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Implemented by Mekong Institute (MI)

Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region Project

END OF PROJECT EVALUATION REPORT

December 2023

Khon Kaen, Thailand



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Trade and Investment Facilitation Department (TIF)
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Khon Kaen, Thailand

ACRONYMS

ADC	Agricultural Development and Commercialization
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCG	Bio–Circular–Green Economic Model (Thailand)
CCI	Cultural and Creative Industry
CLMTV	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam
CBET	Community–Based ecotourism
CBT	Community–Based Tourism
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DASTA	Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (Thailand)
DMC	Destination Management Company
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
HDR	Human Resources Development
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IoT	Internet of Things
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
KII	Key Informant Interview
MFF	Mekong Flooded Forest
MIGIP	Mekong Inclusive Growth and Innovation Programme
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MI	Mekong Institute
MIST	Mekong Innovation in Sustainable Tourism
MISTI	Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation (Cambodia)
MKCF	Mekong–Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund
MoE	Ministry of Environment (Cambodia)
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium–Sized Enterprise
MTCO	Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office
NTO	National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and in collaboration with the local
NCSTI	National Council of Science, Technology & Innovation (Cambodia)
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PoA	Plan of Action
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
RoK	Government of the Republic of Korea
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STD	Smart Tourism Destination
STEPI	Science and Technology Policy Institute of South Korea
TAT	Tourism Authority of Thailand
TIF	Trade and Investment Facilitation
TTCI	Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index

TWG	Technical Working Group (ADB)
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNWTO	World Tourism Organization–UN Agency
US\$	United States Dollars

KEY PROJECT DATA

TABLE 1 – PROJECT COSTS

Key Project Data (US\$)	MKCF Grant Proposed (US\$)	Modified Budget (USD)	Actual Amount Approved (US\$)
Total project cost	999, 157	20,310	978,847
Total grant utilization			946,226

TABLE 2 – PROJECT KEY DATES

Key Dates	Expected	Modified	Actual
Grant Proposal	Januray 30, 2020		
Grant Approval	March 06, 2020		April 1, 2020
Grant Effectiveness			April 1, 2020
Project Completion			December 31, 2023 (the project was extended from March 31, 2023 to December 31, 2023)
Grant Closing			February 2024
Months (Effectiveness to Completion)	36 months (3 years)	9 months	45 months (3 years and nine months)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainability is the key principle which determines the extent to which a smart tourism city establishes a foundation for sustainable social, economic, and environmental growth. Sustainability has become not only a working tool in connection with the maintenance of environmental resources but also a defining element of new concept in tourism sector—**Smart Tourism Destinations (STDs)** and **Sustainable Tourism**. Hence, sustainability is the key driver of destination competitiveness.¹

Smartness comprises the core components of information and communication technology (ICT), innovation and leadership, and social capital. **Smart tourism** can support sustainable development and influence tourism destinations. **Innovation** is the core part of a STD based on a robust technological infrastructure that improves the traveler's experience through providing them with real-time information, personalized products, and seamless travel experience. According to UNEP and UNWTO's Guide for Policy Makers on Making Tourism More Sustainable, **Sustainable tourism** refers to the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.²

In the Mekong region, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam (CLMTV) are geographically connected. All CLMTV are endowed with diverse natural and cultural tourism assets, especially the **cultural and natural heritage**. Tourism has been recognized as the major sector their economies in terms of creating jobs, income, foreign exchange receipts, fostering regional cooperation and economic integration. The key success factors of the CLMTV tourism are the improvements in both software and hardware infrastructure, including ICT development. In recent years, technologies and smart tourism development have been emerged in line with the ASEAN's joint declaration on utilizing digital tools to enhance competitiveness, facilitate growth, enhance tourism management capacity among member states, and develop sustainable tourism.³

In reality, each country has different priorities and approaches to smart tourism—(i) STD development, enhancement of digital communications, and professional capacity for high-priority tourism sites in Cambodia; (ii) Increased investments in physical linkages and market intelligence to facilitate tourism data collection and analysis Laos; (iii) Building a smart tourism ecosystem to support inclusive destination planning in Myanmar; (iv) Use of advanced technologies to attract strategic markets and drive experience-based, sustainable tourism; and (v) accelerated digital transformation to enhance tourist experiences, connect tourism service infrastructure, and enhance the application of green and clean technologies in service and tourist accommodation establishments.

At the same time, CLMTV, especially at the subnational level, have been facing certain challenges in obtaining smart ICT infrastructure and smart technologies to serve the development of smart cities and smart tourism, as compared with the other regions. This limitation has affected the tourism sector's competitiveness in some countries in the Mekong region. Therefore, the Government policies and guidelines on smart technologies, e.g., technology design and experience co-creation, are needed in line with the increasing requirements for investments in ICT infrastructure and data-sharing platforms. Creating an enabling environment to engage the private sector to utilize expertise and optimize technology transfer and wider access to finance for tourism businesses to develop innovative models supported by a investment risk-sharing mechanism, if succeeded, will contribute the advancement of smart tourism. Finally, enhancement of digital skills of the tourism workforce through vocational training, hands-on training for government officials and tourism businesses to adapt to the future of digital transformation is a strategic solution.

¹ <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/25896>

² <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284415496>

³ <https://mekongtourism.org/opportunities-and-challenges-for-smart-tourism-development-in-the-gms/>

In response to an increasing needs for digital transformation to support the development of sustainable tourism in the Mekong region, Mekong Institute (MI) and its co-implementer with the support from the Government of Republic of Korea through the Mekong–Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF) designed and implemented the project on **Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development In Mekong Region** from April 01, 2020–December 31, 2023.

The project was implemented by **MI–Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF)** in collaboration with its co-implementer, **Tour De M. Co., Ltd.**, RoK. Its ultimate objectives are to build a collaborative program with key institutions and organizations in RoK to improve human resources, heritage conservation and social impact management, enhance regional cooperation among Mekong countries to maximize the heritage connection and promote sustainable tourism, and serve the Action Plan of Mekong–RoK Action Plan 2017–2020 on preserving the ecosystem, promoting green growth in the Mekong region, and strengthening the Mekong countries' capacities.

This end of project evaluation assesses the project performance and results delivered from April 2020–December 2023 . Specifically, the evaluation objectives are to:

- Identify and document issues, challenges, experiences, lessons learned, best practices and success stories arising from the implementation of the project activities
- Develop a compendium of smart tourism technologies in the tourism value chain and tourism ecosystem identified to prospective investors in the Investment Forum
- Document country–wise case studies from the implementation of project activities
- Prepare significant policy paper brief to the CLMTV governments for necessary action with a way forward to continue the efforts on Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in Mekong Countries linkage to creative industries for tourism sector, national tourism development plans, private sector to expand investment in the identified areas and universities/institutes to adopt the training materials in their academic curriculum.

The project is evaluated in alignment with with the OECD–DAC evaluation guidelines and criteria, namely, relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability, which are supported by associated questions and justifications as specified in the evaluation framework and rating in Annexes 1 and 2 of this report.

The end of project evaluation has followed a stepped approach consisting of four main phases. A mixed–method approach comprising both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was used for this project evaluation. Quantitative data was collected through the online survey and project filing system while qualitative data was received from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Qualitative data was triangulated with quantitative data (numeric and measurable data) collected from desk study and the survey result. This helped to increase validity of evaluation findings.

The overall project performance is **successful with some areas in need of improvements**. The project design and implementation is assessed **relevant** as it is consistent with CLMTV's needs and priorities for tourism development. At a broader scope, the project is **coherent** with the global, regional, and national strategies and policies on sustainable and smart tourism. The project is rated **partly effective** in realizing most of the targeted short–term outcomes and outputs while it lacks an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and mechanism and tools to measure and enhance the effects of the project results. The project is assessed **efficient** in terms of resource allocation and implementation arrangements given the impact of COVID–19 pandemic.

The evaluation does not assess the project impact and sustainability in consideration of its nature. Instead, the evaluation discusses the possibilities for the project results to be sustained and impact created in the post project closing period. As a result, the project is assessed **likely to be sustainable** and **likely to be impactful**.

The evaluation showcases the compendia of applicable smart tourism technologies and areas for regional cooperation in the Mekong region, and the success stories built on the project implementation and results. To contribute to the project success and continuity, a policy brief on promoting the synergies between smart tourism and cultural and creative industries (CCIs) is established and proposed to MI and the CLMTV for consideration in the future.

The evaluation addresses the issues, lessons learnt, challenges, and proposes follow-up actions to Mekong Institute (MI) as below:

Issues

- Training curriculum package and applied method—A comprehensive training package on hospitality and sustainable and smart tourism and the MI's Modular Training Approach with Action Plan Implementation (API) should have been produced and applied. The documented training materials are used as the project resources within and beyond the project timeframe while the AIP can help the project measure the training impact and the project outcome.
- Lack of a mechanism to measure the effectiveness and influence of the digital platforms produced.
- Lack of an effective coordination mechanism with the Mekong countries to increase the project visibility.
- Lack of follow-up actions with the project beneficiaries and stakeholders upon completion of the project activities.
- Lack of an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and project review meetings with the TWG has affected the project effectiveness.

Lessons learnt

- The designed project with indicators should be fully implemented and monitored and evaluated (M&E)
- The TWG and the key project partner organizations should be established at the project start. This may help the project coordinate with the project beneficiaries and stakeholders in CLMTV more effectively.
- Stronger stakeholder engagement with public and private sectors will enhance the project results
- The project with measurable outcomes should be considered for designing new projects.

Challenges

- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is the key challenge facing the project implementation and results. The project has removed some activities, such as the project baseline study and M&E activities, and extended its duration for a nine-month time from the approved project closing date.
- The current political and social situation in Myanmar has affected the tourism in Bagan, i.e. the UNESCO World Heritage sites are at risks and number of international visitors has decreased, and the country as a whole. The representatives of Bagan City and public organizations did not attend the Exchange Program and could not enter the joint MoUs. The current situation may also deter the regional cooperation as well as the foreign investment in the country.

Follow-up Actions

- Mekong Institute (MI) may consider the next phase(s) of this project to further support the tourism sector in CLMTV by promoting **smart tourism destinations** and **sustainable tourism in sequence with phase 1** in consideration of environmental protection at the heritage sites and/or towns and surrounding areas, adding values to the cultural heritage sites and towns, i.e., the UNESCO World Heritage sites as the unique feature of this project, and creating synergies with associated cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in each country.

- The Mekong countries and Mekong Institute (MI) may consider the recommendations under the Policy Brief for further solutions and actions to realize the synergy between CCIs and tourism to promote **Cultural Tourisms**
- The Mekong countries and Mekong Institute (MI) may consider the recommendations under the Policy Brief for further solutions and actions to strengthen CCIs in each country

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

A. Project Summary

Mekong Institute (MI), with the support of the Mekong–Republic of Korea Cooperation Fund (MKCF), implemented the project on the Sustainable and Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong Region from April 2020–December 2023. The project has addressed such development problems as (i) low awareness of tourism career opportunities to attract young entrants to absorb career in tourism sector resulting in shortage of skilled tourism workers and destination managers; (ii) complex business and regulatory environment along with underdeveloped transport and urban infrastructure in secondary destinations limiting efficient tourism service delivery; (iii) fragmented information flow, lack of integrated destination planning and management among the tourism value chain; and (iv) limited awareness on private investment opportunities and lack of funding to cater the growing demand for services.

Responding to the captioned problems, the project objectives are to promote human resource development (HRD) to manage the growing inbound tourism market through the adoption of sustainable and smart tourism practices in the Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam). The project intervention targeted on the tourism–related organizations in government and private sectors, academe, and civil society organizations (CSOs) through (i) capacity development programs on sustainable tourism to strengthen the quality of hospitality and tourism services, (ii) promoting and deepening regional cooperation between Republic of Korea (RoK) and CLMTV focusing on historical and cultural town twinning, such as Luang Prabang (Lao PDR), Bagan (Myanmar), Siem Reap (Cambodia), Ayutthaya (Thailand), Hue (Vietnam) and the Korean towns of Seokguram Grotto and Bulguksa Temple, Haeinsa Temple Janggyeong Panjeon, the Depositories for the Tripitaka etc., through the exchange program, roadshows, investment forums for information sharing and adoption of best practices in hospitality, tourism, and culture sectors; and (iii) introducing smart technologies to facilitate tourism development and strengthen competitiveness for the Mekong countries.

Mekong Institute (MI) started the project implementation in April 2020. The project results and its implementation are described as below:

TABLE 3 – PROJECT SUMMARY

Project Summary
<p>Project Impact (long-term)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project will build a collaborative program with key institutions and organizations in RoK to improve human resources, infrastructure, heritage conservation and social impact management, subregional marketing, private sector development, and travel facilitation in the Mekong countries • The project will enhance regional cooperation among Mekong countries thanks to its regional nature through sustainable tourism in terms of income and employment generation • The project outcomes will serve the Action Plan of Mekong–Republic of Korea Action Plan (2017–2020) which indicates the priority areas in development cooperation between Mekong countries and the RoK to preserve the ecosystem, promote green growth in the Mekong region, and strengthen capacity of the Mekong countries

Project Outcomes (short-term)

- Outcome 1. Improved level of hospitality and quality of services in tourism sector
- Outcome 2. Enhanced collaboration through twinning of historical/cultural towns between Korea and Mekong countries
- Outcome 3. Enhanced access to online platforms

Project Outputs

The project outputs and activities have been designed in commensuration with each of the respective project outcomes as follows:

- Output 1. Korea–Mekong hospitality and mentoring programs
 - Activity 1.1. Curriculum Development on sustainable tourism
 - Activity 1.2. Training and e–mentoring programs
 - Activity 1.3. Roadshows in CLMTV
- Output 2. Collaboration through twinning of historical/cultural towns between Korea and the Mekong countries
 - Activity 2.1. Exchange program in Mekong countries and Korea
 - Activity 2.2. Investment Forums to introduce investment opportunities
- Output 3. Access to online platforms
 - Activity 3.1. A well–developed concept for content development to support sustainable tourism development
 - Activity 3.2. Developed online platforms
 - Activity 3.3. Project Working Group’s recommendations
 - Activity 3.4. Training on Designing and Building Digital Interactive Infrastructure
 - Activity 3.5. Regional workshop and filmstrip on engaging travel Bloggers, Marketing and Growth Strategy and Baseline study

B. Project Component and Implementation

The project consists of three main components, namely (i) Component A: Facilitating Smart Tourism Development in the Mekong countries; (ii) Component B: Korea–Mekong Hospitality Training & Mentoring; and Component C: Twinning of historical/cultural towns between Korea and Mekong Countries. Each component is described as below:

Component A: Facilitating Smart Tourism Development in Mekong countries

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can offer an innovative approach to sustainable tourism development. ICT applications can play a critical role in managing the impacts of tourism and destination managers, amongst other key stakeholders. Smart tourism destinations based on ICT are emerging as an important tool for sustainable tourism. This component aims to develop digital tangible infrastructure that can support new data model of smart tourism and stimulate innovative entrepreneurial spirit among local tourist providers.

The project will support development of smart tourism online and offline platform using IoT and virtual reality program. Training will be provided to batch of young leaders on design and creation of SMART tourism. This will be supported through development of software online platform and mobile applications. Concept of RoK–Mekong cultural tourism development through sustainable practices using SMART technologies shall be employed. The technological intervention will be further accentuated through providing training on designing and building digital interactive infrastructure such as physical info posts and other gadgets. A regional training on designing and building digital interactive infrastructure such as physical info posts and a workshop on engaging travel bloggers, marketing and growth strategy will be organized for tourism operators and business

owners. Design and brand creation of Smart Mekong tourism will be initiated to promote sustainable and smart tourism in the Mekong countries.

Component B. Korea–Mekong Hospitality Training & Mentoring

The training and mentoring aims at improving the level of hospitality and quality of service through training local young tourism leaders in the Mekong countries to cater rapidly increasing number of visitors and their high expectations. The training programs may include comprehensive area of tourism business and opportunities to experience RoK’s developed ICT in tourism sector and practices/examples of sustainable and smart tourism. In addition, Roadshows are organized with an aim to generate awareness at selected universities institutes related to tourism studies in order to introduce the project and select prospective young leaders for the training. Selection procedures will be installed with specific criteria to recruit students for the training. The institutes/universities located in the cultural historical sites of neighboring areas are given priority in the project.

Component C. Twinning of historical/cultural towns between Korea and Mekong Countries

Twinning activities initiates among cultural and historical towns sites in the Mekong countries and RoK with similar city characteristics to build synergies to transfer sustainable tourism solutions and best practices, and adopt smart solutions in the Mekong countries, namely, Luang Prabang, Bagan, Siem Reap, Ayutthaya, and Hue with similar towns sites in Korea. Public Private Partnerships (PPP) will be considered to develop and operate tourist attractions such as natural areas, museums, historic buildings, and theme parks as well as larger economic infrastructure coupled with associated services. Partnerships among government, industry associations, development partners, and individual enterprises will be strengthened to improve tourism marketing and promotion.

The implementation of all project activities In line with designated components are summarized in Table 4:

TABLE 4 – PROJECT ACTIVITIES BY COMPONENT

Component	Designated Activity	Indicator	Timeline			Participant
			Planned	Modified ⁴	Actual	
Component A: Facilitating Smart Tourism Development in Mekong countries	A.1. Concept Development (in Korean and English) designed	A well–developed contents and products to support sustainable tourism development	Feb–Mar 2020		Mar 2020–Feb 2021	-
	A.2. On–line Platforms (websites, guidebook, etc.) established	No of online platforms, ie., social media: website, facebook, instagram, blogs, etc. a. Website www.mekongsustainabletourism.com b. Facebook www.facebook.com/mekongstory c. Instagram www.instagram.com/mekong_story d. Blogs https://blog.naver.com/mekongstory e. Other websites f. E–brochure	Mar–Jul 2020		Mar 2020–Feb 2021	-
	A.3.1. Regional Workshop on engaging travel bloggers, marketing	01 The Regional Workshop to (i) examine current status of sustainable and smart tourism development in the Mekong countries during COVID–19, (ii) understand	Sept–Oct 2020		Nov 16–20, 2020	22

⁴ Subject to MI request for project extension

	and growth strategy organized	its impact on tourism businesses and stakeholders, and (iii) identify strengths and opportunities for Mekong countries					
	A.3.2 Project Baseline conducted	A Baseline Study	Jan 2020	-	-	-	
	A.4. Training on Designing and Building Digital Interactive Infrastructure organized	01 training program	July–Sept 2020		Nov 30–Dec 04, 2020	22	
	A.5. Monitoring and Evaluation for Year 1	01 Project Working Group (PWG) Meeting	Nov 2020	-	-	-	
Component B: Korea – Mekong Hospitality Training & Mentoring	B.1. Roadshows in CLMTV conducted	05 roadshows in CLMTV	Jan 2021	Nov 2022–Mar 2023	Nov 18, 2022 –Mar 13, 2023	259	
	<i>B.1.1. Roadshow in Siem Reap, Cambodia</i>	01 road show program			Nov 21, 2022	48	
	<i>B.1.2. Roadshow in Luang Prabang, Laos</i>	01 road show program			Jan 12, 2023	91	
	<i>B.1.3. Road show in Bagan, Myanmar</i>	01 roadshow program			Mar 13, 2023	55	
	<i>B.1.4. Roadshow in Ayutthaya, Thailand</i>	01 roadshow program			Nov 18, 2022	19	
	<i>B.1.5. Road show in Hue, Vietnam</i>	01 roadshow program			Mar 7, 2023	46	
	B.2. Training curriculum development on sustainable tourism established	01 training package on sustainable tourism	Mar–Jul 2021		-	-	
	B.3. Training in ROK (Hospitality training program)	01 training program (online) for	Mar–Jul 2021		Jul 14–Nov 16, 2021	94	
		Batch 1 of the training program			Jul 14–Aug 13, 2021	42	
		Batch 2 of the training program			Nov 11–16, 2021	52	
B.4. e–Mentoring program	01 e–mentoring program	Mar–Jul 2021		Jan–Mar 2022	20		
B.5. Monitoring and Evaluation (year 2)	01 Project Working Group (PWG) Meeting	Nov 2021	-	-	-		
Component C: Twinning of historical/cultural towns between Korea and Mekong Countries	C.1. Exchange Program	01 exchange programs in RoK	Jan–Mar 2022	Apr–Jun 2023	Jun 2023	74	
	C.2. Investment Forums to introduce investment opportunities	05 Investment forums in CLMTV	Apr–Aug 2022	Jul–Sep 2023	Oct 02–Dec 12, 2023	138	
		<i>C.2.1. Investment forum in Siem Reap, Cambodia</i>			01 Investment program	Nov 20–21, 2023	30
		<i>C.2.2. Investment forum in Luang Prabang, Laos</i>			01 Investment program	Nov 7–8, 2023	29

	C.2.3. Investment forum for Bagan in Yangon, Myanmar	01 Investment program			Oct 4, 2023	20
	C.2.4. Investment forum in Ayutthaya, Thailand	01 Investment program			Oct 2, 2023	20
	C.2.5. Investment forum in Hue, Vietnam	01 Investment program			Dec 11–12, 2023	59
	C.3. Monitoring and Evaluation	01 end-of-project evaluation	Nov 2022	Oct – Dec 2023	Nov–Dec 2023	92
	C.4. Mekong Heritage Mobile App	01 Mekong Heritage Mobile App: (i) system, (ii) contents; (iii) Pols.		Apr 2022–Sep 2023	Jun 2022–Feb 2023	-
		01 Mekong Heritage Web-based system			Oct–Dec 2023	-

Source: Mekong Institute (MI), Project reports, 2020–2023

CHAPTER II. PROJECT EVALUATION

A. Evaluation Criteria

The end of project evaluation has adopted the OECD–DAC evaluation guidelines with the six core evaluation criteria, namely relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.⁵ The criteria and justifications are in alignment with the nature of this project in support of human resources development and regional cooperation (Table 5).

TABLE 5 – EVALUATION CRITERIA AND JUSTIFICATIONS

Criteria	Justifications
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which project design and objectives responded to the needs and expectations of (i) the Mekong countries (CLMTV), and (ii) the project participants, i.e., beneficiaries and stakeholders supporting and promoting sustainable and smart tourism development through regional cooperation, cultural exchange, capable institutional and individual skills, investment opportunities, application of smart technology.
Coherence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which the project intervention aligned with and supplements the following in the CLMTV and Korea: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mekong–Korea Cooperation Framework, e.g., Action Plan 2017–2020, and 2020–2025 The Mekong Institute’s Strategic Plan 2021–2015 The regional tourism development framework, e.g., ASEAN and GMS The Governments of the Mekong countries’ sustainable and smart tourism policies and strategies The other related projects and/or initiatives developed and implemented in CLMTV
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which the project intervention contributed to the project beneficiaries in terms of achieving its objectives/results based on the quality of the project implementation approaches and strategies, and project management.

⁵ <https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm#>

Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The extent to which the project intervention delivered, or is likely to deliver expected results in efficiency within the project timeframe and budget
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The likely impact on the project beneficiaries' knowledge and practices for contributing to the long-term outcomes through promoting and practicing sustainable and smart tourism development in CLMTV.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The degree to which the project results is perceived as sustainable by different stakeholders; and level of capacity and preparation by the project beneficiaries and stakeholders towards sustainability

B. Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The end of project evaluation has followed a stepped approach consisting of four main phases (Figure 1):



FIGURE 1 – PROJECT EVALUATION APPROACH

A mixed-method approach comprising both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was used for this project evaluation. Quantitative data was collected through the online survey and project filing system while qualitative data was received from key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). The qualitative data was triangulated with quantitative data (numeric and measurable data) collected from the desk study and survey. This helped the evaluation increase validity of evaluation findings.

In line with the employed data collection methods, the Consultant through the support and coordination of the MI- TIF's designated staff conducted the following from November 20 to December 10, 2023:

- One **(01)** survey with **250** informants (given the small size of project population with 700 more or less) involved in the project activities: training and e-mentoring programs, regional workshop, exchange program, roadshows, and investment forums. The feedback from **41** respondents was received, reflecting a below average survey responding rate (16.0 % equivalent).
- Four **(04)** FGDs with the project beneficiaries and stakeholders in Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam to receive the insights on the project performance, results, and the next steps of the project, e.g., the project – phase 2, from different project groups. Thirty-two **(32)** people participated in the FGDs.
- Thirteen **(13)** KIIs to collect information from the representatives in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam who could provide sound knowledge and experience as well as challenges and recommendation to the project implementation in the respective engagement sites at present and future.
- One **(01)** group meeting with MI's Departments attended by **02** members.
- Consultation with the project experts on the project performance and results. Two **(04)** experts, including two **(02)** external experts, were involved in this process.

The data collection process by number of participants and participating countries is shown in Table 6.

TABLE 6 – DATE COLLECTION PROCESS

Data Collection	Participants	Countries					
		Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam	Korea
Desk review		√	√	√	√	√	√
01 Online Survey	41	05	10	12	09	05	
04 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	32	0	0	16	07	09	
13 Key Informant Interviews (KIs)	13	04	03	02	0	04	
01 group meeting with MI-TIF Department	02				02		
Consultation with technical experts	04	03					01
Total	92	12	13	30	18	18	01

C. Overall assessment

Overall, the project is rated **successful with some areas in need of improvements**. The overall assessment is based on equally weighted individual assessment criteria: relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency (Table 7). The project sustainability and impact criteria are just discussed but not assessed because of the project nature and its implementation arrangements for designated activities under respective components which were executed in short periods. This resulted in difficulties in precise attribution and quantification.

TABLE 7 – ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT PERFORMANCE

Criteria	Weight (%)	Assessment Result
Relevance	25	Relevant
Coherence	25	Coherent
Effectiveness	25	Partly Effective
Efficiency	25	Efficient
Sustainability		Likely to be sustainable
Impact		Likely to be impactful
Overall Rating		Successful with some areas in needs of improvements

D. Relevance

The project's rating score is **relevant**.

The project fits with the development context in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam (CLMTV) that are richly endowed with diverse natural and cultural tourism assets, especially the UNESCO World Heritage sites in Ayutthaya, Bagan, Hue, Luang Prabang, and Siem Reap. These Mekong countries have prioritized tourism as one of the key industries in their national socio-economic development plans and strategies given the importance of the tourism's contributions by creating jobs, generating foreign exchange receipts, accelerating regional cooperation and economic integration, and promoting friendship and goodwill among nations. In 2019, Travel and Tourism accounted for over 21.9% of Thailand's GDP, and 32.7% of Cambodia, while such contributions by Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam (LMV) remained below 10% in 2019, respectively.⁶ The number of the international visitors grew steadily over the 2015–2019 period for the subregion (Table 8).

TABLE 8 – TOURISM IN CLMTV

Countries	Inbound International Tourists to CLMTV (Million)								Travel and Tourism' Contribution to GDP (%) in 2019
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	
Cambodia	4.8	5.0	5.6	6.2	6.6	1.3	0.2	2.3	32.7%
Laos	4.7	4.2	3.9	4.2	3.8	0.89	-	1.3	12.0%
Myanmar	4.68	2.9	3.4	3.5	4.4	0.9	0.13	0.22	6.7%
Thailand	29.9	32.5	35.6	38.2	39.9	6.7	0.4	11.1	21.9%
Vietnam	7.9	10.0	12.9	15.5	18.0	3.7	-	2.7	9.1%
Total	51.98	54.60	61.40	67.6	73.7	13.5	0.73	17.67	

Source: ASEAN's Tourism Database and Data reported at TWG-51, 2022

The project design is in a strong connection and likely to complement the tourism development process in CLMTV where the countries have committed to improving the business-enabling environment for tourism and recognized the need to expand tourism-supporting infrastructure, strengthen education and training programs, enhance tourism destination management and tourists' seamless travel, and improve tourism competitiveness and sustainability practices while mitigating the risks caused by an overcrowding of primary destinations, environmental degradation, and increasing vulnerability to climate change. The priorities and targets of tourism development in CLMTV are summarized in Table 9.

TABLE 9 – CLMTV'S TOURISM PRIORITIES AND TARGETS

Countries	Priorities	Targets
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancement of tourism product development and product quality Human resource development (HRD) Improvement in tourism marketing and promotion Management of tourism safety and negative impact Strengthening of travel facilitation, transport, and regional and international connectivity Strengthening of legal systems and management mechanisms 	By 2022 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7.5 million international visitor arrivals - US\$ 5.0 billion international visitor expenditure - 1 million new jobs

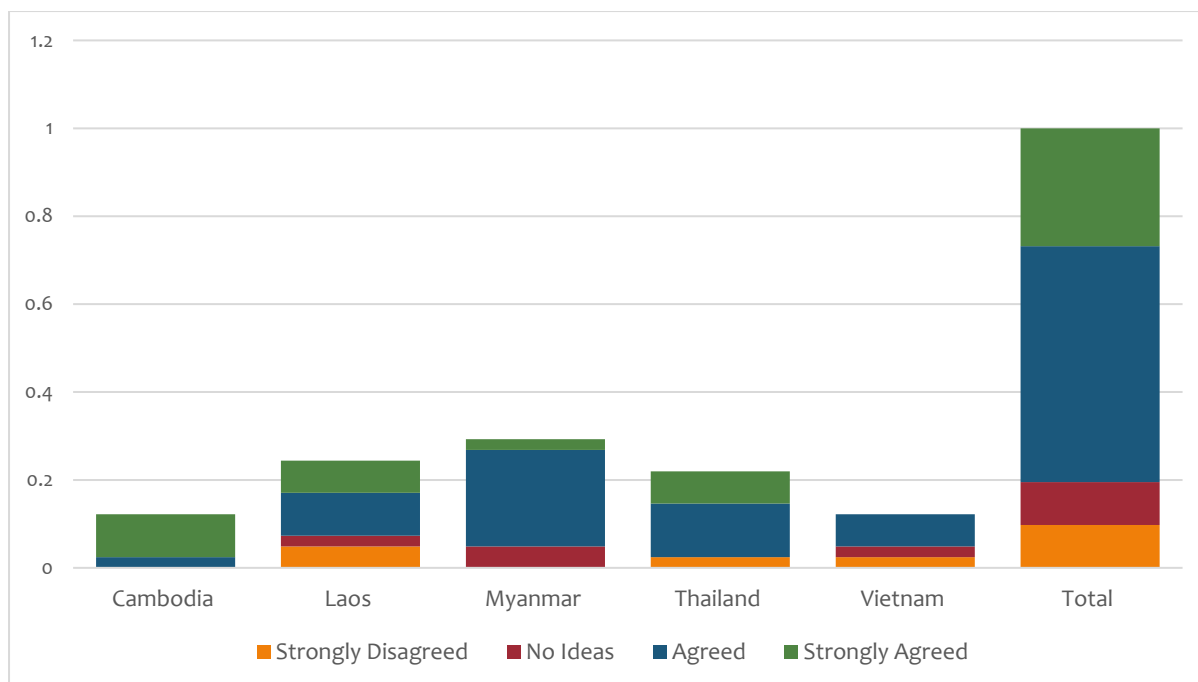
⁶ Travel and Tourism Total Contribution to GDP in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, 2019, www.knoema.com/atlas

Laos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective Implementation of tourism regulations, standards, and zoning • Human resource development (HRD) • Tourism infrastructure strengthening and product development • Tourism research, information, marketing, and promotion • Promotion of public and private investment in tourist destinations and products 	By 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4.5 million international visitor arrivals - US\$ 800 million international visitor expenditure - 100,000 new jobs
Myanmar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human resources development (HRD) and services quality improvement • Promoting Myanmar's image, position, and brands • Improvement in quality products and services • Connectivity and tourism-related infrastructure development • Strengthening of safeguards for destination planning and management • Strengthening of the institutional environment for tourism 	By 2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 7.5 million international visitor arrivals - US\$ 10.2 billion international visitor expenditure - 1.5 million new jobs
Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thai value-based development of the quality of tourism attractions, products and services towards sustainability • Development of tourism facilities and infrastructure supporting local communities and the protecting environment • Human resources development (HRD) • Tourism marketing and branding • Promotion of integration and key stakeholder involvement in tourism management and international cooperation 	By 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 10% cumulative annual growth rate in tourist expenditure - Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) top 30 ranking - 39 provinces achieve more than US\$ 171 million in annual tourism receipts - Environmental Performance Index top 100 ranking
Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vietnamese value-based tourism development as the key economic sector • Enhancement of tourism quality, professionalism, and modernization towards sustainability • Investment promotion supporting tourism infrastructure and facilities • Strengthening of tourism destination management and administration • Tourism marketing and branding • Enabling environment for tourism businesses 	By 2025 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tourism accounting for 15% in contribution to ASEAN GDP - Tourism's share of employment (7%) - Average spending per visitor of US\$ 1,500 - 300 enterprises certified with the ASEAN tourism standards

Source: Mekong Tourism Coordination Office, Asian Development Bank (ADB), GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025

According to the survey results, the project participants' perspectives on the project design and objectives varied from country to country. Figure 2 shows that (i) a total 10% of the surveyed people (LTV) strongly disagreed on the project design; (ii) 10% (LTV) had no ideas – these may reflect the project arrangement and coordination mechanism that did not facilitate the project stakeholders' knowledge and understanding of the project intervention and results in an effective manner, while (iii) 54% (CLMTV) agreed and 26% (CLMT) strongly agreed on the project design and objectives, respectively.

FIGURE 2 – PROJECT RELEVANCE



E. Coherence

The project's rating score is **coherent**.

At the regional level, the project development is in full compliance with the Government of the RoK's partnership strategies with the Governments of the Mekong countries (CLMTV) through Mekong–RoK Cooperation Fund (MKCF),⁸ and realizing the Plan of Action (POA) 2017–2020⁹, and the POA 2021–2025 in support of **human resources development (HRD)** and **regional cooperation** in the **culture and tourism** and **information and communication technology (ICT)** sectors.¹⁰

The project development and intervention is an integrated part of the Mekong Institute's Strategic Plan for 2021–2025¹¹ where its three main strategic areas and initiatives consist of Agricultural Development and Commercialization (ADC), Trade and Investment Facilitation (TIF) under which Smart and Sustainable Tourism is one of the development priorities, and (iii) Sustainable Energy and Environment.

The project framework is coherent with the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016–2015;¹² GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025;¹³ Mekong Innovation in Sustainable Tourism (MIST) launched by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office (MTCO), implemented by Destination Mekong;¹⁴ and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) committed

⁸

https://www.mekonginstitute.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Mekong_Institute/News/2023/TIF/3._MKCF_Management_Manual_Ver3.0_2023_Apr.pdf

⁹ [2nd Mekong-ROK Plan of Action \(2017–2020\)](#)

¹⁰ [Plans of Action \(POA\) 2021–2025 on the Mekong-Republic of Korea Cooperation for the implementation of Mekong-Han River Declaration](#)

¹¹ https://www.mekonginstitute.org/uploads/tx_ffpublication/MI_Strategic_Plan_Infographic.pdf

¹² <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/ATSP-2016-2025.pdf>

¹³ https://www.greatermekong.org/sites/default/files/2016_2025_GMS_Tourism_Sector_Strategy.pdf

¹⁴ [About MIST program](#)

by the CLMTV to the objectives of economic, social, and environmental sustainability.¹⁵ Tourism sector can contribute to sustainable and inclusive economic growth and sustainable consumption and production represented by (i) Target 8.9–devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products, and (ii) Target 12b–develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

The project implementation has aligned with the CLMTV’s Tourism Development Policies and Strategies and created synergies with the other projects and initiatives in tourism sector (Table 10):

TABLE 10 – CLMTV’S TOURISM POLICIES, STRATEGIES AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES

Countries	Tourism Development Policies and Strategies	Tourism Development Projects / Initiatives
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roadmap for Recovery of Cambodia Tourism During and Post COVID–19, 2021–2025, that aims to ensure the nationwide tourism reforms: (i) Phase 1–Resilience & Restart in 2021; Phase 2–Recovery, 2022–2023, and Phase 3–Relaunch targeting on new future for tourism based on sustainable, quality and technology innovations within the context of industry revolution 4.0.¹⁶ Cambodia’s TourismTech Roadmap, a national directive document aims to accelerate Cambodia’s tourism sector growth through harnessing innovative technologies with sustainability and inclusivity. The development of this roadmap is collaborated between the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology & Innovation (MISTI) and the National Council of Science, Technology & Innovation (NCSTI) and the Science and Technology Policy Institute (STEPI) of South Korea.¹⁷ Siem Reap Provincial Tourism Development Master Plan 2021–2035. This Master Plan outlines seven primary strategic areas for the province’s tourism development and includes (i) prioritization of tourist sites; (ii) new tourism products; (iii) promotion; and (iv) quality and sustainability entailed by ambitious targets of attracting 10.9 million domestic tourists by 2023 and 7.5 million international tourists by 2025, creating 940,000 jobs and generating an additional \$6 billion in revenue for Siem Reap’s economy.¹⁸ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community–Based Tourism COVID–19 Recovery Project (ADB)¹⁹ Cambodia Sustainable Landscape and Ecotourism Project (WB), 2019²⁰. In August 2023, A new app, Doe Ieng Sruk Yoeng, was launched by the Ministry of Environment (MoE) with the aim of promoting the Kingdom’s ecotourism hotspots, providing up-to-date transport information and tools to share holiday memories²¹ Siem Reap Tourism Club (STC)’s digital platform to support Smart Tourism Initiative by connecting tourists and local businesses and attractions. At the same time, the platform provides information on sustainable tourism practices. This digital platform will be launched in 2024 Tourism initiative jointly developed by Destination Mekong and STC to promote business networking and collaboration and Public–Private Partnership (PPP)²² “Building Back a Climate–Friendly and Inclusive Tourism Sector in Cambodia” Project, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), WWF Cambodia, launched in September 2022, promoting sustainable energy transition within Cambodia’s tourism sector by implementing solar and efficient cooling solutions in hotels, eco-resorts, and community–based ecotourism (CBET) locations in the Mekong Flooded Forest (MFF), and hotels and eco-resorts in Siem Reap and Phnom Penh.²³ The Siem Reap Smart City Project, JICA, 2020–2025, enhancing the local community’s well-being and accommodating a significantly larger number of tourists,

¹⁵ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/678631/gms-economic-cooperation-strategic-framework-2030.pdf>

¹⁶ https://ibccambodia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Eng_Roadmap_Translation-Final-1.pdf

¹⁷ <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/501344990/roadmap-to-accelerate-tourism-growth-via-innovative-technology/#>

¹⁸ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/linked-documents/53243-001-ssa.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/cam-53243-001-gar>

²⁰ <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P165344>

²¹ <https://kiripost.com/stories/app-showcases-cambodias-ecotourism-gems>

²² [First Destination Siem Reap Networking, 2023](#)

²³ [WWF, Responsible and Sustainable Tourism Key to Building Back Better, 2022](#)

		projected to reach more than 18 million by 2035. The project scope encompasses multiple aspects of smart city development, including (i) digitalization of Tourism Statistics to leverage data to optimize tourism planning and management, and PPP in Tourism to cultivate collaboration between the public and private sectors to boost tourism. ²⁴
Laos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National Green Growth Strategy till 2030: (i) Improving the investment environment and management system; (ii) Ensuring rural development and poverty reduction in an inclusive and fair manner; (iii) Raising the roles and promoting the advancement of women in all socio-economic fields; and (iv) Decreasing the risks and vulnerability of the economy to the climate change and natural disasters.²⁵ The 8th Five-Year National Socio-Economic Development Plan–A strong foundation for achieving 2025 National Strategy on Socio-Economic Development and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development²⁶ Lao PDR Tourism COVID-19 Recovery Roadmap for 2021–2025 considering three main options to support the recovery of the tourism sector through (i) promoting domestic tourism; (ii) strengthening travel bubble; and (iii) greening of tourism and sustainable tourism, e.g., prioritizing nature-based tourism as a medium to long-term priorities.²⁷ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SUSTOUR Laos Project, SwitchAsia, 2022–2024, Promoting Sustainable Tourism by Integrating MSMEs into Sustainable Supply Chains and Raising Consumer Awareness²⁸ Enabling Sustainable Tourism Destination Development Project, Swisscontact, 2017–2020 [Under the Mekong Inclusive Growth and Innovation Programme (MIGIP)] – introducing new models for promoting localities that involve the social, environmental, and economic needs of local populations while creating additional income and jobs²⁹ Sustainable Tourism Development Project for developing model sustainable tourism development and protecting cultural heritage, ADB, 2017³⁰ Laos–China Railway (LCR) application – Mobile phone ticketing application³¹ Lao Bus Navi,³² Vientiane bus tracking system for real time bus schedules
Myanmar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myanmar Tourism Master Plan, 2013–2020, an inclusive framework to strategically develop the country’s vast tourism potential, promoting green growth, advocating for the development of an ecotourism management strategy.³³ Myanmar Ecotourism Policy and Management Strategy for Protected Areas, 2015–2025, engaging all stakeholders to implement ecotourism policies, business models, and management approaches for protecting the unique ecosystems of Myanmar.³⁴ Myanmar Tourism Strategic Recovery Roadmap 2021–2025– Recover, Reset, Restart: (i) Economic recovery, (ii) Marketing and promotion; and (iii) Institutional strengthening and building resilience³⁵ 	<p>Tourism Development projects covering the following themes/areas:³⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destination Management and Development Vocational Training and Education Sustainable and Community-based Tourism: (i) Community Involvement in Tourism; and (ii) Sustainable Tourism Development Tourism marketing and connection are mainly via social media and websites

²⁴ <https://www.thestar.com.my/aseanplus/aseanplus-news/2023/10/24/siem-reap-smart-city-goal-on-track-for-2035>

²⁵ <https://www.greenpolicyplatform.org/national-documents/national-green-growth-strategy-lao-pdr-till-2030>

²⁶ United Nations, Laos, 2016

²⁷ <https://www.undp.org/laopdr/publications/laopdr-tourism-covid-19-recovery-roadmap-2021-2025>

²⁸ <https://www.switch-asia.eu/project/sustour-laos/>

²⁹ <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/migip-laos>

³⁰ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/38015/38015-013-pcr-en.pdf>

³¹ This application is available at App Store and Google Play [website](#) (for downloading)

³² <https://lao.busnavi.asia>

³³ <https://tourism.gov.mm/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/myanmar-tourism-master-plan-english-version-min.pdf>

³⁴ <https://faolex.fao.org/docs/pdf/mya180064.pdf>

³⁵ <https://mekongtourism.org/library/myanmar-tourism-strategic-recovery-roadmap-2021-2025/>

³⁶ [Linked Initiatives in the Myanmar Tourism Sector](#)

Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Bio–Circular–Green Economic Model (BCG) supporting inclusivity and sustainability, capitalizing on Thailand’s wealth of biological diversity, cultural heritage, technology advancement, as well as international Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the tourism sector, this BCG targeting on promoting secondary cities for new vacation spots; using digital platforms to improve convenience; developing national guidelines, and establishing sustainable standards systems, implementing cultural heritage conservation, enabling various niche markets such as wellness travel experiences or eco-tourism activities.³⁷ • Third National Tourism Development Plan, 2023–2027, on rebuilding a high–value tourism industry with resilience, sustainability, and inclusive growth, a guideline and framework for all sectors involved along with reflecting the intentions and work plans of the relevant sectors for tourism to deliver good things to the country, communities, and tourists truly both economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally sustainably under the name “Tourism”³⁸ • Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT)’s Digital Action Plan 2023 –2027³⁹ • The Tourism Authority of Thailand (TAT) has developed its own Sustainable Tourism Goals (STGs) in compliance with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals to achieve net–zero GHG emissions by 2050.⁴⁰ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thailand towards 2030 Future of Travel & Tourism⁴¹ • Ayutthaya Historical Site Conservation Project, Krungsri Bank, in an alignment with the UN SDGs, namely, SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, and SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals.⁴² • “OTOP Inno–Life Tourism-Based Community” scheme, 2017, Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), Tourism Agency of Thailand (TAT), Community Development Department (CDD), and Ministry of Interior Affairs • Community–Based Tourism (CBT) Initiative–Empowering Local Champions for Sustainable Tourism in Thailand, 2022, supported by UNDP Accelerator Lab Thailand, Thailand Policy Lab, the Designated Areas for Sustainable Tourism Administration (DASTA), and Local Alike (one of Thailand’s leading social enterprises working on CBT)⁴³ • Mainstreaming biodiversity–based tourism in Thailand to support sustainable tourism development, GEF–UNDP, 2022–2026⁴⁴ • ThaiCONNEX platform connecting tourism operators with online travel agencies (OTAs) of Thai startups and OTAs operating around the world⁴⁵ • Thailand Tourism Directory (website),⁴⁶ Tourism information available in Thai, English, and Chinese language • Sustainable Tourism Acceleration Rating (STAR) Project, awarding three to five stars to tourism operators based on sustainability improvement. The Project expected to achieve at least 85% of the participating tourism operators entitled to three to five stars by 2025.⁴⁷
Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 2017 Tourism Law defines: “Sustainable tourism development is the development of tourism that simultaneously meets socio-economic and environmental requirements, assuring the harmonization of the interests of the subjects involved in tourism activities, without prejudice to the capacity to meet the demand for tourism in the future” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable and Responsible Tourism Project in Central Viet Nam, ILO, and UNESCO, 2014–2016, addressing the tourism development issues of sustainable cultural resources and environment and focusing on the rural and remote areas in Quang Nam and Thua Thien-Hue provinces.

³⁷ <https://www.thecoloursofthailand.com/sustainable-tourism/the-thai-governments-own-initiatives-for-its-sustainable-tourism/>

³⁸ <https://www.thailandtourismfee.go.th/news/70c172be-28bd-4dd5-a020-287378919431/detail>

³⁹ <https://www.tatnews.org/2022/07/tats-marketing-plan-2023-to-revitalise-thai-tourism-towards-high-value-and-sustainable-growth/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.nationthailand.com/thailand/tourism/40030858>

⁴¹ <https://mekongtourism.org/library/thailand-towards-2030-future-of-travel-tourism/>

⁴² <https://www.krungsri.com/en/esg/sustainable-banking/corporate-social-responsibility/giving-back-to-society/ayutthaya-historical-site-conservation-project>

⁴³ <https://www.undp.org/thailand/blog/community-based-tourism-empowering-local-champions-sustainable-tourism-thailand>

⁴⁴ <https://www.thegef.org/projects-operations/projects/10409>

⁴⁵ <https://www.thailandconnex.com/en/home/>

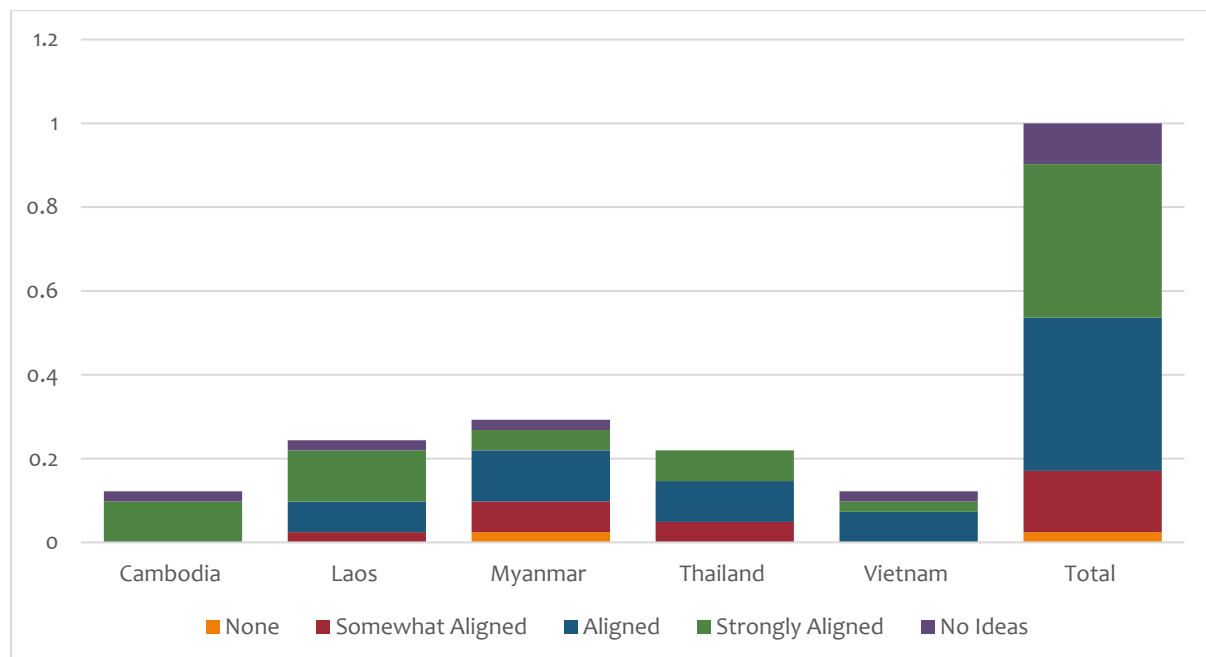
⁴⁶ <https://thailandtourismdirectory.go.th/en>

⁴⁷ <https://blue.star-board.com/news/5-stars-for-starboard/>

- Master Plan on Tourism Development to 2020, Vision to 2030 and Vietnam Tourism Development Strategy to 2030, prioritizing the development of the technical infrastructure, information, tourism services, culture, etc., to ensure environmental sustainability while developing the human resources for tourism, creating significant “leverage” to help Vietnam become an attractive destination for domestic and international tourists.⁴⁸
- The Vietnam Tourism Destination Post Covid-19 Recovery Plan, supporting local destination management organizations in Vietnam during the recovery of the tourism industry.
- Sustainable Tourism Development Project for developing model sustainable tourism development and protecting cultural heritage, ADB, 2017
- Hue Culture and Tourism Smart City Development Project, KOICA, 2021–2025, for developing sustainable city and tourism through developing economy, environment, and society with a view to contribute to conducting millennium sustainable development goals
- Plastic Smart Cities Initiatives (Project) in Hue City, WWF, 2021–2024 ⁴⁹
- Ru Cha-Con Te ecotourism and community-based tourism (CBT)
- Thua Thien Hue Tourism Database, Smart Travel Card, Hue- S, (Smart City), a Mobile Application

The surveyed stakeholders (88%) agreed that the project aligned with the countries’ policies and project s as well as their organizations’ initiatives shown in Figure 3. However, few stakeholders (12%) found no coherence and had no ideas about the project coherence, respectively. Few mentioned about the needs of additional capacity development and technical assistance in support of its sustainable tourism initiative(s). As mentioned in the Relevance session, promoting the project stakeholders’ awareness of the project at the project start is essential for their understanding of the project structure, implementation, and governance in connection with each country in the Mekong region.

FIGURE 3 – PROJECT COHERENCE



F. Effectiveness

The project rating score is **partly effective**.

⁴⁸ <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/practice/item/1210-sustainable-tourism-development-in-vietnam.html>

⁴⁹ [Plastic Smart Cities, WWF](#)

Component A–Facilitating Smart Tourism Development in Mekong countries⁵⁰ with four (04) activities implemented as of April 1, 2020.

With the expected adoption of ICT as an innovative approach serving sustainable tourism development, the Korean experts designed the concept for content development (Table 11) and produced Sustainable Tourism Guidebook and Mekong Sustainable Tourism E–Platforms in consultation with the designated National Tourism Organizations (NTOs) and in collaboration with the local Destination Management Companies (DMCs) and concerned stakeholders.

TABLE 11 – CONCEPT AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS UNDER COMPONENT A

Platforms	Concepts	URL
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of sustainable tourism • Country information by 05 key words • Tourism information on the central and secondary cities • Sustainable tourism programs • Newsletters, Social media quick links 	www.mekongsustainabletourism.com
Facebook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.3 billion users, instant gate opener, find business contacts, target AD to niches, no cost marketing, raise visibility 	www.facebook.com/mekongstory
Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 billion, visual, simple and it is attracting the younger generation more than other social media platforms, linked to Facebook, collaborate with influencers, etc. 	www.instagram.com/mekong_story
Blog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptional boost to search engine optimization • Develop and strengthen relationships with existing and new customers, create new opportunities for sharing 	https://blog.naver.com/mekongstory
E–Brochure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible, time effective, quick response • Environmentally safe, reduce costs, easy to modify, high quality look, easy to download, user friendly format 	Scan QR to download document on – Sustainable Tourism Guidebook–“Make Your Mekong” in English and Korean languages.

Source: Mekong Institute (MI)

According to the Project Mid–term Progress Report in 2022, the content was developed, and the **Mekong Sustainable Tourism Guidebook–Make Your Mekong** (in English and Korean languages) and all **e–platforms** were established and entered into operations with certain followers, and 52 stories uploaded into each of these platforms. These products are understood as a marketing tool promoting sustainable tourism in the designed destinations in CLMTV through providing the tourists, e.g., from Korea, with the information by theme, namely ecology, history, healing, food, and culture as briefly presented in Table 12.

TABLE 12 – CLMTV INTRODUCTION

Themes	Cambodia	Laos	Myanmar	Thailand	Vietnam
Ecology	Lakes	Si Phan Don	Trekking	The Land of Elephants	River

⁵⁰ This is Component C as described in the Project Proposal. The title and order of the components have been changed since the implementation date. This evaluation follows the titles of the project components as indicated in the project documents.

History	Khmer	Phra Kaew	Burma & Myanmar	Dynasty	Vietnam War
Healing	Sunrise & Sunset	River	Inle Lake & Pyin U Lwin	Massage	Coffee
Food	Prohok	Fork	Mohinga & Lapheye	Teow	Rice Noodle
Culture	Apsara Dance	Ppopennyang	Pagoda & Chaitya	Maipen Lai and Sanuk	Ao Dai

Socially, it is not clear about the **number of registration, frequency of access to these websites, and the number of the project participants and the others, or rather general users**, who are aware of the “Make Your Mekong” and the Mekong Stories in all e-platforms until now (December 2023). At the same time, all contents were only uploaded to these platforms from 2021–2022, i.e., no additional updates in 2023. As such, the project may consider a strategy and actions to measure and increase the influence of these platforms.

In addition to the **Regional Workshop on “Engaging Travel Bloggers, Marketing and Growth Strategy”** on assessing the current status of sustainable and smart tourism development in Mekong countries during COVID–19, and strengths and opportunities for Mekong countries, the project organized the training program on **“Designing and Building Digital Interactive Infrastructure to Seize Opportunities in the Post Pandemic World”** from November 30–December 4, 2020. The training program was mostly attended by the participants with the major in Tourism and Hospitality Management, i.e., **not ICT background and experience**, from Cambodia (05), Myanmar (16), and Vietnam (01). The broader objectives of the component is to enhance a wider access and usage of digital platforms serving businesses, especially in sustainable and smart tourism under the impact of COVID–19. As noted, the training program mostly focused on digital marketing and branding, and applicable tools, and business platform, e.g., GBA, while providing the participants with the fundamental concept of sustainable tourism, smart technologies and associated applications, e.g., big data, K-ITC, e.g., Drone Technology, SM9 SkyTech, etc.

Component B–Korea–Mekong Hospitality Training & Mentoring, consisting of four (04) activities that were fully implemented from July 2021–March 2022. One package of the capacity development program, namely, “The Mekong–Korea Training and Mentoring Program on Smart Sustainable Tourism and Business Outreach” with the training materials in the form of PPTs developed and training program delivered by the Korean experts to 94 CLMTV participants (02 batches) working in both public and private sectors from July–November 2021. The training mainly provided the participants with the Korean experience and knowledge of digital marketing tools, culture and life, language, commerce and merchandizing, and travel and tourism patterns, including sustainable tourism. Upon completion of this training program, the **“Mekong–ROK HEROEST Mentoring Program”** was conducted from January–March, 2022 with the attendance of 20 selected CLMTV participants from the Government ministry (agriculture), trade and tourism promotion agencies, SME Federation, private companies (travel and tour operations), and universities. The e-mentoring program focused on (i) Mekong Tourism Development, Sustainability and Cooperation with Korea; (ii) Exploring synergies and collaboration opportunities with Millennium Destinations, Herost, and Destination Mekong; (iii) Smart tourism in daily life and the future of travel; (iv) Doing business and global entrepreneurship, and access to Korean Market; (v) Efficiency in learning a new language and university life of international students in Korea.

In 2023, the project produced **additional training materials** covering (i) Understanding the Tourism Value Chain and the Tourism Ecosystem through System Thinking; (ii) Introduction of Sustainable Tourism and the need for a Regenerative Approach; and (iii) Sustainable Tourism Governance and Strategic Planning. The training materials were disseminated to the project participants on November 29, 2023 that supplemented the hospitality training and mentoring programs.

One of the key features of the training and e-mentoring programs is to inspire the participants to understand digital businesses, sustainable and smart tourism and adopt sustainability practices. Upon completion of the

training and e-mentoring program, some participants received the financial aid for pursuing their further studies in Korea while the others' communication with the project or MI remained inadequate. The evaluation team were unable to meet with up the trainees to discuss the **current level of hospitality and quality of service in CLMTV's tourism sector**, e.g., in what way the participants have utilized the acquired knowledge and concrete results achieved in their real working environment. Hence, the evaluation found it challenging to understand the training impact in the post training period.

As designed by the project proposal, the roadshows would serve to recruit the trainees from the selected universities. In reality, the five (05) **roadshows** in CLMTV were conducted from November 2022–March 2023 during which (i) the “Mekong Heritage” Mobile Application and the importance of points of interest (PoI) supported by information categories, data collection, and database establishment as an integrated part of the Mekong Heritage was promoted; and (ii) the introduction of Korea's economy, people and culture, consumption, technology, etc., was provided to the project stakeholders that can help the CLMTV prepare to attract more Korean tourists to the Mekong countries. In summary, MI and Korean team have successfully extended the project arms to multistakeholders in the tourism ecosystem in each location, and catalyzed the cooperation between and among the CLMTV, and CLMTV–Korea to promote sustainable and smart tourism in the UNESCO World Heritage towns and sites in Ayutthaya, Siem Reap, Luang Prabang, Hue, and Bangan.

Component C–Twinning of historical/cultural towns between Korea and Mekong Countries comprise (i) one (01) Exchange Program conducted in Seoul from June 26–30, 2023; (ii) five (05) Investment forums in CLMTV from October 2–December 12, 2023; (iii) one (01) Mekong Heritage Mobile Application developed from September 2022–February 2023, and one (01) Mekong Heritage Web-based Application system developed from October–December 2023.

The **Exchange Program** was successful in laying an important foundation for the collaborations and partnership between and among the selected UNESCO World Heritage towns and sites in the CLMTV, and between CLMTV and Korea in sustainable and smart tourism development through the cultural, educational, and professional exchange in future. As a result, three (03) Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed between (i) the Seoul Tourism Association and the Planning, Investment, and Tourism Product Development Office, Siem Reap, the Information, Culture, and Tourism Department, Luang Prabang, the Municipality Office, Ayutthaya. (ii) The City of Jeonju, and Luang Prabang, Siem Reap, and Ayutthaya; and (iii) the College of Culture and Tourism of Jeonju University and Ayutthaya Vocational College, Regional Polytechnic Institute Techo Sen (RPITS) Siem Reap. The evaluation noted that Myanmar and Vietnam did not enter the joint MoUs for some reasons. As for Myanmar, the current socio-political situation in Myanmar does not allow Bagan to make the partnership decisions. On the other hand, there was not sufficient time Hue City to get the City's People Committee's approval of the partnership in June 2023.

In addition to the Exchange Program, the project hosted five (05) **Investment Forums** in CLMTV introducing investment opportunities in CLMTV to Korea and domestic investors [and multilateral donors (ADB) in Siem Reap]. Table 13 shows several investment profiles and areas in tourism sector that are in need of investments.

TABLE 13 – INVESTMENT AREAS FOR INVESTMENTS

Countries	Investment Profiles/ Areas in Tourism Sector
Cambodia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Innovative Hospitality Management Academy Integrated In A Premium Hotel–An Innovative Hotel Chansar Community–Based Tourism to Bridge Old and New Siem Reap Town Hospitality and Tourism School and Curriculum Customization
Laos	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One District One Product (ODOP) of Luang Prabang Turning plastic trash into building bricks / pavers Handicraft for Tourism–Laos Textiles Production & Promotion Clay roofing and tiles for heritage house preservation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nahm Dong Park–A Self Sustaining Place
Myanmar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solar Power Plant Project Initiation in Bagan • Protection and preservation of heritage sites in Bagan
Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality) technologies for Inclusive and Accessible Tourism • Waste Disposal and Processing into Electrical Energy • Training and Education
Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and training on hospitality and tourism management (Training center and Curriculum development) • Green Tourism Criteria • Digital Transformation in Tourism sector • Smart hotel models integrating smart sensors and mobile application connection

Source: MI, Investment Forums in CLMTV

At the **Investment forums**, business and investment environment, tourism development status, and business and investment opportunities and profiles were introduced to Korean and domestic investors and businesses. In parallel, business matching sessions were arranged. As a result, no investment decision was made on the spot. The evaluation noted the partnership between Ayutthaya where Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi Baekseok University, Cheonan–si, Korea in Korea, which is under preparation, i.e., MoU is being drafted. As planned, Ayutthaya–Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi will propose a tripartite Memorandum of Action (MoA) to Mekong Institute (MI) in the next steps. As for Vietnam, Hue's current call for investment projects is highly relevant to the interests of Korean investors based in Ho Chi Minh City, especially the projects related to resorts and ecoparks. These investors planned to consult with their parent companies and partners for further actions. Jeonju City and Hue City would continue dialogues for partnership establishment. Jeonju University can provide complimentary training courses, including culinary arts, hospitality management, and tourism marketing. The university is willing to host selected exchange students from Hue Tourism College for 1 or 2 years in the form of a joint degree program. In addition, Jeonju City Government would sponsor representatives from Hue City Government to participate in the Future Cities Global Forum in Jeonju next year. Jeonju City Government also has an international cooperation fund dedicated to cultural heritage city–related projects with which a potential collaboration would be considered.

The development of “**Mekong Heritage**” Mobile Application and the web–based application system have been completed. According to the designed concept/content development, the main purpose of this system is to help domestic and international travelers (demand side) receive updated information on the five (05) Mekong heritage sites and maximize travel experiences visiting the heritage destinations; and small and medium–sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism value chain (supply side) approach international travelers to increase their visibility to travelers while gaining valuable customers’ analytical data and market insights that will help them to make better data–driven business decisions in an innovative manner. There is a room for these application systems to be fully completed in the future.

Regarding **project management**, the outbreak of COVID–19 (external factor) affected the project implementation that resulted in an adjustment to the project activities and timeline–(i) no baseline study on sustainable and smart tourism in CLMTV which was planned to implement in 2020–this activity was substituted by the development of “Mekong Heritage” mobile application; (ii) the annual monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the form of meetings with the Project Technical Working Group (TWG) was revised with the a new activity as Final Project Evaluation to be executed at the project end; (iii) no official establishment of the TWG; and (iv) the project closing date was extended to December 2023 (from the original date of March 31, 2023).

Given the completion of all activities, and survey result on the project effectiveness (Figure 4), the evaluation suggests several areas for further development towards sustainability (Table 14)

FIGURE 4 – PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS

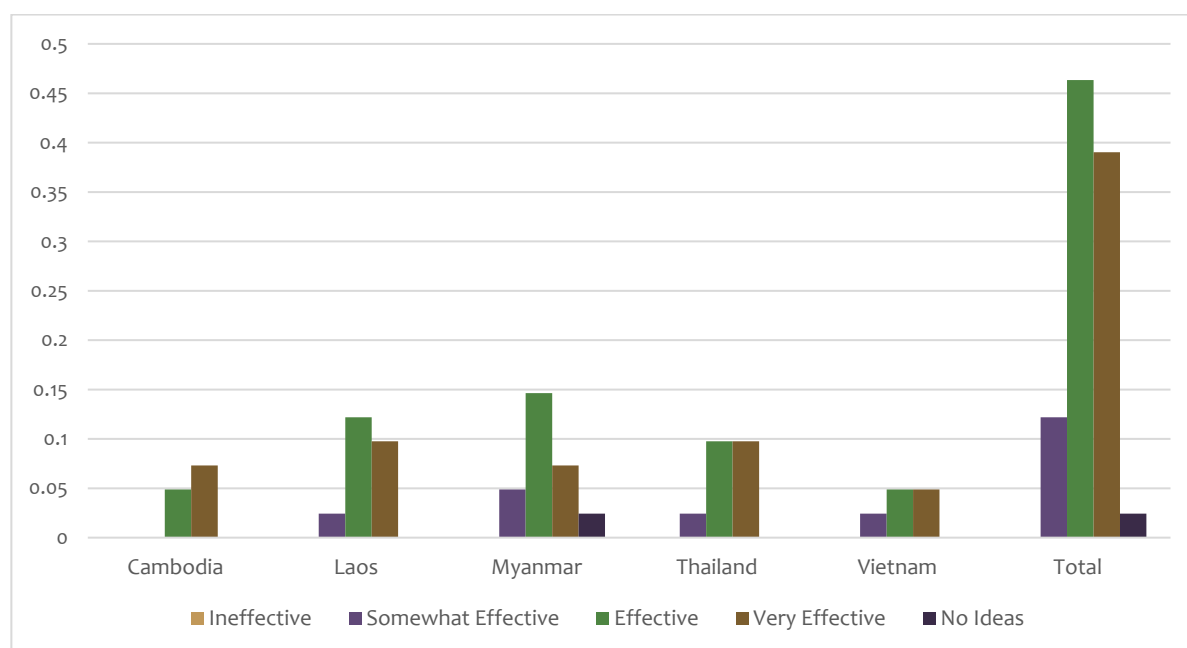


TABLE 14–AREAS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

Areas for Further Development
<p>Component A.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Make Your Mekong Guidebook and Digital Platforms (website and social media)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication strategy to gain wider public accessibility and increase the influence of the marketing information with more users, viewers, reviews, influencers, etc. ○ Additional content creation, including additional information on heritage sites and towns (e.g., Laos Pavillion), community-based tourism, ecotourism sites and business models (e.g., in Cambodia), etc., in a close collaboration with the responsible Tourism organizations in CLMTV to increase value and alignment with tourism development strategies in each countries, including sustainability practices, e.g., environmental protection, including noise pollution control, solid waste management. ○ Consideration of the Mekong languages, if possible, to increase the heritage connection between and among CLMTV ○ Generation of additional webpages or linkages on tourism (travel and hospitality) in CLMTV in the project website and social media platforms, where possible, to create the so-called information synergy <p>Component B.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mekong Hospitality Training & Mentoring</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Further development of training curriculum package, including sustainable and smart tourism

- Strategy for localizing the training program in the form of ToT or sharing material with the project partners in CLMTV to create the project capacity development impact that contributes to increase the level of hospitality and quality of services in tourism sector

Component C.

- ***Exchange Program***

- Strategy for supporting the project partners/partners in CLMTV to implement the MoUs signed with the Korean partners to enhance the regional cooperation (Mekong–Korea cooperation)

- ***Investment Forum***

- Technical assistance to the project stakeholders/partners to transform the selected investment profiles into project or business proposals used to call for investments; or share the established investment profiles with the local governments and concerned stakeholders to call for new projects in support of tourism sector.
- Strategy for catalyzing the investments in the potential project proposal from Korean and domestic investors and businesses in which impact investing in such tourism business models like ecotourism and community–based tourism in connection with preservation of the values of the UNESCO World Heritage towns and/or sites is significant.

- ***“Mekong Heritage” (Mobile and web-based application systems)***

- Additional content creation in line with the original design
- Development of communication and marketing strategy to increase the visibility and credibility of these systems
- Creation of the linkages between these systems and the other digital platforms used in CLMTV.
- Partnership with a strategic business partner to maintain and manage the “Mekong Heritage” website in the long run.

Project management

- Building the project stakeholders’ awareness of the project at the project start (project launching) through the key project partners in CLMTV
- Conduct of M&E during the project implementation period.

G. Efficiency

The project rating score is **efficient**.

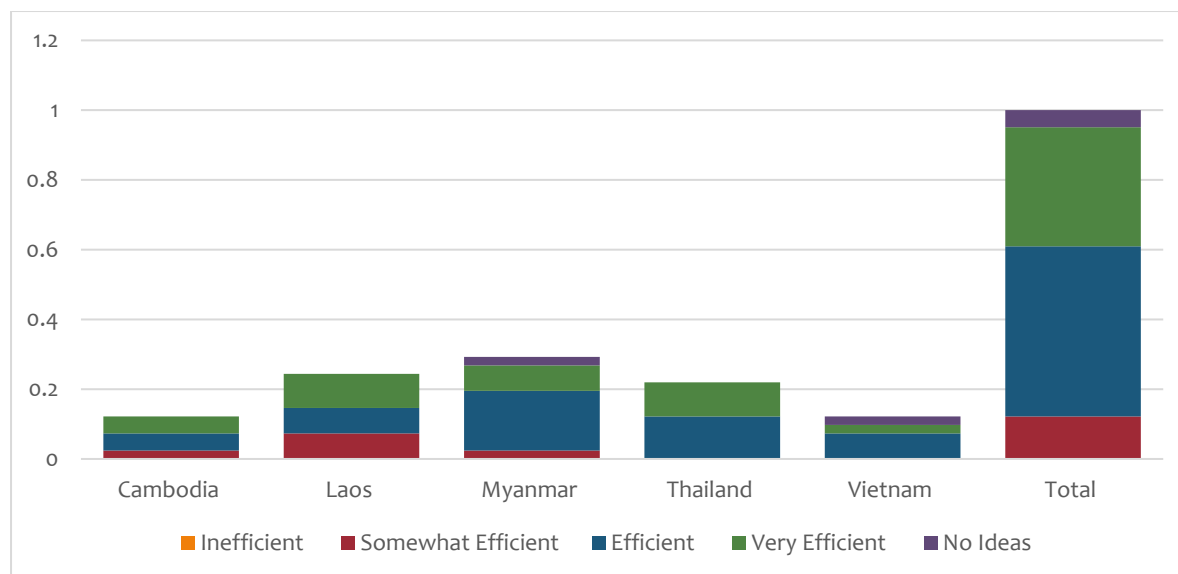
The project is implemented by **Mekong Institute (MI)** and its co-implementing agency, Korea, namely, **Tour De M. Co., Ltd.**, under the impact of the pandemic at the project start. This partnership has contributed to tightening the cooperation between RoK and the Mekong region and adding more value to the project implementation as well as delivering its results, i.e., jointly bringing in expertise and experience in sustainable and smart tourism has increased benefit for the project beneficiaries and stakeholders in CLMTV.

According to the project’s financial data, the project disbursement reached to 88.7 % at the end of November 2023 within the approved budget. The project resources were allocated by component and implemented to deliver the project activities and outputs in compliance with the budget structure under MKCF’s operations guidance on project management and MI’s policies, including financial management and procurement procedures.

By timeline, the implementation progress matched the adjusted timeframe (April 1, 2020–December 31, 2023), i.e., all project activities and deliverables were implemented and completed in full and with no additional costs.

The survey result shows the project stakeholders (95%) agreed on the project efficiency in terms of the project activities delivered in a cost-effective and timely manner. (Figure 5)

FIGURE 5 – PROJECT EFFICIENCY



CHAPTER III. OTHER ASSESSMENTS

A. Impact

The long-term results of the project targets on (i) building a collaborative program with key institutions and organizations in RoK to improve human resources, infrastructure, heritage conservation and social impact management, subregional marketing, private sector development, and travel facilitation in the Mekong countries; (ii) enhancing regional cooperation among the Mekong countries based on the regional nature through sustainable tourism in terms of income and employment generation; and (iii) serve the Action Plan of Mekong–Republic of Korea Action Plan (2017–2020) which indicates the priority areas in development cooperation between Mekong countries and Korea to preserve the ecosystem, promote green growth in the Mekong region, and strengthen capacity of the Mekong countries.

The project implementation and results under its timeframe show that the project is **likely to be impactful**.

The project has contributed to formalizing the partnership between RoK and the Mekong countries in the form of non-binding MoUs by the representative organizations in RoK and the Mekong countries, except for Bagan, Myanmar and Hue, Vietnam, signed in June 2023. To realize a greater impact beyond the project scope and timeline, further actions of Seoul City represented by Seoul Tourism Association, City of Jeonju, the College of Culture and Tourism–Jeonju University, and their partner organizations in Autthaya, Siem Reap, Luang Prabang, Vietnam should be taken: (i) continued dialogues on the collaboration between Jeonju City and Hue City, Jeonju University and Hue Tourism College; and (ii) concrete Action Plan(s) to fully implement the mentioned MoUs.

The project has also brought the investors and businesses from RoK to the Investment Forums held in the project engagement sites in CLMTV where the local stakeholders showcased businesses and investment needs and gauge the investors' interests. The stakeholders/owners of the business profiles may continue with transforming the business profiles into concrete project proposals in the form of investment projects supporting sustainable and smart tourism development in CLMTV to request donor funding in the next steps. If successful, the project impact can be realized.

B. Sustainability

The project is **likely to be sustainable**.

Sustainability refers to the likelihood of maintaining the project outcomes and outputs for a long period. The project intervention has resulted in certain positive effects on promoting the development of sustainable and smart tourism in CLMTV over its implementation period, namely:

- Digital platforms (website, facebook, instagram, blog, e-brochure on MekongStory, Mekong Heritage mobile application and website)
- Training curriculum package on hospitality and sustainable tourism
- Signed MoUs

All can be sustained by Mekong Institute (MI) and its project implementing partner with their ownership and/or taking catalyzing roles to continuously support the project beneficiaries and stakeholders in practicing and promoting sustainable and smart tourism as a way to maximize the effects of the project results beyond the project timeframe (December 31, 2023). However, the sustainability is subject to MI's capacity, strategy, and resources. To this end, the evaluation proposes the conceptualized project sustainability plan (Table 15) as below:

TABLE 15 – CONCEPTUALIZED PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Key Questions and Actions	Responses		Responsibilities		Timeline
			Mekong Institute (MI)	Project Partners	
What project generated results, products, etc., will be handed over to the project partners for sustainability?					
Who are the beneficiaries from the project sustainability?					
With what organizations will Mekong Institute (MI) partner with and why?					
How can this partnership facilitate a successful exit?					
What capacities do the partners need to facilitate the project's successful transfer?					
What financial resources will be needed to maintain project results?					
Who will provide these resources?					

Which benefits of the project can be sustained without continued financial resources?
What types of risks (financial, capacity, operational, political) for the sustainability actions are identified?
What are the risk mitigation measures ?
What is non-financial support needed?

CHAPTER IV. SMART TECHNOLOGIES IN TOURISM SECTOR

Smart tourism is one of the features of smart cities and an important part of the six pillars: (i) smart economy, (ii) smart governance; (iii) smart environment; (iv) smart living, (v) smart people; and (vi) smart mobility.⁵¹ Innovation is the core part of a smart tourism destination based on a robust technological infrastructure improving the traveler's experience by adapting to their needs and offering them information in real time, personalized products, and seamless travel experience. By nature, the development of smart tourism is in connection with smart city development pattern and subject to the following:⁵²

- Technological infrastructure supporting sustainable development and promotes equal accessibility
- Availability of internet access
- Availability of public electric mobility as an alternative to traditional private transportation
- Promotion of a more ecological and sustainable tourism models
- Health or security emergencies through mobile applications
- Real-time information for timely decision making, e.g., traffic flow, accidents, etc
- Facilitating the interaction and integration of visitors with their surroundings
- Innovative and interactive cultural activities

The rapid evolution of the internet and ICTs over the past decade has significantly contributed to the development of smart tourism. Now, there is a variety of smart technological solutions in place, including the big data, internet of things (IoT), cloud computing, artificial intelligence (AI), mobile communication technologies, mobile devices and applications, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), QR codes, social networks, smart phone, wi-fi, etc. The application of smart tourism technologies encompasses different purposes in the tourism landscape—it helps in improving the efficiency of resource management, maximize competitiveness, and enhance sustainability. Particularly, smart tourism technologies increase the value of the tourism products and services, business, and governance, such as, cultural and heritage tourism, ecotourism, smart tourism destination, tourist experience, integrated transportation, digital transaction and communication, tourism security and safety services, digital marketing, destination management, research and innovation in tourism, and so on.

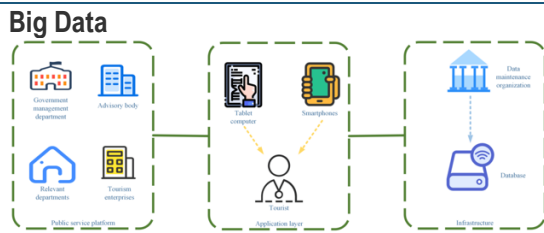
Table 16 illustrates several smart tourism technologies that can be applied to support the development of sustainable and smart tourism in CLMTV.

TABLE 16 – SMART TOURISM TECHNOLOGIES

Smart Tourism Technologies	Description
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⁵¹ [Smart Cities and Smart Tourism What Future Do They Bring, Chapter, March 2019](#)

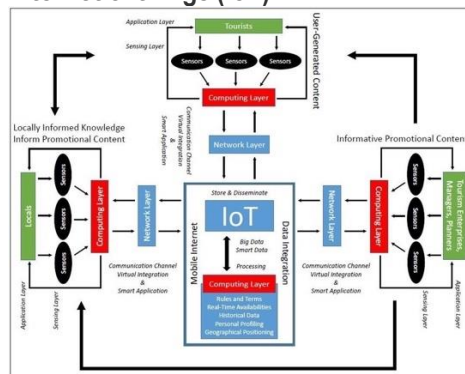
⁵² <https://www.bbva.ch/en/news/smart-tourism-the-bet-of-smart-cities/>



Big data technologies, e.g., data mining, have been widely used in smart tourism, to improve the **intelligent degree** of tourism industry. In other words, big data technologies are used to collect massive amounts of data; intelligently store, process, combine, and analyze big data; and to interpret insights from big data to inform business innovation, operations, and management. Sources of big data in tourism include booking data, social media data, location data, market data, demographic data, etc.⁵³

The benefits of using big data in hospitality and tourism industry include (i) Strategic management; (ii) Revenue management; (iii) Reputation management; (iv) Customer experience; (v) Market research; and (v) Targeted marketing⁵⁴

Internet of things (IoT)



The internet of things (IoT) connect the objects by embedding internet-connected devices within them and sharing their information online. Smart technology uses IoT data to serve hospitality and tourism industry where IoT enables easy access and interaction with a wide variety of information for contexts such as transportation, attractions, tours, shopping, and hotels. IoT big data tourism applications will need to integrate social media, content marketing, and wearable IoT devices.⁵⁵

Application of IoT in tourism value chain: (i) IoT and Hotels; (ii) IoT and Airports; (iii) IoT and Tourist Attractions; (iv) IoT and Smart Nature Destinations, etc.⁵⁶

Augmented and Virtual Reality (AR) & (VR)



Augmented Reality (AR)—a technology allows virtual elements to be superimposed over images of real contexts, whether these are text elements, graphics, or other types of objects. Smart AR glasses are increasingly optimized, and modern ones have features such as Global Positioning System (GPS), a microphone, and gesture recognition, among others. These devices allow users to have their hands free to perform tasks while they receive instructions in real time through the glasses.

Virtual Reality (VR)—a software/hardware application allows users to be completely immersed into a virtual environment, or three-dimensional (3D) world, in very near real time, by using an interactive device and a head-mounted display. Compared with conventional text reading, VR has been shown to be associated with

⁵³ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/6/5162>

⁵⁴ [How Big Data and Analytics Are Transforming Hospitality, 2023](#)

⁵⁵ [Developing Smart Tourism with IoT: Managerial Approaches, Techniques and Applications, 2019](#)

⁵⁶ https://www.riverpublishers.com/pdf/ebook/chapter/RP_9788770221955C8.pdf

increased information retention and recall in memory, due to the user's involvement and personal relevance. AR and VR technologies offer tourists/travelers experiences in exploring immersive destinations—taking virtual tours of landmarks, visit museums and historical sites, and experience local culture. One of the most significant advantages of AR and VR in tourism is the ability to create a personalized experience for travelers, help travel companies create customized itineraries and tours for each individual traveler, based on their interests and preferences. Also, these technologies offer unique opportunities for marketing and advertising in tourism business, e.g., produce immersive promotional materials on destinations and experiences; streamline their operations, e.g., virtual assistants powered by AR can guide tourists through airports and provide information about flights, while VR can be used to train staff and simulate emergency scenarios.⁵⁷

Artificial Intelligence (AI)



Artificial Intelligence (AI) has numerous applications in the tourism sector. It helps consumers (demand side) find the most relevant information more quickly, provides them with greater mobility, and a greater experience. On the supply side, AI helps to manage resources, especially in promotion and productivity, and create a more sustainable business model based on (i) Recommendation systems and personalization techniques; (ii) conversational systems such as chatbots and voice assistant; (iii) Forecasting tools; (iv) Dynamic pricing; (v) Translation applications; etc.^{58 59}

The evaluation also noted several focus areas for regional cooperation in developing smart tourism in the Mekong Region (Table 16).

TABLE 17 – SEVERAL FOCUS AREAS FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

Focus Areas for Regional Cooperation	
Data Protection and Privacy	Cryptography is the science of encoding and decoding information, playing a vital role in promoting digitalization by ensuring secure and confidential communication, safeguarding critical infrastructure, and maintaining trust in digital transactions.
Intellectual Property	Intellectual property (IP) systems provide a regulatory framework aiming to foster innovation and creativity and enabling people and businesses to earn recognition or benefit financially. IP systems have emerged as one of the key drivers of growth in tourism. IP rights in tourism have various benefits, such as enhancing management of businesses and tourism destinations, differentiating tourism

⁵⁷ <https://www.ediie.com/tourism/>

⁵⁸ <https://www.plainconcepts.com/smart-tourism/>

⁵⁹ <https://anywhere.epam.com/business/artificial-intelligence-in-tourism-and-travel-industry>

	destinations and products from competitors, and attracting investment and financing, especially for SMEs
Data Sharing	Data is an important resource for economic growth, competitiveness, job creation, and societal progress. Maintaining open datasets can benefit multiple stakeholders, from small to big businesses or organizations, by opening new and equal opportunities.
Quality of Service	Ensuring delivery of quality service is important for maintaining higher levels of customer satisfaction. Even in the digital economy, this matters as tourists will prefer products or services with better quality. For example, tourists will prefer travel agents who offer smooth booking experience over one providing poor service. Standards and Conformity Assessment is crucial in the digital economy by ensuring interoperability, compatibility, and trust among digital products and services, facilitating seamless integration, innovation, and market growth.
Artificial Intelligence	Artificial intelligence (AI) presents huge opportunities for tourists, businesses, and governments, with applications like chatbots, predictive analysis, personalized experience, and automation. AI still faces regulatory challenges because of the unpredictable nature of business models relying on these technologies, data privacy, security, ownership, and control issues, and AI's complex nature as opposed to traditional software. AI and emerging technologies drive automation, improve efficiency, and encourage innovation, leading to new business opportunities, improved user experience, and transformed industries across various sectors.
Inclusivity and Digital Divide	Inclusivity and bridging the digital divide improves accessibility to information, encourages community participation, and establishes a sustainable tourism environment. Strategies on expanding connectivity infrastructure, providing digital skills training, fostering digital innovation, and designing user-friendly interfaces can address the digital divide among citizens and tourists. Digital Inclusion aims to ensure that all individuals have access to and can fully participate in the digital world.

Source: Asian Development Bank (ADB), 2023, Promoting Smart Tourism In Asia And The Pacific Through Digital Cooperation

CHAPTER V. PROJECT' SUCCESS STORIES AND GOOD PRACTICES

The project represented by Mekong Institute (MI) and its implementing partner in RoK have been successful in the following areas:

- Promoting and marketing sustainable tourism destinations in the UNESCO World Heritage towns and/or sites in the Mekong region, namely Siem Reap, Cambodia, Luang Prabang, Laos, Bagan, Myanmar, Ayutthaya, Thailand, and Hue, Vietnam, respectively.
- Catalyzing the regional cooperation, including investment opportunities, between RoK and the Mekong region and among the Mekong countries
- Introducing smart tourism technologies in support of sustainable tourism development.

The success stories and good practices have been established as part of project results as shown in Tables 18, 19, 20, and 21.

TABLE 18 – PROMOTING AND MARKETING HERITAGE TOURISM DESTINATIONS THROUGH **MEKONG STORIES**

In realization of the global and regional development context where the travel and tourism marketplace has been expanded with the revolution in global information and communications technology and increasing demand for international standards of responsible and ethical conduct in sustainable tourism, the project has promoted the five major destinations in Mekong region by established **Mekong Sustainable Tourism Guidebook–Make Your Mekong and social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, etc.)** as the important marketing tools to promote the images and values of the UNESCO World Heritage destinations in the Mekong regions as well as connecting international tourists, especially Korean people, and the potential travelers who are expected to access to the [Mekong Stories](#) and associated sources over time, to the people and the heritage destinations in the Mekong region.



TABLE 19 – PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION BETWEEN ROK AND MEKONG COUNTRIES

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The three (03) MoUs signed between the following organizations:

- The Seoul Tourism Association and the Planning, Investment, and Tourism Product Development Office, Siem Reap, the Information, Culture, and Tourism Department, Luang Prabang, the Municipality Office, Ayutthaya. The collaboration scope covers (i) exchange programs; (ii) cultural exhibitions; (iii) sustainable initiatives; (iv) joint marketing campaigns; (v) digital collaborations; and (vi) youth programs. The MoU came in effect from June 27, 2023–June 26, 2028, and can be

extended subject to the agreement of all parties.

- The City of Jeonju, and Luang Prabang, Siem Reap, and Ayutthaya. The collaboration scope covers such areas as economy, tourism, culture, education programs, ect. The MoU came into effect from June 27, 2023–June 26, 2025, and shall be automatically extended for one year unless one party informs the others the MoU termination.
- The College of Culture and Tourism of Jeonju



University and Ayutthaya Vocational College, Regional Polytechnic Institute Techo Sen (RPITS) Siem Reap. The collaboration scope includes (i) internship and apprenticeship programs; (ii) curriculum development and exchange; (iii) exchange programs; (iv) industry certification and licensing; (v) industry expert guest lectures; (vi) site visits and job shadowing; (vii) research partnerships; (viii) professional development; (ix) dual degree programs.

has established an **important milestone** for the regional cooperation between RoK and the Mekong countries with the significant contributions of Mekong Institute (MI) and its implementing partner in Korea. It is expected that Vietnam represented by Hue City Government and Hue Tourism College will join the MoUs with the Jeonju city Government and Jeonju University in 2024. **The regional cooperation promoted by the project has created opportunities for enhancing the sustainable and smart tourism as well as upgrading the quality of hospitality and tourism services in the Mekong countries with the continued support of the RoK in the future.**

Although there was not investment decisions at the **Investment Forums**, the project has successfully connected and built the partnership between Rajamangala University of Technology Suvarnabhumi and with Baekseok University, Cheonan-si, in Korea. As planned, the two universities will also propose a tripartite Memorandum of Action (MoA) to Mekong Institute (MI) to jointly implement the collaborative activities in the coming years. In addition, the project has supported the heritage towns or cities to develop investment profiles in which such projects related to sustainable tourism development have drawn attentions from Korean investors, such as, **EcoPark** model in Hue, Vietnam—an inclusive and integrated biospheric program that ensures sustainability on all levels. This business model meets the social, economic, environmental, architectural and agro-ecological international standards and self-sufficient in terms of energy, water and food security and economical sustainable.

In addition to large-sized resorts and hotels, there is a dynamic **Community-Based Tourism (CBT)** that has involved a collection of local businesses to create and sell a variety of goods and services to tourists. CBT is **socially sustainable** and respects local culture, heritage and traditions. As such, tourism activities are developed and operated by local community members. Likewise, CBT is **environmentally sustainable** and implies respect and concern for the natural environment, particularly where environment is one of the attraction. CBT model in Cambodia–**Chansar CBT Initiative**, and the other local-led initiatives, such as solid waste management, e.g., plastic waste upcycling, solar energy, etc. with potentials for investments in support of sustainable tourism in the Mekong’s Heritage Destinations have been introduced by the projects. It is worth considering them for future development.

TABLE 20 – INTRODUCING SMART TOURISM TECHNOLOGIES WITH “MEKONG HERITAGE”

	<p>To support the sustainable tourism development supported by smart technologies, the project has developed “Mekong Heritage” in the forms of mobile application and the web-based application system. The main purpose of this system is to help domestic and international travelers (demand side) receive updated information on the five (05) Mekong heritage sites and related hospitality and tourism services. It also aims to maximize travel experiences visiting the heritage destinations; and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism value chain (supply side) approach international travelers to increase their visibility to travelers while gaining valuable customers’ analytical data and market insights that will help them to make better data-driven business decisions in an innovative manner.</p> <p>The Mekong Heritage is now on iOS App Store and Google Play Store for public use. According to the technical design, mobile application information is the same the Web-based Application System and stored at the Google’s Firebase server.</p> <p>The next development phase of this system includes a web-based (online) booking module with payment gateway integration, and a mobile app booking system. In principle, the online Booking System with Payment Gateway is a platform where hotels, amusement parks, restaurants, cafeteria, etc. can register themselves to become a part of the system, and users (visitors, customers, etc.) can search for, view, and book hotel accommodation, slots for restaurants, cafeteria, etc. The system will provide a user-friendly interface for hotels, restaurants, cafeteria, etc. and customers, allowing them to manage their listings / availability and customers to browse and make reservations in a convenient manner.</p>
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TABLE 21 – GOOD PRACTICES IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND DESTINATION MANAGEMENT

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1. **Engage and consult with stakeholders on future plans and actions.** A Tourism Destination Stakeholder Committee should be established, which includes representation from the destination management organization (DMO), local government, community organizations, and tourism businesses.
2. **Establish a baseline.** It is important to undertake a baseline analysis of the current tourism sustainability performance. This will enable the determination of gaps between where the destination is performing well and where there is opportunity for improvement.
3. **Establish clear goals and the specific action plans to achieve those goals.** This strategy and action plan should be understood and ideally approved by impacted stakeholders, and also be designed to complement and support an existing destination development strategy and goals.
4. **Monitoring and measurement of impacts and results.** Monitoring and assess sustainability performance against the set goals helps shaping the right direction and creating substantial impacts.
5. **Publicly Report.** Integrating key sustainability performance indicators and metrics into reporting efforts is a good practice as it helps build tourism organization's reputation and brand as a destination of sustainability.
6. **Engagement of tourism businesses.** Engaging tourism businesses in the destination is essential to a robust destination sustainability strategy. In order to understand where tourism businesses need the most support, consider promoting that they undertake their own baseline analysis on key issues. Sustainability Score for Tourism Businesses, which is based upon Global Sustainable Tourism Council Recognized criteria and aggregate the results to identify the areas of strength and opportunity can be used.
7. **Formal assessment and certification of destination.** This requires a significant commitment of time and financial resources. Certification verifying that a tourism destination follows Global Sustainable Tourism Council criteria will bring added credibility to the destinations and set a strong foundation for tourism stakeholders and the rest of the industry.

CHAPTER VI. POLICY BRIEF ON ADVANCING SMART TOURISM IN SYNERGY WITH CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN THE MEKONG COUNTRIES

Objective

This policy brief focuses on the digitalization impact that has brought to tourism and cultural and creative industries (CCIs), and promoting the linkages between tourism and CCIs as a way to foster the role of the creative economy toward green transition and sustainable economic recovery in line with the ASEAN policy frameworks and strategies as well as promoting **cultural tourism**.

Digital Economy and Creative Economy in ASEAN

Globally, the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused economic recession. The governments' containment policies have accelerated the digitalization process, making structural change toward a more digital economy. Digital transformation through digital connectivity, digital technology applications and digital

data is an effective solution for economic recovery and sustainable development in most economic sectors during and post crisis periods.⁶⁰

Digitalization has accelerated with 40 million new users going online for the first time in ASEAN in 2020, outpacing the annual average increase of 25 million over the past four (04) years. E-commerce has continued to post new growths. Its revenue in ASEAN is projected to reach more than US\$ 80 billion by 2024. This reflects more opportunities for the the creative economy's development represented by the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), especially the small and medium creative enterprises (SMCEs). This digital accessibility can allow SMCEs to run and grow e-businesses with smaller capital while being able to reach out a wider market.⁶¹

Digitalization has also emerged as an effective solution to its recovery and the long-term resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability in the tourism sector. Application of smart technologies and strengthening of government policies with investment incentives and protection to promote public and private partnership (PPP) in digitally driven tourism practices and enhance regional cooperation and integration have been gaining importance.

To this end, the following cooperation frameworks and strategies have enabled the digital transformation progress at the ASEAN and GMS levels and set a milestone for all countries to collaborate each other to promote digital economy and creative economy.

- **Siem Reap Declaration on Promoting a Creative and Adaptive ASEAN Community to Support the Cultural and Creative Economy, 2022**, acknowledges the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF) with its identification of Cultural and Creative Economy as a key sector with the potential to contribute to the ASEAN economic recovery.⁶²
- **ASEAN Ministerial Statement on Cultural Property Protection, 2022**, recognizes the illicit trade in cultural property is a transnational crime, which is just not a threat to Southeast Asia's rich heritage, but to legitimate markets, cultural rights, local communities, and regional security.⁶³
- **ASEAN Digital Master Plan 2025** has provided guidance to the ASEAN member states (AMSs) through five-actions to achieve both digital economy and digital society.⁶⁴
- **Consolidated Strategy on the Fourth Industrial Revolution for ASEAN (4IR)**, October 26, 2021 by ASEAN Leaders providing guidance for AMSs within building the ASEAN Digital Community in the fields of political and security, economy, and socio-culture. The 4IR offers people the opportunity to grow better connected, helps economies grow and become more competitive, empowers ASEAN's citizens, and improves their livelihoods through digitalizing the provision of basic social services, and helps society decarbonize to meet sustainable development challenges confronting the region. The 4IR is working on bridging the gap in digital connectivity among its members. To realize digital trade potential, the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 is in place, backed by the ASEAN Data Management Framework, the ASEAN Framework on Personal Data Protection, and the ASEAN Model Contractual Clauses for Cross-Border Data Flows.⁶⁵
- **ASEAN Declaration on Digital Tourism, 2020** aims to encourage the application of digital technology and innovation in tourism development in order to enhance competitiveness, facilitate dynamic growth, and develop sustainable tourism, as well as providing opportunities and develop capabilities in the tourism sector of ASEAN.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ [International Monetary Fund \(IMF\), 2023, Digitalization during the COVID-19 Crisis](#)

⁶¹ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/The-ASEAN-Oct-Nov-2021-Digital-v1.pdf>

⁶² https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Siem-Reap-Declaration_AMCAadopted_7July2022.pdf

⁶³ https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Joint_Ministerial_Statement_on_Cultural_Property_Protection_Adopted10thAMCA.pdf

⁶⁴ <https://asean.org/book/asean-digital-masterplan-2025/>

⁶⁵ <https://asean.org/consolidated-strategy-on-the-fourth-industrial-revolution-for-asean/>

⁶⁶ <https://asean.org/asean-declaration-on-digital-tourism/>

- **ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework (ACRF)** and its Implementation Plan, 12 November 2021 by ASEAN Leaders served as a consolidated exist strategy and comprehensive recovery efforts from the pandemic, which consists of five broad strategies.⁶⁷
- **The GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025** addresses the challenges caused by high tourism intensity that can undermine inclusive economic growth, degrade the environment, and diminish interactions between visitors and hosts to promote more competitive, balanced, and sustainable tourism development. It establishes five (05) strategic directions: (i) human resources development (HRD), (ii) tourism infrastructure improvement, (iii) visitor experiences and services, (iv) creative marketing and promotion activities, and (v) regional travel facilitation.⁶⁸
- **The GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS–2030)** builds on the current directions under the Sector Strategy (2016–2025). The GMS–2030 focus on recovery efforts. In the long run, GMS 2030 will support the development of higher value–added and secondary destinations, strengthening of human capital, connectivity infrastructure, public–private partnership (PPP), and environmental sustainability.⁶⁹ The GMS–2030 emphasizes new possibilities initiated by digitalization and promotes inclusive digitalization and the use of advanced technologies in all GMS Program activities and projects. The GMS countries highlighted the implementation results of the digital initiatives that have leveraged to recover their tourism markets and improved visitor management at the 51st GMS Tourism Working Group Meeting (TWG-51). GMS-2030 promotes inclusive digitalization and the use of advanced technologies in all GMS Program activities and projects.⁷⁰
- **The GMS Digital Economy Cooperation Initiative** on “Building Digitally–Connected Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Corridors” to promote the region cooperation in advancing digital sectors, enhancing digital infrastructure, promoting digital innovation, advancing digital cooperation, deepening digital inclusion, and strengthening digital governance system and capabilities⁷¹

Key messages on Smart Tourism–Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) Linkages

An integration of tourism and cultural and creative industry (CCI) policies can help support a strong build back process with the fact that the CCIs have a synergistic relationship with tourism in the tourism value chain, serve as a magnet for tourism and often rely on revenue from tourism to sustain their practices. In the digital era, the complementarities between culture and tourism go beyond these traditional links in recognition of the role of CCIs’ supporting smart tourism, promoting places internationally with creative contents, and contributing to tourism destination diversification and management towards sustainability based on the following perspectives:⁷²

- **Cultural heritage and the creative economy represent a unique tourism asset.** The relationship between culture and tourism has been a major source of tourism growth in recent decades with cultural tourism as one of the largest and fastest growing global tourism markets. In recent years, the concept of creative tourism has grown as policy has recognized the potential for CCIs to support tourism e.g., through learning experiences and contemporary forms of creativity. CCIs contribute to cities and regions’ vibrance and are deeply embedded in local contexts. Hence, such stakeholders as creative workers, businesses, and organizations contribute to the visibility and the feel of a place, making them smart destinations. In return, this contributes to local development in general and creates the so–called spillover effect with a flourishing CCIs increasing further tourism.

⁶⁷ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/FAFD-52.-ASEAN-Guidelines-on-Promoting-the-Utilization-of-Digital-Technologie.pdf>

⁶⁸ <https://www.greatermekong.org/g/greater-mekong-subregion-tourism-sector-strategy-2016-2025>

⁶⁹ <https://www.adb.org/documents/gms-economic-cooperation-program-strategic-framework-2030>

⁷⁰ <https://greatermekong.org/g/gms-countries-roll-out-various-smart-tourism-and-digital-initiatives>

⁷¹ [GMS Digital Economy Cooperation Initiative](#)

⁷² <https://web-archive.oecd.org/2022-12-07/647599-OECD-G20-TWG-Discussion-Paper-Tourism-Cultural-Creative-Sectors.pdf>

- Cultural and creative industries (CCIs) are a major source of job creation and value generation.** CCIs cover a diverse range of industries and professions. Generally, CCIs encompass a wide range of activities, including advertising, architecture, crafts, design, fashion, museums and heritage, music, dance, TV and film, videogames, and visual and performing arts, and even food and gastronomy. There are varying business models in CCIs from not-for-profit organizations, public institutions to profit-generated generated businesses. G-20 has recognized CCIs as the significant economic drivers in terms of jobs and incomes with significant impact on the wider economy. For instance, CCIs' employment accounted for up to 1 in 20 jobs in some OECD countries and up to 1 in 10 jobs in major cities and capital regions. The growth in the number of CC enterprises was higher than in the rest of the business economy (18% vs 12%) and growth in cultural and creative employment outpaced growth in overall employment in most OECD countries (13.4% vs 9.1%) one decade prior to the pandemic. CCIs also contribute to innovation through new products, services and content, as well as new business models and ways of co-production, including through skills mobility. Cultural and creative goods and services are in increasing demand.

Under the umbrella of the ASEAN Creative Economy framework and the fast moving CCI landscape, this policy brief propose the following actions to strengthen the CCIs in the Mekong countries so as to promote cultural heritage tourism in upcoming years.

TABLE 22 – ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF CCI DEVELOPMENT

Actions in Support of CCI Development	
CLMTV Governments	Establish the ecosystem model for CCIs which is a framework for mapping the creative industries ecosystem in a particular country or region. This includes identifying key stakeholders, mapping the value chain, and analysing the regulatory framework, and classifying cultural and creative products (taxonomy) to fit the specific needs of the CCI.
	Mainstream the coordination and partnership between Government and CCI organizations
	Protect intellectual rights in e-business environment
	Improve digital and physical infrastructure
	Promote policies on eco-innovation for producing green products to catalyze sustainable development
	Link traditional culture sectors with new creative arts
	Promote education and training in CCIs-related fields, including in complementary areas like entrepreneurship, management, marketing, etc.
	Enhance branding, market access, and export development
	Enhance regional dialogue and cooperation in promoting CCIs
	Identify and promote green investments in CCIs
Enhance the connection between CCIs and the other sector, especially tourism to promote cultural tourism	

CHAPTER VII. ISSUES, LESSONS, CHALLENGES, AND FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

A. Issues

The project has addressed development related to the sustainable and smart tourism development in the Mekong countries and delivered the needed results as the solutions through (i) building the digital platforms to promote the tourism destinations—the UNESCO World Heritage sites in Ayutthaya, Bagan, Hue, Luang Prabang, and Siem Reap (and the secondary sites in each engagement sites); (ii) providing capacity programs; (iii) promoting the collaboration between designated cities and organizations in Korea and the partners in CLMTV; and catalyzing investment opportunities in tourism sector in CLMTV. This evaluation noted some issues during the project lifecycle:

- Training curriculum package and applied method—A comprehensive training package on hospitality and sustainable and smart tourism and the MI's Modular Training Approach with Action Plan Implementation (API) should have been produced and applied. The documented training materials are used as the project resources within and beyond the project timeframe while the AIP can help the project measure the training impact and the project outcome.
- Lack of a mechanism to measure the effectiveness and influence of the digital platforms produced.
- Lack of an effective coordination mechanism with the Mekong countries to increase the project visibility.
- Lack of follow-up actions with the project beneficiaries and stakeholders upon completion of the project activities.
- Lack of an effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework and project review meetings with the TWG has affected the project effectiveness.

B. Lessons

The project has seen several lessons learnt from its implementation period as recorded by the evaluation.

- The designed project with indicators should be fully implemented and monitored and evaluated (M&E)
- The TWG and the key project partner organizations should be established at the project start. This may help the project coordinate with the project beneficiaries and stakeholders in CLMTV more effectively.
- Stronger stakeholder engagement with public and private sectors will enhance the project results
- The project outcomes which are measurable should be considered for designing new projects.

C. Challenges

- The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic is the key challenge facing the project implementation and results. The project has removed some activities, such as the project baseline study and M&E activities, and extended its duration for a nine-month time from the approved project closing date.
- The current political and social situation in Myanmar has affected the tourism in Bagan, i.e. the UNESCO World Heritage sites are at risks and number of international visitors has reduced, and the country as a whole. The representatives of Bagan City and public organizations did not attend the Exchange Program and could not enter the joint MoUs. The current situation may also deter the regional cooperation as well as the foreign investment in the country.

D. Follow-up Actions

The project evaluation has proposed the follow-up actions as below:

- Mekong Institute (MI) may consider the “areas for improvement” to form the Project Sustainability Plan for the project results.
- Mekong Institute (MI) may consider the next phase(s) of this project to further support the tourism sector in CLMTV by promoting **smart tourism destinations** and **sustainable tourism in sequence with phase 1** in consideration of environmental protection at the heritage sites and/or towns and surrounding areas, adding values to the cultural heritage sites and towns, i.e., the UNESCO World Heritage sites as the unique feature of this project, and creating synergies with associated cultural and creative industries (CCIs) in each country.
- The Mekong countries and Mekong Institute (MI) may consider the recommendations under the Policy Brief for further solutions and actions to realize the synergy between CCIs and tourism to promote **Cultural Tourism**.

ANNEXES. PROJECT EVALUATION AND RATING

Annex 1. Evaluation Framework

TABLE 23 – EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Evaluation criteria by OECD-DAC	Evaluation questions ⁷³	Judgement criteria / indicators	Means and sources of verification / Data collection method
<p>1. Relevance</p> <p>The extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, global, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.</p>	<p>EQ 1. To what extent did the Project meet the needs of the target beneficiaries (direct and indirect) in tourism sector in terms of institutional, organizational, and individual skills and competency?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The project design and support is perceived as relevant to the needs of the project beneficiaries and/or stakeholders given the Mekong development context The size and regularity of the project support is perceived as adequate to meet the project beneficiaries Project inclusion (gender sensitization, training needs, sectors, category of organizations, etc. is integrated in the project design). 	<p>Secondary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved project proposal/project design, and project studies/reports, progress reports Project M&E report(s) Other related documents <p>Primary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online survey with the training participants and stakeholders involved in other project activities (by component) from the Mekong countries and RoK Semi-structured KIIs with (i) MI's representatives (Management and TIF Department), (ii) Project Technical Working Group (TWG) members FGDs with core representatives of the (i) training participants from the Mekong countries; (ii) Roadshow participants; (iii)

⁷³ Key coding for the evaluation questions:

First digit	Second digit
1 = EQ1 (RELEVANCE)	.1 = first question for the particular EQ
2 = EQ2 (COHERENCE)	
3 = EQ3 (EFFECTIVENESS)	
4 = EQ4 (EFFICIENCY)	
5 = EQ5 (IMPACT)	
6 = EQ6 (SUSTAINABILITY)	

			Exchanged program; and (iv) investment forums
<p>2. Coherence</p> <p>The compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector, or institution.</p>	<p>EQ 2. Was the Project in consistency and complementarity with (i) the Mekong countries' policies and/or initiatives on promoting sustainable and smart tourism development; and (ii) the regional cooperation between the Mekong countries and Republic of Korea (RoK) in terms of preserving of the ecosystem, promoting green growth in the Mekong region, and strengthening capacity of the Mekong countries</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The project intervention aligned with Action Plan of Mekong–Republic of Korea Action Plan, 2017–2020 or Action Plan, 2021 – 2025 • The project intervention aligned with and supplemented the Mekong governments' sustainable and smart tourism development policies and/or initiatives, the project beneficiaries' organizations (public and private types) • The project intervention aligned with MI's Strategic Plan and other projects / interventions carried out by MI 	<p>Secondary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved project proposal/project design, and project studies/reports, progress reports • Project M&E reports • Other related documents <p>Primary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey with all training participants and stakeholders involved in other project activities (by component) from the Mekong countries and RoK • Semi-structured KIIs with (i) MI's representatives (Management and TIF Department), (ii) Project Technical Working Group (TWG) members • FGDs with core representatives of the (i) training participants from the Mekong countries; (ii) Roadshow participants; (iii) Exchanged program; and (iv) investment forums
<p>3. Effectiveness</p> <p>The extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.</p>	<p>EQ 3. What changes have occurred and to what extent have the project intervention contributed to the project beneficiaries?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The achievements of the project results • The quality of the project implementation approaches and strategies, project management 	<p>Secondary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved project proposal/project design, and project studies/reports, progress reports • Project M&E reports • Other related documents <p>Primary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey with all training participants and stakeholders involved in other project activities (by component) from the Mekong countries and RoK • Semi-structured KIIs with (i) MI's representatives (Management and TIF Department), (ii) Project Technical Working Group (TWG) members

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FGDs with core representatives of the (i) training participants from the Mekong countries; (ii) Roadshow participants; (iii) Exchanged program; and (iv) investment forums
<p>4. Efficiency</p> <p>The extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.</p>	<p>EQ 4. Were the project resources mobilized and used to achieve the project results in an efficient manner?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value for money–cost efficiency and timeliness in project delivery 	<p>Secondary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved project proposal/project design, and project studies/reports, progress reports • Project M&E reports • Other related documents <p>Primary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey with all training participants and stakeholders involved in other project activities (by component) from the Mekong countries and RoK • Semi–structured KIIs with (i) MI's representatives (Management and TIF Department), (ii) Project Technical Working Group (TWG) members • FGDs with core representatives of the (i) training participants from the Mekong countries; (ii) Roadshow participants; (iii) Exchanged program; and (iv) investment forums
<p>5. Impact</p> <p>The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended, or unintended, higher–level effects.</p>	<p>EQ 6. What is the likely impact created by the project?</p>	<p>The likely impact on the project beneficiaries' knowledge and practices for contributing to sustainable and smart tourism development in the Mekong countries as well as regional cooperation between Mekong countries and RoK</p>	<p>Primary data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online survey with all training participants from the Mekong countries • Semi–structured KIIs with (i) MI's representatives (Management and TIF Department), (ii) Project Technical Working Group (TWG) members • FGDs with core representatives of the (i) training participants from the Mekong countries; (ii) Roadshow participants; (iii) Exchanged program; and (iv) investment forums

6. Sustainability

The extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue or are likely to continue.

EQ 5. What outcomes/changes will be sustained as the project’s long-term outcomes?

- The degree to which the project outcomes is perceived as sustainable by different stakeholders
- Level of capacity and preparation by the project beneficiaries and stakeholders towards sustainability

Primary data

- Online survey with all training participants from the Mekong countries
- Semi-structured KIIs with (i) MI's representatives (Management and TIF Department), (ii) Project Technical Working Group (TWG) members
- FGDs with core representatives of the (i) training participants from the Mekong countries; (ii) Roadshow participants; (iii) Exchanged program; and (iv) investment forums

Annex 2. Evaluation Rating

TABLE 24 – EVALUATION RATING

Rating Value	Relevance	Coherence	Effectiveness	Efficiency	Sustainability	Impact
3	Highly relevant	Highly coherent	Highly effective	Highly efficient	Most likely	Most likely
2	Relevant	Coherence	Effective	Efficient	Likely	Likely
1	Partly relevant	Partly coherent	Partly effective	Partly efficient	Less than likely	Less than likely
0	Irrelevant	Incoherent	Ineffective	Inefficient	Unlikely	Unlikely

