

I. Targeted Poverty Alleviation for Better Life in the Lancang-Mekong Region

Capacity Needs Assessment was conducted to provide a baseline for understanding capacity needs in poverty reduction efforts with strengthening food security for the socio-economic recovery of the regional countries in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendation will consider how regional cooperation frameworks and initiatives, such as the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation and Global Development Initiatives (GDI), can bridge the capacity gaps among the regional countries.

Modular Training Program: In response to rising poverty and food insecurity in the region, funded by the People's Government of P.R. China, SEE department of MI embarked on the one-year project on Targeted Poverty Alleviation and Strengthening Food Security in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-pandemic Recovery. The training's curriculum focused on strategies for vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, poor women households, etc. The program also underscored short-term and long-term interventions to support food security by linking with income generation opportunities in rural areas.

MI conducted a webinar on Targeted Poverty Alleviation and Strengthening Food Security in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-pandemic Recovery to disseminate good practices on addressing key drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition with complementary food security solutions in the region.

Key Results Achieved (from action plan implementation of MI direct participants)

- A dissemination workshop on Food Safety in Cambodia was attended by 74 participants and aimed to raise public awareness about the significance of food safety and quality standards for trade, health, and well-being in Cambodia.
- A training on Application of Rice Fertilizer Reduction and Efficiency Improvement Technology showcased new varieties of rice, the technology of small seedling machine insertion, and the cultivation technology of pre-control and post-promotion for

guidance. It also provided technical guidance on "rice and fishery comprehensive cultivation". A total of 16 participants from Mouding County Longxing agricultural machinery professional cooperative and Mu Ding modern agricultural machinery professional cooperative in the north of Yunnan Province attended the training.

- An action plan implemented on raising catfish in cement tank to reduce poverty and ensure food supply, in Naxaythong district, Vientiane capital (June-October 2023): In line with Lao PDR's 2015-2020 fisheries strategy, the Lao team trained and provided technical assistance for catfish farming. The training aimed to boost income and productivity for vulnerable households through scientific aquaculture methods. The training had 12 participants from 3 villages and 3 families, including 8 women. Subsequent on-site support from July to October included pond preparation, maintenance guidance, and breeding data collection. A 10-week tank-based fish culture revealed that the group using commercial feed had fewer fish deaths than the group using mixed raw materials. This successful small-scale aquaculture experiment promotes catfish farming for food security and poverty reduction in NaxayThong Province, Vientiane.

- A case study on sunflower crop production and seed sufficiency in Tatkon Township, Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, assessed sunflower crop production efficiency, seed availability, and factors hindering targets. It supports the national sunflower production plan and focused on evaluating crop efficiency and seed sufficiency, analyzing women and elderly participation in sunflower cultivation, and providing recommendations for the national sunflower production plan.

- An action plan on poverty reduction through silviculture technique for planting a medicine species (Morinda officinalis How) under plantation forest for local people in Thanh Cao village, Ngoc Thanh commune, Vinh Phuc province, Viet Nam aimed to promote the potential of forests for sustainable livelihoods in the area, reduce the impact on natural forests, and increase income for households depending on forests. The initiative was expected to be successful and replicated in the communities to increase income for people living depend on forest in sustainable way.

- A training on Strengthening Food Security in Thailand's Agricultural Sector, was provided to 48 officials from the Office of Agricultural Economics (OAE), Bangkok. Altogether 48 officials under OAE joined the program which aimed to formulate an action plan on agriculture topics, monitor the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2 and 3, and recognize food security topics and integrate them within the OAE.

3.1.6. Labor Mobility

I. Targeted Poverty Alleviation for Better Life in the Lancang-Mekong Region

The urban-rural labor mobility due to poverty and its implications on agriculture activities and food production was intensively discussed in the training program on Targeted Poverty Alleviation and Strengthening Food Security in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-pandemic Recovery. The training shared supports and services that could be undertaken by

the government for fostering diversified agricultural job opportunities in research, agri-entrepreneurship, etc., to attract youth's engagement in rural economic activities.

3.3. MI's Flagship Programs

3.2.1 Towards Post COVID-19 Resilient Economies

The Hybrid Regional Expert Talk on Promoting Resilient Creative Economy: In conjunction with the Isan Creative Festival 2023, MI organized the Hybrid Regional Expert Talk on Promoting Resilient Creative Economy through Cross-sectoral and Regional Collaboration. The event encouraged all participants to initiate programs that foster exchange across the Mekong countries, adding value to their current work and exploring more co-creation of opportunities. The four key topics covered during the event were Creative District to Creative City, Cultural Diplomacy and People-to-People Links, Gastronomy Network and Food Tourism, and Creative Industry 4.0 and Regional Platform. This half-day expert talk brought together 55 participants from creative industries, governments, international development organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

3.2.2. GMS Knowledge Network

Reinforcing its commitment to drive knowledge-based regional development in line with the GMS-2030 framework, the Greater Mekong Subregion Knowledge Network (GMSKN) convened its 2nd Steering Committee (SC) Meeting supported and facilitated by the MI and Asian Development Bank's (ADB) GMS Secretariat in Bangkok in October 2023.

High-level representatives from knowledge institutions, universities, and think tanks in GMS countries discussed priority sectors, themes, topics, and innovative approaches. These discussions formed a core component of the network's stocktaking study, which was initiated at the 1st SC meeting held virtually in October 2022.

Between October 1-20, 2023, MI and GMS Secretariat co-organized a series of virtual consultations with each GMS country. The consultation was facilitated by Prof. Andreas Brandner, a globally recognized expert in knowledge management, to gather country-specific inputs to substantiate the stocktaking study and contribute to the future work of the GMSKN.

The results of these consultations, confirmed and discussed by the network during the 2nd SC meeting, highlighting key focus areas: (1) Agriculture and Agritourism, (2) Cross-Border Trade and Logistics, (3) Environment, Green and Bio-Circular Economy, Climate Change, and Biodiversity, (4) Knowledge Society and Digitalization, (5) Energy, and (6) Post-COVID-19 Recovery.

In addition to these priority areas, the network identified innovative approaches to acquire, create, share, apply, capture, and manage knowledge. These include partnership development, knowledge services provision, knowledge product creation, digital knowledge and innovation hub establishment, and resource mobilization. The shared focus on a limited number of priority sectors indicates common challenges and priorities among GMS countries, setting the agenda for the next one or two years.

The meeting also served as a platform for members to identify immediate, collaborative "low-hanging fruits" or activities that are easily achievable within the next few months. These activities encompass knowledge fairs, knowledge cafés, knowledge communities, knowledge briefs, and webinar series, which can be applied across various thematic areas.

Building on SC inputs reflected in the stocktaking study, MI and the GMS Secretariat are set to draft a 2-year work plan for the GMSKN, including indicative activities, for submission to and endorsement of the GMS Leaders during the Senior Officials Meeting on November 21, 2023.

3.2.3. GMS City Nodes Network

MI initiated the GMS City Nodes Network activities that will be implemented in various identified locations in the GMS country, namely Nanning and Kunming in P.R. China, Poipet and Bavet in Cambodia, Vientiane and Savannakhet in Lao PDR, Mandalay and Myawaddy in Myanmar, and Bangkok and Khon Kaen in Thailand, and Hanoi and Danang in Vietnam.

However, no progress was seen regarding the possible activities under the program in the reporting period.

4. MI's Contribution to Broader GMS Cooperation Frameworks

4.1. Mekong-Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF) Management

The Mekong-Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF) is one of the cooperation mechanisms among the five Mekong countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) and the Republic of Korea (ROK). MKCF was established in 2013 to encourage and support cooperation among five Mekong countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand) through an annual contribution from the Republic of Korea (ROK). The MKCF provides grants to support catalytic and innovative activities in the seven priority sectors: (a) Culture and Tourism, (b) Human Resources Development, (c) Agriculture and Rural Development, (d) Infrastructure, (e) Information and Communication Technology, (f) Environment, and (g) Non-Traditional Security Challenges.

Mekong Institute (MI) is assigned as the Fund Coordinator with the major responsibilities for coordination and implementation of the fund, including providing assistance in project management, financial management, monitoring and evaluation, and quality assurance of activities undertaken by the Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs). During the period of January-November 2023, MI conducted the following activities:

- Disbursed funds to the project implementing agencies (PIAs) amounting to US$ 4 Million for 15 ongoing projects in CLMVT and ROK, which includes 3 projects being implemented by MI.
- Provided technical and financial advisory services to the PIAs to ensure project implementation compliance with the MKCF Manual.
- Coordinated with the PIAs and prepared the materials for the project launching.
- Processed the project agreements and administrative costs.

- Prepared and announced the 7th MKCF call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs).
- Reviewed and updated the MKCF Management Manual for the 7th Call.
- Evaluated 160 EOIs of prospective fund recipients from CLMVT, ROK, and International Organizations having operating Offices in Mekong countries and ROK.
- Monitored the project activities implementation of 26 ongoing projects
- Reviewed midterm and final reports of 13 MKCF projects.

4.2. Survey of the Mekong Regional Cooperation Frameworks and their Strategies and Responses to the Emerging Regional and Global Issues

A desk study was conducted, which generated a comprehensive overview of donor frameworks in the Mekong sub-region. The study thoroughly assessed these frameworks' responsiveness to global and regional events, prioritizing the most pressing issues in the report. By analyzing long-standing and recent donor activities, the study identified overlooked areas of need through a detailed gap analysis. The study also evaluated the frameworks' effectiveness in project implementation, results assessment, and the level of engagement required from government counterparts regarding meetings and participation in working groups. This study will guide the AOTS and, subsequently, the Government of Japan in rolling out their development interventions in the Mekong region over the next 3-5 years.

4.3. Capacity Building on Regional Project Identification, Design, Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation of MKCF Projects

A half-day online inception workshop was conducted where 89 representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Strategy and Finance, the Ministry of Public Works and Transportation, etc. of the five Mekong countries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea, and other current/past/potential MKCF project implementation agencies attended. With a presentation of the overview of the project and its work plan, the workshop increased participants' predictability and expectations for the project so that they could cooperate actively and, in a timely manner, initiate activities when required. The workshop laid a foundation to establish a cross-country communication channel with stakeholders' contributions for future coordination and to maintain close cooperation and consultation with the participating development agencies and concerned stakeholders.

A **Training on Regional Project Identification** was organized, with support from the MKCF. The training brought together 30 participants from various ministries and institutes across the five Mekong countries, equipping them with knowledge and skills needed to effectively design and plan regional-level projects. The training delivered sessions to enhance the institutional capabilities of the Mekong countries, particularly by developing regional projects that address emerging transboundary issues in the seven priority sectors of the MKCF and promoting institutional networking for future cooperation. It highlighted critical analysis of regional issues with corresponding projects developed to ultimately benefit the Mekong region and promote subregional cooperation. The training was conducted in a participatory and practice-based manner to enrich participants' learning experience and grasp of the subject matters by building upon their existing knowledge and applicability to their respective lines of work.

A **Training on Regional Project Monitoring and Evaluation** serving as the initial phase of MKCF regional M&E framework development, was conducted with the participation of 30 individuals from various ministries representing five Mekong countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam, and Thailand), as well as the Republic of Korea (RoK) and MKCF project implementing agencies. The training played a pivotal role in fostering a culture of results-based project management. It featured a tailored training module that encompassed a wide range of topics, ranging from the fundamentals of project management, monitoring, and evaluation to more advanced concepts such as data collection, evaluations, attribution, and contribution analysis. Participants significantly enhanced their knowledge, skills, and competency, which are essential for achieving better project outcomes.

A Structured Learning Visit was organized, which provided MKCF stakeholders with a unique opportunity to observe, study, to interact with professionals and experts, and to learn processes in a real-world setting of regional development projects. The participants learned about various regional cooperation initiatives and development projects from ADB, USAID, IOM, and BIOTEC. It also enriched the knowledge and understanding of MKCF stakeholders by exposing them to practical project implementation, case studies, and real-life applications of concepts of regional project management. In the meantime, it allowed MKCF stakeholders to meaningfully interact with other participants, experts in the field, and other projects' stakeholders in their area of interest.

4.4. Global Development Initiative Leverages Sustainable Development in the Lancang-Mekong Region

As the global cause of development stands at a crossroads, P.R. China called for the Global Development Initiative (GDI). The Initiative aims to address the challenges developing countries face in realizing sustainable development goals (SDGs). With the support from the People's Government of the People's Republic of China, MI, in collaboration with the Center for International Knowledge on Development (CIKD), is thus undertaking a series of activities under the one-year project on "Global Development Initiative Leverages Sustainable Development in the Lancang-Mekong Region". The project aims to prioritize the capacity needs of LM Countries that could be supported once the new global Initiative rolls out.

A webinar on "Global Development Initiative Leverages Sustainable Development in the Lancang-Mekong Region" was conducted where over 50 participants, including development experts, distinguished delegates from the Lancang-Mekong (LM) countries, opinion leaders, and government officials, participated in the webinar. Additionally, nearly 300 people viewed the event via live streaming on Facebook. The webinar facilitated the exchange of knowledge and ideas to enhance understanding of the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and explore strategies, interventions, and approaches to synergize the GDI and Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Action Plans.

Three consultative workshops were organized on i) Financing Sustainable Development, ii) Promoting Green and Low-carbon Development, and iii) Enhancing Rural Health Workforce Development in the Lancang-Mekong Countries.

4.5. Comprehensive Human Resource Development for the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation

Human Resource Development (HRD) is a critical component of increasingly interconnected world and is a fundamental element of a country's economic future. To be ready to support economic growth in the LM Region, skilled and knowledgeable human resources are essential. MI implemented a project of "Comprehensive Human Resource Development for the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation" to develop the human resource capacity of public institutions and will equip government officials with advanced HRD skills, regional perspectives, and professional and personal networks.

Regional Training Program on Comprehensive Human Resource Development for the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation: Supported by the People's Government of Yunnan Province of P.R. China (FAOYN), MI organized the regional training which aims at developing human resource capacity of public institutions and equipping government officials with advanced HRD skills, regional perspectives, and professional and personal networks. Twenty-five participants from Cambodia, P.R. China, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Viet Nam and Thailand joined the program.

4.6. Support in Establishing ACMECS Interim Secretariat (AIS)

Following the request from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), MI agreed to support the Mekong Cooperation Unit (MCU) under MoFA, Thailand, with its expertise, experience, and network, in the establishment of the AIS.

On 14 June 2023, an informal ACMECS Senior Officials' Meeting was held, hosted by Thailand in Bangkok, and was attended by ACMECS SOM Leaders from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The Meeting welcomed the establishment of the ACMECS Interim Secretariat in Thailand with the technical support of MI as its back office. The Meeting also agreed to the Thai proposal to organize commemorative activities on the 20th anniversary of the founding of ACMECS in the third week of December 2023 such as setting up an official ACMECS website and organizing an ACMECS logo competition and academic seminar. MI is expected to support the activities regarding the anniversary. At the event, it is expected that there will be a signing ceremony for the MoU between MFA and MI with the witnesses from ACMECS Embassies' representatives.

5. Institutional Strengthening

5.1. Greater Mekong Community Affairs

A. Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning

MI revised the MEL Policy, Strategy, and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). They are the foundation of the **Results-Based Management (RBM)** that enhance the operationalize the mechanism of RBM approach. The remarkable changes are using stepwise approach to formulate the operationalization of the MEL system on SOP, where it addressed designated roles and responsibilities step-by-step on the MEL system.

Accordingly, the concept of MI's MEL system is also revisited in the revised SOP which emphasizes the role of evidence for the implemented activities and results. Previously, MI primarily focused on activity and process, but the new MEL mechanism has put emphasis on tracking the results. Following the revised SOPs, MI **developed web-based MEL system** for data collection, management, and reporting. The new system will track MI activities with means verifications along with primary information. The main objectives of the new MEL system are to:

- Alternate solution for non-systematical information, harmonizing different practices from different unit programs (Google sheet Activity Workplan, Update Activity Budget).
- Automatically calculate Indicators/Results based on Verification/ Information updated.
- Monitor results regular basis.
- Review the activity progress/results and report enabling robust mechanism for adaptive management.

A **Capacity Building Workshop on MEL Strategy, Policy, and SOPs for MI Staff** was hosted by MEL unit in February 2023. It was the opportunity for the program departments and operation units to discuss how to enable the stepwise approach and operationalize MEL system. Hereinafter, MEL unit ran several meetings with operation unit to gather discussion and information on addressing the issues of data collection and calculation of the indicators of the Logical Framework. The draft indicator guidelines developed for the teams was reviewed and feedback was received during the workshop.

The newly developed **MEL system was rolled out** in March 2023, that has been helping to synthesize information regularly and provide real-time data. Based on the features of the MEL system, MI staff can manage their projects and activities regularly, and automated reports are generated and shared with the programs based on the data provided in the system in monthly basis. At management level, program directors can oversee the activities in timely manner through the updating system of the project implementation status and other detailed analysis. Some snapshots of the system-generated automatic reports are following:

In February 2023, with the facilitation of MEL unit, an **MOU was signed between Khon Kaen University International College (KKUIC) and MI** to formalize the collaboration in education and research. Accordingly, the MoU opened various research collaboration opportunities like internship and cooperative education of KKUIC students in MI, exchange of academic materials, cooperation through symposia, seminar, forums, and workshop, etc.

Since, MI is midway through the Strategic Plan (SP) for 2021-2025, a **Mid-Term Review (MTR)** of the SP was conducted during August-November 2023. The overall objective of this mid-term review was to reflect on the progress of the strategic plan implementation, identify challenges, and recommend possible changes and improvements to the strategies/approaches for better implementation in the remaining duration of the strategic plan. The MTR review was conducted in a hybrid modality. An external consultant was

mobilized to facilitate two in-house workshops and write the MTR report. Data collection was mainly conducted by MI's MEL Unit. The consultant also interviewed some key informants[1]. The main findings and recommendations of the MTR report are based on different sources of information, including (i) an online survey to all MI staff (of which, 33 responses were received); (ii) an online survey to 555 beneficiaries (from those who participated in activities from 2021-present); (iii) interviews with donors, implementing agencies; (iv) interviews/FGDs with MI Steering Committee and MI Secretariat staff. Results from the MI Annual Reports, Performance Reports, and some other studies conducted by MI in recent years; (v) feedback from the MI staff at two in-house workshops on 02 August and 01 November 2023.

The findings and recommendations of the MTR were shared in the Special Steering Committee meeting and a Development Partners' meeting held on 16 November in Bangkok. The agreed-on recommendations from the steering committee meeting, along with the full MTR report, were presented to the MI Council for their consideration and decision in the 2nd governing board meeting in Cambodia in December 2023.

B. Communications and Knowledge Management

To broaden public awareness and understanding of MI's expanded portfolio of services, increase impact visibility of MI's capacity development, research advocacy, and advisory services, and enhance support in wider GMS stakeholder engagement and collaboration, various publications such as the monthly E-Briefing, 2022 Annual Report, Proceedings, videos and corporate brochures, flyers, and roll-ups have been developed. Each PR material targets different audiences with different key messages and channels for dissemination.

To maintain the smooth functionality of online platforms (i.e., front end design update, system update, security and debugging maintenance) and daily operation of the unit, subscriptions of photo stock and Photo Platform, Flickr account, Video block have been renewed as well as subscription to a new digital collaboration platform such as Canva. Also, new equipment related to video production, photo taking and PR-related have been purchased for internal use.

To enhance support in wider GMS stakeholder engagement and collaboration, various strategic meetings were held where CKM Unit led or provided support in the organisation and PR material development. The events include the first-ever Mekong Forum 2023 to be held outside Thailand, Development Partners' Meeting, among other events. Also, in August 2023, MI was nominated to be the interim secretariat of the ASEAN-Climate Resilience Network (CRN). By assuming this role, MI will continue to provide communications support to the ASEAN CRN.

MI regularly updated MI website and social media and maintained the standard of the content and visuals (187); produced MI and project collaterals (e.g., fact sheet (6), roll-ups (15), VDOs

---

[1] This includes the interview with the Chairman of the MI Council; the Chairman of the MI Steering Committee; all MI SMT members; program specialists, program managers, a senior program coordinator, and the head of all management/operations units at the MI Secretariat.

(15), and produced monthly E-briefing (12) and Annual Report (1) as well as other GMS publications (2). For the website and social media accounts, the stats are as follows: Facebook 202, Twitter 197, LinkedIn 170. MI also maintained its Alumni Database (563) and E-learning platform for enhanced outreach.

MI fostered engagement of GMS stakeholders and MI staff for effective knowledge building and sharing in 2023:

- Number of websites visitors (21,781)
- Number of people reached by Facebook posts (435,233)
- Number of Facebook viewers engaged (39,538)
- Number of people reached by Twitter posts (29,142)
- Number of Twitter viewers engaged (9,889)
- Number of LinkedIn page views (3,700)

5.2. Finance and Operations

A. Financial Management

To improve MI's internal financial mechanism, MI developed a system to report expenses incurred by each department/unit against the approved budget, aiming to control expenses within the approved budget. Cash flow forecasting, monitoring, and control mechanisms were applied by MI improving visibility and planning for liquidity needs and minimizing cash flow gaps. MI conducted regular internal audits, identifying areas of improvement, addressing gaps, and strengthening compliance with international accounting standards that minimized the risk of financial irregularities.

Effective reporting:

MI successfully maintained a continuous and efficient process of recording and preparing reports for various projects and the report requitements from the management team throughout the year.

Audit compliance:

MI demonstrated a commitment to financial transparency and compliance by working with auditors twice during the year reflecting strong financial governance.

Internal audit support:

MI played a key role in supporting the internal audit of MKCF's projects in conjunction with PIA, enhancing accountability and internal control measures.

Income generation:

The finance unit generated income through consulting services and took charge of managing the development of application systems for Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS).

Knowledge exchange:

The finance unit and the director of financial and operation actively engaged in knowledge and experience exchange with MRCS in Lao PDR, strengthening relationships and laying the foundation for future cooperation and partnership opportunities.

MI supported MKCF's Project Implementation Agencies (PIAs) to implement projects. MI launched 12 Projects across the Mekong countries and disbursed the sum of 2.9 million to the PIAs. During the launching meeting, MI introduced the project modalities, requirements, and alignment of the existing ongoing project on the procurement, compliance and the MKCF manual norms along with the introduction of AppSheet to capture the project's financial details. MI focused to bring quality and smooth implementation of the project with transparency and accountability through providing handholding support to all ongoing, newly launched project or project which has been closed during this phase. To support the MKCF's PIAs, MI representatives visited several organizations and provided orientations. Besides, MI conducted PIAs' assessments on the grant financial management such as PIAs' finance policy and system, procurement, capability to manage the funding, internal financial control, financial reporting, and others. MI also reviewed and provided feedback on PIAs financial reports.

Table 1: Amount of grant disbursed (as of Oct 2023) to the Project Implementing Agencies (PIAs)

No	PIA's name	Country	Project Title	Disbursed Amount (in USD)
1	Land Use Division, Department of Agriculture	Myanmar	Assessment of Heavy Metal Contamination in Soil and Water for Safety Crop Production in Myanmar	112,005
2	Department of Planning and International Cooperation, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology, Cambodia	Cambodia	Data Collection and Processing for the Cambodian Irrigation Schemes Information System and Sharing Information on Water Resources between the Mekong-ROK	131,901
3	Research Institute for Energy and Mines, Ministry of Energy and Mines	Lao PDR	Development and Promoting of Solar Dryer for Agricultural and ODOP Products	150,000
4	Department of Provincial; Administration, Ministry of Interior of Thailand	Thailand	Enhancing People-to-People Connectivity to Address Non-traditional Security Challenges in the Mekong Region	212,786
5	International Rice Research Institute	Viet Nam	Rice straw-based circular economy for improved	499,511

No	PIA's name	Country	Project Title	Disbursed Amount (in USD)
	Vietnam Country Office (IRRI)		biodiversity and sustainability (RiceEco)	
6	Project Management Unit, Ministry of Natural Environment	Viet Nam	"Strengthen the Water User Organizations (WUOs) for Irrigated Agriculture Development in the Mekong Delta"	125,054
7	Asian Forest Cooperation Organization (AFoCO)	ROK	Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Adaptation to Climate Change and Forest Fire Management in Mekong Region	498,016
8	School of Industrial Training and Education (SITE)	Myanmar	Strengthening TVET Management and Upskilling TVET Personnel to Meet Industry Demand Reflecting IR 4.0	248,159
9	Capacity Building for Sustainable and Climate Change Resilient Water Resources Management in Mekong River Basin	Cambodia	Capacity Building for Sustainable and Climate Change Resilient Water Resource Management in Mekong River Basin	212,825
10	Southern Institute of Ecology (SIE)	Viet Nam	Building a portal of ecosystems and biodiversity information for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development for the Mekong Delta	400,000
11	Seoul National University	RoK	Promoting of Innovative Rainwater for Drinking System as a Sustainable Water Supply in Rural Health Care Facilities and/or Schools	200,000
12	Department of Agicultural Land Management, Ministry of Agiculture and Forestry (MAF), Lao PDR	Lao PDR	Soil, Water and Nutrient Management (SWNM) for increasing Farm Households	119,963
	Total Disbursed			**2,920,220**

B. Human Resources Management:

Following MI Policy, the MI always emphasize the recruitment of diversified staff based on the principles of non-discrimination, equal treatment, and opportunity in all aspects of employment, irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age or national origin. In 2023, the following staff were recruited by MI:

Table 2: Name of new staff joined in MI

Name	Position	Date of Joining	Country
Regular Staff			
Ms. Anna Leigh V. Anillo	Communications Coordinator	May 15, 2023	The Philippines
Ms. Kittikar Kittipitayakorn	Human Resources Officer	May 1, 2023	Thailand
Ms. Thongvone Sosamphan	Program Officer	June 26, 2023	Lao PDR
Mr. Subpa-ut Kongmee	Human Resources Officer	July 17, 2023	Thailand
Ms. Piyachat Chanla	Project Operations Support Assistant	September 11, 2023	Thailand
Temporary Staff			
Ms. Jennisa Chayboonkrong	Administration Assistant	March 1, 2023	Thailand
Ms. Wilasinee Boonkwang	Human Resources Assistant	March 1, 2023	Thailand
Ms. Hyeyoung Lee	Project Manager	February 20, 2023	Republic of Korea
Ms. Joclarisse Espiritu Albia	Consultant	May 15, 2023	The Philippines
Mr. Yatikorn Sitthichanda	Procurement Assistant	May 22, 2023	Thailand
Mr. Eastword De Guzman Manlises	Consultant	May 29, 2023	Philippines
Ms. Kirana Chanrattanagorn	Project Operations Support Assistant	August 15, 2023	Thailand
Mr. Sovanpol In	Program Coordinator	September 1, 2023	Cambodia

All concerned department heads were satisfied with the recruitment process which ensured the representation of the key personnel from the specific department and other departments in the recruitment committee. All committee members discussed and agreed on all stages of the recruitment process.

MI has revised and announced the guidelines of the Career Progression Framework (CPF) to encourage and promote staff to senior positions. In 2023, Six staff members were internally promoted to senior positions due to their higher-level performance in the previous years.

Gender and nationality:

There were 48 staff members from 13 nationalities, with 40% of male and 60% of female. Representatives from all the six GMS member countries were present at MI in 2023.
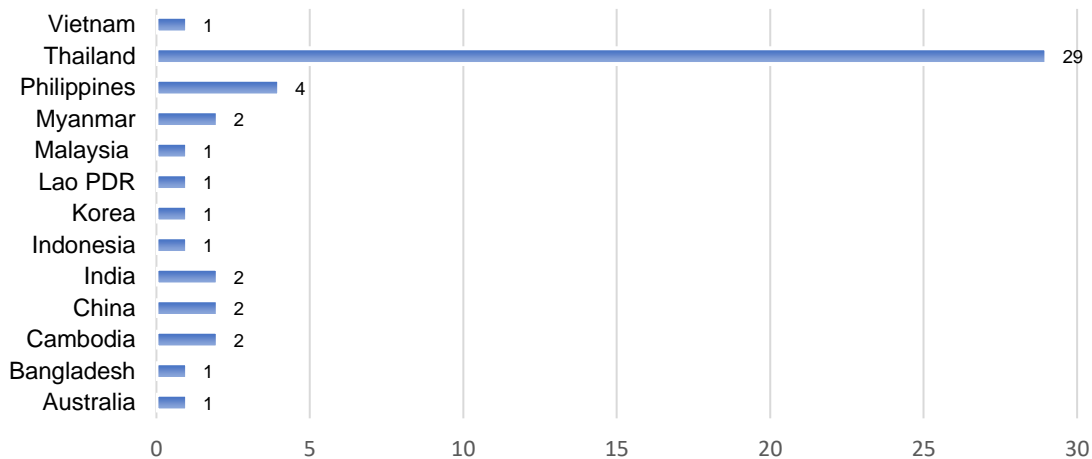
Vaccination:

Six staff members received a booster dose of the Covid-19 vaccine. It ensures that our staff have enough immunity to protect against and prevent the Covid-19 virus.

Staff performance review:

MI staff's mid-term performance review was conducted in July 2023 involving supervisors and supervisees effectively. The process for mid-term performance review was announced and scheduled after the agreement between supervisor and supervisee. Job-related criteria measure as well as expectations from the positions were used to assess the employee's performance.

Staff capacity building:

MI continued to support staff in participating in online training sessions. The major areas that our staff participated in are as follows:

- Program Manager of the Sustainable Energy and Environment (SEE) Department attended a Mekong-Australia Partnership Short Term Awards (MAPSTA) Course on Responding to the Climate Change Challenge, sponsored by The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia and organized by The University of Queensland, Australia on February 6-17, 2023.
- Program Manager of Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF) Department attended a two-day workshop on ASEAN Trade Repository (ATR) and ASEAN Solutions for Investment, Services and Trade (ASSIST), organized by EU ARISE Plus at Movenpick and Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit Hotel, Bangkok on February 16-17, 2023.

- Senior Program Coordinator of the Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF) Department participated in the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET) organized by the Swedish Institute in Bern, Switzerland, from July 10-21, 2023.
- Senior IT Support Officer attended a 4-day training on CompTIA Network+, which was organized by ARIT Company Limited and took place from September 5-8, 2023.
- Procurement Officer took part in three training courses: "Penetrating Hurdles in Purchasing," "Purchasing Performance Measurement / Reporting / KPI Setting," and "Tendering Techniques." These courses were organized by One Step Training Center and were held at Jasmine Sukhumvit 23 Hotel in Bangkok from September 20-22, 2023.
- and Sofitel Bangkok Sukhumvit Hotel, Bangkok on February 16-17, 2023.

C. General Services Management

Cleanliness of MI premises:

MI premises were regularly cleaned and disinfected to be secured from COVID-19 or any viruses; it was ensured that no high-risk staff or other people visited the premises.

Transportation services:

A total of 415 rounds of transportation services were provided to requesters, including 15 rounds of VIP support, 205 rounds for MI duties, 195 rounds for the courses (including rental van), and MI staff. MI maintained a good condition of the vehicles for safe driving and made them ready to use at any time.

Conference room support:

MI organized 485 events in its conference rooms, including 130 online meetings, 294 onsite meetings, 22 onsite training, 2 online webinars, and 37 online training.

Ensured efficient operation and optimum use of MI assets and equipment:

MI managed its assets following the asset database. MI conducted items' routine maintenance for its two premises and belongings in 2023. MI's in-house technician provided several repair and maintenance support as per the request of MI staff and reduced the maintenance cost.

Increased safety and security of people and assets in MI:

There was 100% safety and security of people and assets in MI building because our security guards provided security services for 24 hours in a day and 7 days in a week. MI asset was prepared and regularly counted twice in the year in July and December and there was no loss of the items.

MI's new kitchen:

A kitchen was renovated to set new MI standard catering, since a new kitchen provides an opportunity to ensure compliance with food safety regulations and best practices. In addition,

it also helps encourage better management for a general service unit to provide meals for MI staff and guests.

New restaurant at MI canteen

The new restaurant was opened at MI Canteen in September, primarily focusing on serving participants and MI staff, such as breakfast, lunch, and gatherings. It aims to provide greater convenience and delight participants with a Thai buffet option, as opposed to the previous lunchbox service during the COVID-19 pandemic. New restaurant supports us in saving time in finding food and refreshments for participants.

MI building renovation and painting:

Renovating and painting of the buildings extensively improved their appearances to be more professional and modern since we welcome guests and participants to visit MI buildings. In addition, we need to maintain our buildings to keep them in good condition for a better working environment and workplace.

New MI signage in front of MI building:

The new MI signage features a contemporary design, perfect for photo opportunities, especially group shots, and ensures easy visibility from the road. We've maintained the iconic MI color, preserving its distinct identity.

D. IT Services Management

Developed and operationalized an efficient IT infrastructure for MI

MI continued upgrading its online facilities, including IT program software such as Zoom and Google Workspace. Furthermore, MI proactively replaced old and malfunctioning computers with new laptops, ensuring uninterrupted workflow; the institute acquired 10 sets of new computers to meet its technology needs.

IT infrastructure and services during events:

The IT team excelled in providing seamless IT services during events hosted by the organization. This accomplishment involved ensuring uninterrupted internet connectivity, robust Wi-Fi services, and efficient audio-visual setups for conferences, webinars, and other events. The team's ability to handle high-stress situations and maintain a high level of performance during critical events was a significant achievement. MI's IT team supported the program departments with training and workshops smoothly and effectively both in Thailand and outside Thailand; for example, there were 2 events in Khon Kaen and 1 event in Kunming, China, which were managed by the IT team successfully.

Smooth operation and maintenance of computers and IT equipment:

The IT team effectively managed the operation and maintenance of all computers and IT equipment within the organization. This achievement includes timely hardware and software upgrades, regular maintenance, and proactive troubleshooting to minimize downtime. As a

result, employees experienced minimal disruptions, and productivity remained consistently high.

MI enhanced its IT capability to support online meetings, training, webinars, and forums throughout the pandemic. MI's IT team supported a total of 356 onsite, online, hybrid, training courses, webinars, and meetings. IT personnel enriched their ability to organize online events and planned to prevent interference. Besides, IT equipment was repaired/maintained to extend their lifetimes.

E. Procurement Services Management

MI Effectively managed the procurement of goods and services In 2023, the Procurement Unit played a vital role in the procurement process and made substantial contributions to overall MI operations.

Construction of MI Canteen's Kitchen and Garden with MI sign:

The procurement has achieved a significant milestone in overseeing the successful construction of the new canteen kitchen at MI. This achievement underscores our commitment to enhancing MI's facilities, promising improved food services and the capacity to support on-site activities. The state-of-the-art kitchen not only elevates our offerings but also lightens the workload for the GS team, further streamlining operations.

In parallel, our successful procurement efforts have resulted in the development of the MI garden, now graced with the iconic MI sign at its entrance. This transformation has turned the garden into a welcoming and functional space, enriching the institute's environment. The MI sign is not only a symbol of excellence but also evidence of our dedication to progress and enhances MI's overall mission and image. This innovation will promote MI to international and regional schemes through participants who join MI training and workshops with group photos in front of this symbol appearing on social media.

Purchase requests and purchase orders:

Throughout the year, the procurement team admirably handled a total of 386 purchase requests and skillfully managed 62 purchase orders. Our dedication allowed us to meet numerous urgent requests, ensuring the timely and efficient delivery of top-quality goods and services. This remarkable effort played a pivotal role in supporting our program departments and various units, consistently providing the necessary resources to facilitate our operations.

Global procurement of consultants under Special Service Agreements (SSA):

In a significant expansion of our services, we've broadened our procurement capabilities to engage consultants and resource persons through Special Service Agreements (SSAs). Over the first ten months of 2023, MI embarked on a comprehensive global selection process, successfully recruiting 62 consultants from a pool of more than 554 candidates worldwide. Our impressive 244% increase compared to last year underscores our strong commitment to acquiring top-tier expertise, solidifying our global leadership position. The procurement team

carefully ensured that experts matched specific job needs, demonstrating our dedication to high standards and contributing significantly to our success.

Cost negotiations and updated procurement guidelines:

Our negotiations with vendors resulted in significant cost reductions, particularly for copying machines and internet services. Furthermore, we successfully updated and gained approval for revised procurement guidelines related to the hiring of Resource Persons and consultants, enhancing the efficiency and transparency of our processes.

Timely renewal of 42 service contracts:

We have successfully accomplished the timely renewal of 42 contracts, ensuring the uninterrupted provision of essential services and products necessary for sustaining MI's day-to-day operations. This achievement, coupled with our diligent procurement efforts, underscores our commitment to operational excellence.

Consultant and resource database:

In 2023, the Procurement Unit continued to evolve and innovate, supporting the institution's growth and mission with outstanding procurement services and strategies. Despite the absence of dedicated procurement software, we have successfully created and maintained a consultant and resource persons database using the AppSheet platform. This platform not only ensures the security of personal information but also allows consultants and resource persons to update their profiles. Furthermore, we have categorized areas of expertise, simplifying the process of finding the right consultant or resource person for training, activities, and studies.

Additionally, we introduced a consultant payment database, which is accessible by the responsible staff and the finance unit, streamlining the consultant payment process. These initiatives reflect our unwavering commitment to enhancing our procurement processes and contributing to MI's overall mission.

6. MI's Financial Performance

6.1 Consolidated Statement of Financial Status (**January 1 - October 31, 2023**):

MI's current total assets amounted to US$ 10,373,291. The cash and cash equivalent were amounted to US$ 8,918,168, while other current assets were of US$ 411,354, with the net value of fixed assets being US$ 1,043,769.

MI has total liabilities of US$ 8,421,141, including unearned revenue from GMS countries' contributions of US$ 181,095. The total equity was US$ 1,952,149, which is an increase by 0.4% compared to December 31, 2022.

Table 3: Summary Statement of Financial Status (as of October 31, 2023)

Asset	Amount (in USD)	Percentage
Cash and Cash Equivalent	8,918,168	86.0%
Other Current Assets	411,354	4.0%
Fixed Assets	1,043,769	10.1%

Total of Assets	10,373,291	100.0%
Liability and Equity	**Amount (in USD)**	**Percentage**
Current Liability	156,354	1.5%
Unearned Revenue (GMS Country Contributions)	8,083,692	77.9%
Grant Advance Received	181,095	1.7%
Total Liability	**8,421,141**	**81.2%**
Equity	1,952,149	18.8%
Total of Liability and Equity	**10,373,291**	**100.0%**

MI's total revenue was US$ 2,797,479, achieving 71% of the target budget for 2023 as of October 31, 2023. This includes total revenue from long-term projects (US$ 1,760,733), short-term projects (US$ 370,188), customized activities (US$ 212,695), GMS countries' contributions (US$ 437,177), and other revenues (US$ 16,686).

On the other hand, total MI's expenses amounted to US$ 2,772,976, covering expenses from project and program delivery (US$ 1,926,909) and operation expenses (US$ 792,089). MI's non-cash operation expenses amounted to US$ 53,979. MI recorded net earnings of US$ 24,503 as of October 31, 2023.

Table 4: Summary of Statement of Revenue and Expenses (as of October 31, 2023)

Revenue	**Amount**	**Percentage**
Long-Term Projects	1,760,733	62.9%
Short-Term Projects	370,188	13.2%
Customized Activities	212,695	7.6%
Total Project Revenue	**2,343,615**	**83.8%**
GMS Countries' Contributions	437,177	15.6%
Other Revenues	16,686	0.6%
Total Revenue	**2,797,479**	**100.0%**
Expenses	**Amount**	**Percentage**
Project/Program Delivery	1,330,926	48.0%
Program Administration	539,337	19.4%
Business Development	56,645	2.0%
Total Project Expenses	**1,926,909**	**69.5%**
Total Operation Expenses	**792,089**	**28.6%**
Total Expenses before non-cash operation	**2,718,997**	**98.1%**
Earnings (Deficit) before non-cash expenses	**78,481**	**2.8%***
Non-cash expenses	53,979	**1.9%**
Total Expenses	**2,772,976**	**100.0%**
Earnings (Deficit) after non-cash expenses	**24,503**	**0.9%***

The Percentage of earnings is compared with Total Income

The following graph shows the MI revenues from 31 projects implemented during Jan-Oct 2023:

Figure 3:% share of MI revenues by countries (as of October 2023)
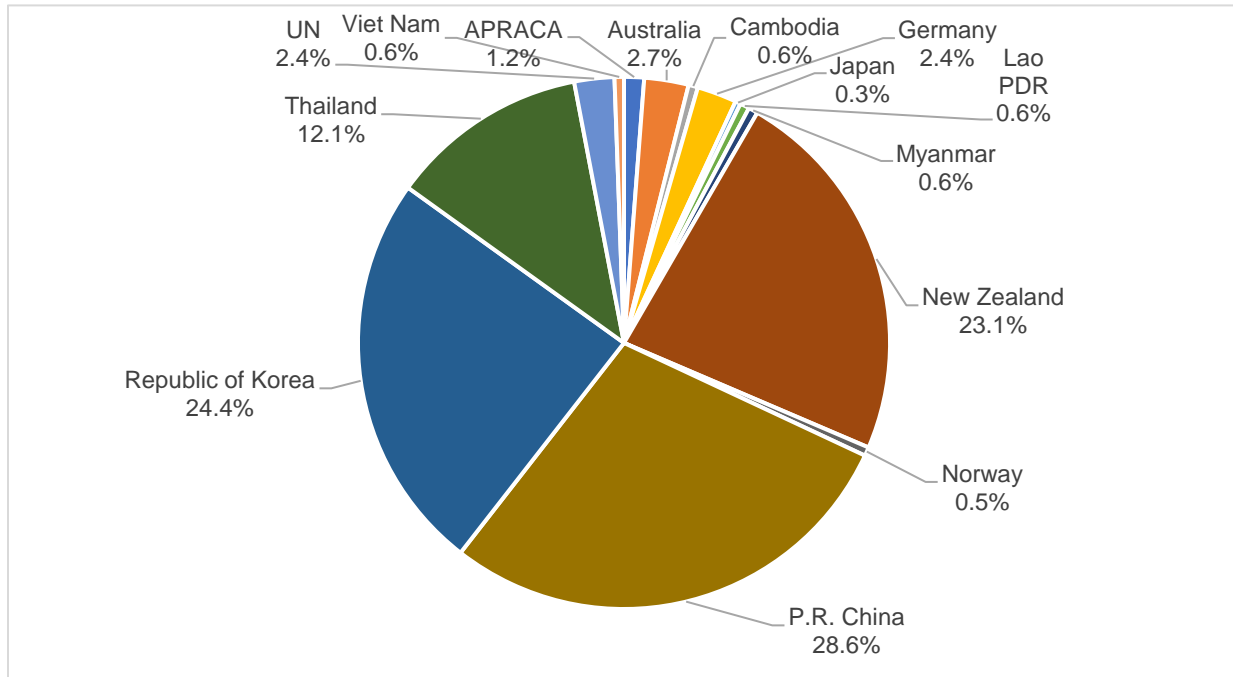
As of October 2023, MI received contributions from all its member countries amounted to US$522,48. The member countries' contribution was 16% of the total revenue of MI.

Table 5: GMS Countries' Annual Contributions in 2023 (as of October 31, 2023)

GMS Country	Contribution	Receiving Month
Cambodia	20,000	April 2023
P.R. China	150,000	September 2023
Lao PDR	20,000	April 2023
Myanmar	20,000	August 2023
Thailand	292,482	May 2023
Viet Nam	20,000	June 2023
Total	**522,482**	
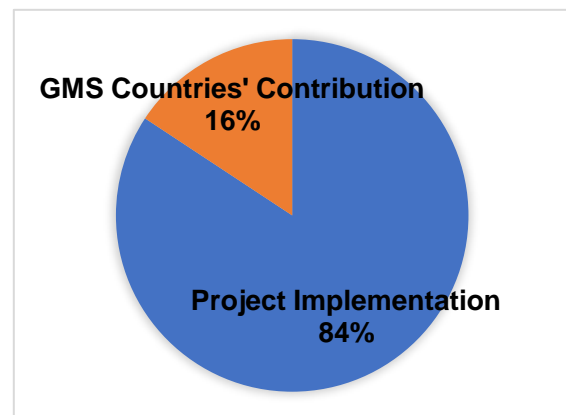
Figure 4: Sources of MI's revenues

7. Challenge Faced in 2023

- MI continued facing difficulties in recruiting the right number of participants from all its member countries for its capacity development events.
- MI has not been able to highlight and strengthen the "environment" dimension yet within its program implementation.
- The reach of MI's activities is largely limited to MI's own channels while partners' communication channels as well as the media are not maximized to full potential.
- Establishing outcome monitoring still was a big challenge of MI, since MI does not have long-term dedicated projects/interventions to bring higher-level changes (in capacity, performances, and contribution) of the MI participants/beneficiaries. MI also lacks the budget of outcome monitoring in the project design.

8. Recommendations

- Institutional strengthening should have more strategic and forward-looking strategy; seeking a short staff exchange program would be desirable.
- MI need to focus expanding its visibility through broadening wider public awareness about MI's work.
- It is important for MI to promote its branding for attracting talent to the organization, as more staff want to work for organizations that value diversity and offer everyone a sense of belonging.
- MI should create more opportunities for the MI staff to attend capacity-building activities by using the departments' budget for capacity-building activities. Additionally, MI should foster more in-house knowledge sharing, enabling the staff to take an active role in helping MI become a Center of Excellence.
- Systematic caching should be provided to the MI staff to develop and foster MI expertise in specific areas. A concerted effort to create more learning opportunities, knowledge sharing, and capacity building will develop their capabilities.
- More interactive workshops should be organized between MI program departments and other operations units on knowledge and information sharing that will create harmony within the organization.
- There should be an encouragement in the promotion of learning culture to create a sense of involvement through group discussions to create a more efficient and organized work climate.
- There should be an implementation of systematic knowledge management that would allow departments/units to report their improvements/achievements and generate more flow of information among the departments and units.
- Since there is an uprising of the emergence of new issues in the GMS, MI should initiate a new mechanism to respond to emerging issues to create and align MI's work and feed the needs of the GMS countries.
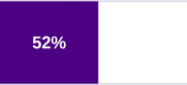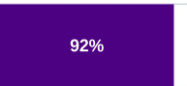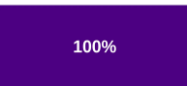
9. Annex

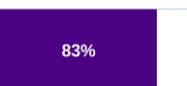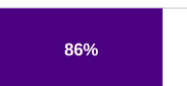## 9.1. Annex 1: MI Results Framework 2021-2025
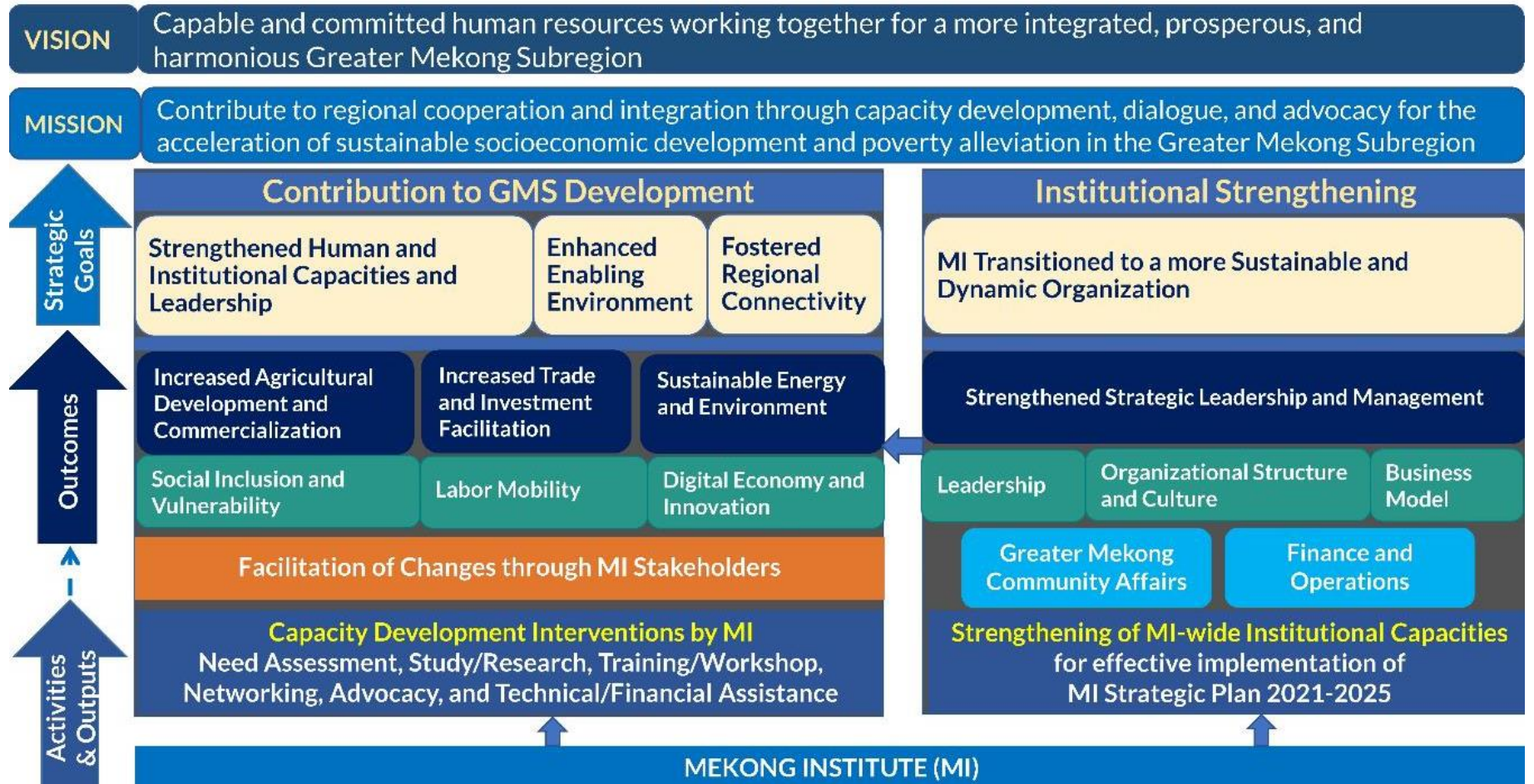
9.2. Annex 2: MI Capacity Development Model (CDM)
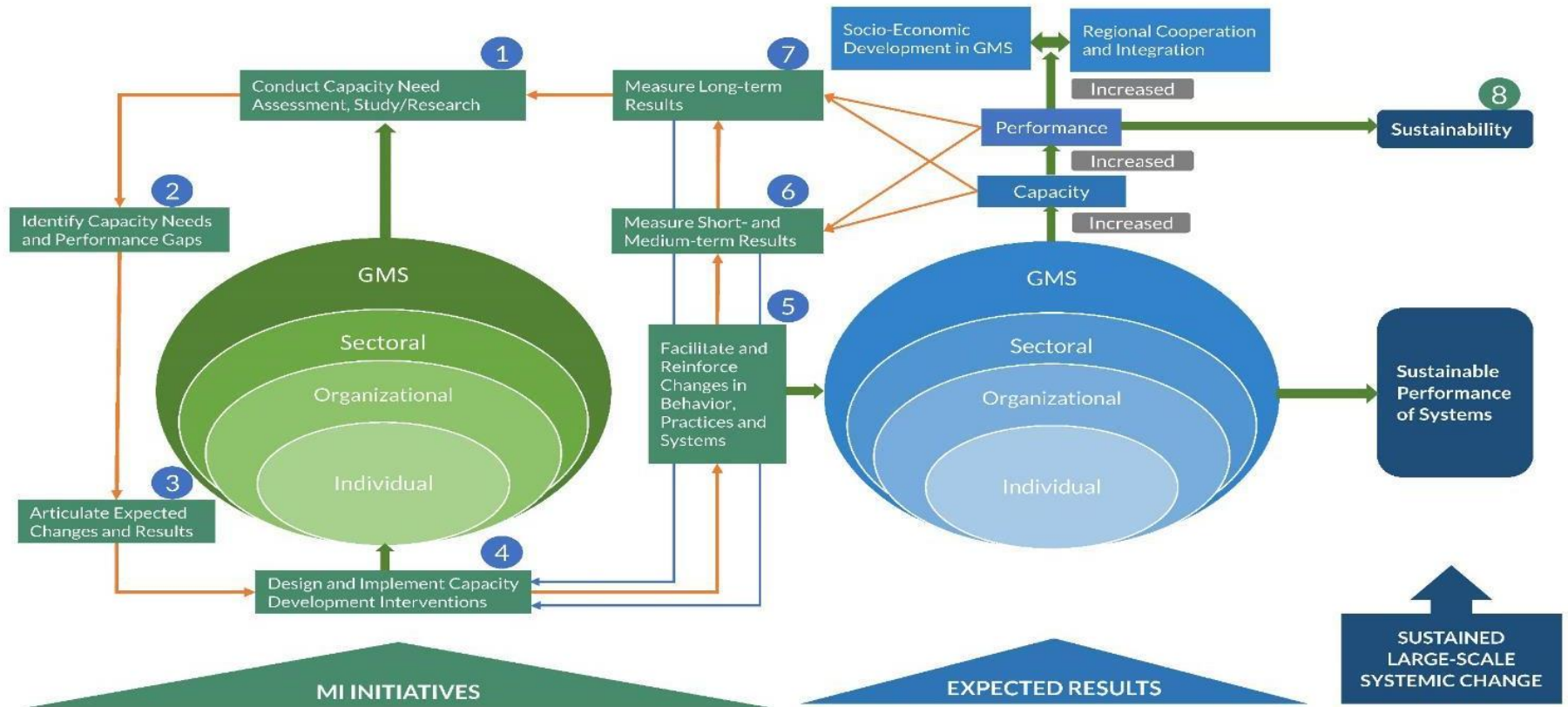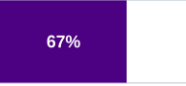
9.3. Annex 3: Status of Completion (in %) of Projects by Thematic Areas
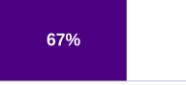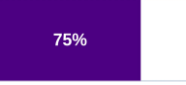
Project Name	Donor	Implementing Department	Status of Progress
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT THEMES			
Agricultural Development and Commercialization			
Promoting Safe Food for Everyone in CLMV (PROSAFE)	NZAP	ADC	52%
Development and Implementation of Common Rice Production Standard in Mekong-Lancang Subregion	MLCSF	ADC	58%
Development of Rice Pest and Natural Disasters Monitoring, Forecasting and Warning Center for Sustainable Rice Production under Climate Change in Mekong-Lancang Subregion	MLCSF	ADC	92%
Knowledge Management in Agricultural Development	APRACA	ADC	100%
Impacts of COVID-19 on Food System in the LMC	PRC	ADC	25%
MKCF-Sustainable and smart agricultural supply chain development in Mekong countries	MKCF	TIF, SEE, ADC	83%
Promoting Climate-Smart Agriculture Technologies and Innovations in Lower Mekong Countries	DFAT	ADC, SEE	50%
Trade and Investment Facilitation			
Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region	MKCF	TIF	86%

Project Name	Donor	Implementing Department	Status of Progress
Lancang-Mekong Business Forums	MLCSF	TIF	50%
Capacity Building on Regional Project Design, Implementation, Monitoring & Evaluation of MKCF projects	MKCF	TIF	50%
Survey of the Mekong Regional Cooperation Frameworks and their strategies and responses to the emerging regional and global issues	AOTS	TIF	100%
RoK-ACMECS Regional Branding Project - Facilitating Cross Border Trade through Synchronization for Rules and Regulation in the ACMECS	ROK	TIF	13%
Chile –Thailand International Workshop on Trade Negotiation for ASEAN Members	AGCID	TIF	100%
Paperless Trade Study (Consultant Services)	UNESCAP	TIF	75%
Training on 'E-commerce Policy Development and Implementation Strategies for SME Development in CLMVT Countries	AOTS	TIF	100%
Accelerating the Development of Regional Logistics Channels and Transportation Infrastructure for the Lancang-Mekong Regional in the Content of the China-Lao PDR-Thailand Railway	FAOYN	SEE, TIF	63%
Sustainable Energy and Environment			
ASEAN-CRN Secretariat Facilitator to support for ASEAN-CRN and ANGA	GIZ	SEE	80%

Project Name	Donor	Implementing Department	Status of Progress
The implementation of the triangular cooperation project on sustainable development in the Lower Mekong Basin based on the Water-Energy-Food (WEF) Nexus	RoK-UNOSSC	SEE	67%
Forum on Accelerating Innovation through Energy Technology Cooperation in the Greater Mekong Subregion	P.R. China	SEE	50%
Upstream single-use plastic reduction solutions for Khon Kaen's street food complexes	NREF	ADC	67%
CROSS-CUTTING THEMES			
Digital Economy and Innovation			
Scaling-Up Digital Connectivity for Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-Pandemic Resilience	P.R. China	SEE	
Labor Mobility			
Targeted Poverty Alleviation for Better Life in the Lancang-Mekong Region	P.R. China	SEE	31%
Social Inclusion and Vulnerability			
Targeted Poverty Alleviation and Strengthening Food Security in the Lancang-Mekong Countries for Post-pandemic Recovery	P.R. China	SEE	31%
MI CONTRIBUTION TO BROADER GMS COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS			
Comprehensive Human Resource Development for the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation	FAOYN	SEE	50%
MKCF Fund Management	MKCF	TIF	75%

Project Name	Donor	Implementing Department	Status of Progress
Survey of the Mekong Regional Cooperation Frameworks and their strategies and responses to the emerging regional and global issues	AOTS	TIF	100%
Global Development Initiative Leverages Sustainable Development in the Lancang-Mekong Region	P.R. China	SEE	50%