



## Greater Mekong Subregion Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program



Greater Mekong  
Subregion  
Sustainable  
Agriculture & Food  
Security Program

Consulting firm:



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### What's New?

The last few months have been eventful for the GMS region. At the international level the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) was a significant event with implications for the GMS countries and their agriculture sector policies. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) funded TA 9916 Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program (SAFSP) has been designed to assist the GMS countries to tackle key climate change challenges to their agricultural sectors. Two of the three TA 9916 output themes are closely aligned to COP26 objectives. These are: 'climate-friendly, inclusive, and gender responsive agri-food value chains and agribusiness' and 'climate-adaptive agriculture in the context of water-energy food nexus'. The third output theme 'harmonized crop and livestock safety and quality systems' aims to support cross-border trade and agri-food product exports, which is vital in assisting post-pandemic economic recovery in the GMS.

COVID-19 is a continued challenge in the GMS, impacting the agriculture sector and especially smallholder farmers. A knowledge product on COVID-19 Food Security Response and Recovery Actions in the GMS was prepared by the TA 9916 consultants to assist the GMS countries with their post-pandemic recovery. Moreover, the TA 9916 consultants will provide COVID-19 policy and planning support through a series of webinars

in early 2022.

Early December witnessed the official launch of the China-Laos railway, which will provide opportunities for increased agri-food trade between Laos, China, and also Thailand. Improved and harmonized food safety and quality (FSQ) standards certification is required to boost cross border trade. Harmonized FSQ standards are a priority TA 9916 activity and progress is presented in this newsletter.

Following the launch of our first newsletter in September 2021, we are now honored to present our second edition. This newsletter will keep you updated with the latest TA 9916 activities and feature key developments in GMS agriculture sector cooperation.

Warm regards,

Stewart Pittaway  
TA 9916 Team Leader

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## Recent Highlights from the GMS Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program (SAFSP)

### Capacity Building

[SAFSP joined forces with China's MARA in capacity training on agro-food quality and safety inspection for GMS countries, more joint events planned for 2022](#)

TA 9916 consultants led by Ms. Vichelle Roaring Arunsuwannakorn, International Trade Facilitation Specialist, collaborated with the Foreign Economic Cooperation Center (FECC) of China's Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs (MARA) to successfully organize an online training workshop on the important topic of agro-food quality and inspection for the GMS countries on 24-27 August 2021. Nearly 200 participants from China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam were involved.



*In 2021, Cambodia directly exported first batches of fresh mangos to China - Source: Phnompenhpost*

Besides participants from the GMS countries, representatives from Malaysia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Singapore, also attended the 4-day event. Some international organizations, including GIZ, GS1 and the Mekong Institute also participated. Main topics presented at the training workshop included China's agricultural product quality control and food safety inspections, Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) certification and cross-border fruit traceability system, agricultural

product risk monitoring, China's requirements for the quality and safety of imported food, and China's agricultural products and food safety inspection and supervision mechanisms. Ms. Arunsuwannakorn delivered a lecture on currently proposed cross-border traceability pilot demonstration for GAP Certified Fruits in Viet Nam, Thailand, and China.

[Read more](#)

### [Good news – GMS Agriculture may benefit from low-cost e-traceability!](#)

### [US FDA announced winners of low-to-no-cost solutions in digital traceability.](#)

Attention was drawn in the first [SAFSP newsletter](#) to the research experiences of the National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA) of Thailand on e-traceability and the potential of using [block chain to drive transparency in agri-food supply chains](#). Block chain Technology, or Distributed Ledger Technology, is a nearly immutable, tamper proof online database that stores information across a network of personal computers, as publicly accessible ledgers. No single entity owns the database, while multiple users in the network can use it.

One of the SAFSP objectives is to better understand how digital technologies can enable [end-to-end traceability](#) in the agri-food industry of the GMS countries. During the first SAFSP scoping exercise two potential companies were identified that are capable of offering e-traceability services in the Subregion. [TE-FOOD](#), a company based in Viet Nam offering a blockchain-based solution for fruits and pork traceability and the US-based [OpsSmart Global](#) supporting e-traceability in Thailand and Viet Nam.



*OpsSmart Connected Blockchain Network - Source: OpsSmart*

The US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) announced on September 13<sup>th</sup> 2021, the winners of the low or no-cost digitally enabled traceability challenge, which was part of the [New Era for Smarter Food Safety initiative](#). The initiative aimed at achieving end-to-end traceability throughout the supply chain, while developing creative low- to no-cost solutions, enabling food companies of all sizes to achieve full traceability. Most platforms make use of GS1 standards and block chain for making value chain transactions and other food safety data records traceable from farm-to-fork and for fast product recall.

[Read more](#)

## Demonstration

### [SAFSP to step up preparation for first pilot demonstrations and value chain studies in](#)

## GMS countries from January 2022



*ADB mid-term review mission to the organic vegetable demo under CASPII in Vietnam – Source: TA9916 consultant*

Pilot demonstrations are a key activity in SAFSP, having received strong interest and support from GMS countries. Development of the demonstrations has been delayed by COVID-19 disruptions across the GMS, although the TA 9916 team and GMS partner departments and institutes have continued their dialogue over demonstration preparation despite the disruptions.

A set of value chain studies will commence in early 2022 that will feature the crops linked to the proposed demonstrations. These will include tea (China), dragon fruit (Viet Nam), durian (Thailand), banana (Laos), and vegetables (Cambodia). The findings from these value chain studies will complement the development of the pilot demonstrations and contribute to TA 9916 capacity development activities, and the preparation of knowledge products.

Demonstration development and implementation will be further discussed with the GMS Working Group in Agriculture on 19 January 2022. Confirmation of the proposed demonstrations will occur at the meeting. The TA 9916 2022 workplan will also be presented and discussed at the meeting.

## Cross-border demonstration on GAP certified fruit traceability has strong support from GMS countries

The proposed demonstration for piloting traceability of fruit value chain will feature the theme: Towards Achieving Agri-food Safety and Quality Harmonization in the GMS in the context of COVID-19 and Climate Change. The demonstration will use GS1 barcode/QR code. There has been strong support from GMS countries for the demonstration pilot.

Traceability is an important tool for FSQ assurance in promoting transparency, digitization, and the systematic capture of FSQ regulatory requirements (GAP certification, GMP, testing results). Two demonstration pilots in three GMS countries, are proposed to be implemented through a harmonized approach, which is expected to generate valuable feedback for policy development. Implementation of the pilot demonstrations between Viet Nam and China, and Thailand and China, can also be instrumental in demonstrating and validating the adoption (or non-adoption of) harmonized/mutually recognized standards (i.e., GAP), post-harvest practices (GMPs) and conformity assessment systems (audit, certification, inspection, food safety testing, and SPS).



*Dragon fruits from Vietnam and a GS1 Malaysia's traceability process for durians under APEC PSU Phase 2 - Source: GS1*

To gather more concrete information and data for the demonstrations and the capacity building needs, the SAFSP will carry out value chain studies mentioned above.

### [Climate Smart Irrigation and Soils for Sustainable Crop Production in Cambodia](#)

Preparation of a proposed demonstration featuring innovative soil and water management on farms has been undertaken with the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in Cambodia. Improved soil carbon storage and soil health and on-farm water usage will be demonstration features.

The partners for this work are the Department of Agriculture and Land Resources Management (DALRM) and Department of Agricultural Engineering (DAEng).

The concept note for the demonstration is being reviewed by Cambodian counterparts and will be one of the demonstrations discussed at the GMS Working Group Agriculture meeting on 19 January 2022. The proposed demonstration site may be at the DALRM station in Kampong Speu Province, about 60km west of Phnom Penh.



*South Rolaing Chrey Canal in Kampong Speu under restoration to help farmers that suffered from severe droughts – Source: [www.khmertimeskh.com](http://www.khmertimeskh.com)*

## **Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic**

### [SAFSP released 1st Knowledge Product on COVID-19 Food Security Response and Recovery Actions in the GMS](#)

The first TA 9916 knowledge product, titled “COVID-19 Food Security Response and Recovery Actions in the GMS” is now finalized and [publicly available](#). This follows the regional workshop held on 01 September where findings were discussed with GMS countries.



*A campaign by BigC Bac Giang Outlet to support Bac Giang province to consume farm produces amid COVID-19 in 2021*

The report provides essential context for understanding the design and implementation of the TA during the global pandemic. The report, authored by project consultant Dr. David Roland-Holst with inputs from TA team members, gives an overview of the persistent and emerging risks that COVID-19 presents to the agri-food sector in the GMS and beyond. Risks are classified into four salient categories: Supply Chains, Production Systems, Labor Markets, and Demand Patterns.

It is also unveiled from the study that, in responding to this never-seen challenge, ADB has committed \$19.83 billion to help all Member Countries respond to the pandemic, allocating \$7.39 billion for Southeast Asian economies. Of this funding, \$93.75 is allocated to the agricultural sector and \$65.1 million for Southeast Asia.

Country	Number of COVID-19 ADB Projects	Country	Number of COVID-19 ADB Projects
Brunei	0	Mongolia	19
China	11	Myanmar	5
Cambodia	7	Philippines	17
Timor-Leste	1	Singapore	0
Indonesia	15	South Korea	1
Japan	0	Thailand	8
Lao PDR	5	Vietnam	10
Malaysia	3		

Source: Asian Development Bank

[Read more](#)

## Gender and Youth

### [First ADB Gender Forum held in November 2021](#)

The first ADB Gender Forum with the theme “[The Power to Transform: Gender Equality in Asia and the Pacific](#)” was held on November 22-25, 2021. A total of 27 virtual sessions, panel discussions and knowledge labs were graced by prominent gender professionals and various sector experts and practitioners. Over 1,900 registered participants from 82 countries had the chance to join the discussions and to take away insights on important topics such as building inclusive economies that work for women by leveraging on the automation and digitization of processes and harnessing women’s empowerment through inclusive digital finance. There were dialogues on the potential of women-led climate action backed by gender-responsive climate finance in pursuing holistic climate change mitigation and adaptation. Crafting gender-responsive city planning and design as well as reducing poverty by tackling the challenges that beset the informal sector were also discussed. The four-day conference culminated with discussions on what development agencies can do to address gender-based violence in domestic and professional settings, a nod to UN Women’s annual international campaign, [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence](#), that starts on November 25 each year.



ADB Gender Forum held in November 2021 – Source: ADB

Mr. Bambang Susantono, ADB Vice-President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development, gave the [closing remarks](#). He affirmed ADB’s continuous committed to gender equality through the prioritization of the creation and dissemination of gender-related knowledge,

the continuous revitalization of efforts on addressing entrenched gender norms in the Asia Pacific Region, and the conscious efforts of keeping the empowerment of women and girls at the center of ADB's development agenda.

[Read more](#)

### **TA-9916's Solutions-Search Contest for Youth in GMS Agriculture**

Results from TA [survey](#) on youth conducted from June to August 2021 show that youth in the GMS share a strong interest in training, workshops, internship opportunities and startup funds. The survey participants consisted of 186 GMS youths (aged 15-35) working and/or studying in the agriculture sector, primarily from Thailand and Vietnam. Most youth want to be trained in Theme 1 (Climate-Friendly, Inclusive, and Gender-Responsive Agri-Food Value Chains), Theme 2 (Financing Climate-Smart Small and Medium Agribusinesses), Theme 3 (Enhancing Food Safety and Quality Standards, Certification and Traceability), Theme 5 (Water and Soil for Enhanced Food Security in a Changing Climate) and Theme 6 (Agriculture in the Context of Water-Food-Energy Security Nexus) of the TA. Youth are also more interested in video, essay, photography, and start-up pitch competitions, than in hackathons.



TA9916 Youth in Agriculture Video and Essay Contest –  
Source: TA9916

In response to the youth's preferences, TA-9916 launched a solutions-search competition for GMS youth in October 2021. Solutions to some of the most critical development issues exist in local communities but are often unnoticed by the larger community. Therefore the competition was designed to better identify and spotlight what's already working on the ground, and to expand its impact. Through the form of a short video or an essay, youths participating in the contest are encouraged to showcase their current

business/initiative that is relevant to any of the three main themes of this TA. The competition is open for entries until December 31, 2021. Winners will have the opportunity to participate in TA 9916 capacity building and other activities.

[Read more](#)

## **Other News from the GMS**

### **Newly Inaugurated China-Laos high-speed rail could accelerate fruit trade in the GMS**

On 3 December 2021 the \$6 billion high-speed rail line connecting Kunming, China with Vientiane, Laos was officially inaugurated after 5 years of construction. The electrified passenger and cargo railway has a total length of 1,035 km and will cut the travel time between Kunming and Vientiane to just less than 10 hours, facilitating trade, investment and tourism in the two GMS countries.

It is expected that fresh Laos produce may now be more quickly shipped from local farms to supermarkets in China, via cold chain transportation. Chinese farm products will also quickly reach Vientiane, which is becoming a gateway to other GMS country markets. Before the train, it took about 30 hours on average to transport the same products between Laos and PRC.



*Launching ceremony for the rail service in Vientiane, Lao PDR in December 2021 - Source: Pattaya news*

Cheaper logistic cost is also another commercial advantage for agribusiness and farmers.

Not only Laotian and Chinese exporters benefit. Thai fruits such as durian or jackfruit are expected to make use of the train service to better serve consumers in China. A high-speed train, currently under construction, will connect Bangkok with Nong Khai in 2028.

[Read more](#)

### [\*\*Scaling up Finance and Innovation in Climate-Resilient Agri-food Systems needed to implement Paris commitments\*\*](#)

A workshop themed “Scaling up Finance and Innovation in Climate-Resilient Agri-food Systems” organized by the ADB was held on 4 November 2021. The webinar was part of a series of virtual events organized as part of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) Resilience Hub: Southeast Asia and East Asia Regional Hub. ADB’s Principal Climate Change Specialist, Dr. Srinivasan Ancha moderated the event.



*Dr. Srinivasan Ancha of ADB moderated the event – Source: TA9916 project*

To realize the global goal of ending hunger by 2030 in a climate-friendly manner, more innovation and ambitious climate finance at various levels in the agri-food sector are needed. Up to US\$ 180 billion is needed each year to address the impact of climate change. Panel members discussed case studies from selected Asian countries to identify ways to stimulate the transition of the agri-food sector and its financial service providers towards

climate-resilient supply chains. Besides mobilizing additional finance and deploying new technologies, the role of the private sector in transforming agri-food systems will need to be promoted. Dr. Suriyan Vichitlekarn, Executive Director of Mekong Institute (MI) mentioned that most of the countries nowadays face the risk of aging farmers in the risk agriculture sector, so the role of the private sector can be promoted to match the farmers’ needs with technology application, not only to scale up but to mitigate the risks of climate events.

[Learn more](#)

## [ADB TA-9916 to increase coordination and collaboration with ASSET Project](#)

A Regional Virtual Workshop on Agro-ecological and Safe Food Systems Transition for Green, Resilient and Inclusive Recovery in the ASEAN Region was held on 8-9 November 2021. It was organized under the Agro-ecology and Safe Food System Transitions in Southeast Asia (ASSET) Regional Project. The workshop served as a forum for government officials and other relevant stakeholders to share perspectives on the actions and support needed in addressing challenges, opportunities, and recommendations for accelerating agro-ecological and safe food system transitions in the region. This event was a joint collaboration between the ASSET project and UN ESCAP, with support from CIRAD, GRET, FAO and other partners.



Agroecology site under ASSET Project – Source: ASSET Project Facebook

ASSET is a 5-year project with budget of 15 million Euros funded by AFD, EU and FFEM for the period 2020-2025. The objective is to make food and agricultural systems in Southeast Asia more sustainable, safe and inclusive, through harnessing the potential of agro-ecology in Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar.

Dr. Srinivasan Ancha, Principal Climate Change Specialist at ADB participated as one of the discussants. TA-9916 and the ASSET project are expected to have more cooperation and collaboration on future joint knowledge sharing events.

[Read more](#)

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### **Events, Meetings and Webinars**

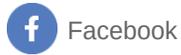
- ADB, GMS WGA | GMS Working Group on Agriculture Annual Meeting | In-person event | June/July 2022
- GMS SAFSP | Regional Workshop on Food-Water-Energy Nexus (Webinar) | Online | Q1/2022 – TBC
- GMS SAFSP | Training Workshop on Food Quality Assurance Systems – GMS | Online | Q1/2022 – TBC
- GMS SAFSP | Regional Meeting on Pilot Demonstration development and implementation (Internal) | Online | 19 January 2022
- GMS SAFSP | Covid-19 Response and Recovery Action Workshop | Cambodia | Online | 26 January 2022 – TBC

### **Recent Publications, Knowledge Products and Reports**

- [Covid-19 Food Security Response and Recovery Action in the GMS](#)
  - [Financing Sustainable and Resilient Food Systems in Asia and the Pacific \(by ADB\)](#)
  - [SAFSP 1st Newsletter](#)
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ADB Project Website



GMS WGA Website

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**Get in touch!**

Regional Cooperation and Operations Coordination Division  
Southeast Asia Department, Asian Development Bank  
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City 1550, Metro Manila, Philippines  
+63 2 8632 4444 | [gmssafsp@adb.org](mailto:gmssafsp@adb.org)

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