



# The Mekong-U.S. Partnership (MUSP)

## SEMI-ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

September 2024

Greetings from the Department of State's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP)!

My name is Andrew Herrup, and I am the new Deputy Assistant Secretary responsible for Southeast Asia and ASEAN Affairs in EAP, including the Mekong-U.S. Partnership (MUSP). Prior to this position, I was the Chargé d'affaires at Embassy Phnom Penh and also have served in Vietnam and Thailand. I look forward to our collaboration and to further promote our policy and development objectives in the Mekong sub-region.



I am joining the team at a time of important milestones and positive momentum for the MUSP. We held our first in-person Foreign Ministers Meeting in July, co-chaired by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Lao PDR Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith, where we formally adopted the MUSP Plan of Action 2024-2026. We look forward to making further progress on the Plan of Action over the next three years.

As we celebrate 15 years of U.S.-Mekong cooperation this year, the newsletter is an opportunity to see how far we have come since the launch of the Lower Mekong Initiative in 2009 and the positive impacts we continue to make on the ground across sectors and communities. I hope you enjoy reading about the many activities and progress our partnership has made over the past six months. If you have any questions or concerns, please email the EAP Mekong team email at EAP-MLA-MEKONG-DL@state.gov.

Sincerely,



Andrew Herrup  
Deputy Assistant Secretary  
United States Department of State

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Follow along with MUSP's latest work here:

<https://mekonguspartnership.org/><sub>1</sub>  
and MUSP Facebook page<sub>2</sub>

# MUSP MEETINGS

## Foreign Ministers Meeting Pushes Mekong-U.S. Partnership Momentum Forward

On July 27, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister (DPM/FM) of the Lao People's Democratic Republic Saleumxay Kommasith co-chaired the Third Mekong-U.S. Partnership (MUSP) Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) in Vientiane, Lao PDR, convening the MUSP members to formally approve and adopt the MUSP Plan of Action 2024-2026. Secretary Blinken and DPM/FM Saleumxay also released a joint co-chair statement reflecting the progress and achievements of the MUSP and reaffirming a collective commitment to cooperation as integral to the equitable, sustainable, and inclusive development of the Mekong sub-region.

Thai Foreign Minister Maris Sangiampongsa also announced Thailand would take on the MUSP co-chair role for 2025. He highlighted promoting digital economy and digitalization; combating non-traditional security issues, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, and online scams; and tackling transboundary air pollution as key priority areas Thailand would seek to address as co-chair.



Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Saleumxay Kommasith of the Lao PDR at the MUSP Ministerial in July 2024.



MUSP Policy Dialogue participants in Viet Nam March 2024.

## Mekong-U.S. Partnership Policy Dialogue Convenes to Discuss Priority Areas

The United States and Lao PDR co-chaired the 2024 MUSP Policy Dialogue in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam, March 20-21. The two-day event convened Director and Deputy Director General officials responsible for issues relevant to the collective Mekong sub-region from the six MUSP member countries of Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, Viet Nam, and the United States.

The Dialogue focused on coordination efforts across MUSP's four areas of engagement: economic connectivity, natural resources management, non-traditional security, and human resource development. Participants discussed programming under the MUSP 2024-2026 Plan of Action, provided progress updates on existing initiatives, and exchanged views on priorities for future initiatives under the MUSP. In addition, two special sessions focused on fostering business enabling environments and addressing cyber-scam operations. These sessions garnered significant interest from MUSP delegates and provided an opportunity for targeted discussion on matters of regional interest. The United States reaffirmed its commitment to the MUSP, as well as its goals of promoting stability, peace, prosperity, and the sustainable development of the Mekong sub-region.

# MUSP MEETINGS

## MUSP Lays Groundwork for Deeper Cooperation at Senior Officials' Meeting

Deputy Assistant Secretary (DAS) for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs (EAP), Melissa A. Brown, co-chaired with Lao PDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Director General of the Department of Economic Affairs, Somboun Sihanath, the Mekong-U.S. Partnership Senior Officials' Meeting held in Vang Vieng, Lao PDR. DAS Brown reaffirmed the United States' unwavering commitment to the Mekong sub-region, and, together with officials from the five MUSP partner countries, committed to deepen cooperation in a number of different areas and as reflected in the MUSP Plan of Action (POA) 2024-2026.



MUSP SOM participants in Lao PDR June 2024.

United States Agency of International Development (USAID) Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer joined the in-person meeting to share updates on the many USAID programs implemented in connection with MUSP including a new direct grant to the Mekong River Commission (MRC). DAS Brown also previewed several new projects in development supporting MUSP priority areas: Mekong RiverRT, a project to investigate human impact on Mekong River erosion using machine-learning; DigiTEC, a multifaceted symposium focused on education and digital transformation; Mekong Energy Harvest, a project to turn agricultural waste into clean energy for communities in northern Thailand; and Sustainable Tourism Futures, a project to train 100 Mekong region youth in ecotourism fundamentals and provide advanced training plus seed grants to 10 exceptional candidates.

## Friends of the Mekong Commit to Coordination and Collaboration at Senior Officials' Meeting



FOM SOM participants in Lao PDR June 2024.

DAS for EAP, Melissa A. Brown, chaired the Friends of the Mekong (FOM) Senior Officials' Meeting held in Vientiane, Lao PDR. The meeting was hosted by the Mekong River Commission. DAS Brown reaffirmed the United States' goal for synergy and complementarity between the MUSP and likeminded Mekong+1 mechanisms through the FOM, under the guiding principles of openness, transparency, sustainability, and inclusive growth.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Assistant Administrator Michael Schiffer joined the in-person meeting to inform members on USAID programs and open discussions on a strategic vision for engagement in the Mekong sub-region. FOM members - the Asian Development Bank, Australia, the European Union, Japan, the Mekong River Commission Secretariat, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, and the World Bank, together with the United States and the Mekong countries - shared summaries of key activities and engagements in the region in an effort to improve coordination, identify gaps, and explore opportunities for collaboration. FOM members expressed support for implementing tools to enhance further cooperation, including the development of an exercise to map activities in the Mekong sub-region, and to bolster the capacity of locally-led organizations to address Mekong partner priorities.

Representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat, India, and the United Kingdom participated in the meeting as observers.

# ECONOMIC CONNECTIVITY

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

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Energy (ENR) hosted three JUMPP events in Phnom Penh in April. From April 1-3, the JUMPP Clean Energy Investment Conference brought together over 160 private and public sector stakeholders to promote JUMPP partner countries' knowledge of clean energy technologies and investment opportunities. Keo Rottanak, Cambodia's Minister of Mines and Energy, and ENR DDAS Kimberly Harrington delivered remarks highlighting U.S. support for sustainable energy and quality infrastructure development in the Mekong region. DAS Harrington also met with Minister Keo, along with leadership from Cambodia's national utility, and private sector representatives to discuss U.S.-Cambodia cooperation to advance the clean energy transition during her April visit.



Participants at the Japan-US-Mekong Power Partnership Conference in April 2024.

Following the conference, delegates from four lower Mekong governments attended the quarterly Technical Advisory Group meeting and discussed progress on key technical projects including grid code synchronization on existing transmission lines, which received strong support from JUMPP partners for its potential to enable near-term regional power trade – typically a long-term effort reliant on a regional grid code. Separately, ENR's Power Sector Program conducted a training with Cambodia's national electricity regulator on distributed generation, with expert case studies from U.S. regulators from states with high concentrations of rooftop solar – a growing trend in Cambodia's energy mix.

## Mekong Community Leaders Explore Sustainable Economic Development Through IVLP

In August, the U.S. Department of State hosted the Sustainable Economic Development for Mekong Community Leaders IVLP, convening 11 visitors from Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam to strengthen linkages at the local level between the U.S. and Mekong sub-region communities. During the program, the cohort discussed issues spanning water resource challenges, climate change adaptation, and capacity building among Mekong municipal and community leaders to advocate for locally-led resource management decision-making. For the program, the visitors traveled to Washington, D.C. and New Orleans where they met with a range of government officials, academics, think tanks, and NGOs, and learned about the U.S. government, American foreign policy in the Mekong sub-region, water resource management, and economic development initiatives.

Additionally, after concluding their meetings in New Orleans, the IVLP cohort traveled to Lake Tahoe, Nevada, where they exchanged best practices with U.S. community leaders about how to conserve water resources for future generations through transboundary water management at the 28th Annual Lake Tahoe Summit. USAID successfully partnered with the University of Nevada, Reno and other groups like the World Wildlife Fund to amplify the voices of Mekong community leaders concerned about the sustainability of drinking water for the 70 million people in Southeast Asia who rely directly on the Mekong River for their livelihoods. The cohort shared their experiences and heard about the unique ways community leaders in the American West are overcoming drought, pollution, erosion, overfishing and other complex challenges through cooperation on transboundary water management.

# ECONOMIC CONNECTIVITY

## U.S. Department of Transportation East-West Connectivity Project Boosts Cross-Border Mobility and Trade

As part of its East-West Connectivity Project to support regional trade facilitation and the improvement of corridors in the Mekong sub-region, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) facilitated several technical assistance and capacity building activities with Mekong partners in the first half of 2024. From March 6-8, DOT delivered a U.S.-ASEAN workshop on Border Transportation Planning to improve Cross-Border Mobility and Trade in the 21st Century in Vientiane, Lao PDR. The 35 workshop participants, representing nine ASEAN member states, learned from federal, state, and local subject matter experts on the United States' northern and southern borders, with a focus on replicating best practices in the Mekong sub-region. The workshop included a site visit to Lao PDR's Thanaleng Dry Port and the Thai-Lao Friendship Bridge.



DOT study tour participants at a site visit March 2024.

DOT led a study tour for 12 representatives from Lao PDR's Ministry of Public Works and Transport and Ministry of Finance for technical meetings and site visits related to public-private partnerships (PPPs) for transport infrastructure projects from March 16-27. Destinations included: Washington, D.C., for meetings with federal agencies and the World Bank; Front Royal, Virginia, for a site visit to the Virginia Inland Port; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for meetings with PennDOT



DOT study tour participants in Harrisburg, PA in March 2024.

and a site visit on the Rapid Bridge Replacement Project; and Austin, Texas, for meetings with TxDOT on PPPs, electric vehicles, and a site visit to PPP State Highway 130.

In a similar vein, from April 27-May 9, DOT facilitated a study tour of the U.S. for 10 representatives from Thailand's Ministry of Transport focused on rail technology, research, and development. Destinations included: Washington, D.C., for meetings with federal agencies and non-governmental organizations; Chicago, IL, for meetings with rail stakeholders including Amtrak and Metra; Pueblo, CO, for a site visit to DOT's Transportation Technology Center; and Long Beach, CA, for a site visit to the Port of Long Beach.



DOT study tour participants at a meeting in Lao PDR March 2024.

# ECONOMIC CONNECTIVITY

## USAID Collaborates with Office of Energy Regulatory Commission to Double Thailand's Wind Power Capacity by 2030

To expand existing wind power plant capacity, the Office of Energy Regulatory Commission (OERC) in Thailand is implementing a clean energy procurement quota for an additional 1,500 megawatts of wind power by 2030. On March 25-26, the USAID Southeast Asia Smart Power Program co-hosted with OERC a capacity-building workshop in Bangkok for more than 50 participants involved in the policy, design, and implementation of wind energy projects in Thailand.



USAID Southeast Asia Smart Power Program and OERC in Thailand for a capacity-building workshop March 2024.

During the workshop, subject matter experts highlighted emerging wind power technology, wind power project financing, and environmental considerations for new and existing wind power sites. As a result of the training, OERC revised a Code of Practice for new wind power throughout Thailand.



USAID/RDMA and Thailand local community members at exhibition in Thailand March 2024.

## USAID Strengthens Economic Resilience Among Communities Affected by HSR

As Thailand develops high-speed rail (HSR) between Bangkok and Nakhon Ratchasima, strong community engagement is essential to mitigate negative impacts on households in the path of new infrastructure. USAID and Australia, through the Mekong Safeguards Program, are working with the Thai government and local communities to build economic resilience and promote opportunities for women-owned enterprises and other micro-businesses based in households along the HSR. On March 17, USAID/RDMA Mission Director Steven G. Olive opened an exhibition in Ayutthaya on the positive impact of Mekong Safeguards among local communities, which has benefitted at least 206 households and 544 microbusinesses. The event included a marketplace selling locally made products, as well as a "Shark Tank" style competition of business model pitches by an organization led by people with disabilities.



USAID/RDMA Mission Director Steven G. Olive providing opening remarks in Thailand March 2024.

# SUSTAINABLE WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

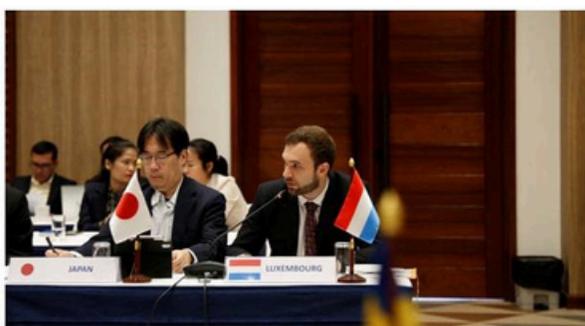
## United States Concludes Term as Chair of the Mekong River Commission Development Partners' Troika at 12th Annual Informal Development Partners Meeting



Development Partners convene in Lao PDR June 2024.

Serving as chair of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Development Partners' (DPs) leadership troika, the United States, along with fellow DPs Australia, Belgium, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Switzerland, joined the 12th Informal DP Meeting with the MRC Secretariat in Vientiane, Laos PDR, on June 27. The MRC DPs engaged the MRC Secretariat and Member Countries on key topics including the MRC Mid-term Review outcomes, Mekong Fund operations,

updates on Joint Action Plans, information sharing on existing hydropower projects, and developments in Proactive Regional Planning. The meeting marked the end of the U.S. year as chair of the DP troika and the U.S. Embassy's Regional Environmental Affairs Office (REO) in Bangkok formally welcomed Germany as the new MRC DP chair for 2024-2025 and Australia as the incoming Chair for 2025-2026.



Development Partners at the 12th Informal Development Partners Meeting in Lao PDR June 2024.

# SUSTAINABLE WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

## USAID and the Mekong River Commission Announce Partnership for Sustainable Water Management

The Mekong River is a lifeline for millions of people across Southeast Asia, providing essential water resources for food, agriculture, and transportation. On June 27, USAID/Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA) and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) held a signing ceremony in Vientiane, Laos PDR, to formally launch the Mekong Basin Partnership, funded through a direct grant from USAID to support MRC’s Basin Development Strategy implementation. The partnership between USAID and MRC demonstrates USAID’s commitment to invest in locally-led development solutions and will improve MRC’s capacity to tackle transboundary environmental challenges through cooperation between its member countries and development partners. It also aligns with the priorities of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership to support the autonomy and sustainable growth of the Mekong sub-region. Through this new program, MRC will integrate data from the latest U.S. satellite tools to improve existing MRC platforms for transboundary river management, sediment monitoring, and hydropower coordination. Additionally, a virtual model of key locations in the basin will be created to analyze and visualize current and potential flood and drought impacts.

## IVLP Strengthens Partnerships to Protect Mekong Ecosystem and Biodiversity

In June, the U.S. Department of State held a month-long Mekong Ecosystem and Biodiversity Conservation International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), during which participants explored how protection and sustainable use of shared resources in the Mekong sub-region is fundamental to cooperation, stability, and prosperity of Mekong countries. Throughout June, participants visited Washington, D.C., Rochester (NY), Miami (FL), and Sacramento (CA), while studying U.S. efforts to protect biodiversity and increase conservation through environmental laws and policies, scientific research, environmental education, and law enforcement.

Through this IVLP, the U.S. Department of State identified priority areas for international cooperation among public, private, academic, community, and tourism organizations and groups and facilitated the exchange of knowledge between visitors and U.S. scientists and policymakers. The program strengthened regional partnerships and developed new areas for potential collaboration, enhanced visitors’ understanding of U.S. environmental management practices and efforts, and provided insights regarding water management and conservation strategies.



Signing ceremony for USAID and MRC partnership in Vientiane June 2024.

# SUSTAINABLE WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

## U.S.-ASEAN Water Smart Engagements Tackles Water Management Challenges

The U.S.-ASEAN Water Smart Engagements Program (WiSE), a program under the U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership (USASCP), has active projects in the Mekong sub-region in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam; Phuket, Thailand; and Vientiane, Lao PDR. WiSE pairs U.S. and ASEAN cities to promote the delivery of essential water and waste services.

The pairing of the Phuket Provincial Water Authority (PWA) and The Water Council (TWC), a non-profit, membership-based organization, focuses on reducing water loss through technical assistance provided from its members. Milwaukee Water Works facilitated an interactive training program for PWA staff in October 2023 and produced a detailed training manual translated into Thai to share with utilities across the country. San Francisco Public Utilities Commission and the Saigon Water Corporation (SAWACO) are working together to improve Ho Chi Minh City's water quality. Through a series of in-depth capacity-building workshops and staff exchanges in 2024 and 2025, SAWACO staff will be trained on best practices of water quality management and integrated water resource management.

The Vientiane City Office for Management and Services and the Clean Water Services of Hillsboro, Oregon, are tackling challenges to wastewater. The city pairing will pilot a nature-based treatment solution in 2024-2025 using an artificial wetland to filter and clean wastewater in the Vientiane residential area. In February 2024, the USASCP Program Manager, WiSE Program Manager, and representatives from VCOMS, Clean Water Services, and Biohabitats, the Baltimore-based firm specializing in artificial wetland filtration systems, visited the location of the proposed pilot project to survey, collect data, and draft a blueprint for the project.

## USAID Regional Workshop Builds Resilience through Local Leadership on Climate Action

Climate change disproportionately threatens the livelihoods and wellbeing of women, youth, and marginalized groups. To advance equitable action, two USAID-supported programs collaborated with civil society organizations (CSOs) from five Southeast Asian countries for a five-day Inclusive Climate Actions Workshop in Chiang Mai from February 12-16. SERVIR Southeast Asia, a USAID-National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) partnership with the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center, and Mekong for the Future, a USAID-World Wildlife Fund (WWF) partnership, convened 91 representatives from 20 CSOs to develop a planning roadmap that will guide future programming, strategies, and plans for climate adaptation, natural disaster prevention and response, and air pollution management.



Inclusive Climate Actions Workshop participants in Thailand February 2024.

# SUSTAINABLE WATER AND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

## USAID Promotes Conservation and Awareness of Mekong Endangered Fish

USAID-supported Wonders of the Mekong (WOM) project activity released more than 600 endangered fish - including the iconic giant barb, striped catfish, and silver barb - at the junction of the Mekong and two other rivers in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, on May 24 to celebrate World Fish Migration Day.



USAID and WOM attendees release endangered fish in Cambodia May 2024.



USAID and WOM celebrating World Fish Migration Day in Cambodia May 2024.

WOM promotes sustainable development of the Mekong River Basin through an integrated program of applied research, capacity building, and outreach to local and international audiences.

Promoting the unique ecosystem of the Lower Mekong sustains the livelihoods and food security of millions of people in Southeast Asia; however, wild fish stocks are being pushed to the brink of extinction by habitat loss and climate change. In collaboration with World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF), Wonders of the Mekong published a report in March called, "The Mekong's Forgotten Fishes,"<sup>3</sup> which highlights the current state of these fisheries and the collective, regional efforts needed to ensure they survive and thrive. The Wonders of the Mekong project is led by the University of Nevada Global Water Center-Reno.

## USAID Launches Carbon Reduction Collaboration Within the Stock Exchange of Thailand

While Thailand has committed to reduce its carbon emissions by 40 percent by 2030, experts note that there is a lack of credible standards to quantify and certify mitigation efforts. On February 22, Mekong for the Future, a USAID-WWF partnership, launched a collaboration between the Gold Standard, a rigorous climate standard platform, and the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) to quantify and certify climate and development interventions such as voluntary carbon markets. At the event, USAID Regional Development Mission for Asia Deputy Mission Director Linda McElroy highlighted U.S. supported for opportunities to grow and thrive within a green economy. The event raised awareness of carbon credits and other carbon reduction opportunities among SET-listed companies, accelerating progress toward climate security and sustainable development in Thailand and across Southeast Asia.

# NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

## Mekong One Health Innovation Program Successfully Organizes Regional One Health Symposium in Lao PDR

The Michigan State University (MSU) Mekong One Health Innovation Program (MOHIP), partnered with Laos One Health University Network (LAOHUN) to organize the Regional One Health Symposium - Sharing Experiences of Mekong One Health Innovation Program and Way Forward: Strengthening Health Security of the Lower Mekong Sub-Region in Vientiane, Lao PDR. The May 13-15 symposium is a significant milestone to MOHIP's commitment to collaboration, innovation, and the future of One Health education, research, and policy implications.

Seventy delegates from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam, seven faculty members from MSU, and officials from the U.S. government attended. The symposium provided an opportunity to share the MOHIP program model, the One Health programs, and research of the regional and global health partners. Attendees determine ways to collaborate to yield synergetic outcomes. The program included panel discussions on health security, One Health programs, and the future steps for the transnational network of One Health researchers, educators, practitioners, and policymakers. Heather Variava, U.S. Ambassador to Lao PDR, and Dr. Phayvanh Keopaseuth, Vice Minister of the Ministry of Health, Lao PDR, delivered opening remarks for the conference.



MOHIP Regional One Health Symposium attendees in Lao PDR May 2024.

## USAID Advances Entomological Capacity for Malaria Elimination in Lao PDR Through its Second Year of Collaboration with the Thailand International Cooperation Agency

USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia announced a significant milestone achieved in collaboration with the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA); the Division of Vector Borne Disease (DVBD), Ministry of Public Health, Thailand; and the Center for Mariology, Parasitology, and Entomology (CMPE), Ministry of Health, Lao PDR. In the second year of collaboration, from April 1-5, USAID and partners conducted a follow-up visit and need assessment to boost entomological capabilities and implementation of Lao PDR for malaria elimination and prevention of the reintroduction at the Thailand-Laos border. DBVDP and CMPE conducted a joint need assessment in Vientiane and field visit to cross-border provinces of Savannakhet and Mukdahan to observe cross-border malaria foci investigation activities.



Participants from Savannakhet and Mukdahan at stakeholders meeting in Lao PDR September 2024.

During a stakeholders meeting, participants from Savannakhet and Mukdahan discussed entomological field works between these twin cities to understand cross-border needs and gaps for additional support, and to explore possible cross-border collaboration activities. The findings of this visit will be shared and discussed during the upcoming regional workshop planned for in September 2024.

# NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

## USDA Boosts Public and Private Sector Engagement Through Genetic Resources, Plant Variety Protection, and Biodiversity Regional Consultation

From April 22-25, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Team in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Seed Alliance (APSA) conducted the Genetic Resources, Plant Variety Protection and Biodiversity Regional Consultation in Bangkok, Thailand. The workshop boosted awareness and enhanced public and private sectors engagement in food security and sustainable development through a science-based policy environment that promotes a robust system for plant variety protection, facilitates movement of high-quality seeds, and balance system for genetic resources to be accessed in Mekong countries. This activity is a component of the capacity building and harmonization of plant variety and biodiversity laws and enhancing high quality seed movement and production for sustainable agriculture development and food security in the lower Mekong sub-region funded under the Mekong-U.S. Partnership.

The first half of the program entailed a seminar and facilities visit in the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) and Gene Bank of the Department of Agriculture Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Thailand. The second half comprised of expert consultation on plant variety protection and biodiversity in Bangkok. Officials and private sector entities from Thailand, Lao PDR, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, along with 40 representatives from Asia Pacific Seed Association, American Seed Trade Association, USDA, Ministries of Agriculture; Natural Resources; Environment; as well as Biotechnology Research and Development Office, and the Office of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy and Planning (ONEP), and Khon Kaen University were among those in attendance.



Genetic Resources, Plant Variety Protection and Biodiversity Regional Consultation participants in Thailand April 2024.



Participants at the USDA-APSA Regional Consultation in Thailand April 2024.

# NON-TRADITIONAL SECURITY

## DOJ and INL Work with Prosecutors to Improve Handling of Wildlife Crime Cases

The U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) organized and presented at the Vietnam-Laos Wildlife Trafficking and Money Laundering Workshop, funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL), in Da Nang, Viet Nam. The March 19 -21 workshop included 25 Vietnamese procurators (equivalent of prosecutors) and five Lao prosecutors. The OPDAT Southeast Asia Counter Wildlife Trafficking Regional Resident Legal Advisor presented on including money laundering with wildlife trafficking crimes and recommending working in teams and led practical exercises on following the money, drafting mutual legal assistance requests, and using species victim impact statements at sentencings for convicted defendants.



Workshop attendees in Da Nang, March 2024.

## DOJ and INL Work with Prosecutors and Law Enforcement Officers to Fight Cyber-Enabled Wildlife Crime



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Attaché shows replica ivory and effective evidence collection to workshop participants in Bangkok, May 2024.

U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance and Training (OPDAT) organized and presented at a May 13-16 workshop to improve basic knowledge of digital evidence and add money laundering charges to wildlife trafficking cases, funded by INL, in Bangkok, Thailand. Participants included 28 prosecutors and law enforcement officers from Lao PDR, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Mongolia. The OPDAT Southeast Asia International Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property Attorney Advisor presented on using digital evidence to combat cyber-enabled crime.



Participants at OPDAT workshop in Thailand May 2024.

# HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

## ***WE Inspire Empowers Women-Owned Enterprises Across Mekong Communities***

The WE Inspire joint initiative by the MUSP and the Kenan Foundation Asia continued to empower marginalized women across Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam. In recent months, efforts have focused on primarily fostering business growth.

In Thailand's Chiang Rai province, the project distributed seed grants to 20 women-owned enterprises in March 2024 and will provide supervision and consultation for these enterprises until September. Eight grant recipients also gave a talk to inspire, motivate, and offer guidance to 100 other project participants during workshops in May.

In Cambodia's Battambang and Banteay Meanchey provinces, 52 women entrepreneurs completed their financial literacy training program, and are currently implementing their six-month action plans to improve their business finances. Additionally, about 30 other women are undergoing a series of training in the WE Inspire business incubation program.

Meanwhile, nearly 100 women in Tra Vinh, Viet Nam, recently commenced their business incubation journey, with orientation and first business training sessions held this June.

Earlier, the women received free health checkups in February and attended healthcare training in March.

The WE Inspire project aims to promote the healthcare access, financial stability, and business acumen of marginalized women across the Lower Mekong sub-region. The initiative has already empowered more than 300 women in Thailand, Cambodia, and Viet Nam, and now seeks to expand its success to Lao PDR and Myanmar.



Women entrepreneurs in Cambodia 2024.



Women at orientation and business training in Vietnam March 2024.



For more information on the *WE Inspire* initiative, please visit: <https://weinspire.kenan-asia.org/>.

# HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

## USAID Supports a New Regional Civil Society Coalition Based in Northern Thailand

On February 28, USAID/Regional Development Mission for Asia's Deputy Mission Director, Linda McElroy, joined civil society organizations from Thailand and Lao PDR to officially open the Home Hug Mekong Center in Nong Khai, Thailand. The center will serve as the headquarters for the Hug (which means "love" in the local language) Network, which was established in August 2023 with the support of the Mekong for the Future, a USAID- World Wildlife Fund (WWF) partnership to increase civil society engagement in natural resource management. The network aims to strengthen relationships among communities and provinces along both banks of the Mekong, while increasing cooperation among public, private, and government agencies to conserve and sustain the river's resources. The event also engaged participants in activities to restore the Mekong ecosystem, including planting Khai, a mangrove species, and releasing fish. More information is highlighted in this article features on the Global Waters.org site, "[Harnessing the Power of Collaboration to Secure a Strong Future for the Mekong River.](#)"<sup>5</sup>



Participants at Home Hug Mekong Center opening in Thailand February 2024.

## USAID and DOS/OES Invest in Platforms to Champion the Stories and Efforts of Environmental Defenders across the Mekong Sub-Region

The Mekong River is a lifeline for millions of people across Southeast Asia, providing essential water resources for food, agriculture, and transportation. To support sustainable, equitable, and locally-owned climate action, Mekong for the Future trained 23 professional and citizen journalists from Lower Mekong countries, empowering them to produce stories reflecting environmental challenges, climate resilience, and locally-led solutions through the [Our Mekong, Our Say](#) platform. Sixteen pitches, each resulting in a grant and one-on-one mentorship for the lead journalist, led to stories that generated 443,972 views on media websites and social media platforms, and 155,458 impressions and engagements. The initiative amplified the perspectives and experiences of local leaders to address environmental challenges, such as [worsening water quality](#)<sup>7</sup> in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake and decreasing populations in a Thai village impacted by [mainstream dams](#).<sup>8</sup> These efforts are further supported by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs (OES) small grant program to empower the efforts of civil society in efforts to combat nature crimes. For example, OES-funded small grants are engaging communities across Cambodia and southcentral Laos in efforts to combat illegal deforestation and trafficking of local wildlife.



USAID/RDMA with civil society organizations in Thailand February 2024.

# HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

## Ambassador Water Expert Program Brings Earth-Observation Experts to Thailand

In August, the U.S. Department of the Interior, International Technical Assistance Program (DOI-ITAP) supported three U.S. experts from The Stimson Center and Eyes on Earth leading a week-long workshop on remote sensing and water data management. The workshop was hosted by Chiang Mai University, Thailand, and included faculty and post-graduate students from the host institution, Mae Fah Luang University,



Participants from Eyes on Earth at the DOI-AWEP workshop in August 2024.

Chulalongkorn University, and a researcher from the Open Development Initiative. Attendees gained valuable skills in integrating data from various sources, enhancing their understanding of the complex issues and potential solutions related to challenges in the Lower Mekong River Basin. The workshop was made possible through funding provided by U.S. Department of State under the DOI-ITAP Ambassador's Water Expert Program (AWEP).

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. <https://mekonguspartnership.org/>
2. <https://www.facebook.com/MekongUSPartnership/>
3. [https://asiapacific.panda.org/hidden/the\\_mekong\\_forgotten\\_fishes/](https://asiapacific.panda.org/hidden/the_mekong_forgotten_fishes/)
4. <https://weinspire.kenan-asia.org/>
5. <https://www.globalwaters.org/resources/assets/harnessing-power-collaboration-secure-strong-future-mekong-river>
6. <https://www.mekongeye.com/2024/01/30/omos/>
7. <https://www.mekongeye.com/2024/01/22/pollution-tonle-sap/>
8. <https://www.mekongeye.com/2024/02/12/dongna-mekong/>