

THE EIGHTH GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION SUMMIT

Hosted by the People's Republic of China
At Kunming, Yunnan Province

7 November 2024

Joint Summit Declaration Toward a Better Community Through Innovation-driven Development

We, the Heads of State/Governments of the Kingdom of Cambodia, the People's Republic of China (PRC), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on the occasion of the Eighth Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Summit:

Appreciate the return of greater normalcy as the world successfully controlled and emerged from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic but also recognize that, apart from the lost growth momentum, the global economy as well as our national economies are now facing other broader and longer-term challenges.

Acknowledge, the significant progress in implementing the GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030), which we endorsed at the Seventh GMS Summit hosted virtually by the Kingdom of Cambodia on 9 September 2021.

Recall our Joint Summit Declaration of the Seventh GMS Summit in 2021 in which we reaffirmed our commitment to the advancement of the GMS Economic Cooperation Program for the full realization of the further enriched GMS vision of a more integrated, prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive subregion and toward building a GMS community with a shared future.

Reaffirm our commitment to the spirit of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence—namely, mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence— as well as true multilateralism; nondiscriminatory, open, fair, inclusive, equitable, transparent and rules-based multilateral trading system and open economy; and the principles of consensus, mutual respect, equality, wide consultation and coordination, common contribution and shared benefits; with the realization of advancing interconnectivity, trade and investment facilitation and liberalization; making economic globalization more open, inclusive, balanced and beneficial for all, thereby promoting the subregion's integration.

Recognize that to successfully navigate through the current and future challenges that we face, there is an urgent need to foster a culture of innovation for development of the GMS to ensure that our diverse economies move toward a transformative phase of development through an ecosystem that encourages creativity, research, adaptive action as well as technological breakthroughs guiding us toward sustainable growth.

Reaffirm our commitment to Regional Cooperation and Integration (RCI), with the realization that our future is intertwined and the GMS thrives when we collaborate, share knowledge, pool resources, pledge to deepen regional cooperation, harmonize policies, and

create seamless cross-border pathways, thereby unlocking the full potential of our interconnected economies.

Appreciate that cities are the catalysts for change and that urban centers are engines of growth and transformation, with a pivotal role in driving innovation, attracting talent, and fostering entrepreneurship.

Note with a sense of urgency the environmental concerns, including pollution, biodiversity loss and climate change in the GMS, as well as economic issues that negatively impact income equality, job creation, and sustainable growth, and while some countries in the subregion have experienced rapid economic development, disparities between urban and rural and border areas remain.

Convinced that more effective regional connectivity and integration is the key to face multiple post-pandemic trade related challenges in the subregion, such as navigating protectionist policies, uneven economic development among member states, infrastructure deficits and lack of harmonized regulation hindering connectivity, as well as vulnerability to global supply chain disruptions.

Appreciate the arduous and results-focused work of our ministers, senior officials, GMS working groups and forums, and other GMS stakeholders in advancing GMS collaborative undertakings in the directions and areas set in GMS-2030.

NOW THEREFORE WE FIRMLY RESOLVE to further strengthen and deepen our collective efforts in pursuit of sustained and accelerated GMS development amid the extreme challenges and threats that we face in this decade and beyond and *REAFFIRM OUR COMMITMENT* to even closer and stronger cooperation toward the realization of our vision of a more integrated, prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive GMS.

I. Achievements under Innovative Approaches across Crosscutting Themes Set in the GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030)

1. An important and novel feature of GMS-2030 is that it recommends **innovative approaches in crosscutting areas** that are critical in addressing the new and important challenges facing the subregion. Much of the achievements and work done in the last 3 years pertain to these innovative approaches, among which are:

2. **Harnessing the digital revolution.** Recognizing the importance of digitalization in the pursuit of overall development, the GMS ministers endorsed in 2022 the **GMS Digital Economy Cooperation Initiative**—initiated by the PRC—which provides a framework for GMS countries' cooperation in all aspects of the digital revolution. Subsequently, the **GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025–2027)** was prepared, which aims to harness the digital revolution and promote inclusive digitalization and advanced technologies across key sectors—tourism, agriculture, and trade and investment—through actionable steps. In 2024, GMS countries endorsed the **GMS Cooperation Framework on Digitalization of Trade Documents**, which aims to enhance the practical cooperation in trade digitalization by encouraging application of digitalized trade documents.

3. **Enhancing spatial approach to development.** In line with this approach, the **development of various border and specific areas along the GMS economic corridors** is being pursued. These include corridor towns development within the Lao PDR and border area development between Viet Nam and Guangxi in the PRC, as well as studies on improving connectivity between Vientiane and Ha Noi along the GMS North–South Economic Corridor and on reassessing and improving strategies for the development of border economic zones in the Thai–Cambodian border along the GMS Southern Economic Corridor.

4. **Conducting deeper dialogue on policies and regulation, underpinned by knowledge-based solutions and capacity building.** Work on the implementation of key agreements and software instruments proceeded well, including putting the **GMS Cross-Border Transport Facilitation Agreement (CBTA)** back on track, after a brief hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the relaunching and extension until end-2026 of its Early Harvest Program at the Eighth CBTA Joint Committee Meeting held in Hainan, PRC in December 2023. In the environment sector, policy dialogues were organized on green freight, low-carbon agriculture, air pollution control, and waste management toward circular economy in March 2023; and climate change adaptation and disaster risk management in July 2023.

5. Likewise, to address the pressing challenges of climate change and energy security, the GMS Energy Transition Task Force was established in 2022 to accelerate the **transition to cleaner energy sources and energy efficiency** in the subregion.

6. We acknowledge the efforts leading to the creation of a robust knowledge-sharing platform for the GMS called the **GMS Knowledge Network (GMSKN)**, with the aim of providing relevant innovative knowledge solutions to enhance policy dialogue among GMS countries. Members of GMSKN are committed to prioritizing research on digitalization, environment and climate change, agriculture, energy and cross-border trade, thereby providing intellectual support to the innovation for development of GMS.

7. Recognizing the need for skills and capacity building, the GMS civil servants have benefited from the **training programs** under the ADB-supported **BIMP-EAGA, IMT-GT and GMS Capacity Building Program (B-I-G Program)**, in such areas as project management; Big Data and AI solutions; and enhancing capacities in “smart tourism” readiness, including the role of digital technology in accelerating tourism recovery, and gender mainstreaming.

8. **Embracing private sector solutions.** Recognizing that leveraging the private sector’s expertise, knowledge, and financing is necessary to attain the GMS countries’ goals and commitments, the **GMS Strategy for Private Sector Engagement** being formulated focuses on enhanced and outcome-driven approaches for public and private sectors dialogue and proposing specific institutional arrangements and procedures for enhanced and structured private sector participation in the GMS Program. Pursuant to this strategy, **Private Sector Roundtables** were organized to discuss project collaboration with the private sector. Training programs were also conducted for GMS government officials on public–private partnerships. Also aligned with this strategy is giving the GMS Business Council a more prominent role and participation across the various sector working groups and other bodies of the GMS Program.

9. **Transforming the GMS Program into an open platform.** A key initiative in this effort is the work underway on the **Strategic Approach for Strengthening Local Government**

Engagement in the Greater Mekong Subregion, which aims to strengthen, expand, make more inclusive, and raise the visibility of the existing mechanisms for local government participation, namely, the GMS Economic Corridors Forum and the GMS Governors' Forum, through such measures as expanding development partners' participation and inclusion of cities, as well as organizing sub-corridor forums. Moreover, recognizing the critical role of development partners in the GMS, a study on **Deepening Development Partners' Engagement in the Greater Mekong Subregion Program** was prepared in 2022, which recommended several actions and mechanisms to help mobilize development partners' technical, knowledge, and financial resources for GMS development.

10. **Strengthening links with other RCI initiatives** is a key element of this transformation. This includes the GMS energy program's enhanced cooperation with the related initiatives of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN); and the broad alignment of the GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025 with the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016–2025. Likewise, the GMS countries also participate and collaborate with the Mekong–Lancang Cooperation, including in its initiatives to foster regional cooperation in science, technology, and innovation; as well as with the Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, which is another key RCI mechanism in the region.

11. **Gender mainstreaming.** We have made significant strides toward mainstreaming gender and promoting inclusivity in the subregion. The **GMS Gender Strategy**, endorsed in 2022, has been further strengthened by the recent approval of the **GMS Gender Strategy Implementation Plan 2025–2030**, which provides specific, measurable activities and outputs to effectively operationalize the Strategy, including addressing intersectional issues.

12. We remain mindful of the need to monitor the GMS Program's progress and welcome the formulation and application of the **GMS-2030 Results Framework** with specific and measurable indicators to guide us in achieving GMS-2030 outputs and outcomes.

13. **GMS Regional Investment Framework.** To support GMS 2030 through the identification and development of actual projects, the Regional Investment Framework 2023–2025 (RIF 2025) was improved as a new three-year rolling pipeline of priority projects. It incorporates new project selection criteria adopted at the 25th GMS Ministerial Conference which has been prepared through an extensive consultative process and is supported by capacity building and training programs. Subsequently, RIF 2024–2026 (RIF 2026) and RIF 2025–2027 (RIF 2027) were endorsed this year. RIF 2026 comprises 128 projects amounting to \$17.7 billion while RIF 2027 comprises 176 projects with a total estimated value of \$26.43 billion.

II. Achievements in GMS Sectors of Cooperation

14. Substantial progress was achieved in the work in the various sectors, which remained the backbone of GMS cooperation.

15. In **agriculture**, the GMS Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program is building the institutional and technical capacity and awareness of GMS stakeholders on food security and safety, and sustainable farm agri-food production, particularly, through innovative technologies. The program is assisting GMS countries to adopt climate-adaptive and low-

carbon practices on-farm and along the value chain, emphasizing the participation of women in agri-business, utilization of digital technology to support farm-to-fork traceability, and sharing of good practices and experiences in cross-border animal disease control. The forthcoming strategy will chart an ambitious course for the subregion's agricultural future.

16. In **energy**, the GMS energy program enhanced its cooperation with development partners and ASEAN and has actively engaged in discussions on the ASEAN Power Grid, aimed at deeper coordination on multilateral and regional power trade. The GMS Energy Transition Task Force is implementing a **two-year work plan** focused on energy efficiency and demand-side management. The forthcoming **GMS Energy Sector Strategy 2024–2030** will define the strategic priorities of the GMS energy cooperation program toward a secure and green energy future for the region.

17. In **environment**, the 6th GMS Environment Ministers' Meeting held on 10–13 September 2024 endorsed the **GMS 2030 Strategic Framework for Accelerating Climate Action and Environmental Sustainability** and the **Phnom Penh Joint Statement on Prevention of Plastic Pollution in the GMS**. The strategic framework will support GMS countries through activities in four priority themes: (i) climate and disaster resilience, including loss and damage, (ii) low-carbon transition, (iii) pollution control and circular green economy, and (iv) nature-based solutions, and four crosscutting issues: (i) youth, gender, and social inclusion; (ii) green and digital technologies; (iii) innovative financing mechanism; and (iv) private sector engagement.

18. In **health**, we continued to strengthen and accelerate resilient, green, sustainable, and inclusive post-pandemic recovery and growth in the subregion guided by the **One Health Approach**, which was also integrated into the new **GMS Health Sector Strategy 2024–2030** endorsed by the GMS health ministers this year, anchored on the pillars of regional health security and strengthening health systems to achieve universal health coverage.

19. In **tourism**, international tourist arrivals and receipts continued to rise across the GMS, well on its way to recovering to pre-pandemic levels, thanks to the collective GMS efforts to safely reopen borders, improve visa openness, and reestablish cross-border transport. The **Mekong Tourism Recovery Communications Plan** successfully guided information dissemination supporting safe and sustainable tourism recovery. Moreover, the annual Mekong Tourism Forum returned this year to Lijiang, PRC, on 23–25 April 2024, with the forward-looking theme “Visionary Journeys: Redefining Tomorrow’s Travel,” aimed at travel experiences that promote sustainability and enhanced GMS benefits. We note with appreciation that the new strategic framework for the GMS Tourism Strategy 2030 has been endorsed by the Tourism Working Group, focusing on building sustainable destinations, developing human capital, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and enhancing destination marketing. Institutional arrangements for GMS tourism cooperation continue to grow stronger with agreement to elevate the status of the Mekong Tourism Coordinating Office to an intergovernmental organization with the title of the GMS Tourism Office.

20. **Transport** remains the key sector in the GMS Program with transport infrastructure projects making up the majority of the GMS RIF 2027 projects both in terms of number and volume of financing. Among the major transport projects completed recently are the China–Laos (Kunming-Vientiane) Highspeed Rail Project; the Thailand GMS Highway Expansion

Phase 2 Project; and the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway. The 26th Subregional Transport Forum, held in Beijing, PRC, on 26–27 September 2024, focused on updating the **GMS Transport Sector Strategy 2030**, which will prioritize multimodal transport, cross-border facilitation, and addressing the climate challenge through investments in rail, waterways, and resilient infrastructure. The Global Sustainable Transport Forum 2024 was held in Beijing in September 2024, with endorsement and adoption of the Development Vision for the Sustainable Transport Forum (The Beijing Vision) by participating GMS countries to promote sustainable transport development.

21. In **transport facilitation**, there has been good progress under the CBTA, with the relaunching and extension of the Early Harvest Program. A trial operation was launched in Yunnan, PRC, in June 2024, representing the longest route yet attempted under the CBTA's early agreements. Its successful completion paves the way for full operation along all 11 routes outlined in those agreements. Significant progress was also achieved on key aspects of railways development with GMS countries improving the organizational structure of the Greater Mekong Railway Association; completing an operational readiness plan; advancing negotiations to address the Framework Agreement for Cross-Border Railway Transport Connectivity; and updating the GMS cross-border rail network strategy.

22. In **trade and investment**, we congratulate the Task Force on Trade and Investment on its elevation to a new full-fledged GMS Working Group. This advancement holds significant potential to bolster regional trade and investment cooperation through improvements in the business climate and deeper collaborative efforts in the future.

III. The Way Forward

23. Since its beginning in the early 1990s, the GMS Program has continued to evolve and grow often in response to the needs and challenges of the times. A recent reflection of this is the inclusion of sustainability and inclusivity as key elements of our shared vision in GMS-2030, as environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, and the climate emergency became global and regional threats, together with the persistence of poverty and human welfare inequality.

24. Similarly, with digitalization—and now AI—emerging as key enablers and accelerators—as well as potential disrupters of development—we again find it necessary to formulate effective strategies to harness and benefit from these technological advances. It is necessary to strengthen cooperation on digital economy and green development and build a more sustainable and inclusive development model to spur growth. We stress the need to strengthen exchanges and cooperation on AI. We welcome that the United Nations General Assembly adopted by consensus the resolution “Enhancing International Cooperation on Capacity Building of Artificial Intelligence.” We call for the common implementation of this resolution by the international community and seek to bridge the Artificial Intelligence divide. Recognizing that innovation has proven to be a key driver of competitiveness and overall development, we mandate urgent actions in a coordinated and collaborative manner to promote, direct, and optimize its positive impact on the accelerated and quality development of our subregion.

25. We have therefore enthusiastically endorsed the **GMS Innovation Strategy for Development (GMS ISD) 2030**, the formulation of which was initiated by the GMS Ministers' approval of its concept in December 2023. The primary aim of the GMS ISD is to accelerate progress toward achieving the objectives of the GMS-2030, including providing the foundations for the development of the GMS innovation system, identifying ways of enhancing cross-border collaboration and cooperation to maximize the potential and efficiency of innovation in the subregion. It will support, strengthen, and help build the components of national innovation strategies in each GMS country by addressing the weaknesses of the existing subregional innovation system. It focuses on three complementary strategic approaches to increase progress toward meeting the ambitions of GMS-2030 and address ongoing and developing subregional challenges. The three strategic approaches are digitalization, green transition, and improving connectivity through investment in hard and soft infrastructure.

26. On **digitalization**, building digital skills is of utmost importance in developing a workforce with the capabilities and competencies to take advantage of the digital economy. We will support national efforts promoting digitalization, developing cross-border digital connectivity; encouraging increased cross-border digital trade, information flows, and investment, while instituting appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks to support the digital transition. We will support subregional efforts to sustain the digital transition across different value chains.

27. On **green transition**, while national policies are key in encouraging a shift toward greener growth, the cross-border nature of the problem and the need for transboundary cooperation and collective effort provide a strong rationale for the GMS cooperation on green transition. We will support national efforts by promoting diffusion and adoption of green technologies across priority sectors, the use of environmentally friendly technologies in sustainable use and integrated management of natural resources, including land, water, and forest resources, to achieve subregional food, water, and energy security as well as preserve valuable ecosystems and biodiversity.

28. On **connectivity**, by enabling improved integration within the GMS but also with other subregions in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia, greater connectivity provides opportunities for enhancing cross-border cooperation, integration in regional value chains, and learning and knowledge diffusion. We will promote the development of innovative cross-border connectivity solutions to boost innovation performance in the GMS as part of GMS economic corridors development, promoting dialogue to encourage regulatory alignment, providing means of sharing knowledge and technology solutions and business models.

29. Through the GMS ISD, together with the other knowledge products of our recent cooperation efforts, as well as the activities and solutions aligned with the innovative approaches set in GMS-2030, the GMS Program has again demonstrated its agility in responding to and surmounting enormous challenges thrown its way and remains relevant in achieving the subregion's development aspirations.

30. Through all these transformations, what remains constant is our shared conviction that close and results-oriented cooperation is not only a facilitator but a critical factor in the

achievement of our shared vision of a more integrated, prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive subregion.

31. The success we have achieved in our cooperation program would not have been possible without the support of our development partners. We therefore acknowledge and are thankful for the unwavering support of the Asian Development Bank since the beginning of the program, as well as the increasing support of a growing number of other committed development partners. With a thrust toward greater inclusivity and the GMS Program's transformation into a more open cooperation platform, we hope to engage more closely with an even more expanded body of stakeholders and partners.

32. We fully commit to making joint efforts to develop the GMS Program as an open cooperation platform and to tap the opportunities offered by linkages with other relevant global and regional initiatives. We will therefore further promote synergies and complementarities between the GMS Program and other RCI platforms, including the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Civilization Initiative, ASEAN, Mekong–Lancang Cooperation, Ayeyawady–Chao Phraya–Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, and the Cambodia–Lao PDR–Myanmar–Viet Nam Cooperation, to provide new impetus to the development of the subregion and beyond.

33. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to the PRC for graciously hosting the Eighth GMS Summit.

34. We agree to meet again at the Ninth GMS Summit to be held in the Lao PDR in 2027.

Endorsed in Kunming, People's Republic of China, on the 7th of November 2024.