

The Mekong-Japan Initiative for SDGs toward 2030

4 November, 2019

Preamble

The 10th Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting held in October 2018 adopted the Tokyo Strategy expressing their determination to cooperate in achieving the SDGs in the Mekong region to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This Initiative outlines areas of cooperation between the Mekong countries and Japan. The Mekong countries and Japan expressed their satisfaction with the progress made in various projects of the Action Plan for “A Decade toward the Green Mekong” Initiative adopted in 2009, and their contribution to development and prosperity in the region. The “Action Plan” is incorporated into “The Mekong-Japan Initiative for SDGs toward 2030”.

1 Future Vision: Objectives of the Initiative

The Mekong region is rich in both natural and human resource. The Mekong region lies in the center of the dynamic Asia-Pacific region, which is witnessing robust economic growth. The Mekong region also forms a corridor through East Asia and South Asia and a land bridge between the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The Mekong region is endowed with a geographic advantage for the development and prosperity. Japan has been cooperating for many decades with the Mekong countries to draw out their potential so that all the Mekong countries can optimize their development strategy, steadily achieve economic growth and improve people’s life in a sustainable manner. The Mekong countries and Japan will continue to work closely together to achieve everlasting prosperity in the region.

The objective of this Initiative is to support Mekong countries in achieving the SDGs by 2030. This is of vital importance not only to “us” but also for the future generations both in the Mekong countries and Japan. SDGs are also key means to reinforce the bonds “between people and society” and “between people and people” as well as the connection “between human and nature” and “toward the future generations”.

2 Challenges across the Mekong Region

The Mekong region is facing various challenges, which are of a region wide

nature and require collective action with the Mekong region.

2.1 Addressing pollution and climate change

Rapid industrialization has spurred economic growth but has also provoked cross border pollution including industrial waste pollution, marine litter, and climate change. These issues impede the realization of “Sustainable Cities and Communities” (Goal 11), “Responsible Consumption and Production” (Goal 12), “Climate Action” (Goal 13) and “Life Below Water” (Goal 14).

2.2 Ensuring sustainable and efficient utilization of resources

The rich resources of the Mekong region have helped improve the livelihood of people but their sustainability hinges on efficient utilization. The appropriate resource management is essential to realize sustainable development by utilizing fertile soil and rich nature in the Mekong region. Efficient utilization of resources is also essential to realize “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6)” “Affordable and Clean Energy” (Goal 7), “Decent work and Economic growth” (Goal 8) and “Life on land” (Goal 15).

2.3 Achieving inclusive growth

While economic growth has positively impacted many lives, there are groups of people who have not fully enjoyed these fruits. Inclusive growth is especially important to realize “Good Health and Well-Being” (Goal 3), “Quality Education” (Goal 4), “Gender Equality” (Goal 5) and “Peace Justice and Strong Institutions” (Goal 16).

3 Priority areas for cooperation/Priority Goals

Taking into account the challenges and the Sustainable Development Goals in mind, the following areas should be addressed on a priority basis. The priority areas under Mekong-Japan cooperation described below will be promoted in accordance with international standards of quality infrastructure investment such as openness, transparency, economic efficiency, and debt sustainability of borrower countries as mentioned in such documents as the "G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment" endorsed at the G20 Osaka Summit in June 2019, which will apply to all cooperation wherever applicable.

3.1 Environmental and urban issues

With a view to addressing environmental and urban issues, the Mekong countries and Japan will pursue harmonization between environment protection and economic development, and reinforce social resilience.

3.1.1 Waste Management / Sound Material-Cycle Society (Goal 11, 12)

Effective and environmentally safe waste management and the 3Rs (reduce, reuse, recycle) society are important to assure health and well-being of people and to build sustainable communities. It is necessary to promote the development of quality infrastructure for effective waste management and recycling such as waste-to-energy plants, information sharing, capacity enhancement and policy making on waste management. Japan will contribute to waste management in the Mekong countries through financial and technical support.

3.1.2 Marine Plastic litter / Water and River Pollution (Goal 14)

Marine plastic litter has become an important issue for the environment and people's life. The Mekong countries and Japan will collaborate to promote ocean environment research, monitoring and observation, environmentally sound management of wastes, recovery of marine litter, and innovation toward realization of the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision that aims to reduce additional pollution by marine plastic litter to zero by 2050, which was shared at the G20 Osaka Summit, while recognizing further concrete actions in line with the G20 Implementation Framework for Actions on Marine Plastic Litter. In the Mekong region, it is particularly necessary to tackle plastic litter in rivers. In this regard, it is important to enhance cooperation with the Mekong River Commission (MRC) to protect the Mekong River. The Mekong-Japan cooperation is making progress in line with related initiatives led by ASEAN, such as the ASEAN+3 Marine Plastics Debris Cooperative Action Initiative. Japan is planning to conduct human resource development and training in marine litter monitoring and establish a knowledge center as a hub for information gathering in order to share knowledge and good practices for raising awareness in prevention and countering of marine plastic litter.

3.1.3 Disaster Risk Reduction and Disaster Management (Goal 11)

Natural disaster could impede sustainable development and, therefore it is important to prevent and reduce the risk of disaster to realize SDGs. In line with "Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030", the Mekong countries and Japan promote "mainstreaming disaster risk reduction", which introduces the view of disaster risk reduction in development policy planning, and cost-effective investment for disaster

risk reduction with consideration for disaster risk information to prevent future losses. The Mekong countries and Japan also apply the “Build Back Better” approach, which creates a more resilient community in preparation for disasters in the post-disaster recovery phase. Japan continues to support the MRC’s activities in order to reduce natural disaster relating to the Mekong river and to support capacity building of Mekong countries, particularly, in the areas of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. From this perspective, Japan and the Mekong countries will continue the promotion of quality infrastructure investment based on international standards such as openness, transparency, economic efficiency, debt sustainability of borrower countries.

3.1.4 Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Building Climate Resilience (Goal 13)

Climate change is one of the most important and urgent environmental issues. The Mekong countries and Japan reiterated their strong commitments to fully implementing the Paris Agreement. In order to advance low emission and decarbonized technologies in the Mekong region, the Mekong countries and Japan will continue to promote Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) including HFC lifecycle management. Japan also promotes Co-Innovation in collaboration with the Mekong countries. Japan will finance projects which contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilient society.

3.2 Sustainable natural resource management and utilization

Sustainable development in the Mekong region requires that natural resources are managed and utilized in the most efficient and sustainable manners, balancing the needs of the present and those of the future. The Mekong countries and Japan will strive to preserve rich natural environment as well as to utilize efficiently and sustainably natural resources in the region.

3.2.1 Agricultural Productivity (Goal 8, 12)

Agriculture has been an important sector for the Mekong region. It is necessary to increase agricultural productivity to narrow income gaps and promote economic prosperity in the Mekong region. In this regard, it is important to modernize agriculture through improved facilities such as irrigation, agriculture mechanization, agro-processing and ICT. Japan will continue its assistance to the Mekong countries’ efforts in enhancing agricultural productivity including through capacity building in the area of food value chain. The Mekong countries and Japan make efforts to increase income of small scale

farmers by utilizing ICT.

3.2.2 Water Resources Management (Goal 6, 7)

Water resources management, particularly that of the Mekong river, is of vital importance for the development of the Mekong region. To ensure sustainable development in the region, the Mekong countries and Japan will address water-related issues including integrated water resources management, and work in collaboration with international organizations including the MRC. Japan will support irrigation facilities development and technical operation in collaboration with the MRC. To improve water resources management of the Mekong river, the Mekong countries and Japan will enhance cooperation in data collection, survey, environmental monitoring, flood and drought management in the Mekong river. Efforts will also be made to develop water supply service by expanding water treatment facilities and improving distribution network.

For the sustainable development of the Mekong region, wastewater management is also important. With a view to achieving efficient and sustainable wastewater management, it is necessary to promote water infrastructure, raising awareness, and monitor sanitary wastewater management. Japan will support wastewater work development and provide technical assistance to the Mekong countries.

3.2.3 Sustainable Forest Management (Goal 15)

Sustainable forest management is necessary to preserve rich bio-diversity and continue to contribute to the economic growth of the Mekong countries. Japan supports projects relating to the sustainable forest management in collaboration with international organizations such as FAO and ITTO, research institutes and private sectors. These actions aim to promote the REDD+; to provide, develop and deploy technologies based on Japan's experiences; and to support capacity building, poverty reduction and to improve livelihood for local people.

3.3 Inclusive growth

Inclusive growth is indispensable to realize a society where no one is left behind. The Mekong countries and Japan will advance actions by focusing on “individuals” to ensure inclusive growth in the Mekong region.

3.3.1 Education and Human Capital Investment (Goal 4)

Education and Human Capital Investment is a foundation of society. As emphasized in the G20 Initiative on Human Capital Investment for Sustainable

Development, the Mekong countries and Japan will invest in human capital and ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. It is also important to continue support for girls' and women's education and training, including providing quality primary and secondary education, improving access to STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education and vocational trainings.

Industrial human resource development is a key to advancing industrialization of the Mekong countries. Japan will continue to support industrial-related human resource development in the Mekong countries including through Japan's "Industrial Human Resource Development Cooperation Initiative 2.0".

Efforts will be made to reinforce networks of alumni of the Project for Human Resource Development Scholarship (JDS) so that they can exchange their experiences and policy making know-how to realize SDGs. Japan will also continue to support human resource development in various fields such as culture, education, finance, pollution control and food related industry.

3.3.2 Health and Social Welfare (Goal 3)

Healthy life is one of the basic needs of human being. The Mekong countries and Japan will take necessary steps to realize healthy life and well-being for all people in the Mekong region, especially for those demographic vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities and senior citizens. The Mekong countries and Japan will enhance their efforts for promoting Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and achieving healthy life and well-being for all people by 2030. In this regards, the Mekong countries and Japan will support all healthcare related industries for effective healthcare systems in the Mekong region. Japan and the Mekong countries will cooperate in strengthening health financing for moving towards UHC in the Mekong countries in reference to the G20 Shared Understanding on the Importance of UHC Financing in Developing Countries together with human resource capacity building to increase accountability for the commitments on UHC.

3.3.3 Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women (Goal 5)

Promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is important to attain harmonious community, and facilitate sustainability and socioeconomic development. The Mekong countries and Japan are committed to empowering women and girls in various fields. In this regard, Japan will offer microfinance funding to support female entrepreneurs in Asian countries including the Mekong countries. The Mekong countries and Japan will continue to make collaborative efforts to eradicate human trafficking, in

particular, trafficking of women, girls and children.

3.3.4 Legal and Judicial Cooperation (Goal 16)

To realize peace, justice and strong institutions in the Mekong region, the Mekong countries and Japan will promote close cooperation to advance legal and judicial reform and capacity building of criminal justice practitioners and legal professionals for strengthening of the rule of law and good governance.

3.3.5 Promoting on Inclusive and Sustainable industrialization (Goal 9)

While recognizing that Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) are the prime mover to achieve sustainable development, the Mekong countries and Japan are determined to enhance cooperation in MSME sectors and to carry out business matching, sharing technology know-how among the MSME of Mekong and Japan, and hold MSME Trade shows.

3.3.6 Tourism Cooperation (Goal 8)

Tourism Sector plays a crucial role in socioeconomic development of the Mekong Region. The Mekong countries and Japan will continue to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promote local culture and products which will expand and diversify markets and contribute to sustainable development in tourism sector in order to achieve the SDG goals.

4 Approach for cooperation

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

4.1 Region-wide Approach

The challenges faced by the Mekong region are becoming increasingly diversified and complex as the globalization develops. Therefore, region-wide approaches are needed to achieve the SDGs in the region as well as in effort to preserve and strengthen the “Vibrant and Effective Connectivity” and free and open Indo-Pacific.

Japan will strongly encourage and support the enhancement of the coordination among the Mekong countries themselves as a part of the region-wide approach, including through the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

4.2 Open Approach

For the sustainable development of the Mekong region, multiple partners outside the region have been involved to fulfill a wide range of development needs. In promoting SDGs in the region, it is required to combine the efforts of various donors and stakeholders including private enterprises, and all other appropriate relevant stakeholders and to seek and leverage synergies between sub-regional, regional and other strategies. The Mekong countries and Japan will strengthen coordination with various actors and seek synergy with multiple development initiatives and activities. From this perspective, it is important that the efforts under this framework and ASEAN complement each other.

4.3 Public-Private Cooperative Approach

Recognizing that effective utilization of cutting-edge technologies and knowledge enable the creation of conducive environment for the promotion of SDGs in various aspects, Japan will fully utilize technologies and knowledge to address a variety of development related issues including environment and climate change issues to achieve the SDGs in the Mekong region. The Mekong countries and Japan will also strengthen private-public partnership bearing in mind international standards, and fully utilize knowledge and experience of both sides to achieve more efficient and effective cooperation.

The amount of the private finance prevails that of the official development assistance to the developing countries. The situation surrounding private finance promoting economic growth has drastically changed, as shown by the global trend of increased PPP. Development assistance acted as a catalyst and attracted private investments which as a result lead to the development and the poverty reduction in the local community. It is important to accelerate this productive cycle of the aid and investment.

5 Follow-up and review

5.1 Mekong-Japan SDGs Forum

The Mekong countries and Japan appreciated the continued commitment of Japan and Thailand to have co-hosted the Green Mekong Forum. The Mekong countries

and Japan decided to upgrade the Green Mekong Forum to the Mekong-Japan SDGs Forum as a track 1.5 mechanism to seek the synergy of public and private sector efforts.

To ensure the medium- to long-term implementation of this Initiative, the Mekong-Japan SDGs Forum will be held regularly to follow up on specific actions being undertaken by the Mekong countries and Japan.

5.2 Working-Level Meeting / Expert Meeting Modality

In order to review the initiative and the efforts under it, a working-level meeting will be held regularly. As necessary, experts meeting will be held in order to discuss technical issues based on the instruction from the working-level meeting.

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