Background Paper 1

Mekong Subregion: Development and Cooperation Status

Nguyen Anh Duong, Dinh Thu Hang and Vo Tri Thanh

November 2020

This chapter should be cited as
Nguyen, A.D., T.H. Duong and T.T. Vo (2020), 'Mekong Subregion: Development and Cooperation Status', in Kimura, Fukunari (ed.), *Subregional Development Strategy in ASEAN after COVID-19: Inclusiveness and Sustainability in the Mekong Subregion (Mekong 2030).* Jakarta: ERIA, pp.BP1–BP23.

Background Paper 1

Mekong Subregion: Development and Cooperation Status

Nguyen Anh Duong, Dinh Thu Hang, and Vo Tri Thanh

1. Introduction

The Mekong River flows through five mainland countries – Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam – which shape the Mekong Subregion (MSR). Since 1992, the MSR countries have embarked on various subregional economic cooperation mechanisms to enhance their economic relations. These have put each country and the MSR as a whole in a dynamic but complex web of economic links, in the broader context of regional and plurilateral integration in the Asia-Pacific region in the past two decades.

In recent years, MSR countries have witnessed significant socio-economic achievements. However, the development gap between the MSR and other ASEAN Member States (AMS) remains sizeable. Rapid economic growth in MSR countries has not always been accompanied by improved well-being of their citizens. The MSR therefore needs to search for a new cooperation mechanism to ensure that regional and individual economic and social transformations contribute more to inclusive and sustainable development. Such a new cooperation mechanism must also be effective in the new regional and international context (with major aspects such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR 4.0), Society 5.0,[1] trade conflicts amongst major economies, geopolitical tensions in many regions, and non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, infectious diseases, etc.). For such a new cooperation mechanism, reviewing the state of economic development and cooperation mechanisms amongst MSR countries would be essential to help identify major objectives and characteristics.

This chapter aims to provide a review of the current development status of the MSR. It focuses on (i) comparative analysis of economic growth in the MSR vis-à-vis the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with emphasis on the importance of the

[1] In Japan's 5th Science and Technology Plan, Society 5.0 is defined as 'a society that can be expected to facilitate human prosperity. Such a society is capable of providing the necessary goods and services to the people who need them at the required time and in just the right amount; a society that is able to respond precisely to a wide variety of social needs; a society in which all kinds of people can readily obtain high-quality services, overcome differences of age, gender, region, and language, and live vigorous and comfortable lives' (Government of Japan, 2016).

wwMSR for regional development and inclusive growth; and (ii) ongoing mechanisms for economic cooperation in the MSR.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a comparative analysis of inclusive development-related aspects of MSR countries. Section 3 then elaborates on inclusive development of the MSR countries. Section 4 concludes with some recommendations.

2. Inclusive Development in Mekong Subregion: A Comparative Analysis

2.1 Economic Growth

As a whole, ASEAN witnessed a high gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate during 2010–2018, averaging 5.4% per year (Figure 2). Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV) grew at a faster pace than the rest of ASEAN. The economic size of the MSR countries has more than doubled in 10 years, from $431.7 billion at current prices in 2008 to $866.1 billion in 2018 (Figure 1). This impressive result was partly attributed to the low GDP base of most MSR countries (i.e. the catch-up effect).

By economic sector, the GDP structure of CLMV countries saw a modest shift to a higher share for industry (an improvement of about 2–3 percentage points over 2015–2018). Thailand reflected the opposite, with a decreased proportion for the industry sector in GDP (34.7% in 2018 vs. 36.4% in 2015).

Figure 1: GDP at Current Prices in ASEAN, 2008–2018 ($ billion)

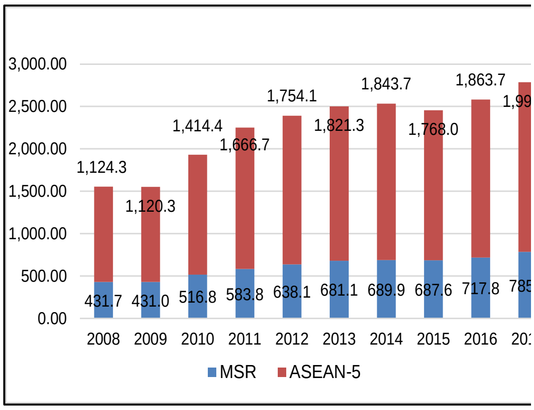
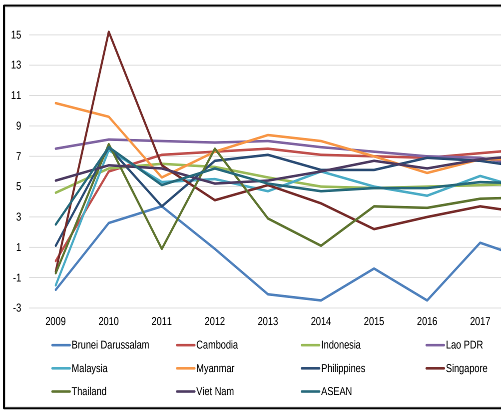


Figure 2: GDP Growth Rate in ASEAN, 2009–2018 (%)



ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, GDP = gross domestic product, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic, MSR = Mekong Subregion.
Note: MSR countries include Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The ASEAN 5 includes Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.
Source: ASEAN (2019).

Table 1: GDP Structure by Economic Sector in ASEAN, 2015–2018 (%)

Country	2015				2018			
	Agriculture	**Industry**	**Services**	**A+I+S**	**Agriculture**	**Industry**	**Services**	**A+I+S**
Brunei Darussalam	0.9	63.4	37.6	101.9	0.8	62.9	38.0	101.8
Cambodia	22.2	32.1	39.6	93.9	16.3	32.1	43.1	91.6
Indonesia	13.0	41.0	42.8	96.8	12.5	39.8	43.6	96.0
Lao PDR	16.5	32.2	41.3	89.9	14.5	35.7	39.6	89.8
Malaysia	8.3	38.4	52.0	98.8	7.3	37.5	54.0	98.8
Myanmar	28.9	30.0	41.1	100.0	24.6	32.1	43.2	99.9
Philippines	9.5	33.5	57.0	100.0	8.1	34.1	57.8	100.0
Singapore	0.0	24.3	65.7	90.0	0.0	25.1	64.4	89.5
Thailand	6.4	36.4	56.8	99.6	6.1	34.7	58.7	99.5
Viet Nam	15.3	32.5	36.4	84.2	14.3	35.6	38.8	88.7

A = agriculture, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, GDP = gross domestic product, I = industry, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic, S = services.
Notes: (i) agriculture comprises fishing and forestry; (ii) industry comprises mining and quarrying, manufacturing, construction, and utilities; (iii) services comprise wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food services, information and communications, finance and insurance, business services, and other service industries; and (iv) the sum of GDP shares of A+I+S may not equal 100% in some ASEAN countries, mainly due to the separate treatment of GDP associated balancing items from the total GDP, including items on taxes, and subsidies on particular products and services.
Source: ASEAN (2019).

Despite the downward trend in the share of GDP, agriculture, forestry, and fishing still exhibited positive growth in terms of value added for all AMS (Table 2). During 2011–2018, value added from the agriculture, forestry, and fishing of MSR countries grew at an average rate of 1.8% per year. In terms of growth rate, however, Viet Nam and the Lao PDR were amongst the countries with the highest growth rates of agriculture, forestry, and fishing value added (2.9% per year and 2.7% per year, respectively, in 2011–2018).

Table 2: Added Value of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fishing in ASEAN, 2000–2018

(2010 constant prices, $ billion)

Country	2000	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Brunei Darussalam	0.08	0.10	0.10	0.11	0.10	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.11
Cambodia	2.32	3.81	3.93	4.09	4.16	4.17	4.18	4.23	4.33	4.37
Indonesia	74.83	105.18	109.33	114.34	119.15	124.20	128.87	133.21	138.37	143.78
Lao PDR	1.13	1.61	1.62	1.66	1.71	1.78	1.84	1.90	1.95	1.99
Malaysia	19.28	25.73	27.49	27.76	28.31	28.89	29.31	27.79	29.79	29.66
Myanmar	9.15	18.26	18.14	18.44	19.11	19.64	20.31	20.22	20.47	20.73
Philippines	18.55	24.58	25.22	25.93	26.22	26.66	26.70	26.37	27.41	27.66
Singapore	0.12	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.10	0.10	0.09	0.09	0.09
Thailand	29.04	35.90	38.16	39.19	39.47	39.36	36.89	35.99	38.23	39.59
Viet Nam	15.18	21.31	22.21	22.86	23.46	24.27	24.85	25.19	25.92	26.89
ASEAN	169.68	236.56	246.28	254.48	261.79	269.18	273.15	275.09	286.68	294.87

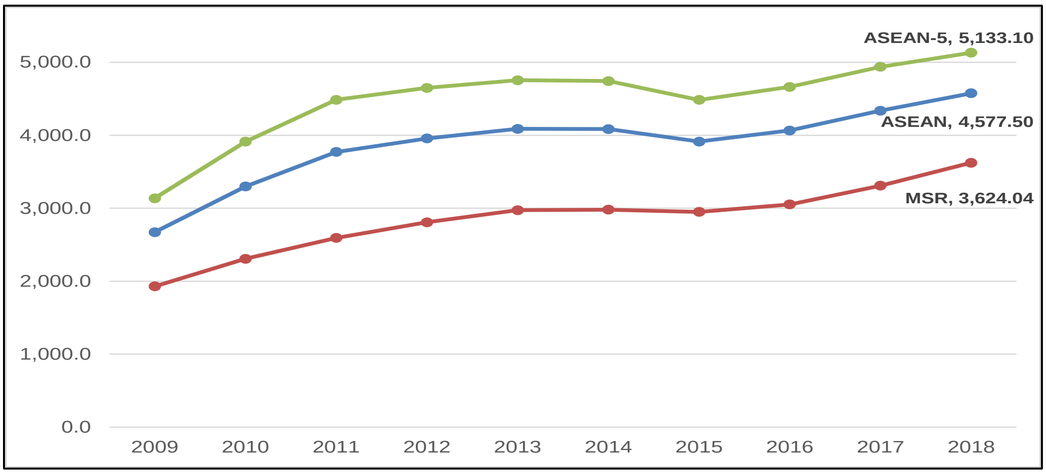
ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic.
Source: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.KD (accessed 10 April 2020).

GDP per capita mostly showed an uptrend in AMS during 2009–2018 (except Brunei Darussalam). The GDP per capita of the individual MSR countries witnessed significant increases (1.8–2.9 times during 2009–2018, Figure 3), but remains far below that of the remaining ASEAN 5 (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore). Notwithstanding efforts to narrow the income gap between the MSR and the rest of ASEAN, progress was slow and insignificant. APO (2019) showed that the annual catch-up rates[2] to the United States (US) of Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Viet Nam during 1970–2017 were relatively unremarkable (2%–3% per year), while the progress of Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar was slower.

[2] The catch-up rate to the US of country X is defined as the difference in average annual growth rates of per capita GDP between country X and the US.

Figure 3: GDP per Capita in ASEAN, 2009–2018

($)



ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, GDP = gross domestic product, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic, MSR = Mekong Subregion.
Note: MSR countries include Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The ASEAN 5 includes Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.
Source: ASEAN (2019).

2.2 Infrastructure

Transport and Utility Infrastructure

Viet Nam outperformed other MSR countries in terms of utility infrastructure, with more than 98% of the population having access to electricity. Cambodia and Myanmar performed relatively poorly in this area. For example, only 89.0% of Myanmar's urban population and 39.8% of its rural population had access to electricity (ADB, 2018). Meanwhile, the gap between CLMV and the ASEAN 6 (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) in water supply and quality is narrowing over the years, although significant room for improvement remains. In the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index 4.0 2019 rankings (World Economic Forum, 2019), the CLMV ranked very low (87th–107th) in utility infrastructure – far below Singapore (5th) and Brunei Darussalam (45th).

Table 3: ASEAN Infrastructure Rankings, 2019

Indicator	BRN	KHM	IND	LAO	MYS	PHL	SGP	THA	VNM
Pillar 2: Infrastructure	**58**	**106**	**72**	**93**	**35**	**96**	**1**	**71**	**77**
2A Transport infrastructure	***77***	***96***	***55***	***87***	***29***	***102***	***1***	***53***	***66***
Road connectivity	93	107	109	126	133	125	n.a.	54	104
Quality of road infrastructure	32	97	60	89	19	88	1	55	103
Railroad density	n.a.	n.a.	85	n.a.	63	91	1	55	58
Efficiency of train services	n.a.	n.a.	19	n.a.	13	88	5	75	54
Airport connectivity	91	58	5	88	20	26	23	9	22
Efficiency of air transport services	62	113	56	104	25	96	1	48	103
Liner shipping connectivity	104	93	36	n.a.	5	59	1	35	19
Efficiency of seaport services	69	91	61	115	19	88	1	73	83
2B Utility infrastructure	***45***	***107***	***89***	***97***	***51***	***96***	***5***	***90***	***87***
Electricity access	71	115	95	96	87	103	2	2	84
Electricity supply quality	28	89	54	n.a.	38	53	2	31	62
Exposure to unsafe drinking water	28	99	98	108	63	105	25	107	95
Reliability of water supply	55	86	74	93	49	77	7	60	81

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, BRN = Brunei Darussalam, IND = Indonesia, KHM = Cambodia, LAO = Lao PDR, MYS = Malaysia, n.a. = not available, PHL = Philippines, SGP = Singapore, THA = Thailand, VNM = Viet Nam.
Note: Myanmar was excluded from the ranking list.
Source: World Economic Forum (2019).

In terms of transport infrastructure, air transport in ASEAN as a whole and individual AMS in particular has progressed over the last 2–3 decades to support flourishing tourism, international trade, investment, and business activities in the region. According to the World Bank (2020), Viet Nam experienced the highest annual growth rates of passengers carried by air transport (17.37%) and air transport freight (9.21%) during 2000–2018. Viet Nam also made impressive progress in rail transport, ranked 2nd in ASEAN in terms of goods transported, at 3,190 million ton-kilometres in 2016. Container port traffic expanded most rapidly in Myanmar (21.9% per year) in the 10-year period from 2009 to 2017, followed by Viet Nam (12.1% per year). With these improvements, CLMV rankings in the 2019 Global Competitiveness Index 4.0's transport infrastructure were relatively positive, in particular Viet Nam (ranked 19th in liner shipping services and 22nd in air connectivity). However, in terms of the quality of transport means, CLMV performed very poorly, with low rankings in efficiency indicators for all types of transport.

ICT Infrastructure

The quality of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure in CLMV was generally far behind that of the ASEAN 6. However, CLMV moved very fast in mobile communications and internet access, and has been closer to ASEAN 6 level. This trend was in line with the decline in fixed telephone subscribers in all AMS. According to the World Development Indicators, during 2010–2018, fixed broadband subscribers in the Lao PDR grew at the fastest annual pace (31.9%), followed by Myanmar (22.9%), Cambodia (21.7%), and Viet Nam (15.7%). Such a rapid pace may be promising for the MSR, as developing countries may not necessarily be latecomers in digital economy development (Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, 2018).

Table 4: ASEAN's Ranking and Value of Access to ICT, 2019

Indicator	BRN	KHM	IND	LAO	MYS	PHL	SNG	THA	VNM
Rank									
Pillar 3: ICT adoption	**26**	**71**	**72**	**102**	**33**	**88**	**5**	**62**	**41**
Mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions	41	65	64	134	31	84	16	5	14
Mobile-broadband subscriptions	13	56	52	111	19	79	6	26	76
Fixed broadband internet subscriptions	70	111	97	117	81	98	43	66	63
Fibre internet subscriptions	38.0	77.0	63.0	82.0	44.0	n.a.	8.0	51.0	26
Internet users	12	103	104	117	38	82	24	90	66
Value									
Mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions (per 100 population)	131.9	119.5	119.8	51.9	134.5	110.1	145.7	180.2	147.2
Mobile-broadband subscriptions (per 100 population)	130.0	82.8	87.2	42.0	116.7	68.4	145.7	104.7	71.9
Fixed broadband internet subscriptions (per 100 population)	11.9	1.0	3.3	0.6	8.6	3.2	25.9	13.2	13.6
Fibre internet subscriptions (per 100 population)	6.3	0.5	1.5	0.4	4.6	n.a.	22.3	2.4	9.9
Internet users (% of adult population)	94.6	40.0	39.8	25.5	81.2	60.1	88.2	56.8	70.3

BRN = Brunei Darussalam, ICT = information and communication technology, IND = Indonesia, KHM = Cambodia, LAO = Lao PDR, MYS = Malaysia, n.a. = not available, PHL = Philippines, SGP = Singapore, THA = Thailand, VNM = Viet Nam.
Note: Myanmar was excluded from the ranking list.
Source: World Economic Forum (2019).

2.3 Poverty Reduction

AMS achieved remarkable progress in poverty reduction. During 2000–2015, the figure was almost halved, reaching 14.0% in 2015. CLMV made a significant reduction in poverty, as measured by the national poverty line, as the population under the national poverty line in Viet Nam and Cambodia was cut by about two-thirds. However, CLMV still have a long way to go in poverty reduction efforts.

Table 5: Population Under National Poverty Line in ASEAN, 2000–2017 (%)

Country	2000	2005	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Brunei Darussalam	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Cambodia	36.0	33.0	29.9	22.9	21.1	19.8	18.9	16.0	13.5	13.5	13.5	13.5
Indonesia	19.0	16.0	15.4	14.2	13.3	12.5	12.0	11.4	11.3	11.2	10.9	10.6
Lao PDR	36.0	30.0	27.6	n.a.	24.0	n.a.	n.a.	23.2	n.a.	24.0	23.2	23.4
Malaysia	9.0	6.0	n.a.	3.8	n.a.	n.a.	1.7	n.a.	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.4
Myanmar	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	25.6	23.6	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	19.4	32.1	24.8
Philippines	26.0	26.0	n.a.	26.3	n.a.	n.a.	25.2	n.a.	n.a.	22.0	21.6	21.6
Singapore	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Thailand	21.0	10.0	20.5	19.1	16.9	13.2	n.a.	n.a.	10.5	7.2	8.6	7.9
Viet Nam	29.0	16.0	14.5	n.a.	14.2	12.6	11.1	9.8	8.4	7.0	7.0	9.8
ASEAN	25.0	18.0			15.0					14.0		

- = not available, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic, n.a. = not applicable.
Notes: The figures for Malaysia and Viet Nam are the percent number of households. The Philippine figures use regional poverty estimation methodology.
Sources: ASEAN (2017c; 2019).

2.4 Human Development

Human development witnessed an impressive improvement in CLMV, and the gap between CLMV and other nations in the region gradually narrowed. CLMV moved faster than the ASEAN 6 in the Human Development Index (HDI) value over 1990–2018, but the average annual HDI growth during 2010–2018 was slower than during 2000–2010 (UNDP, 2020). Still, the HDI of CLMV remained at the bottom of the AMS. Globally, CLMV stayed in the 'medium human development' group, with Viet Nam ranked 118th out of 189 countries, while Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar were ranked below 140th.

Table 6: Human Development Index in ASEAN, 2009–2018

Rank in 2018	Country	HDI value								Change in rank	Average annual HDI growth (%)			
		1990	2000	2010	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2013–2018	1990–2000	2000–2010	2010–2018	1990–2018
9	Singapore	0.718	0.818	0.909	0.923	0.929	0.933	0.934	0.935	−1	1.31	1.07	0.35	0.95
43	Brunei Darussalam	0.768	0.805	0.832	0.844	0.843	0.844	0.843	0.845	−6	0.47	0.33	0.19	0.34
61	Malaysia	0.644	0.724	0.773	0.787	0.797	0.801	0.802	0.804	−1	1.18	0.66	0.49	0.80
77	Thailand	0.574	0.649	0.721	0.731	0.746	0.753	0.762	0.765	12	1.24	1.05	0.74	1.03
106	Philippines	0.590	0.631	0.672	0.692	0.702	0.704	0.709	0.712	3	0.67	0.62	0.73	0.67
111	Indonesia	0.525	0.604	0.666	0.688	0.696	0.700	0.704	0.707	0	1.40	0.99	0.74	1.07
118	Viet Nam	0.475	0.578	0.653	0.673	0.680	0.685	0.690	0.693	−1	1.99	1.23	0.74	1.36
140	Lao PDR	0.399	0.466	0.546	0.579	0.594	0.598	0.602	0.604	−2	1.55	1.60	1.28	1.49
145	Myanmar	0.349	0.424	0.523	0.551	0.565	0.571	0.577	0.584	2	1.94	2.13	1.39	1.85
146	Cambodia	0.384	0.419	0.535	0.555	0.566	0.572	0.578	0.581	−1	0.89	2.46	1.05	1.49
	East Asia and the Pacific	0.519	0.597	0.691	0.714	0.727	0.733	0.737	0.741	—	1.42	1.48	0.87	1.28

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, HDI = Human Development Index, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic.
Source: UNDP (2020).

Quality of Health

With regards to the quality of health, CMV (except the Lao PDR) outperformed the ASEAN 6 in health spending as a share of GDP in 2016. The highest share was in Cambodia (6.1%), followed by Viet Nam (5.7%) and Myanmar (5.1%). However, the Lao PDR saw a significant decline in health expenditure. All AMS (except Cambodia) performed relatively well in the lost health expectancy sub-indicator and were in the top third amongst 189 countries in the 2019 HDI. However, CLMV were generally at the bottom of the AMS in most indicators, such as the number of physicians and hospital beds.

Table 7: Quality of Health and Health Expenditure in ASEAN

Country	**Lost health expectancy** (%)	**Physicians** (per 10,000 people)	**Hospital beds** (per 10,000 people)	**Health expenditure** (% of GDP)	
	2017	**2010–2018**	**2010–2015**	**2000**	**2016**
Brunei Darussalam	12.1	17.7	27	2.5	2.3
Cambodia	13.2	1.7	8	6.4	6.1
Indonesia	12.3	3.8	12	2.0	3.1
Lao PDR	12.0	5.0	15	4.7	2.4
Malaysia	11.6	15.1	19	2.4	3.8
Myanmar	12.6	8.6	9	1.8	5.1
Philippines	12.5	12.8	10	3.2	4.4
Singapore	12.5	23.1	24	3.4	4.5
Thailand	12.3	8.1	21	3.2	3.7
Viet Nam	11.7	8.2	26	4.4	5.7

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, GDP = gross domestic product, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic.
Note: Three-colour coding is used to visualise partial grouping of countries and aggregates by indicator. For each indicator, countries are divided into three groups of approximately equal size (terciles): the top third (green), the middle third (yellow), and the bottom third (orange).
Source: UNDP (2020).

Quality of Education

Increasing public spending on education has always been the focus of all AMS. During 2013–2018, the top three countries in ASEAN with the largest education expenditure to GDP were Viet Nam (5.7%), Malaysia (4.7%), and Thailand (4.1%). Although the share of education expenditure to GDP for Cambodia and the Lao PDR showed an upward trend, the figures remained lower than those of other countries. According to the UNDP (2019), the quality of education in CLMV was reflected by very poor performance in such indicators as (i) the ratio of pupils per teacher (particularly in Cambodia – 42 pupils per teacher); (ii) the ratio of schools with internet access; and (iii) students' capacity in math, science, and reading (Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores). Only Viet Nam performed very well, with scores above the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average for mathematics and science (493 and 490, respectively).

Table 8: Quality of Education and Education Expenditure in ASEAN

Country	Pupil–teacher ratio, primary school	Primary school teachers trained (%)	Schools with access to the internet (%)		Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) score			Government expenditure on education (% of GDP)
			Primary schools	Secondary schools	Reading	Science	Science	
	2013–2018	2010–2018	2010–2018	2010–2018	2015	2015	2015	2013–2018
Brunei Darussalam	10	85	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.4
Cambodia	42	100	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1.9
Indonesia	16	n.a.	n.a.	51	386	397	403	3.6
Lao PDR	22	97	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2.9
Malaysia	12	99	100	100	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.7
Myanmar	23	98	0	5	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	2.2
Philippines	29	100	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Singapore	15	99	n.a.	n.a.	564	535	556	2.9
Thailand	16	100	99	97	415	409	421	4.1
Viet Nam	20	100	n.a.	n.a.	495	487	525	5.7

n.a. = Not available; ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, GDP = gross domestic product, Lao PDR = Lao People's Democratic Republic.
Note: Three-colour coding is used to visualise partial grouping of countries and aggregates by indicator. For each indicator, countries are divided into three groups of approximately equal size (terciles): the top third (green), the middle third (yellow), and the bottom third (orange).
Source: UNDP (2020).

The educational level of the CLMV labour force has improved significantly. However, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Viet Nam were the least competitive in terms of workforce skills (Table 9). Those countries performed relatively poorly in almost all the important sub-indicators, such as skills of the current workforce, quality of vocational training, graduate skillsets, digital skills amongst the population, and ease of finding skilled employees.

Table 9: ASEAN Rankings of Labour Force Skills, 2019

Indicator	BRN	KHM	IND	LAO	MYS	PHL	SGP	THA	VNM
Pillar 6: Skills	**59**	**120**	**65**	**104**	**30**	**67**	**19**	**73**	**93**
6.A Current workforce	***70***	***127***	***73***	***114***	***32***	***40***	***13***	***91***	***100***
Mean years of schooling	81	126	92	120	59	69	32	96	97
Skills of current workforce	44	111	36	73	8	19	3	68	103
Extent of staff training	63	76	33	69	8	18	4	48	73
Quality of vocational training	49	112	37	97	12	29	6	74	102
Skillset of graduates	38	104	37	55	17	20	4	79	116
Digital skills amongst population	35	112	52	74	10	22	5	66	97
Ease of finding skilled employees	89	123	45	67	11	13	9	86	96
6.B Future workforce	***42***	***118***	***64***	***101***	***44***	***88***	***22***	***57***	***83***
School life expectancy	66		80	102	78	85	27	42	
Skills of future workforce	23	121	40	79	13	81	28	64	82
Critical thinking in teaching	45	76	29	68	17	24	21	89	106
Pupil–teacher ratio in primary education	10	124	54	85	19	105	48	56	75

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, BRN = Brunei Darussalam; IND = Indonesia, KHM = Cambodia, LAO = Lao People's Democratic Republic, MYS = Malaysia, PHL = Philippines, SGP = Singapore, THA = Thailand, VNM = Viet Nam.
Note: Myanmar was excluded from the ranking list.
Source: World Economic Forum (2019).

2.5 Gender Equality and Empowerment

With regards to gender equality, Myanmar, the Lao PDR, and Cambodia were at the bottom in ASEAN, while Viet Nam had a slightly higher ranking. Nevertheless, women's empowerment in CLMV was remarkable, reflected by the relatively high shares of women in parliament in Viet Nam and the Lao PDR (26.7% and 27.5%, respectively). The share of female graduates from science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) programmes in tertiary education rose to 64.9% in the Lao PDR – the highest amongst the AMSs – and approximately doubled the figure for Viet Nam. About one-third of senior and middle management in CLMV were female. However, in MSR countries, women had fewer job and educational opportunities than men.

Table 10: Gender Inequality and Empowerment in ASEAN, 2018

Country	Gender Inequality Index		Share of seats in parliament (% held by women)	Population with at least some secondary education (% aged 25 and older)		Labour force participation rate (% aged 15 and older)		Share of graduates in STEM programmes at tertiary level, female (%)	Share of graduates from STEM programmes in tertiary education, female (%)	Female share of employment in senior and middle management (%)
	Value	Rank		Female	Male	Female	Male			
	2018	2018	2018	2010–2018	2010–2018	2018	2018	2008–2018	2008–2018	2010–2018
BRN	0.234	51	9.1	69.5	70.6	58.2	71.7	23.6	51.9	37.0
KMH	0.474	114	19.3	15.1	28.1	75.2	87.6	6.0	16.7	n.a.
IND	0.451	103	19.8	44.5	53.2	52.2	82.0	15.4	36.5	n.a.
LAO	0.463	110	27.5	35.0	46.0	76.8	79.7	47.3	64.9	31.5
MMR	0.458	106	10.2	28.7	22.3	47.7	77.3	8.6	25.2	23.4
MYS	0.274	58	15.8	79.8	81.8	50.9	77.4	18.1	38.6	n.a.
PHL	0.425	98	29.1	75.6	72.4	45.7	74.1	12.2	37.1	19.4
SGP	0.065	11	23.0	76.3	83.3	60.5	76.3	22.3	33.7	n.a.
THA	0.377	84	5.3	43.1	48.2	59.5	76.2	17.8	36.3	25.5
VNM	0.314	68	26.7	66.2	77.7	72.7	82.5	15.0	30.1	29.5

n.a. = Not available; ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations; BRN = Brunei Darussalam; IND = Indonesia; KHM = Cambodia; LAO = Lao People's Democratic Republic; MYS = Malaysia; MMR = Myanmar; PHL = Philippines; SGP = Singapore; STEM = science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; THA = Thailand; VNM = Viet Nam.
Source: UNDP (2020).

3. Cooperation Mechanisms

Over the past 2 decades, the MSR countries have intensified cooperation via diversified mechanisms. According to Le (2018), there are about 15 cooperative mechanisms in the Mekong Region divided into two groups: intra-regional mechanisms (cooperation amongst Mekong countries) and cooperation between the MSR countries and external partners.

3.1 Intra-Regional Mechanisms

Mekong River Commission

On 5 April 1995, Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam signed the 'Agreement on the Cooperation for the Sustainable Development of the Mekong River Basin' (the 1995 Mekong Agreement), which established the Mekong River Commission (MRC). The MRC is the only organisation in the Mekong region tasked with developing legal frameworks (Le, 2018). Compared to those of other international river basin organisations, the Mekong Agreement has more specific and stricter regulations on water use. Under the Phnom Penh Declaration of the 3rd MRC Summit in April 2018, the MRC leaders reaffirmed the political commitment towards the Mekong Agreement. At the same time, the Declaration also emphasized the unique role of the MRC in the sustainable development of water and related resources in the Mekong basin.

The MRC Strategic Plan, 2016–2020 identified four key results areas, seven outcomes, 43 outputs, and 169 activities to be implemented during a 5-year period. The 2019 Midterm Review of MRC Strategic Plan, 2016–2020 noted some impressive achievements, with 90% of outputs 'on track' and only 10% 'delayed' (relative to 23% 'delayed' in 2017). In 2018, the Preliminary Design Guidance was updated from the 2009 version with the introduction of contemporary performance targets; and design and operating principles for mitigation measures, monitoring, and adaptive management. In late 2017, the four member countries (Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Thailand, and Viet Nam) issued a joint statement on the Pak Beng Hydropower project, concluding the prior consultation process and calling for the Government of the Lao PDR to make every effort to minimise potential adverse transboundary impacts on water flow, sediment, fisheries, water quality, aquatic ecology, navigation, and socio-economic issues. The third State of the Basin report was completed in 2018, covering a consistent set of indicators (15 strategic indicators, 53 assessment indicators, and 182 monitoring parameters) from the MRC Indicator Framework in five core dimensions: (i) environmental aspects; (ii) social aspects; (iii) economic aspects; (iv) climate change; and (v) cooperation. The framework aims at informing member countries on how to progress towards the objectives of the 1995 Mekong Agreement. For the first time, the State of Basin Report also included a review of conditions in the Upper Mekong Basin in China and Myanmar.

The MRC countries continued to increase their funding to the MRC in line with the commitments under the 2030 roadmap to be a self-financing inter-governmental organisation, promoting a greater sense of ownership. Stakeholder engagement continues to be strengthened. The MRC also demonstrated its commitment to continual improvement and being more open and transparent, undertaking independent reviews of its operations and the MRC Strategic Plan.

Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation

Following the initiative of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) was established in 1992 with six members – Cambodia, China (Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The GMS identified 10 priority areas for cooperation. Amongst them, infrastructure connectivity is the top priority. In particular, the GMS countries approved large infrastructure projects, including the three economic corridors (the North–South Economic Corridor, the East–West Economic Corridor, and the Southern Economic Corridor), amongst many others.

The GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework, 2012–2022, adopted in 2011, was anchored in the development of economic corridors and expanded the GMS Program from conventional infrastructure to multi-sector investments designed to foster economic corridor development – involving stronger cross-sectoral linkages, better consideration of regional economic development's spatial aspects, more local stakeholder involvement, and more effective monitoring. In 2014, GMS members ratified the GMS Cross-Border Transport Facilitation Agreement, and agreed on the memorandum of understanding (MOU) for 'Early Harvest'[3] implementation of the agreement, allowing subregional movement of commercial vehicles and containers to begin. In 2017, a midterm review of the Strategic Framework, 2012–2022 was conducted to ensure the programme's continued effectiveness and responsiveness. The review called for an expansion of economic corridors to boost connectivity between countries and within rural and urban centres to ensure that the benefits of economic growth are more broadly distributed.

The Sixth GMS Summit in Hanoi in March 2018 adopted the GMS Regional Investment Framework 2022. This framework is project-based, with 222 projects totalling about $65 billion. It also produced a Joint Declaration of the Summit, the Hanoi Plan of Action, 2018–2022, and a number of related documents to promote cooperation in this period. The joint declaration recognised the GMS's transformation, which has yielded unprecedented favourable outcomes.

[3] The MOU allows each GMS country to issue up to 500 GMS road transport permits and temporary admission documents for goods and passenger vehicles registered, owned and/or operated in that country (Greater Mekong Subregion (2018).

During 1993–2018, the annual economic growth rate of the GMS was 6.3%, while GDP per capita increased by 5% per year and intra-subregional trade grew 90-fold. In line with economic improvement, GMS countries achieved better quality of life for people in the subregion, heading towards high-quality development. Since the establishment of the GMS, the 3Cs (connectivity, competitiveness, and community) formed the core building blocks of the programme, particularly physical connectivity via economic corridors. Developments in power exchange amongst GMS members were highly appreciated, and will contribute to establishing an integrated regional power market.

Mekong–Lancang Cooperation

The Mekong–Lancang Cooperation (MLC) framework includes six countries – Viet Nam, Cambodia, China, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Thailand. The MLC was formally established at the First MLC Leaders' Meeting in China on 23 March 2016, and the Sanya Declaration on Mekong–Lancang Cooperation was adopted at this event, which defined the '3+5' cooperation framework, i.e. three cooperation pillars[4] and five key priority areas.[5] Within 4 years, the MLC cooperation framework has achieved impressive outcomes, including the completion of all 45 Early Harvest projects in the priority areas.

The MLC has been highly institutionalised, with the holding of a Leaders' Meeting every 2 years, and the annual Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Senior Officials' Meeting. Member states also set up national secretariats for the MLC in 2017. The second MLC Summit in January 2018 adopted two important documents, the Phnom Penh Joint Declaration and the Plan of Action on the MLC, 2018–2022, which focused on strengthening sectoral cooperation planning and implementing small and medium-sized cooperation projects. The MLC's characteristics of 'pragmatism, high efficiency, [and a] focus on concrete projects' are considered the key factors for the impressive outcomes of the MLC mechanism (Lancang–Mekong Cooperation, 2017). It had provided financial support for about 214 projects and reports in the Mekong region as of January 2018 (Le, 2018).

With regards to the challenging new regional and international context, MLC leaders have reaffirmed their focus on consolidating coordination between countries in handling regional challenges; bringing about long-term benefits for people; raising the technological capacity of businesses; improving market stability; and pushing the implementation of the MLC Plan of Action, 2018–2020 on regional connectivity, production capacity, water resources, trade, and agriculture. Most recently, the Fifth MLC Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane in February 2020 emphasised important areas of cooperation in the coming period, including (i) enhancing trade connectivity, firstly focusing on promoting synergies between the MLC and the Belt and Road Initiative; the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, 2025; and the Ayeyarwady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) Master Plan, 2019–2023; (ii) advancing

[4] The three cooperation pillars are (i) political and security issues, (ii) economic and social areas, and (iii) sustainable development and humanities.

[5] The five key priority areas are (i) connectivity; (ii) production capacity; (iii) cross-border economic cooperation; (iv) water resources; and (v) agriculture, and poverty reduction.

cooperation in public health; (iii) deepening water resources cooperation; (iv) promoting agricultural cooperation, in particular promptly implementing the MLC Three-Year Action Plan on Agricultural Cooperation, 2020–2022; (v) promoting efforts to improve people's livelihoods; (vi) actively conducting non-traditional security cooperation, enhancing exchanges over governance, sharing development experiences, and jointly defending peace and tranquillity in border areas; and (vii) facilitating coordinated development of subregional mechanisms such as the GMS, the MRC, and the ACMECS to produce a greater effect.

Cambodia–Lao PDR–Viet Nam Development Triangle

The Cambodia–Lao PDR–Viet Nam (CLV) Development Triangle was initiated at the First Summit in Vientiane in 1999. It serves to promote socio-economic development, and hunger and poverty reduction, contributing to the stability and security of the three countries. The 10th CLV Summit in Hanoi adopted the Joint Declaration on CLV Cooperation, emphasising the need to strengthen connectivity amongst the three economies to enhance economic competitiveness, effectively take part in regional and global value chains, and respond to common challenges. The summit agreed to gradually expand the CLV Development Triangle Area. Accordingly, the leaders adopted the Master Plan on CLV Economic Connectivity up to 2030, aiming to promote connectivity in infrastructure, institutions, economy, and people-to-people exchange.

CLMV Cooperation

The first CLMV Summit was held at the 10th ASEAN Summit on November 2004 in Vientiane. The summit adopted the Vientiane Declaration, aiming to strengthen economic cooperation and integration in the frameworks of the Mekong subregion and ASEAN. CLMV cooperation areas include trade, investment, agriculture, industry, transport, tourism, and human resources development. In September 2019, the CLMV Economic Ministers' Meeting agreed on a framework for economic development, focusing on (i) connectivity to facilitate trade and investment cooperation; (ii) measures to attract skilled workers; and (iii) measures to attract investment in the sectors with comparative advantages (mainly agriculture, food, and tourism). This framework is expected to be approved by CMLV leaders in 2020.

Ayeyarwady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS)

Established in November 2003, the ACMECS presents a framework for economic cooperation between Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The ACMECS has seven areas of cooperation: (i) trade and investment facilitation, (ii) agriculture and industrial cooperation, (iii) transport linkages, (iv) tourism cooperation, (v) human resources, (vi) public health, and (vii) environment. Implementation is via seven working groups, each of which is responsible for one area of cooperation. Each ACMECS country coordinates at least one area of cooperation (Le, 2018).

ASEAN–Mekong Basin Development Cooperation

The ASEAN Summit in 1995 established the ASEAN–Mekong Basin Development Cooperation (AMBDC). This was an initiative serving to link ASEAN with GMS cooperation. The AMBDC covers a railway corridor from Singapore to Kunming, Yunnan – crossing the Malaysian Peninsula, Thailand, and the Lao PDR, and branching out to Cambodia and Myanmar – as the main axis. The programme is considered instrumental to Mekong river basin development, whilst presenting a forum for policy dialogue between ASEAN and China to strengthen subregional economic development, cooperation, and poverty reduction. The last meeting under the ASEAN–Mekong Basin Development Cooperation mechanism was the 15th Ministerial Meeting in Brunei Darussalam in August 2013. As of 2019, the Singapore–Kunming Rail Link was largely incomplete.

3.2 Cooperation Mechanisms with Partner Countries outside the Region

Mekong–Japan Cooperation: The Mekong–Japan Cooperation Framework was started in 2007. This Framework covers various cooperation areas such as socio-economic development, infrastructure construction, implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, environmental protection, and Mekong water resources security. The 10th Mekong–Japan Summit Meeting in October 2018 adopted the Tokyo Strategy, expressing the determination to cooperate in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the Mekong region to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Action Plan for 'A Decade toward the Green Mekong', adopted in 2009, is incorporated in The Mekong–Japan Initiative for SDGs toward 2030. Priority areas of The Mekong–Japan Initiative for SDGs toward 2030 include (i) environmental and urban issues (waste management/sound material-cycle society, marine plastic litter/water and river pollution, disaster risk reduction and disaster management, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and building climate resilience); (ii) sustainable natural resources management and utilisation (agricultural productivity, water resources management, and sustainable forest management); and (iii) inclusive growth (education and human capital investment, health and social welfare, gender equality and empowerment of women, legal and judicial cooperation, promoting inclusive and sustainable industrialisation, and tourism cooperation).

The Mekong countries and Japan shared a common recognition that all the approaches (region-wide approach, open approach, and public–private cooperative approach) are essential to achieve the SDGs in the Mekong region. In addition, the Mekong countries and Japan affirmed that these approaches are in line with ASEAN approaches relating to SDGs, including ASEAN's ongoing work on narrowing the development gap and promoting complementarities between the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Lower Mekong Initiative

The United States (US) returned to the Mekong region in 2009 with the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) between the US and Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Viet Nam, and Myanmar (officially joined in 2012). LMI members develop shared responses to transboundary challenges across six pillars – agriculture and food security, connectivity, education, energy security, environment and water, and health – and in cross-cutting areas such as gender issues. LMI members are also members of Friends of the Lower Mekong, an important convening platform to improve donor coordination in programming development assistance in the Lower Mekong subregion and to promote policy dialogue.

To date, the LMI has carried out a number of outstanding initiatives and collaborative activities, with significant funds from the US. The MRC and the Mississippi River Commission signed a 'sister river' Memorandum of Understanding in 2010 to promote annual exchange of experience. The programs on 'Forecast Mekong' and environmental cooperation reflect efforts to monitor climate change in the subregion using an automatic observatory.

Mekong–Ganga Cooperation

In 2000, the Mekong–Ganga Cooperation (MGC) was approved at a meeting of six foreign ministers from Cambodia, India, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The MGC serves to strengthen friendship and solidarity amongst the countries in the Mekong and the Ganga basin. The MGC covers four main areas – tourism, culture, education, and transport connectivity. The 11th Mekong–Ganga Cooperation Senior Officials' Meeting in New Delhi in July 2019 discussed the Draft MGC Action Plan for 2019–2022. India's assistance to Cambodia, the Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam under the MGC Quick Impact Project Scheme since its inception in 2014 is progressing steadily. A total of 24 projects with aggregate investment of about $1.2 million have been completed so far, including 15 in Cambodia and nine in Viet Nam. In addition, one project in Cambodia and three projects in the Lao PDR are under implementation.

In addition to these mechanisms, there are other mechanisms such as the Mekong–Republic of Korea Cooperation and the Swiss–Mekong Region Cooperation Strategy, though the level of cooperation is not significant.

3.3 Some Limitations of Current MSR Mechanisms

Despite the diversity, ongoing cooperation mechanisms involving MSR countries exhibit some limitations. First, such cooperation mechanisms present a complex web, which may be prone to duplication and inefficient use of resources. For instance, GMS cooperation covers transportation, energy, environment, tourism, telecommunications, trade, investment, human resources development, agricultural and rural development, and urban development along economic corridors – many of which may be similar to the three pillars and five priority areas under the MLC, Mekong–Japan cooperation, and the LMI. Dr. An Pich Hatda, head of the MRC Secretariat, acknowledged that 'overlapping is unavoidable, but what is vital is to create a more coherent and effective coordination mechanism that ensures joint efforts' (MRC, 2019d). As a consequence, any new initiatives in the MSR will have to address the explicit question of potential duplication and coordination with existing cooperation mechanisms.

Second, the existing mechanisms are yet to sufficiently improve efficiency in water use and management. MRC (2017: 2) notes that:

> The absence of joint planning and collaboration between border provinces has resulted in inappropriate infrastructure development in the Mekong Delta. Uncoordinated development of flood control and irrigation systems, such as dikes and embankments, could cause floods and drought in other areas of the floodplain and may result in water pollution and shortages, and less agricultural production*.*

More recent analysis and data also show that the natural flow of water in the Mekong River has been adversely affected by various infrastructure projects along the river (Viet Nam Department of Water Resources Management, 2020). According to the MRC, the water level in Thailand's Chiang Sen was 2.10 metres, 0.92 metres lower than its long-term average (3.02 metres) during June–July 2019 (MRC, 2019c).

Third, notwithstanding the range of cooperation mechanisms, the diversity of their funding sources has not been improved significantly. For instance, the CLMV and Thailand are yet to fund activities under the MLC. Vannarith (2016) asserted that the main challenge for the MRC during 2016–2020 is the mobilisation of funding. Given the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak, which may drain the fiscal space of MSR countries and external donors, ensuring sufficient funds for Mekong projects may become no easy task.

4. Policy Recommendations for MSR Countries

- Facilitate domestic economic reforms to address weaknesses of socio-economic development. Maintain a regular review of the status of the MSR as a whole and individual countries relative to other countries in the region (ASEAN, China, etc.) to recommend appropriate policy recommendations. Promote a better balance between economic and social targets via scoping of inclusive and sustainable development.
- Encourage greater cooperation amongst member countries in undertaking economic promotion activities, accelerating the development of economic corridors, connectivity, cross-border trade, and investment, etc. Promote effective consultations with individual member countries to better understand their reform process and their need for assistance in order to develop more suitable assistance and/or cooperation programmes. New areas of economic development (such as ICT, circular economy, etc.) should be prioritised. Adopt a more proactive approach to planning and the management of trade-offs between sectors and countries.
- Promote synergies and complementarities between the current MSR cooperation programmes and other global and regional initiatives for the development of a sustainable, integrated, and prosperous subregion. From this perspective, rethinking of institutional arrangements for regional cooperation at both the national and subregional/regional levels may be considered in order to facilitate

the participation of a more representative set of stakeholders in the prioritisation of activities and to ensure synergies between the various initiatives.

- Foster the development a long-term, diversified, and sustainable financing system, enhancing financial infrastructure connectivity and encouraging development financial institutions to play active roles in subregional cooperation.
- Facilitate a regional and open approach for addressing new challenges and taking advantage of opportunities for the most sizeable benefits of all participating countries and social groups. Collaboration with external international institutions and donors will help promote the effectiveness of the assistance programmes, especially subregional ones. A cooperation mechanism between MSR countries, with financial/technical support provided by a more advanced country/international institution, needs to be encouraged.

References

ADB (2018), *Review of Configuration of the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Corridors*. Manila: Asian Development Bank. https://greatermekong.org/sites/default/files/gms-corridors-configuration-review.pdf (accessed 10 April 2020).

APO (2019), *APO Productivity Databook 2019.* Tokyo: Asian Productivity Organization. https://www.apo-tokyo.org/publications/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/APO-Productivity-Databook-2019_light.pdf (accessed 10 April 2020).

ASEAN (2017a), *ASEAN Community Progress Monitoring System 2017 – Inclusive Development.* Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Inclusive-Development.pdf (accessed 2 April 2020).

ASEAN (2017b), *ASEAN Community Progress Monitoring System 2017 – Narrowing the Development Gap.* Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. https://www.aseanstats.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Narrowig-the-Development-Gap.pdf (accessed 2 April 2020).

ASEAN (2017c), *ASEAN Statistical Report on Millennium Development Goals 2017.* Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. https://asean.org/storage/2012/05/ASEAN_MDG_2017.pdf (accessed 9 April 2020).

ASEAN (2018), *ASEAN Statistical Highlights 2018.* Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. https://www.aseanstats.org/infographics/asean-statistical-highlight-2018/ (accessed 2 April 2020).

ASEAN (2019), *ASEAN Statistical Yearbook 2019.* Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat. https://www.aseanstats.org/publication/asyb-2019/ (accessed on April 2, 2020).

ASEAN and UNCTAD (2019), *ASEAN Investment Report 2019 – FDI in Services: Focus on Health Care.* Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat and United Nations Conference on Trade and Investment.

https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/unctad_asean_air2019d1.pdf (accessed 9 April 2020).

Greater Mekong Subregion (2018), 'Joint Summit Declaration', The Sixth GMS Summit, Ha Noi, 31 March. https://greatermekong.org/joint-summit-declaration-6th-gms-summit-leaders (accessed 10 April 2020).

Greater Mekong Subregion (2018), 'Cross-Border Transport Facilitation Agreement: 'Early Harvest' Implementation Guide'. Hanoi. (https://www.greatermekong.org/sites/default/files/PRF8-VIE.pdf (accessed 20 May 2020).

Government of Japan (2016), 'Fifth Science and Technology Basic Plan'. Tokyo. https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/english/basic/5thbasicplan_outline.pdf (accessed 12 June 2020).

Ho, S. and K. Pitakdumrongkit (2019), 'Can ASEAN Play a Greater Role in the Mekong Subregion?', *The Diplomat*, 20 January. https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/can-asean-play-a-greater-role-in-the-mekong-subregion/ (accessed 1 April 2020).

International Labour Organization, ILOStat data. https://www.ilo.org/ilostat (accessed 9 April 2020).

Kimura, F. and A. Obashi (2009), 'International Production Networks: Comparison between China and ASEAN', *ERIA Discussion Paper Series*, ERIA-DP-2009-01. Jakarta: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia. https://www.eria.org/ERIA-DP-2009-01.pdf (accessed 2 April 2020).

Lancang–Mekong Cooperation (2017), 'A Brief Introduction of Lancang–Mekong Cooperation'. http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/gylmhz_1/jj/t1519110.htm (accessed 15 April 2020).

Le, H.B. (2018), 'Cooperation Mechanisms in the Mekong Region and Vietnam's participation', *Communist Review*, 27 July. http://english.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/Foreign-Relations-and-International-Intergration/2018/1141/Cooperation-Mechanisms-in-the-Mekong-Region-and-VietnAMSs-participation.aspx (accessed 3 April 2020).

Mekong–Lancang Cooperation (2020), 'Joint Press Communiqué of the Fifth Mekong–Lancang Cooperation Foreign Ministers' Meeting', Vientiane, 20 February. http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/zywj_5/t1759773.htm (accessed 3 April 2020).

Ministry of External Affairs, India (2019), '11th Mekong–Ganga Cooperation Senior Officials' Meeting', Press Release, 9 July. https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/31560/11th+Mekong+Ganga+Cooperation+Senior+Officials+Meeting (accessed 3 April 2020).

MRC (2017), Mekong Delta Water Issues: Collaboration between Cambodia and Viet Nam. IWRM Brief.

MRC (2019a), *Annual Report 2018 – Part 1: Overview.* Vientiane: Mekong River Commission. http://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/Annual-Report-2018-Part-1-final.pdf (accessed 11 April 2020).

MRC (2019b), 'Mekong Related Regional Cooperation Frameworks Recommend More Joint Efforts, Coordination to Boost Effectiveness', News Release, 16 August. http://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/news/mekong-related-regional-cooperation-frameworks-recommend-more-joint-efforts/ (accessed 12 May 2020).

MRC (2019c), 'Mekong Water Levels Reach Low Record', News Release, 18 July. http://www.mrcmekong.org/news-and-events/news/mekong-water-levels-reach-low-record/ (accessed 30 May 2020).

MRC (2019d), *State of the Basin Report 2018.* Vientiane: Mekong River Commission. http://www.mrcmekong.org/assets/Publications/SOBR-v8_Final-for-web.pdf (accessed 12 April 2020).

Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (2018), 'Regional Economic Outlook and Update on Digital Economy', Presentation at the APEC Economic Committee Plenary Meeting, Port Moresby, 5 March.

UNDP (2019), Human Development Report 2019 – Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century. http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf (accessed 10 April 2020).

UNDP (2020), Human Development Data (1990–2018). http://www.hdr.undp.org/en/data (accessed 9 April 2020).

USAID (2020), Lower Mekong Initiative. https://www.usaid.gov/vi/vietnam/lower-mekong-initiative-lmi (accessed 4 April 2020).

Vannarith, C. (2016), 'The Mekong Region: From a Divided to a Connected Region', Report for Konrad Adenauer Stiftung.

Viet Nam Department of Water Resources Management (2020), 'Alleviating Water Shortage in Mekong Downstream Area' [Hạn chế tình trạng thiếu nước nghiêm trọng ở hạ lưu sông Mê Kông], in Vietnamese, 8 May. http://dwrm.gov.vn/index.php?language=vi&nv=news&op=Tai-nguyen-nuoc/Han-che-tinh-trang-thieu-nuoc-nghiem-trong-o-ha-luu-song-Me-Kong-8948 (accessed 10 June 2020).

Vo, T.T. (2008), 'Narrowing the Development Gap in ASEAN: Approaches and Policy Recommendations', in H. Soesastro (ed.) *Deepening Economic Integration: The ASEAN Economic Community and Beyond*, ERIA Research Project Report 2007-1-2. Chiba: IDE-JETRO, pp.147–55.

World Bank (2020), World Bank Open Data. https://data.worldbank.org/ (accessed 10 April 2020).

World Economic Forum (2019), *The Global Competitiveness Report 2019.* Geneva: World Economic Forum. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_TheGlobalCompetitivenessReport2019.pdf (accessed 9 April 2020).