



MEKONG-AUSTRALIA PARTNERSHIP

KEY RESULTS FOR THE PERIOD FROM 1 JANUARY 2022 TO 31 DECEMBER 2022

The Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP) is a four-year flexible \$232 million program (2020/21 to 2023/24). MAP's overarching goal is to foster an inclusive and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, and support an open, prosperous and stable Mekong subregion.

MAP engages with the Mekong subregion through five pillars: Economic Resilience; Water, Energy and Climate; Human Capacity; Cyber; and Trade and Investment.

MAP IS STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA'S ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND DEVELOPMENT RELATIONSHIPS IN THE MEKONG SUBREGION AND IS CONTRIBUTING TO DEVELOPMENT RESULTS



ECONOMIC RESILIENCE PILLAR



The *Cambodia Trust Fund on Public Financial Management and Service Delivery* activity led to

- Measurable improvements to the Government's payroll payment times from 33.4 to 10.4 days and payment processing times reduced by over 50 per cent.
- A 97 per cent completion rate for a leadership and innovation program on Public Financial Management (PFM) involving 473 senior government officials.
- Improving Cambodia's social protection system to protect households against shocks through a new cash transfer program and an integration of datasets.



The *Australia-Thailand Economic Resilience Partnership* provided technical advice and capacity building results, influencing a decision to increase public funding by almost six times for learning materials and for food and milk for the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration's early childhood centers.



The *Australia-Thailand Policy Dialogue on Critical Infrastructure* drew over 100 participants to discuss the nature of risks, including national interest concerns, associated with foreign investment.



Through the *Consumer Protection Capacity Building* program, knowledge sharing between Australia and Vietnam's consumer protection agencies was strengthened through four key events: a Leaders' Dialogue; a seminar on drafting legislation; a study visit with 12 Vietnamese delegates; and a law reform symposium.



In Laos, the *PFM for Stability* initiative delivered six key assessments, including on governance frameworks of state-owned enterprises, digital economy tax revenue, land, and environmental tax laws. Forty government officials attended a workshop on mainstreaming gender in PFM.



The *Mekong Safeguards* program supported increased use of environmental, social and corporate governance standards for infrastructure development by Mekong organisations, including a major Thai power producer.

AND THIS CONTRIBUTED TO...
observed changes supporting the Mekong subregion's economic recovery and resilience



WATER, ENERGY AND CLIMATE PILLAR



The Support to the *Mekong River Commission* (MRC) activity helped to generate a comprehensive analysis of water flows to improve transboundary water security and provide concrete strategies for climate adaptation and mitigation in the Mekong River Basin.



The MRC was also supported to trial an updated, user-friendly, highly visual website using up-to-date status of river condition, river flood forecast, risk of flash flooding, drought forecast, and rainfall distribution over the Lower Mekong River Basin.



The *Resilient Urban Centre and Surrounds* investment supported the promotion of nature-based solutions (NBS) in managing urban challenges with different agencies in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam through eight projects in eight cities.



In 2022, MAP supported the MRC to publish a '*Handbook on Mainstreaming Gender into the Mekong River Commission's Core Functions and Activities: A Guidebook for a Gender- Responsive and Resilient Lower Mekong River Basin*' to provide guidance on developing more gender inclusive strategies.



In 2022, MAP supported 3,095 women, including young and Indigenous women, engaged in water resource governance and renewable energy-related public events, platforms, and forums at local, national, regional, and international levels.



In Vietnam, the *Australia Mekong Water Facility (the Facility)* provided Australian expertise on pressurised water piping systems in 17 schemes across five provinces to ensure that irrigation systems can supply water on demand for high-value crops.



In Thailand, the Facility is sharing knowledge on Australia's water allocation systems and building the capacity of Thai officials to monitor water quality in its reservoirs and implement effective systems to enable equitable access to water among agricultural users.



In Cambodia, through the *Strengthening Climate Resilience in Lower Mekong* activity, leaders in three communities were supported to conduct vulnerability risk assessments and formulate a disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation plan.



In Laos, the Department of Water Resources gained knowledge in groundwater management which was used to prepare a Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan (SGMP) for the Sekong Province, potentially benefitting 132,000 people.

AND THIS CONTRIBUTED TO...
strengthened transboundary and domestic water governance and improved water management capacity

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HUMAN CAPACITY PILLAR



Almost 600 participants from Mekong subregion countries attended 29 short courses and workshops.



In Vietnam, participants reported that three short courses (*Strategic Analysis and Analytical Writing*, *Water Diplomacy for a Resilient Mekong*, and *Carbon Market Operations and Co-operative Mechanisms under the Paris Agreement*) enabled them to contribute to policy development, practice and knowledge transfer. Participants completed legal documents on climate change adaptation, and proposed context-specific policies for Vietnam.



In Laos, the *Leadership for Responsive Public Administration* training program equipped participants with knowledge and skills on leadership concepts and practices for middle-level managers at the National Academy of Politics and Public Administration and contributed to their individual and organisational performance.



Cambodian participants of the *Fundamentals of Governance for Mining Industry Regulators* training course visited two mine sites and were introduced to 39 Australian organisations across QLD, ACT, and NSW.



In Thailand, the *Attracting and Managing Foreign Direct Investment* short course and the *Thailand-Australian Competition Law Implementation* program supported the implementation of competition laws and provided training on foreign direct investment.



47 scholarships were awarded, with all scholars mobilised to Australia by mid-2022.

AND THIS CONTRIBUTED TO...

enhanced skills, knowledge and networks of alumni and increased cooperation and dialogue between countries



CYBER PILLAR



The *Digital Transformation Opportunities and Challenges in the Lower Mekong Region: A Focus on Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam* research provided recommendations for regional and country level digital transformation.



The *Strengthening Digital Media Literacy in the Mekong* activity delivered a four-module media literacy curriculum to five Civil Society Organization (CSO) partners in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam, who went on to deliver 11 information sessions reaching 360 people.



The *Cambodian Cyber Security Uplift – Cyber Security Training* program was provided to over 60 participants from several public institutions to improve security awareness and cyber incident responses.



In Vietnam, the *Women, Peace and Cybersecurity: Promoting Women's Peace and Security in the Digital World in Southeast Asia and the Pacific* activity strengthened the leadership of women's CSOs by working with the Vietnam Women's Union to develop a handbook on cyber security.



The *Thailand Cyber Security Defensive Readiness* program delivered a cyber security fundamentals workshop on cyber security threats and three incident response fundamentals sessions to the National Cyber Security Agency and other critical infrastructure organisations.

AND THIS CONTRIBUTED TO...

addressing cyber-related gaps and generating knowledge for cyber resilience



TRADE AND INVESTMENT PILLAR



Supporting the implementation of the Australia-Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy, the *Australia-Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Grant (AVEG)* pilot round provided 28 grants totaling \$2.6 million for activities including research, training (seminars and workshops), dialogues, forums, and visit and study tours. The 28 grant activities have largely been completed, supporting advancements in the following key sectors in Vietnam: education, skills, training; agriculture, forestry, and fisheries; science, technology and innovation; and services.



The development of an *Australia-Vietnam Global Engagement Roadmap* to support Australian Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to diversify and expand supply chains in partnership with Vietnamese SMEs, with gender as a key focus.



The Australian Chamber of Commerce in Vietnam (AusCham) and DFAT signed an agreement to establish a hub for Australian industry bodies to link with Vietnamese industry groups to increase bilateral trade and investment.



The establishment of the *Australia-Vietnam Policy Institute* provides a platform for universities, think-tanks and businesses to share research and insights on Vietnam.



The *Women entrepreneurs in Australia and Vietnam: Building capacity, Building Relationships* training program provided opportunities for 20 Vietnamese women entrepreneurs to enhance their capacities and build relationships as a start-up community.

AND THIS CONTRIBUTED TO...

supporting increased trade and investment, economic resilience and advancements in industry engagement



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EXAMPLES OF MAP CONTRIBUTIONS

MAP HAS RECEIVED POSITIVE FEEDBACK, SEEN HIGH PARTICIPATION AND DEMAND ACROSS THE PILLARS, AND CONTRIBUTED TO LOCALLY OWNED ACTIVITIES AND IMPROVEMENTS



POSITIVE FEEDBACK



The *Attracting and Managing Foreign Direct Investment* short course received 100 per cent satisfaction from participants who were pleased with the 'ecosystem approach' for attracting and managing foreign direct investment.



70 per cent of respondents completing the impact survey on three short courses in Vietnam (*Strategic Analysis and Analytical Writing, Water Diplomacy for a Resilient Mekong, and Carbon Market Operations and Co-operative Mechanisms under the Paris Agreement*) reported that the courses were useful and enabled them to contribute to development outcomes.



HIGH PARTICIPATION & DEMAND



Under the *Cambodia Trust Fund on PFM and Service Delivery* activity, 473 senior government officials successfully completed a leadership and innovation program on PFM (a 97 per cent completion rate).



Following the delivery of the *Cyber Security Defensive Readiness* program, the Thai National Cyber Security Agency requested further Australian engagement and training.



OWNERSHIP



Laos' Department of Irrigation actively participated in the design and implementation of a fish passageway in partnership with Charles Sturt University to boost food security and climate resilience.



Vietnam's consumer protection agency drove the development of a training agenda which informed the capacity development activities delivered by Australia's consumer protection agency.



IMPROVEMENTS



Support provided through the *Cambodia Trust Fund on PFM and Service Delivery* activity led to measurable improvements in business processes such as a 69 per cent reduction in processing times for staff salaries.



Through the *Australia-Thailand Economic Resilience Partnership*, advice to Thai policy makers led to improvements to leadership in public schools, including increased engagement by school principals in classrooms to better understand student and teacher needs.

CASE STUDY: THE AUSTRALIA-VIETNAM BUSINESS CHAMPIONS INITIATIVE

The *Business Champions Initiative* played a crucial role in advocating for trade and investment between Australia and Vietnam, with the appointment of distinguished industry leaders in Australia and Vietnam as Business Champions. These individuals worked to engage their respective business communities, raise awareness about opportunities in both markets, streamline regulatory and investment frameworks, and facilitate smoother business operations.

This initiative culminated in the *Australia-Vietnam Business Champions Recommendations Report*, which presented business-led and business-informed recommendations to promote and strengthen the commercial relationship between Australia and Vietnam. The Report was presented to the trade ministers in both countries during the third Australia-Vietnam Economic Partnership Meeting in April 2023, solidifying its significance in guiding future strategies for bilateral economic cooperation.

The various engagement activities were of significant benefit, as they fostered knowledge sharing and networking that enhanced awareness and an understanding of commercial engagements in Vietnam.

