

# Semiannual Mekong-U.S. Partnership Update Report



Greetings from the Mekong Unit in the Department of State’s Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Welcome to this year’s first MUSP Semiannual Update Report. The MUSP provides a strategic forum for the United States and Mekong member states to work together on tackling pressing issues, including economic connectivity, sustainable natural resource management and environmental sustainability, non-traditional security, and human resource development. When Vice President Kamala Harris visited the region in the fall of 2021, she [praised the “results oriented” nature of the MUSP](#). We will continue providing tangible benefits to the people of the Mekong through the MUSP.

This year, we’ve celebrated the “Heroes of the Mekong”—an extraordinary group of people working to strengthen their communities in the Mekong. They are students, teachers, leaders of conservation groups, and travel pioneers whose stories of achievement serve as lessons for all of us by demonstrating the importance of working together for the benefit of our communities. Their stories can be viewed on [MekongUSPartnership.org](https://MekongUSPartnership.org) or on the [Mekong-U.S. Partnership Facebook page](#). We invite you to join us in using the #MekongUSPartnership hashtag when highlighting their achievements on social media.

With over \$4.3 billion in U.S. assistance to the Mekong between 2009 and 2021, we realize it can be difficult to capture each project the U.S. government undertakes in the Mekong under the MUSP. Our aim with this report is to provide success stories and link technical experts with desk officers covering the activities of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership. This report is intended to highlight many of the programs listed in the MUSP Plan of Action (POA) 2021-2023 and may also feature projects that are newly implemented since the POA was authored.

The United States is very pleased to work with Lao PDR as 2022 co-chairs. We look forward to holding a director-level policy dialogue in April to discuss plans to make 2022 another successful year full of tangible outcomes. We are also delighted at the prospect of hosting our Mekong friends in Washington, D.C. during the U.S.-ASEAN Special Summit and look forward to highlighting Mekong issues and priorities throughout the event.

If you have additional questions or suggestions for our report, please email Mekong-U.S. Partnership Unit Chief Nicole Smolinske ([SmolinskeNL@state.gov](mailto:SmolinskeNL@state.gov)) or the EAP Mekong team email ([EAP-MLA-Mekong@state.gov](mailto:EAP-MLA-Mekong@state.gov)).

Sincerely,

**Nicole Smolinske**  
Mekong-U.S. Partnership Unit Chief

## Area 1: Economic Connectivity

**Connectivity for Women in Business:** In September 2021, MUSP launched WE Inspire, a program to increase marginalized women’s financial literacy skills. WE Inspire activities include information sessions on healthcare packages bundled with financial products, financial and insurance product consultation workshops, healthcare screenings, and establishing connections to healthcare providers. For more information, please visit <https://www.kenan-asia.org/we-inspire/>

With support from the **U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership**, the female-owned technology company Peth Yoeung has digitized healthcare records at 20 private hospitals and clinics in Cambodia’s three Smart Cities – Phnom Penh, Siem Reap, and Battambang.

The project included software deployment and training doctors and staff to create and maintain digital health records. This project concluded with the digitalization of over 100,000 medical records.



The **Mekong Connections** program, implemented by Pact, issued eight grants to civil society organizations in the Mekong for projects tackling transboundary issues. For example, the Mekong Community Institute's project increases women's participation in riverine management. Read more [here](#).



The United States will partner with Singapore to jointly host an October 2022 **Smart Cities Professional Exchange Program on Circular Waste Management** peer-to-peer exchange for ASEAN member-state participants starting with a study tour to Singapore and Washington, DC. To learn more, contact the Public Affairs Section at your local embassy.

### Energy Connectivity:

**The Japan-U.S.-Mekong Power Partnership (JUMPP)** is currently creating an action plan for activities through 2024. JUMPP is preparing the second meeting of technical

advisors from energy-focused ministries in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. So far, JUMPP has delivered 18 technical reports and assessments shared between partner governments on topics such as battery energy storage systems and readiness assessments for electric vehicles. JUMPP has trained 272 member-country representatives and completed 15 technical assistance activities on integrating variable renewable energy and other issues. In addition to these efforts and the collaborative creation of a plan of action, JUMPP has 22 activities already underway.



USAID’s Southeast Asia’s Smart Power Program has released a [new factsheet](#).

**East-West Connectivity:**

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) will soon publish a report titled, “Connecting South and Southeast Asia through Improved East-West Linkages.” The report will be available on [MekongUSPartnership.org](#). The report catalogs and analyzes the 11 major east-west transportation corridors to identify potential opportunities for future U.S.-led technical assistance and recommendations to strengthen corridor planning processes. In reporting their findings, DOT reviewed over forty transportation planning documents, policy plans, and feasibility studies.

**Food Connectivity:**

In 2021, the **Smart Infrastructure for the Mekong (SIM)**, in partnership with USAID’s **Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center (SEAFDEC)** and Cambodia’s Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute, [completed fish passage barrier inventories](#) along the rivers draining into the west side of Cambodia’s Tonle Sap Lake and prioritized sites for restoration.

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**Area 2: Sustainable Water, Natural Resources Management, and Environmental Conservation and Protection**

**Mekong Water Data Initiative:** In December 2021, the [Mekong Dam Monitor](#) launched an updated website that allows users to interact in seven different languages, as well as increased opportunities to share data.

**NexView’s [NexGen fellowship](#)** and academic exchange program selected its first cohort. These young scientists began the program in winter 2021. They are currently studying natural resource management capacity-building and tools to explore the socio-economic trade-offs among policy decisions for water, energy, food, and environment.



Members of NexGen Young Scientists work to develop the exchange program.



Mekong sub-region to learn about software and tools relevant to remote sensing, monitoring, and hydrologic and hydraulic management. Four more workshops are planned over the next two years.

**U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Sister Rivers Partnership:**

In December 2021, the U.S. Department of State announced an additional grant to improve data collection and data-driven cooperative management in the Mekong River Basin and continued exchanges with the U.S. Mississippi River Commission. The program continues to improve data sharing for basin planning, forecasting, impact monitoring, infrastructure operations, stakeholder engagement, and state-of-basin reporting.

**Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership (SIP):** Following a July 2021 kickoff exchange between the Mekong River Commission, Republic of Korea, and U.S. technical experts, [SIP](#) held a second workshop in February 2022, bringing together U.S.-based experts from the University of Virginia, NASA, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers together with more than 60 trainees from across the

**USAID’s Mekong for the Future** project has initiated critical research aimed at addressing transboundary environmental issues, and hosted its Regional Inception Workshop in September 2021, with more than 100 participants from civil society, academia, sectoral stakeholders, and the WWF and USAID global networks. The project is currently collaborating with the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) to create a platform for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and policy recommendations. In collaboration with the ACWC, Mekong for the Future offered

a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion workshop in March 2022 to exchange ideas and knowledge on gender mainstreaming in climate issues.

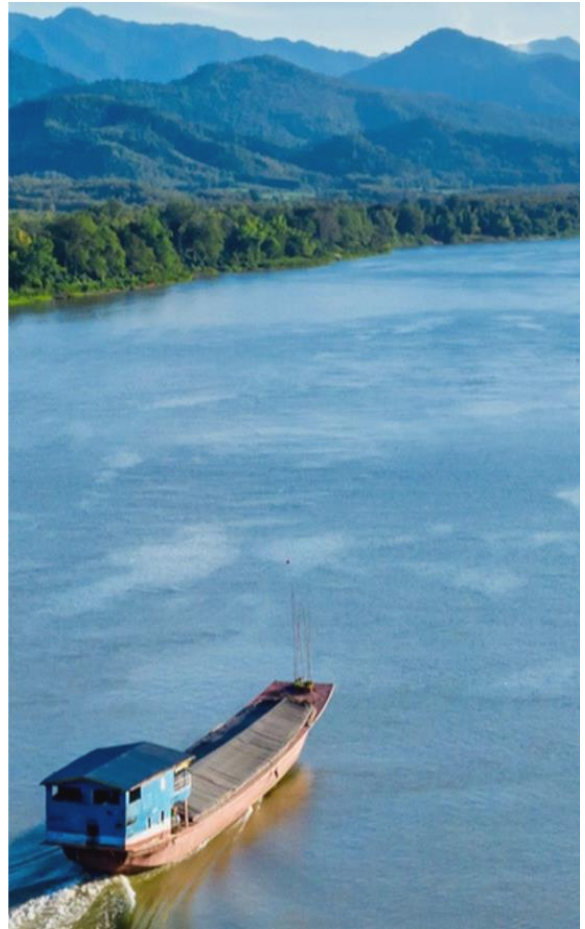
**SERVIR-Mekong:** In March 2022, SERVIR-Mekong trained Royal Thai Government officials to use landslide datasets to identify areas at risk for landslides. This training drew on a partnership between SERVIR-Mekong and NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center to develop an advanced landslide situational awareness model using satellite data and geospatial information.

USAID’s SERVIR-Mekong team also developed a rainstorm tracker tool that alerts the Mekong River Commission officials about the probability of rainstorms generating flash floods.

<http://rainstorms-servir.adpc.net/>



SERVIR-Mekong also supplies tools to forecast and monitor droughts. Recurring droughts adversely impact rice productivity in Vietnam. USAID’s SERVIR-Mekong activity developed the Drought and Crop Watch Tool to help the provincial government in Vietnam’s Ninh Thuan province monitor, analyze, and forecast droughts (up to three months in advance) and identify potential impacts on crop yields. As of March 2022, SERVIR-Mekong’s Drought and Crop Watch Tool had benefited approximately 60,000 households within Vietnam’s Ninh Thuan province and helped policymakers and farmers better plan for the upcoming 2022 onward growing season. Farmers use these forecasts to consider switching to less water intensive crops to prevent loss of income and improve food security, thereby increasing their resilience to climate change.



**Smart Cities Business Innovation Fund:** Upon advertising a funding opportunity totaling \$1 million, 71 proposals were received by the U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership (USASCP). Awardees will receive up to \$300,000 for net-zero and low carbon solutions to urban challenges. Awardees will be announced in early June.

### Area 3: Non-traditional Security

#### Prioritizing Public Health

**MUSP Flagship Program on Public Health:** The new flagship program allows scientists and health practitioners from the Mekong to learn about and apply U.S. expertise and best practices to support health security in the sub-region. After working with U.S.-based experts to understand available tools and techniques, participants

wrote grant applications for pilot programs to help communities prevent disease emergence and spread. The winners will be announced in the coming weeks. The winners will receive mentoring and support from U.S.-based academics and researchers. After significant pandemic-related delays, MUSP is pleased that the **Vector Control Information Sharing Program** - first planned for 2020 - will take place later this year – barring any further contingencies.



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### Working Together to Fight Transnational Crime

In February 2022, the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training (OPDAT) partnered with the Lao People's Supreme Court to conduct workshops on **digital evidence** for 104 judges in three regions across Laos. The workshop introduced four phases of digital evidence: pre-search, search, investigation, trial, and digital forensics "phased analysis approach" of triage, investigation, and deep analysis.



The United States and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) **AML/CFT Technical Assistance Project** organized multiple trainings on criminal financial investigations and techniques for Lao police officials in Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and Champasak province in 2021 and 2022. Police officials strengthened their capacity on legal frameworks, law enforcement skills, and practical exercises to prevent and combat illegal financial flows from drugs and crime in accordance with international standards. In 2022, the AML/CFT Assistance Project will be further expanding to enhance the Government of Lao PDR’s anti-money laundering regime.

**Customs Enforcement:** The United States organized a January 4-6 workshop in Luang Prabang for Lao Customs officials on Risk Management and Cargo Targeting. The workshop shared information and best practices for customs officials to help with enhanced cargo screening to detect contraband and smuggling. In 2022, the United States will support additional U.S. Customs and Border Patrol led workshops. We are pleased to announce a new project, in partnership with UNODC, to enhance Lao Customs skills to interdict and combat drug, human, and wildlife trafficking, as well as associated money laundering. Separately, U.S. Embassy Vientiane's Regional Security Office conducted a **technical skills workshop** for 51 participants in March 2022 in Luang Prabang province for Lao Customs officials based at checkpoints in northern provinces and technical officials from the Civil Aviation Department. The workshop shared and exchanged information and experiences of investigative procedures from U.S. law enforcement, including on topics such as human trafficking and document fraud.



**Countering Drug Trafficking:** In January 2022, Lao police, including officers previously trained by the United States, seized over 36 million methamphetamine tablets, 590 kilograms of crystal methamphetamine, and several bricks of heroin in Bokeo Province. An earlier seizure in October 2021 of 55 million methamphetamine tablets and 1.5 tons of crystal methamphetamine was one of the largest drug busts in ASEAN history. We congratulate the Lao authorities for these significant seizures. These successes highlight the incredible scope of the drug trafficking challenges in the Mekong region and the importance of our continued partnership to combat this global threat.

To **combat the threat of child exploitation**, the U.S. Department of State, the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Homeland Security Investigations

(HSI), and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) are partnering with Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security and Supreme People's Procuracy to build capacity, cooperation, and information sharing to protect our most vulnerable citizens. Vietnamese officials confirmed during a March 2022 workshop that information from NCMEC's cyber tip line provided by HSI led to the arrests of child sex offenders in Vietnam, demonstrating the success of our growing partnership. The United States is also working with UNICEF and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to work with Vietnamese policymakers, legal scholars, and various ministries to improve the legal and policy frameworks, victim services, and child-friendly best practices for law enforcement and justice sector officials to handle these sensitive crimes.



The United States Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) office, the Department of Justice and the Department of State conducted two recent training workshops on **online and cyber investigations**. The cybercrime training workshops represent the next step in efforts to build the capacity of Vietnam's criminal justice sector on cyber-enabled crime, an area of focus in the joint **Transnational Organized Crime (TOC) initiative**.

A diverse array of nearly 20 presenters from U.S. law enforcement agencies, the private sector, and a foreign government provided a detailed look into current tools and methods, with an emphasis on building interagency, multi-national, and public-private partnerships. The Department of State, in partnership with the Department of Justice, also collaborated with Thailand to develop new cybercrime training curriculum used to train 30 prosecutors in November 2021.

#### Area 4: Human Resource Development

**MUSP Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue Series:** In March 2022, the MUSP completed its third of seven dialogues, focused on economic, environmental, and digital connectivity. The second dialogue in October 2021 focused on energy and infrastructure. The dialogue's resulting report in December 2021, was shared at a ceremony that included remarks from Thailand's Ambassador Manasvi Srisodapol. The report for the first dialogue on local stakeholder perspectives on five regional cooperation themes: Mekong connectivity; energy and infrastructure; non-traditional security; water governance; and nature-based solutions, was released in September 2021 (link [here](#)), featuring remarks by acting Assistant Secretary of East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kin Moy and Vietnam Ambassador to the United States Ha Kim Ngoc.



The **Third Country Training Program (TCTP)** is a partnership between the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the U.S. Department of State which jointly conducts capacity building courses for Southeast Asian countries, particularly those in the Mekong region. TCTP courses since August 2021 have focused on topics ranging from renewable energy to impact-based forecasts and warning systems. TCTP courses in 2022 will cover Green Infrastructure, Risks to Health Security, Cybersecurity, Digital Economy, Water Management and Communications, and Infrastructure Finance and Standards. Over 1,700 ASEAN officials have participated in TCTP programming.