

# THE MEKONG U.S.-PARTNERSHIP SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT: FEBRUARY 2023

Greetings from the Mekong Unit in the Department of State's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Office of Multilateral Affairs (EAP/MLA) and welcome to this year's first Mekong-U.S. Partnership (MUSP) Semiannual Update Report.

For those I haven't yet had a chance to meet, my name is Holly Lindquist Thomas and I am the new Director for EAP/MLA. I started in this position last summer after three years at our Embassy in Hanoi, where I supported our bilateral cooperation in the areas of climate, health, and energy, including how those issues affect Mekong River communities. I'm excited to bring my 20 years of experience in the State Department to this job, and look forward to working with you and determining how we can advance our shared goals for the future of the Mekong sub-region.

The MUSP recognizes the interconnected nature of the sub-region's challenges: climate change, economic growth and connectivity, transboundary crime and non-traditional security threats, and of course, natural resource management and environmental sustainability. While these are troubling challenges, we have seen first-hand the extraordinary success we can achieve together with our Mekong partners in empowering local communities in the region. We want to continue working with you to provide tangible benefits to the people and communities of the Mekong sub-region through the MUSP.

Over the last six months, we centered our MUSP activities around engagement efforts throughout the sub-region to ensure that Mekong countries and citizens can continue recovering from the current pandemic. To date, the United States has donated nearly 487 million vaccine doses to the Mekong sub-region to help protect people from COVID-19 and its variants. In addition to the health impacts, the pandemic has exacerbated the transnational criminal networks trafficking drugs, humans, and wildlife. In 2022, the United States provided approximately \$31 million to build capacity in countries in the lower Mekong sub-region to combat transnational crime.

We were thrilled to support Vice President Kamala Harris's Mekong engagement during her travel to Thailand for the APEC Summit. During her visit, the Vice President emphasized regional transboundary engagement in the Mekong sub-region. Showcasing the Biden Administration's support for connectivity and green infrastructure, the Vice President announced further intended support for the Japan-U.S.-Mekong Power Partnership.

Our aim with this report is to provide success stories and to link technical experts with desk officers covering the activities of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership. The report highlights many of the programs included in the MUSP Plan of Action (POA) 2021-2023 and how they are being implemented. We look forward to additional discussion on these programs as we consider a new POA for 2024-26.

Sincerely,

*Holly Lindquist Thomas*

EAP/MLA Director

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**To Stay Up to Date on the work of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership:**

<https://mekonguspartnership.org/>



## Key Regional Visits in 2022

### Vice President Kamala Harris Visits Thailand, Highlights Mekong Engagement

In her November 2022 visit to Thailand, U.S. Vice President Harris committed to seeking up to \$20 million in additional funding from the U.S. Congress to support the Japan-U.S.-Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP). This clean energy work advances national and regional clean energy goals, as well as plans to enhance cross-border power trade and electrical interconnectivity. The JUMPP Technical Advisory Group is exploring opportunities to release the Action Plan publicly, so their citizens understand how governments are accelerating clean energy deployment and building sustainable and affordable power sectors to support economic growth and opportunity. The White House released two Fact Sheets related to the Vice President's travels, one on engagement in [Thailand and Mekong sub-region](#), and another emphasizing [clean energy](#).

### Mekong River Commission

A/S Kritenbrink met with the CEO of the MRC Secretariat, Dr. Anoulak Kittikhoun in Vientiane. A/S Kritenbrink reinforced the strong U.S. Support for the MRC while highlighting \$7 million in active U.S. foreign assistance funding to support sustainable water management in the Mekong sub-region. CEO Anoulak shared the history of the MRC, and the two sides discussed areas of possible cooperation in river infrastructure operations, services, and tools to ensure transparency and accountability in decision making in the Mekong River Basin.



A/S Kritenbrink meets with CEO of the MRC and team.

### On the Ground

EAP Assistant Secretary (A/S) Daniel Kritenbrink and Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) Dr. Jung Pak separately visited Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia in October to reaffirm U.S. commitment to partnership in the Mekong sub-region. While in Laos, A/S Kritenbrink participated in the U.S.-Lao Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue, the first since 2019, to discuss ongoing bilateral areas of cooperation, and celebrated our MUSP co-chairmanship with Lao PDR. DAS Pak's engagement included conversations with the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Flood and Drought Management Centre in Phnom Penh, and community leaders in northern Thailand to learn more about their concerns about both man-made and climate-related changes to the Mekong River system.



Here, DAS Pak visits Tai Lue weavers in Chiang Rai, Thailand who are working to support their community as changes to the Mekong River impact traditional fishing and agriculture practices.

### Friends of the Mekong Senior Officials Meeting

On August 2, 2022, DAS Pak chaired the first in-person Friends of the Mekong (FoM) Senior Officials' Meeting on the margins of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting since the COVID-19 pandemic. This meeting was an opportunity for FoM Senior Officials to hear about regional projects and avoid duplicating regional efforts. A major ongoing issue raised at this meeting was that of Burma's participation in the MUSP. Senior Officials pushed for a MUSP Foreign Ministers' Meeting to further discuss this issue.

# Economic Connectivity

## WE Inspire

MUSP's Mekong Inspiring Women Entrepreneurs (WE Inspire) project implemented by Kenan Foundation Asia aims to empower women across Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam who have been affected by changes to the river's water flow, the COVID-19 pandemic, and limited access to fundamental government services. WE Inspire provides training and mentoring on essential skills, including financial literacy, digital literacy, and business-related training to enhance skills and confidence in enterprise management and to support female-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

In Thailand, this project has reached over 150 stateless women, female migrant workers, and low-income women in Chiang Rai. The work in Thailand commenced with a roadshow to promote health screenings and raise awareness regarding the rights of migrants to access healthcare and financial services. In 2022, WE Inspire's work in Thailand continued through workshops on digital literacy, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship to equip participants with skills related to personal financial planning, saving plans, digital skills, and how to start a business.



WE Inspire participants in Chiang Rai, Thailand.

In Cambodia and Vietnam, the project will adopt lessons learned from the work in Thailand and will localize implementation based on key findings from scoping research and baseline analysis. WE Inspire will also kick off a roadshow in Cambodia and Vietnam in early 2023. For more information on the WE Inspire program, please visit: <https://weinspire.kenan-asia.org/>

## Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS)

EAP/MLA Director Holly Lindquist Thomas participated virtually in the Thai-hosted ACMECS Development Partners Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) to discuss coordinating efforts among its primary development partners in the Mekong sub-region and express appreciation for their continued support for the region's sustainable socioeconomic development. ACMECS announced detailed plans to establish a formal funding mechanism for members and development partners as well as an interim secretariat based in the Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

## East-West Connectivity

Under the East-West Connectivity Project, the U.S. Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT) conducted a gap analysis to identify obstacles that could hinder the successful planning, implementation, and operation of connectivity projects in the Mekong sub-region and to develop targeted technical assistance activities to address these obstacles. U.S. DOT met with more than 70 stakeholders from over 30 organizations – including U.S. embassies, foreign governments, multilateral organizations, and regional stakeholder entities – to gain a more nuanced understanding of technical assistance needs. The findings informed the development of several technical assistance and capacity building activities planned through 2024. In August, U.S. DOT facilitated a Third Country Training Program in cooperation with Singapore to provide training on transportation infrastructure to ASEAN officials, with a focus on issues relevant to Mekong countries. U.S. DOT plans to host eight capacity building activities in 2023, including workshops for Mekong transportation officials on sustainable infrastructure and cross-border transport facilitation.

# Economic Connectivity

## Mekong Connections

The ‘Mekong Connections: Supporting Governance, Transparency, and Local Voices’ program held its first ‘Learning Forum’ event in Chonburi, Thailand, August 22-24, 2022, bringing together 17 community leaders from eight organizations. The group represented the first cohort of Mekong Connections, which is implemented by [Pact Inc.](#) The program supports innovative projects for Mekong communities in action on good governance, environmental protection, and health security in the Mekong sub-region, and a key aim is to strengthen transboundary collaboration among Mekong communities. Through panel discussions and informal exchanges, participants were able to learn from each other, share successes and challenges, and build relationships.

Key challenges that emerged from their discussions were: reflecting women’s voices in policymaking; engaging effectively with local government authorities; enabling citizen science; and managing project budgets in view of increased travel costs during the global pandemic. The next Mekong Connections Learning Forum is expected to take place in May 2023 with the second cohort of grant recipients.



Mekong Connections Learning Forum in Chonburi, Thailand.

## Mekong Connections Small Grant Recipient Activities

Mekong Connections issued small grants to two cohorts of Mekong community leaders. The Coalition for Integrity and Social Accountability (CISA)’s project in Strung Treng, Cambodia, promotes youth participation in health security by empowering young people to take part in the local-level decision-making processes. The youth participants are translating this knowledge into an innovative approach to feeding community views into the process of developing local by-laws that protect the local Mekong environment. In Stung Treng, CISA works directly with 48 members of a local community youth network and another 240 young people aged 15 to 35 from 16 different communes.

Through the project, participants have received training on how to conduct action research on ecosystem health and health security, carry out field data collection, and analyze and report their data. Project activities have engaged around 5,480 families, including female-led households. The group plans to build on their activities in the Strung Treng province by advocating directly to the Mekong River Commission, ministry staff in Cambodia, and international NGOs about the project findings and by-law proposals.



Mekong Connections Learning Forum in Chonburi, Thailand.

# Sustainable Water, Natural Resources Management, and Environmental Conservation and Protection

## MUSP Young Scientist Program

In 2022, the MUSP Young Scientist Program hosted its third and final cohort around the theme of agricultural technology and innovation. The 2022 agricultural technology and innovation program recruited nearly 30 young scientists, researchers, and entrepreneurs from Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to develop solutions to agricultural technology challenges and business opportunities. The program began with a series of virtual sessions led by entrepreneurs and faculty members from the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering at Arizona State University (ASU). This was followed by a one-week in-person event in partnership with the Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education. The event ended with a pitch competition during which participants presented their agri-tech solutions to a panel of judges who represented startup incubators and higher education professionals from the region. The winner of the \$15,000 USD seed fund was a participant from Myanmar, who took advantage of her country's ginger production in the Southern Shan State. More than 11 million pounds of ginger are produced annually there. Exports outweigh the domestic use of ginger, but farmers face many barriers to exporting their product, resulting in lower profits and spoilage.



MUSP Young Scientist Program participants in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

## U.S. Department of Agriculture Seed Trade Capacity

USDA's Seed Trade Capacity project in the Mekong sub-region is developing and supporting sustainable food security solutions in the Mekong sub-region. USDA is 1) strengthening seed sectors, seed trade capacities, and rules-and science-based policy environments in lower Mekong countries; 2) fostering cooperation and the harmonization of seed policies among lower Mekong countries, consistent with practices and approaches in the United States, the ASEAN Seed Council, and with relevant international guidelines and enabling factors; and 3) identifying and promoting public-private partnerships related to enabling environments for seed use and trade in lower Mekong countries.

## Clean EDGE Asia

Clean EDGE Asia has launched the Country Spotlight Series to highlight a different country in the

Indo-Pacific each month. This series brings together the focus country's government and NGOs, the whole of U.S. government, the private sector, and international financial institutions to wed clean energy development problems faced by the country to near-term actionable solutions. Malaysia is the inaugural country for the Spotlight.

## Mekong and Mississippi Sister Rivers Exchange

Members of the Mississippi River Commission visited Laos and Cambodia for the 2022 Mekong-Mississippi Sister Rivers Partnership Exchange July 10-16. The delegation, which included senior leaders from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, traveled with MRC officials to share best practices in water management. Through annual exchanges, the Sister Rivers Partnership enhances transboundary river governance, disaster risk mitigation, and sustainable development. MRC video linked [here](#).



The Mississippi River Commission and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers delegation watching the sunset over the Mekong River in Luang Prabang, Laos.

# Sustainable Water, Natural Resources Management, and Environmental Conservation and Protection



JUMPP Technical Advisory Group participants in Laos.

## Japan-U.S. Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP)

Since JUMPP's launch in 2019, the U.S. and Japan have trained 554 persons and delivered over 85 technical cooperation projects in the form of training, workshops, regulatory capacity building workshops, U.S. study tours and technical assessments to promote clean energy, battery storage, and electric vehicle integration, establish competitive power markets, and enhance cross-border power trade. JUMPP partner governments established a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) that met four times in 2022 and completed the JUMPP Action Plan outlining 40 new technical assistance projects for completion by 2024, which includes 22 under development by our partners. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Energy Resources' Power Sector Program was pleased to sponsor two U.S. study tours, one regional JUMPP delegation, and one Vietnamese delegation focused on renewable energy and power market operations.

## Mekong Dam Monitor

The Mekong Dam Monitor (MDM) entered its third year of operation in January 2023. The MDM has confirmed use by government agencies and NGOs in Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Mekong River Commission. In 2022, it provided the first-ever real-time monitoring of the lower Mekong flood pulse and Tonle Sap Lake expansion, forecasting timely information to fish and agricultural sectors in Cambodia and Vietnam. The MDM also issued 37 dam release and restriction early warning alerts to local communities and governments providing impacted communities with 2-5 days to adapt and react to coming changes in river levels. Finally, the MDM was mentioned in more than 19 million social media interactions in 2022 across six Mekong languages and English language outputs. Learn more about the MDM team's 2022 findings by watching the recording of its recent [Where's the Water: Dry Season 2023](#) event.

## Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership (SIP)

Following the July 2021 kickoff of Republic of Korea-U.S. Collaboration in the Mekong, the Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) completed a series of Mekong regional training events in 2022 in partnership with the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, Republic of Korea K-Water, and U.S. technical experts. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, NASA, and the University of Virginia all contributed, with 111 participants from 19 government agencies in lower Mekong countries to boost in-house capacity for remote sensing, monitoring, and hydrologic and hydraulic management data and tools in support of the Reinvigoration of MRC Decision Support Framework. A [wrap-up event](#) on October 4, 2022, in Seoul, reviewed SIP's achievements

# Sustainable Water, Natural Resources Management, and Environmental Conservation and Protection

## Mekong Research Symposium 2023

Preparations are now underway for the [Mekong Research Symposium 2023](#) in Chiang Rai, Thailand, in March 2023 on the theme, “Data into Action for a Resilient Mekong.” Building on recent regional, technical, and political dialogues, the 2023 Mekong Research Symposium will consider how data can drive solutions to problems in the Mekong basin, including nature-based, locally-led solutions and other climate-sensitive approaches that will provide long-term, equitable benefits across the Mekong sub-region. Various government, academic, and local community stakeholders are invited, including youth, women, and vulnerable groups. Simultaneous interpretation of six local languages will be provided.

## MRC Shared Vision Planning

Under the auspices of the MUSP NexView Program, ASU and USACE are actively developing a decision-making tool designed by the MRC that integrates and visualizes a variety of data sources and model outputs. Data visualization will help users better understand the impacts and trends of basin development actions in the context of ongoing impacts of climate change. This tool looks at the data through multiple lenses, from raw numbers to normalized statuses to track trends in the lower Mekong River Basin. The power of this tool is using visuals to ensure every person involved in this transboundary, multi-institutional decision-making system is using a common, trusted library of data. It can also examine data trends from a variety of disciplines including hydrology, socioeconomic, and ecology to support basin-wide planning. Tailor-made for the Mekong sub-region, this web-based Shared Vision Planning tool will empower multi-sector analysis of tradeoffs and synergies of development pathways and facilitate transboundary cooperation on the potential impacts and mitigation strategies that impact the Mekong River.

## NexView

The United State Geological Survey worked with the Mekong River Commission in 2022 to adapt social and environmental monitoring and modeling for use by the MRC and its member countries. USGS adapted groundwater and socioeconomic modeling using the NexView approach to show how changes to groundwater could affect livelihoods and vulnerability. In 2022, the project focused on conceptual groundwater modeling in two transboundary aquifers and increasing the utility of census data for understanding different impacts of natural and human environmental impacts on women and men. The activities produced two draft reports, one describing the behavior of groundwater in transboundary aquifers in 1) Cambodia/Vietnam and 2) Lao PDR and Thailand, and a second report to describe materials and methods that will be needed to better understand how women and men experience environmental changes in the Mekong River region. The Japan Ministry of Agriculture also contributed to the projects. The MRC and USGS seek to link the monitoring and modeling of diverse information to improve the utility and power of natural resources and socioeconomic information, ultimately to help protect the people and livelihoods of the Mekong region.



SIP case study training on August 29-31, 2022 in Siem Reap, Cambodia.

# Sustainable Water, Natural Resources Management, and Environmental Conservation and Protection

## NASA SHARE (Strategic Hydrologic and Agricultural Remote-sensing for Environments)

From July 26-27, 2022, NASA, in partnership with the Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) and in support of the goals of the [U.S. Global Water Strategy](#), organized a capacity building training event in Bangkok, Thailand, for more than 30 subject matter experts, engineers, and water managers from four participating Mekong countries and the MRC Secretariat. The NASA team trained participants on a suite of customized satellite-based data acquisition and model integration tools (NASAaccess), and a custom suite of satellite-informed SWAT model and visualization tools (SWATonline) developed for and being adopted by the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for near real-time streamflow modeling, foresting, hydropower dam assessment, and scenario analysis.

## YSEALI and USAID

In June 2023, the Department of State and USAID expects to formally launch the YSEALI Mekong Program. This new, three-year initiative will enhance the leadership capabilities of youth with a specific focus on issues relating to climate change, environment, and biodiversity within the Mekong sub-region. Through strengthening the knowledge, experience, and ties of the youth leaders within the region, with the greater ASEAN region and Timor Leste, as well as with the United States, a community of leaders will develop to work locally and across borders to address shared issues. Vietnam National University in Ho Chi Minh City will host the program and will seek, identify, develop, and support partnerships with local, regional, and international public and private sector stakeholders to achieve program objectives. The first cohort is scheduled to begin in June 2023, pending various factors.



NASA representative teaching a participant how to work with remote sensing data products at SIP and NASA's joint training event in Bangkok, Thailand.

## USAID, Australia, and Thailand Collaboration on Energy Transition

To reach its commitment for carbon neutrality by 2050 and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2065, Thailand must deploy advanced energy storage systems and increase existing low-carbon infrastructure. On January 25, the USAID and Australia Mekong Safeguards Program and the Ministry of Energy's Office of Energy Policy and Planning (EPPO) formalized a plan to develop a carbon neutrality roadmap for Thailand's energy sector using integrated resource planning and various analytical tools. By mid-2023, the new Power Development Plan (PDP) will incorporate various energy planning scenario outcomes, including pollution limits, generation portfolios, power trade, and new technology deployment.



# Non-Traditional Security

## Mekong One Health Innovation Program (MOHIP)

Through support from the MUSP, Michigan State University (MSU) launched a three-year project in 2022 to improve public health security in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam by strengthening a One Health approach. MOHIP's overarching goal is to connect U.S. health experts with Mekong researchers and create a transnational health security network. Such a network will enable people-to-people engagement and sharing of tools and resources that U.S. experts have created for researching One Health-related issues, enabling Mekong researchers to make informed decisions about their country's health security policies and programs. This program expands upon the work of the MUSP Pathfinder Health Program, which ended in September 2022.

## Combatting Wildlife Trafficking and Illegal Logging and Associated Trade

In November 2022, the Department of State partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security, Customs, and the Institute of Ecology of Biological Resources to deliver two training courses for 36 Environmental and Economics Police, Customs, and provincial officers to strengthen capacity to identify illegally trafficked wildlife products, and develop procedures in line with international counter-wildlife trafficking standards. The Department of State and the U.S. Forest Service also launched a Wood Identification Screening Center to support the Vietnam Academy of Forest Science with a mass spectrometry machine to proactively combat illegal logging by building capacity to identify species and origin of harvested timber. Additionally, the Department of State is supporting public outreach efforts to address demand for endangered and protected species for use in traditional medicine in Vietnam. Finally, the Department of State and Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training delivered training for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges throughout the Mekong sub-region to improve their knowledge and skills to combat wildlife trafficking.



MSU's MOHIP team meets with MSU's International Advisory Board.

## Customs Enforcement and Border Security

In 2022, the United States, in partnership with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), launched the Border Liaison Office (BLO) project with Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. The project focuses on advancing border management in the lower Mekong region to address drug and precursor trafficking by targeting key border areas based on criminal trend analysis and institutionalization of project-delivered training. Major lines of effort include the institutionalization of border management training, focused on precursor and drug control; targeted BLO strengthening in particularly vulnerable locations; information sharing and data collection between BLOs and with central authorities; and prioritization of border management at the policy level.

The United States also assisted in training to build the capacity of law enforcement along the Mekong River. In June 2022, the United States supported a two-week narcotics checkpoint training for Royal Thai Police and Border Patrol Police, providing initial and refresher instruction to support our Thai law enforcement partners to better detect and interdict narcotics trafficking in the Golden Triangle. In August and September 2022, we also supported riverine training for Thai law enforcement on a range of critical skills including mission planning, repair and maintenance, and lifesaving skills, to continue U.S. efforts to build Thai capacity to detect and interdict transnational criminal activity along Thailand's Mekong River border. Finally, in November 2022, the United States donated pickup trucks and contraband-detecting equipment to the Lao Customs Department to assist the Customs Inspection and Suppression Division personnel in patrolling remote areas and to respond to criminal violations.

# Human Resource Development

## MUSP Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue Series

In December 2022, The Stimson Center completed its fifth of seven policy dialogues, focused on economic, environmental, and digital connectivity. The Stimson Center, in collaboration with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, focused on the theme of Nature-based Solutions (NbS). More than 50 participants from seven countries gathered in Bangkok to discuss topics related to food security, resilience, disaster risk reduction, grey/green infrastructure, and financing for NbS. Participants also toured Benjakitti Forest Park in central Bangkok as an example of best practices in applying NbS in urban settings.

The report for this fifth dialogue will include policy recommendations to advance NbS in the region and will be released in February 2023. U.S. Ambassador to Thailand Robert Godec presented opening remarks alongside Mr. Chumlarp Tejsaen, Foreign Affairs Director at the Thailand Office of National Water Resources. We look forward to the next Policy Dialogue on non-traditional security scheduled for late March in Lao PDR.



Speakers and participants at the Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue on Nature-based Solutions.

## NexGen

NexGen Mekong Scientists is funding 30 early career scientists and professionals from the lower Mekong basin to attend NexGen Day and the 2023 Mekong Research Symposium in Chiang Rai, Thailand, this March. NexGen Day is focused on the science of innovation and international collaboration at the nexus of food, energy, and water.



TCTP Digital Economy workshop participant engaging with virtual reality.

## Third Country Training Program (TCTP)

The Third Country Training Program is a partnership between the U.S. Department of State and the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs to jointly conduct capacity building training courses for ASEAN member states, the ASEAN Secretariat, and Timor Leste. In 2022, the United States and Singapore successfully conducted courses on Green Infrastructure, the Digital Economy, and Infrastructure Finance and Standards. The final two courses scheduled for the 2022-2023 cycle include workshops on Cybersecurity and Risks to Health Security. To date, the program has trained over 1,800 participants.

## Working with USAID

### Southeast Asia One Health University Network

USAID supported the Southeast Asia One Health University Network (SEAOHUN) in 2022 to help facilitate the SEAOHUN International Conference from September 5-7, 2022, in Bangkok. The conference convened over 300 students, academics, One Health practitioners, and policy makers to share experiences and research findings under the theme, “Catalyzing One Health Citizens of the Future.” Participants discussed current trends in One Health education, the COVID-19 pandemic response, and antimicrobial resistance. Additionally, in 2022 SEAOHUN joined the multilateral, multi-sectoral Global Health Security Agenda and expanded its capacity to mobilize resources, further advancing the Network’s objective to train the next generation of health professionals across human, animal, and environmental health disciplines.

### USAID Asia Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) Program

In November 2022, USAID’s Counter Trafficking in Persons (CTIP) program in Cambodia coordinated with USAID’s Regional Asia CTIP and Bangladesh CTIP projects to assist Bangladeshi survivors who had been detained in Cambodia. USAID’s Regional Asia CTIP project helped facilitate timely information exchange about the victims and coordinated a response by the Humanity Research Consultancy (HRC), an NGO partner, resulting in USAID-supported projects and local partner organizations taking quick action to repatriate the victims. USAID’s partner organizations communicated with representatives from the Bangladesh Embassy to Cambodia (located in Bangkok) to help facilitate the return of the survivors to Bangladesh. USAID’s CTIP program in Bangladesh now provides protection and prosecution assistance to the survivors who were repatriated. This collaboration between USAID implementing partners and NGOs across the region underscores the importance of crafting regional solutions to address non-traditional security issues under the MUSP.



Conference room with SEAOHUN annual conference participants including health practitioners, educators, and researchers.

### Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong Closes Out

USAID and the U.S. Department of the Interior celebrated the official closeout of the eight-year [Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong \(SIM\)](#) program in October 2022. SIM provided partner Mekong countries with U.S. Government expertise in natural resource management to improve social and environmental safeguards for infrastructure development. By responding to demand-driven requests from national ministries and regional organizations to support natural resource management, biodiversity conservation, disaster response, and food security, SIM advanced the Mekong-U.S. Partnership and USAID/RDMA’s Regional Development Cooperation Strategy to address transboundary environmental challenges across the lower Mekong. From 2014-2022, the program responded to 19 requests for river ecology and fisheries assessments, hydropower environmental safeguard and environmental law development, dam safety and sedimentation assessment, and hydrological training.

# The Mekong Sub-Region and Beyond:

## Science, Technology, and Innovation Cooperation

In close partnership with EAP/MLA, Arizona State University (ASU) will deliver key activities and programs to strengthen science, technology, and innovation cooperation between the United States and ASEAN. The U.S.-ASEAN Science, Technology, and Innovation Cooperation (STIC) Program will provide a comprehensive, collaborative, and scalable partnership between the U.S. government, industry, academic partners, and member state government entities in science, technology, and innovation (STI). The overarching objectives of this program are 1) to strengthen and increase national and regional cooperation between ASEAN Member States and the U.S. government at the federal, local, private sector, and academic levels, and 2) to develop and implement policies to foster STI through increased funding mechanisms, data sharing, intellectual property generation, commercialization, and academic research partnerships.

STIC includes three core program activities: 1) a two-week study tour in Washington, D.C. for rising leaders in careers related to STI policymaking and regulations; 2) the launch of the U.S.-ASEAN STIC Virtual Talent Mobility Portal to provide a vast portfolio of online synchronous and asynchronous upskilling courses aligned to priority technical topics and cross-cutting themes for ASEAN; and 3) a three-day regional conference where participants will be able to pitch their research ideas and innovations for awards.



MUSP Young Scientist Program participants in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

## USAID and NREL Teaching Resources on Gender Equity and Power Systems Transformation

Although women make up half of the world's potential workforce, they are under-represented in the power sector, particularly in technical and leadership roles in utility management, planning, policy making, and engineering. On January 25, USAID, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), and the Global Power System Transformation Consortium (G-PST), led a webinar on *Training the Workforce of the Future*. Organized by the USAID Southeast Asia EDGE Hub as part of the Clean EDGE Asia Power Sector Learning Series, the webinar explored the importance of a diverse systems operation workforce, increased technical training opportunities for women, and regional gender equity resources. Participants gained free access to technical teaching materials developed under the USAID-NREL Women in Power System Transformation program.

## U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Business Innovation Fund

In 2022, the U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership (USASCP) launched the first iteration of their climate finance mechanism, the Smart Cities Business Innovation Fund. The Smart Cities Business Innovation Fund requested proposals offering sustainable net-zero/low carbon solutions to address documented urban challenges. The program offered \$1,000,000 worth of available awards and each award could range from \$30,000- \$300,000. The Smart Cities Business Innovation Fund received 72 on-time proposals worth a total of \$14,000,000. Six winning proposals were selected from Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. Winning proposals included innovations such as affordable, 3-D printed solutions to climate and hydrologic monitoring; a women-led seaweed packaging company that aims to reduce single-use plastic pollution; a team working to sort, repair, and reuse salvageable solar panels; and a business that upcycles plastic products into useful items.