

AIC Working Paper

ACMECS – MGC Linkages and India as Development Partner: Potential Areas of Cooperation*

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Abstract

The Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), initiated by Thailand in 2003, is a cooperation framework among the five countries in the Mekong subregion, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. ACMECS has been working as a subregional forum to facilitate economic cooperation among the member countries. India has strong civilisational and cultural linkages with ACMECS countries. Under the overarching theme of connectivity, the focus of ACMECS has been on development of border zones, smart and sustainable development and synchronised economy. To further strengthen the ACMECS, Thailand has invited India as a development partner. India has been actively engaged with ACMCES under the Act East Policy (AEP) through Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), which was launched in 2000 and initiated several projects. MGC has been celebrating 20 years of its establishment in 2020. In popular term, MGC = India + ACMECS. There are similarities and synergies between MGC and ACMECS. India's activities as a development partner would further deepen the India-ACMECS relationship as well as MGC. This paper investigates the linkages between ACMECS and MGC, identifies the complementarities between ACMECS and MGC Plan of Actions (POA) and discusses the potential areas of cooperation.

Keywords: ACMECS; MGC, Development Cooperation, Regional Integration

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* Views expressed in this paper are authors own. Usual disclaimers apply.

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1. Introduction

The Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), initiated by Thailand in 2003, is a cooperation framework among the five countries in the Mekong subregion, namely, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

ACMECS has been working as a subregional forum to facilitate economic cooperation among the member countries. Under the overarching theme of connectivity, the focus of ACMECS has been on development of border zones, smart and sustainable development and synchronised economy. ACMECS has a vision of “Building ACMECS Connect by 2023”, and aim to achieve (i) seamless ACMECS through seamless multidimensional connectivity (physical, digital, institutional, and people-to-people); (ii) synchronized ACMECS through integrated and synchronized Mekong economies; and (iii) smart and sustainable ACMECS through investments in human resources development and innovation; multi-faceted security including water, food and energy security as well as inclusive and sustainable development. Box 1 illustrates the major outcomes of the 8th ACMECS Summit which was held in Bangkok in 2018.

**Box 1: Bangkok Declaration of the 8th ACMECS Summit, 16 June 2018, Bangkok
“Towards an Integrated and Connected Mekong Community”**

- (1) Seamless ACMECS to promote seamless connectivity from multi-modal transports links (roads, rails, bridges, ports, air, inland waterway, and maritime connectivity) including but not limited to infrastructures designed for sub-regional digital connectivity and energy infrastructure interconnection. Special emphasis will be on filling all the missing links in the sub-region, and the auxiliary connection lines linking industrial parks and seaports to main corridor routes; complete the missing railway links to enhance operations of sub-regional railway network, particularly the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and Southern Economic Corridor (SEC).
- (2) Synchronized ACMECS to promote software connectivity namely, i) Trade, Investment and Industrial Cooperation emphasizing on ACMECS policy cooperation in the harmonization and simplification of rules and regulations to facilitate movement of people, free flow of goods, services, and investment and with a view to leveraging integrated value and supply chain of ACMECS, and ii) financial cooperation including the establishment of the ACMECS Fund and the ACMECS Infrastructure Fund and Trust, promoting financial literacy, capital market cooperation as well as financial connectivity such as payment and settlement, use of local currency, Fintech and cooperation between banks and other financial service providers.
- (3) Smart and Sustainable ACMECS to promote the development of human capital in strategic areas including entrepreneurship (MSMEs/Startups), agriculture, tourism, medical services and education, while continue to promote environmental cooperation including sustainable water resource management and other strategic fields including agriculture, industry, tourism, health, renewable energy, climate change, disaster-risk management, and natural resources conservation.

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Thailand

To further strengthening the ACMECS partnership, Thailand has invited India, South Korea, Japan and China as development partner of ACMECS. India has accepted the invitation and joined as a Development Partner on 29 July 2019. India’s decision to join ACMECS as Development Partner is quite appropriate since India has been actively engaged with the Mekong countries through the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), which was launched in 2000, and initiated several projects under MGC. India has been celebrating 20 years of MGC in 2020.

India's Act East Policy (AEP) is an initiative to intensify engagements with Southeast and East Asian countries. AEP has received greater momentum through MGC. India's proactive role in building a common and connected market with an ambitious but realistic connectivity programme is the key focus of AEP.⁴

In view of the above, this paper attempts to identify the linkages between ACMECS and MGC. In particular, this paper looks at the specific projects from the list of ACMECS priority projects for joint implementation, focusing particularly on projects that can also complement joint projects already being undertaken by India with the ACMECS countries under both bilateral and regional frameworks such as the MGC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations.

The rest of the paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 presents the profile on ACMECS. Section 3 discusses India's engagement with ACMECS in terms of economic and socio-cultural aspects. Section 4 reviews the complementarities between ACMECS and MGC Plan of Action (POA) and their respective engagement in terms of project implementation in the Mekong subregion, and identifies the areas for joint implementation, collaboration and pooling the resources for effective operation to achieve the POA. Section 5 attempts to identify the potential areas of cooperation between India and ACMECS. Finally, Section 6 concludes and presents the policy recommendations.

2. Background of ACMECS

The Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS) initiated by Thailand, also known as the Economic Cooperation Strategy (ECS), is a cooperation framework among Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam to utilize the diverse strengths of the member countries and to promote balanced development in the subregion.

The former Prime Minister of Thailand, Chatchai Choonhavan, envisioned a policy of *converting a battlefield into a market place* in the Indochina region. His ambition later guided the Thai leaders in rebuilding the Mekong subregion. The development of ACMECS is a continuation of Prime Minister Chatchai's dream. Introduced by the Thailand government during the ASEAN's special Summit Meeting on Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003, the ACMECS is aimed at promoting economic prosperity and social sustainability between Thailand and its neighboring countries in the Mekong subregion. Deriving its name from three major rivers in this subregion, namely, Ayeyawady, Chao Phraya and Mekong rivers, ACMECS connects with the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Programme (GMS), promoted by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The ACMECS, however, goes further than the GMS in utilising the relocation of agricultural and industrial sectors. In 2003, the governments of Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia joined the initiative, while Viet Nam followed a year later.

2.1 Profile of ACMECS Countries

ACMECS countries located in Southeast Asia are natural resource rich countries, having a significant proportion of semi-arid farm lands, mountains, hills and valleys. ACMECS

⁴ Refer, De and Suthipand (2017), De (2012)

countries are strategically located between India, China and other Southeast Asian countries. Approximately 237.20 million people reside in ACMECS subregion over an area of 1938.76 sq. km (Table 1). Thailand is the largest economy in ACMECS, followed by Viet Nam. The per capita income of ACMECS countries was an average US\$ 8552.74 (in PPP term) in 2017.

Trade has been at the forefront of the ACMECS; both Thailand and Viet Nam are having high trade openness, whereas Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar show wide gap with Thailand and Viet Nam (Table 1). Total trade of ACMECS countries exceeded US\$ 931.36 billion in 2017 in which both Thailand and Viet Nam show trade surplus and other three countries show trade deficit. In 2017, Viet Nam's total export to ACMECS countries was the highest in the subregion (US\$ 12.80 billion), followed by Thailand (US\$ 8.84 billion), Cambodia (US\$ 8.06 billion), Myanmar (US\$ 5.01 billion) and Lao PDR (4.48 billion). Table 1 also presents the inflow of FDI from ASEAN countries. In 2017, ACMECS received an inward FDI of US\$ 7.72 billion from ASEAN, whereas US\$ 30.57 billion came from rest of the world.

Table 1: Basic Economic Indicators of ACMECS Countries, 2017

Indicators	Cambodia	Lao PDR	Myanmar	Thailand	Viet Nam
Total land area (sq. km)	181.04	236.80	676.58	513.12	331.23
Total population (in thousand)	15.72	6.75	53.40	67.65	93.68
GDP at current prices (US\$ Billion)	22.34	17.09	65.61	455.70	223.93
Exports (US\$ Billion)	2.55	3.61	13.87	236.69	213.93
Imports (US\$ Billion)	3.30	4.78	19.25	222.76	210.63
Total trade (US\$ Billion)	5.85	8.39	33.11	459.46	424.56
Trade (% of GDP)	26.19	49.07	50.47	100.82	189.60
Intra-ACMECS trade (US\$ Billion)	8.06	4.48	5.01	8.83	12.80
FDI inflows from ASEAN (US\$ million)	603.49	171.16	2590.45	1824.12	2531.17
FDI inflows from rest of world (US\$ million)	2732.15	1695.38	4002.43	8045.51	14099.98

Source: ASEAN Stats, ASEAN Secretariat

China has become ACMECS's major trade partner. In 2018, ACMECS countries' export to and imports from ASEAN were US\$ 98.05 billion and US\$ 88.12 billion, respectively (Table 2). On the other, ACMECS countries' export to China was US\$ 77.81 billion and import from China was US\$ 117.71 billion in 2018. Compared to China and ASEAN, ACMECS countries trade with India is relatively low in volume. In 2018, ACMECS countries' exports and imports with India were US\$ 14.57 billion and US\$ 9.04 billion, respectively. Figures 1(a) and 2(b) show the share of ACMECS countries export and import to ASEAN, China and India with respect to the world. It clearly shows that the ACMECS countries principal trade partner is ASEAN, followed by China and India.

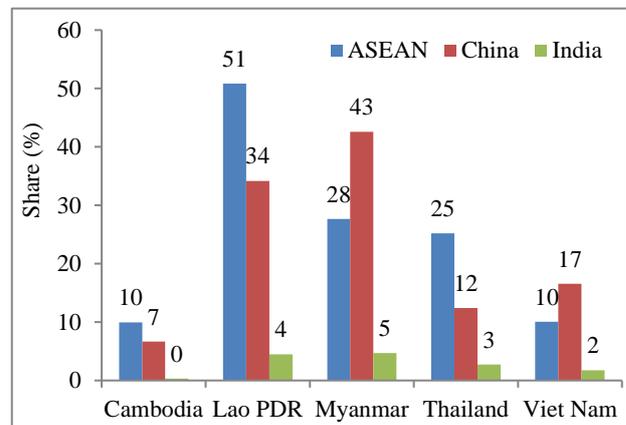
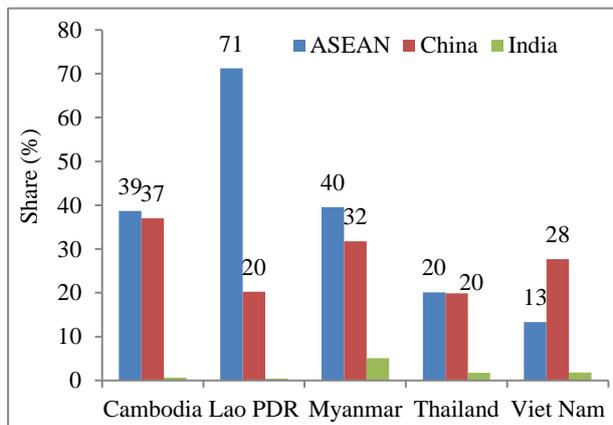
Table 2: ACMECS Countries Trade with ASEAN, China and India, 2018

(US\$ Billion)

	Cambodia		Lao PDR		Myanmar		Thailand		Viet Nam	
	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import	Export	Import
ASEAN	0.95	7.03	3.45	3.45	4.21	8.67	64.96	37.26	24.48	31.71
China	0.86	6.14	1.55	1.75	5.53	6.22	28.60	38.19	41.27	65.41
India	0.05	0.16	0.13	0.05	0.57	0.99	7.26	3.72	6.56	4.12
World	12.70	17.49	5.54	5.85	16.65	19.34	241.01	191.97	242.97	236.84

Source: ACMECS International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) 2018

Figure 1: Share of ACMECS Countries Trade, 2018
1(a) Exports **1(b) Imports**



Source: ACMECS International Merchandise Trade Statistics (IMTS) 2018

2.2 Objectives of ACMECS

Noted in ACMECS development plan, “ACMECS aims to build upon existing regional cooperation programmes and complement bilateral frameworks with a view to transform the border areas of the five countries into zones of economic growth, social progress and prosperity, and to blend local, national and regional interests for common benefits, shared prosperity, enhanced solidarity, peace, stability and good neighbourliness.”⁵ It has four objectives:

- i. To increase competitiveness and generate greater growth along the borders;
- ii. To facilitate relocation of agricultural and manufacturing industries to areas with comparative advantage;
- iii. To create employment opportunities and reduce income disparity among the four countries; and
- iv. To enhance peace, stability and shared prosperity for all in a sustainable manner.

⁵ Refer, <http://www.mfa.go.th/acmeecs/>

2.3 Areas of Cooperation

Initially, the ACMECS had only five areas of cooperation. Later, in 2005 and 2010, two more areas of cooperation were added. The areas of cooperation as on date are as follows.

- Trade and Investment Facilitation
- Agricultural and Industrial Cooperation
- Transport Linkages
- Tourism Cooperation
- Human Resources.
- Public Health
- Environment

Each country coordinates at least one field. Thailand coordinates joint efforts in trade-investment and health care; whereas Viet Nam directs workforce development, industry-energy, and coordinates with Cambodia in environment. Cambodia coordinates tourism collaboration, while Lao PDR and Myanmar direct transportation and agriculture, respectively. Through these areas of cooperation, ACMECS aims to promote trade and investment by reducing trade barriers, improving productivity and market access, develop and utilize transport linkages, and developing human resources. Projects under the ACMECS have been adopted on the following bases: (i) compatibility and reinforcement to the existing bilateral and regional cooperation; (ii) practicality with concrete results based on comparative advantages; (iii) realizable and agreeable; (iv) voluntarily and equally shared benefits; and (v) consensus decision-making.

Over time ACMECS has adopted several projects. In 2003, 270 projects were adopted, of which 80 percent were bilateral projects, while another 20 percent were common projects. About half of the common projects were related to only two areas: trade and investment facilitation; and agricultural and industrial cooperation. Bilateral projects also concentrated in these areas, with Thailand occupying the longest list of bilateral projects. The energy plan was later incorporated into the Agricultural and Industrial Cooperation of ACMECS during the Second Summit of this sub-regional initiative. The Plan of Action (POA), which was a key document in the implementation of many of ACMECS projects, divided all projects into short (2003- 2005), medium (2006-2008), and long term (2009-2012). The plan was set for review every two years. The detail project activities based on ACMECS areas of cooperation is given in Appendix 1. The areas of cooperation are briefly discussed below.

Trade and Investment Facilitation

The objective is to expand trading activities, with a view to doubling the trade and investment volumes among the ACMECS countries, and improve the flow of goods and services as well as to encourage investment along the border areas, thereby creating jobs, increasing income, reducing socio-economic disparities, and increasing the competitiveness of the ACMECS countries as a whole in preparation for the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). These projects include investment and trade mission program; agreement on border trade; agreement on border trade; promotion of export oriented investment opportunities to enhance investment.

Agricultural Cooperation

The objective is to strengthen agricultural cooperation by increasing productivity, improving market access, promoting joint production, research and development, and information sharing in agriculture, livestock, fisheries and forestry amongst the ACMECS countries, so that they can become regional and global suppliers of agricultural produce. These projects include animal health development; agro-processing and agribusiness; technical exchange and economic cooperation on animal health, food processing, seed production and forestry and fishery; information exchange on plant genetic resources and crop production technologies.

Industrial and Energy Cooperation

The objective is to promote industrial and energy cooperation through the establishment and improvement of infrastructure facilities in industrial areas, and the efficient joint utilisation of ACMECS countries' resources, especially by industries along the border areas. The actions such as development of renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies, development of power transmission lines and networks, strengthening investment in industrial infrastructure aim to ensure energy security, while, at the same time, support environmentally sustainable economic development. These projects include exploration of mineral resources, feasibility study on industrial estate; establishment of the center for commodity processing and distribution; project on photovoltaic cell and energy conservation and solar battery; exchange of information on industrial sector, energy and mining.

Transportation Linkages

The objective is to maximize use of the existing transport linkages among the ACMECS countries with further development of the software side of connectivity by harmonizing transport related procedures to facilitate cross-border transport within the sub-region and completion of missing links and feeder roads. These projects include investment and trade mission programme; agreement on border trade; agreement on border trade; promotion of export-oriented investment opportunities to enhance investment.

Tourism Cooperation

The objective is to promote joint strategies for sustainable, socially, environmentally responsible tourism among the ACMECS countries in order to facilitate travel intra-regionally and increase the attractiveness of the subregion as one of the world's best tourism destinations. Under this cooperation, ACMECS Single Visa scheme allows nationals of 35 countries to enter both Thailand and Cambodia for the purpose of tourism, under the same visa, with single validity for each country. ACMECS Single Visa can be applied at Thai or Cambodia consulates/embassies, subject to pre-clearance from both sides. Visa fee collected at the point of application is similar to normal tourist visa fee of that country (tourist visa fee for application at the Royal Thai Embassy in Singapore is SG\$ 50), and additional fee, similar to normal tourist visa fee of the other country, is collected at the international border checkpoint of the other country. ACMECS Single Visa allows applicants to save time for visa application process for both countries. Other projects include organizing of friendship caravan tours and cross-country tours; development of air linkages; joint promotion of potential tourist sites of nations; joint promotion of potential tourist sites of both nations, investment etc.

Human Resource Development

The ACMECS countries shall cooperate to continue to enhance the well-being and livelihood of their people as well as the effectiveness of their institutions through capacity-building, focusing in particular on the labour force so as to increase their competitiveness and prepare them for the creation of a single production base under the coming AEC. These projects include human resource development programs to support the various projects; training and transfer of technology and technical know-how of industry and farm production, etc.

Public Health

The objective is to forge closer national and regional cooperation at all levels, within ACMECS and with other regional cooperation frameworks, such as ASEAN+3 Field Epidemiology Training Network (FETN), GMS and the Mekong Basin Disease Surveillance Cooperation (MBDS), etc. to prevent and control the spread of infectious diseases by enhancing national and regional preparedness and response capacity through integrated approaches. These projects include human resource development for disease surveillance and control; health information system and information sharing; strengthen national pandemic preparedness plan; promote other emerging infectious disease control at the borders.

Environmental Cooperation

The main objective is to ensure that economic activities undertaken in the ACMECS countries are sustainable and environmentally friendly, in accordance with the green growth imperative.

2.4 Structure of ACMECS

ACMECS has followed the structure of ASEAN in many ways. The working groups of the ACMECS at the ambassadorial level meet every two months in Bangkok. Senior officers' meetings (SOM) take place every six months. Each member country is designated to coordinate a sectoral working group: Thailand (trade and investment facilitation); Myanmar (agricultural and industrial co-operation); Lao PDR (transport linkages); Cambodia (tourism co-operation); and Viet Nam (human resources development). The Ministerial Meeting takes place once a year, while a Summit, which is the highest level of meeting between the ACMECS' leaders, is scheduled every two years (Table 3). Although there is no secretariat office, Bangkok acts as the main coordinating point for ACMECS activity since most of the meetings are conducted at the ambassador level in Bangkok. In Thailand, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) also takes the responsibility of coordination with other ACMECS countries.

In 2018, ACMECS came out with Master Plan of Connectivity (2019-2023). Vision is "Building ACMECS Connect by 2023". ACMECS received great political support in 2018 at Bangkok when it has the 8th Summit.⁶

⁶ Refer, for example, MFA, Thailand (2018)

Table 3: Summary of ACMECS Summits and Action Plans

ACMECS Summit	Year	Host Country	Key Initiatives
1	2003	Myanmar	At the 1st ACMECS Summit, the Leaders adopted the Bagan Declaration, affirming their commitment to cooperate in five priority areas of cooperation (trade-investment, agriculture, industry-energy, transportation, and tourism), and endorsed the Economic Cooperation Strategy Plan of Action (2003-2005).
2	2006	Thailand	At the 2nd Summit, ACMECS countries agreed to add public health to their cooperation and hold a mid-term review on the sidelines of ASEAN high-level meetings and adopted the Plan of Action (2006-2008).
3	2008	Viet Nam	The Leaders at the 3rd ACMECS Summit adopted a joint statement on trade, investment, tourism facilitation and prioritised economic connectivity, especially when promoting internal trade and investment to cope with challenges. It also established a working group on the environment.
4	2010	Cambodia	The 4th ACMECS Summit exchanged views on the implementation of cooperation in trade, investment, industry, energy, human resource development, transportation and environment. The Summit adopted Phnom Penh Declaration, which preliminary touched upon the cooperation in rice export and ACMECS Plan of Action (2010-2012). On the sideline of this Summit, Cambodia hosted the 2nd ACMECS Business Forum, in which ACMECS Business Council was founded with an aim to promote the participation of the private sector in the cooperation between member countries.
5	2012	Lao PDR	In the 5th Summit, ACMECS country leaders adopted Vientiane Declaration and ACMECS Plan of Action for 2013 – 2015, which aimed to boost the linkage between ACMECS cooperation with the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 and the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, raise the competitiveness and role and position of ACMECS countries in the global production and supply chains.
6	2014	Myanmar	The 6th ACMECS Summit adopted Nay Pyi Taw Declaration and Plan of Action for 2016 – 2018. The principal goal of the Plan of Action was to turn ACMECS into a top investment and tourism destination and to build up a unified manufacturing hub in ACMECS, especially in the border areas, and seize new opportunities that the AEC brings about.
7	2016	Viet Nam	The 7th ACMECS Summit themed “Towards a Dynamic and Prosperous Mekong Sub-region”, adopted the Hà Nội Declaration and pledged to boost priority collaboration in transportation, trade-investment, industry, tourism, agriculture and environment.
8	2018	Thailand	At the 8th ACMECS Summit, the Plan of Action (2019-2023) was adopted which aims at seamless, synchronized and smart and sustainable ACMECS. The ACMECS Connectivity Master Plan was also adopted.

Source: AIC’s compilation based on Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Viet Nam

2.5 Development Cooperation

ACMECS relies on member countries' financial resources, which in fact makes it heavily dependent on Thailand. Considering the past strained relationships with other countries, Thailand's contribution to aid and assistance is seen necessary to create trust among the ACMECS members. In 2004, the Thai government announced its intention to put in Thai Bhat 100 million (US\$ 2.9 billion) budget for the implementation of 42 projects and was considering another 10,000 million baht (US\$ 285 million) for the next five year to support cooperation projects with neighboring countries. According to the National Economic and Social Development Board (NESDB), since 2004 Thailand has spent the largest portion of financial support on infrastructure projects, accounting on average Bhat 800 million (US\$ 23 million) and about Bhat 100 million (US\$ 2.9 million) were spent on other soft projects. Moreover, it has also provided US\$ 2.5 million as seed fund for public health cooperation. However, the implementation of 200 ACMECS projects required significant amount of funds. In 2004, the third-party participation was introduced in ACMECS in order to encourage the participation of the so-called development partners to provide financial support for the ACMECS projects. Some offers are already being floated, such as the French Development Agency's (AFD – *Agence Francaise de Developpement*) support of a railway construction in the Lao PDR, Japan's feasibility study of Sawannakhet airport rehabilitation in Lao PDR, the World Bank's study on power transmission in Lao PDR-Cambodia, and Cambodia-Viet Nam, or Singapore's offer of scholarships to students in the ACMECS countries.

In 2018, the leaders attended the ACMECS Summit emphasized that development funding is the key focus of ACMECS. Thailand has proposed starting a new Southeast Asian fund to boost sources of financing for transportation infrastructure and other projects in five Mekong River basin countries. In addition, Thailand initiated to create a platform for the public and private sectors as well as financial institutions from ACMECS countries and development partners to exchange information, perspectives and make recommendations on how to coordinate and promote cooperation on connectivity, trade and investment, and finance.

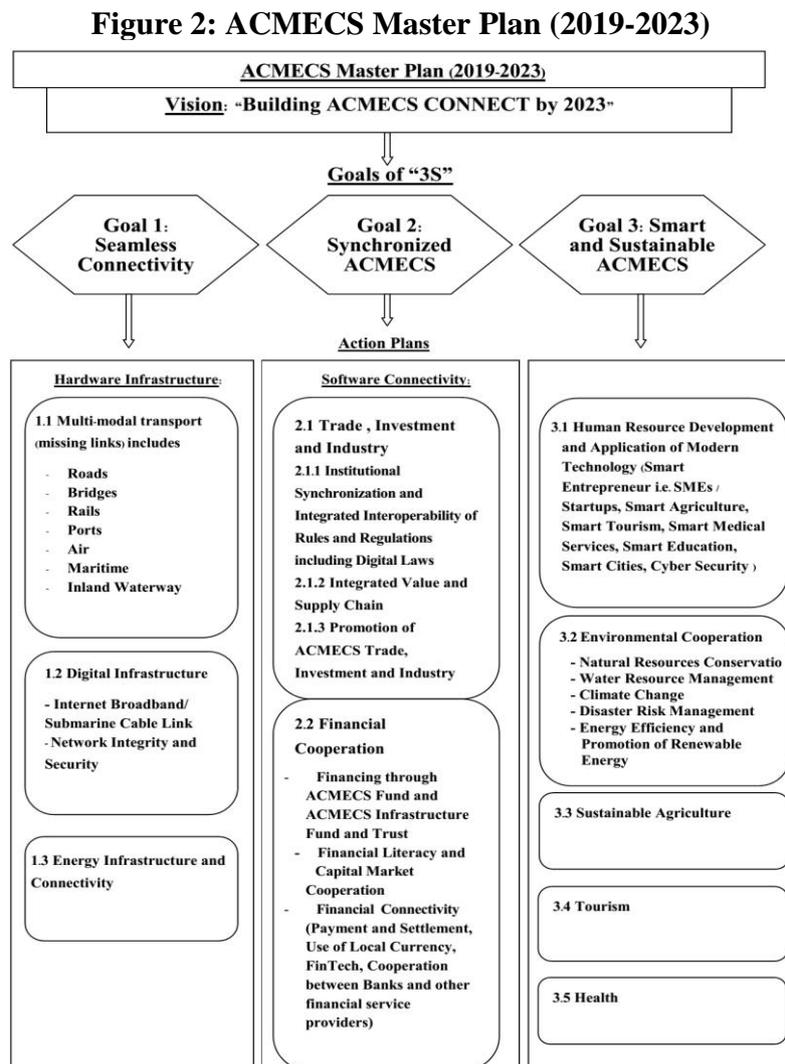
2.6 Master Plan of ACMECS

In the 8th ACMECS Summit held in 15-16 June 2018, the CLMV countries and Thailand underscored the importance of cooperative implementation of three main pillars of the ACMECS Master Plan (2019-2023) as the followings:

- Seamless ACMECS to promote seamless connectivity from multi-modal transports links (roads, rails, bridges, ports, air, inland waterways, and maritime connectivity) including but not limited to infrastructures designed for sub-regional digital connectivity and energy infrastructure interconnection.
- Synchronized ACMECS to promote software connectivity, namely, i) trade, investment and industrial cooperation emphasizing on ACMECS policy cooperation in the harmonization and simplification of rules and regulations to facilitate movement of people, free flow of goods, services, and investment; and ii) financial cooperation including the establishment of the ACMECS Fund and the ACMECS Infrastructure Fund and Trust.
- Smart and Sustainable ACMECS to promote the development of human capital in strategic areas including entrepreneurship, agriculture, tourism, medical services and

education, while continue to promote environmental cooperation, renewable energy, climate change, disaster-risk management and so on.

Figure 2 illustrates outline of the master plan of ACMECS. This Master Plan was developed from previous ACMECS Plans of Action and aims at streamlining operational structure and utilizing full economic potentials of ACMECS. Specific goals, strategy and practical work plan outlined in this Master Plan reflect the current global and regional situation, priorities and needs of the ACMECS countries as well as to address new evolving and fast changing challenges facing the world today. This Master Plan serves as a guideline for clear and well-coordinated work plans among ACMECS countries, while also complementing the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).



Source: ACMECS Master Plan, ACMECS

Role of Potential Development Partners

The master plan identifies the role of Development Partners. ACMECS countries welcome the long standing commitments of its Development Partners and other external partners to implement this Master Plan. The suggested areas of cooperation with potential development

partners are briefed in Table 4. India has been considered as a Development Partner for Digital Infrastructure; Medical Service; and Vocational and University Education.

Table 4: Possible Areas of Cooperation with Potential Development Partners

<p>1. Infrastructure 1.1 High-technology hardware infrastructure (CHN / JAP/ROK)</p>	<p>1. Software Connectivity 2.1 Trade & Investment 2.1.1 Institutional Synchronization and Interoperability of rules and regulation (CHN / JAP) 2.1.2 Integrated value chain (CHN/ JAP / ROK/US)</p>	<p>3.1 Smart Entrepreneur (SMEs/ Startups) (ROK,CHN, IND,JAP) 3.2 E-Commerce (CHN, US) 3.3 Smart Agriculture (CHN/JAP) 3.4 Sustainable Energy (US/JAP/CHN) 3.5 Smart and Sustainable Tourism (ROK/TH/JAP) 3.6 Medical Service (IND/US/ JAP/ROK) 3.7 Vocational and University Education (US / JAP/ IND) 3.8 Financial Literacy (CHN/JAP/US)</p>
<p>1.2 Digital Infrastructure (US / JAP / IND)</p>	<p>1.2 Financing Cooperation 1.2.1 ACMECS Infrastructure Fund and Trust (TH/ CHN/ JAP) 1.2.2 Capital Market Cooperation (TH / JAP /CHN) 1.2.3 Other Financial Connectivity (US / JAP / ROK)</p>	
<p>1.3 Energy Infrastructure and Connectivity (US/JAP/CHN)</p>		

Source: ACMECS Master Plan, ACMECS

- ACMECS countries agree to promote overall and closer coordination (finance and assistance both in cash and kind) between ACMECS and its development partners through existing Mekong programs and frameworks namely Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation (GMS), Mekong-Japan, Mekong-Lancang, Mekong-ROK, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC), and Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI), Friends of the Lower Mekong (FLM).
- ACMECS countries realise the importance of coordination and improvement of resource mobilization to avoid overlapping activities.
- ACMECS countries agree to explore possibility to streamline the organisational structures of all Mekong sub regional frameworks such as organizing ACMECS Summit back-to-

back with other Summits of Mekong sub regional frameworks (GMS, Mekong-Japan, Mekong-Lancang).

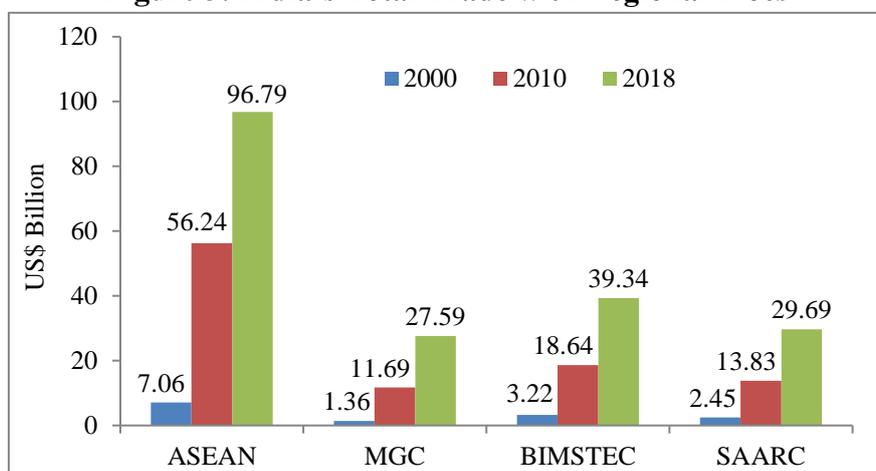
3. India’s Engagement with ACMECS Countries

India has strong civilisational and cultural links with ACMECS countries. Prior to the formation of ACMECS, Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) was initiated on 2000 (MGC = India + ACMECS), based on the civilizational rivers of Ganga and the Mekong. Civilisational and cultural links between India and the Mekong countries date back thousands of years. Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilizational rivers, and the MGC initiative aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two major river basins. Probably no other country has such strong links with the Mekong subregion as much as India by way of religion, language, culture and civilisation. The cultural influence flowed both ways and Southeast Asia has also contributed in enriching India’s culture and traditions. On one hand, Mekong countries and India inhabit a shared geographical and cultural space, while, on the other, each country retains its distinctiveness and unique identity. It is this celebration of unity in diversity which underlines the MGC partnership. MGC is such a multidimensional initiative dealing not just economic aspects of regional cooperation but a host of cultural issues those are important for building an inclusive and prosperous society. MGC aims to facilitate closer contacts among the people inhabiting these two major river basins. MGC has gained further momentum under the Act East Policy (AEP), superseding the Look East Policy (LEP). ASEAN centrality is the core to AEP, where Mekong countries are member states of ASEAN.

3.1 India’s Trade and Investment Relation with ACMECS

India’s trade with Mekong countries has increased over the period 2000 to 2018. India’s total trade with Mekong countries in the year 2000 was just a mere US\$ 1.36 billion, which increased to US\$ 27.59 billion in 2018 (Figure 3). Compared to BIMSTEC or SAARC, India’s pattern of trade with Mekong countries is relatively asymmetric, thereby implying high unlocked trade potential. Infact, intra-regional trade with MGC countries is about US\$ 73.42 billion in 2018, which is much closer to the intra-regional trade with ASEAN of about US\$ 86.04 billion. It shows that about 90 per cent of intra-regional trade is with the Mekong countries among ASEAN countries (Table 5).

Figure 3: India’s Total Trade with Regional Blocs



Source: Calculated based on Export Import Databank, Government of India

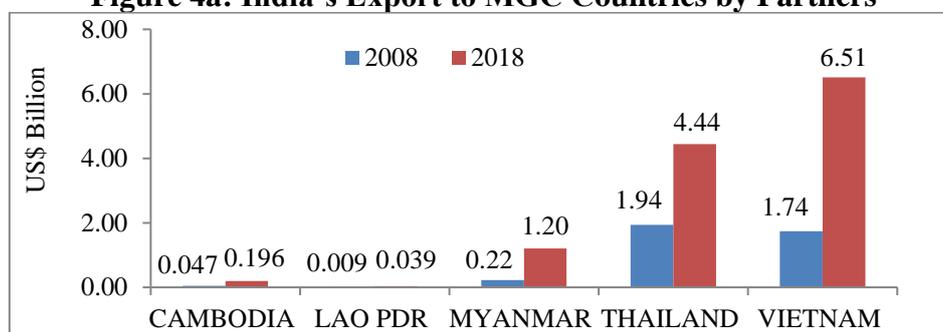
Table 5: Trends in Intra-regional Trade

Year	ASEAN-India		BIMSTEC		MGC		SAARC	
	Value (US\$ Billion)	Share (%)						
2000	8.99	2.17	3.92	3.42	3.95	3.19	2.20	4.62
2005	22.90	4.09	9.65	4.29	9.63	3.94	8.34	6.37
2010	58.40	5.83	23.67	5.38	31.30	6.28	16.07	6.03
2018	86.04	11.47	47.58	7.48	73.42	8.67	32.08	8.13

Source: UN Comtrade

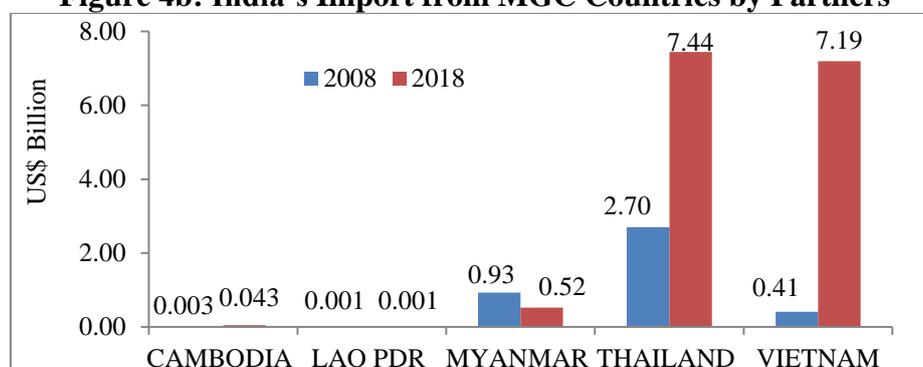
Thailand, Viet Nam and Myanmar are the top three trading partners of India in MGC. India's export to Viet Nam in recent years has witnessed a phenomenal rise. During 2008 to 2018, India's export to Viet Nam increased by over 5 times between 2008 and 2018. With an export of US\$ 6.51 billion in 2018, Viet Nam has become India's largest export partner in MGC, followed by Thailand of about US\$ 4.44 billion in 2018 (see Figure 4a). In case of India's imports from Mekong countries, with US\$ 7.44 billion Thailand comes in the top position, followed by Viet Nam of about US\$ 7.19 billion and Myanmar of about US\$ 0.52 billion in 2018, respectively (Figure 4b). To conclude, India-Viet Nam trade has witnessed a sharp rise during 2008 and 2018, exceeded the volume of trade between India and Thailand. The trade with Thailand and Viet Nam also indicate high potential of value chains between India and ACMECS countries or in MGC.⁷

Figure 4a: India's Export to MGC Countries by Partners



Source: Calculated based on Export Import Databank, Government of India

Figure 4b: India's Import from MGC Countries by Partners

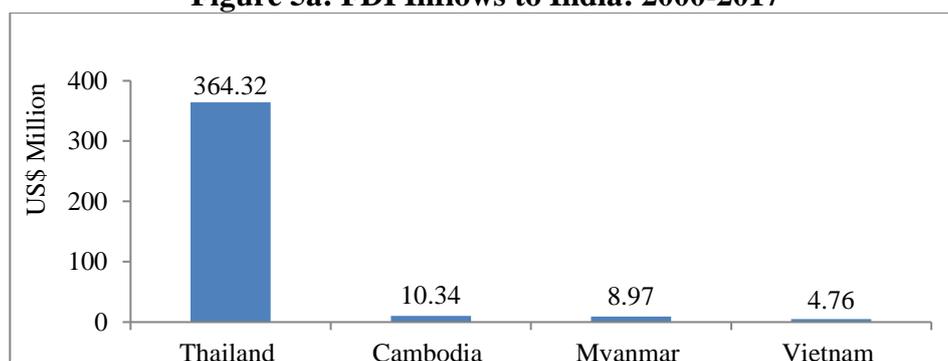


Source: Calculated based on Export Import Databank, Government of India

⁷ Refer, AIC-RIS (2017)

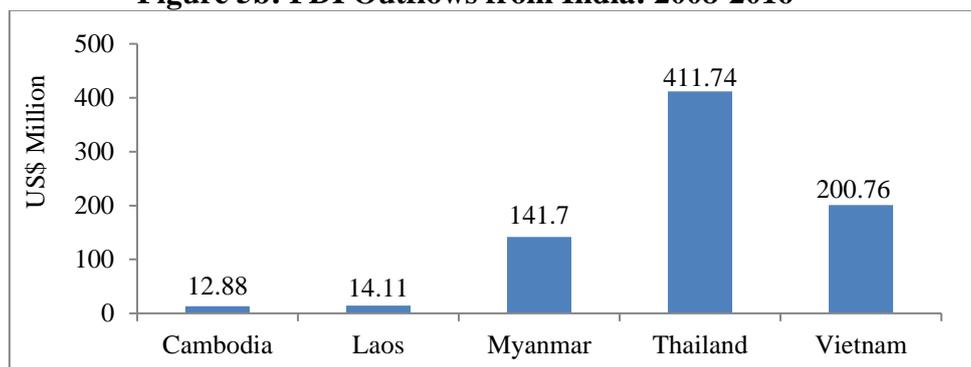
Investment relation has also gained significance in the recent decades. FDI flows between Thailand and India is the highest among the MGC countries, followed by Viet Nam (Figure 5(a)). Thailand is the major source of FDI inflows to India from ACMECS. On the other, Thailand has been the major destination for Indian outward FDI, followed by Viet Nam and Myanmar (Figure 5(b)). However, both India and MGC countries have potential to strengthen their investment relations further given that both India and MGC are fastest growing emerging economies which require FDI flows for their economic growth and development. Besides, with rise in value chains, FDI flows will also pick up further momentum.

Figure 5a: FDI Inflows to India: 2000-2017



Source: Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP), Government of India

Figure 5b: FDI Outflows from India: 2008-2016



Source: Reserve Bank of India

3.2 ACMECS and MGC in Comparison

ACMECS countries and India inhabit a shared geographical and cultural relation, and also each country retains its own distinctiveness and unique identity. Both were formed to draw larger gains from regional cooperation and integration in not only economic areas but also non-economic areas such as public health, agriculture, education, etc. Between them, there are some common areas of cooperation such as trade and investment, transportation, tourism, and health (Table 6).

India and Mekong countries have been collaborating for regional cooperation in four areas such as tourism, culture, education and transport and communications. It has further extended to SME cooperation, Conservation of Rice Germplasm, Setting up a Working Group on Health, Establishment of a Common Archival Resource Centre (CARC) at the Nalanda University and India-Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Viet Nam Quick Impact Projects during the 7th MGC Ministerial Meetings in 2016 (Table 6). MGC has witnessed 10 Ministerial

Meetings since its establishment in 2000. The 10th MGC Ministerial Meeting was held in Bangkok on 1 August 2019, which further reinforces the MGC partnership.

Table 6: ACMECS and MGC

	ACMECS	MGC
Countries	Cambodia, Myanmar, Lao PDR, Thailand and Viet Nam	Cambodia, India, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam
Year	2003	2000
Motivation	Ayeyawady, Chao Phraya and Mekong	Mekong and Ganga
Objectives	The promotion of the prosperity in the sub-region in a sustainable manner and reduction of the economic gap	Enhancement of trade and investment cooperation in the sub-region.
Areas of Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trade and Investment Facilitation • Agricultural and Industrial Cooperation • Transport Linkages • Tourism Cooperation • Human Resources • Public Health 	<p>Traditional Areas of Cooperation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourism • Culture • Education • Transport and communications <p>New Areas of Cooperation (added in 7th MGC Ministerial Meeting on 2016)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SME cooperation • Conservation of Rice Germplasm • Setting up a Working Group on Health • Establishment of a Common Archival Resource Centre (CARC) at the Nalanda University • India-Cambodia-Laos-Myanmar-Viet Nam Quick Impact Projects
Major Projects	<p>Broadly to complement and enhance existing bilateral and regional economic cooperation, especially the ADB GMS programme. Some of the projects under ACMECS are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rehabilitation of existing roads • construction of road links between Viet Nam, the Lao PDR and Myanmar, • establishment of wholesale and distribution centres, • facilitation of contract farming • productive transfer of knowledge • establishment of training centres • promotion of eco-tourism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trilateral Highway (On-going, connecting India, Myanmar and Thailand) • Proposed Extension of Trilateral Highway connecting Viet Nam, Lao PDR and Cambodia • Kaladan Multi Model Transit Transport Project (KMMT)
Development Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thailand has offered close to US\$ 25 million to promote infrastructure development in CLMV countries. • Creating platform for the public and private sectors as well as financial institutions • Generating Investment in cooperation projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • India has extended over US\$ 1 billion Line of Credits (LoC) to CLMV countries • Capacity Building Programme • MGC Scholarship Scheme • SMEs cooperation • Business fair • Connectivity Projects (TH, KMMT) • Digital connectivity
Ministerial Meetings	As on 2018, it had 8th Summit level meetings. The last one held at Bangkok, Thailand on 16 June 2018.	As on 2019, it had 10th MGC Ministerial Meetings. The last one held at Bangkok in 1 August 2019.

Source: AIC's compilation from different sources

Table 6 summaries various India's development cooperation initiatives in MGC countries, which also broadly help to narrow the gaps between India and Mekong regions. India assists MGC countries through various development cooperation projects such as physical and

digital connectivity (e.g. Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, Trilateral MVA, GPON digital links, etc.); soft connectivity such as the Trilateral Motor Vehicle Agreement (Trilateral MVA), which play a critical role in realizing seamless movement of passenger, personal and cargo vehicles along roads linking India, Myanmar and Thailand; people-to-people connectivity (e.g. scholarships and fellowships, restoration of temples, visual and performing arts, etc.), science and technology (e.g. satellite launching station), training and capacity building (e.g. EDI centres, language training centres, etc.), business and networking (e.g. SMEs cooperation, business fairs, etc.). For instance, India has extended over US\$ 1 billion Special Fund to CLMV countries to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN, and a Project Development Fund (PDF) with a corpus of Rs. 5 billion to develop manufacturing hubs in CLMV countries. India also provides ITEC assistance to Mekong countries. For example, over Rs. 6 billion has been earmarked for Myanmar on ITEC account in 2014-15 and 2015-16. Under the MGC Scholarship schemes, India offers 50 seats every year to the Mekong countries for pursuing higher studies and spends about US\$ 166,420 in 2015-16. Recently, India has offered scholarship to Mekong countries to do PhD programme in IITs.

Road Connectivity

Road connectivity covers the Trilateral Highway (TH) routed through Northeast India; Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project linking Kolkata, via sea route to Sittwe, and then to Paletwa in Myanmar, Zorinpur in India; Rih-Tiddim Road, and extension of Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. In particular, the ongoing Trilateral Highway is aimed to connect Moreh in India to Mae Sot in Thailand via Myanmar. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project involves construction of a 1,360 km highway connecting Moreh in Manipur to Mae Sot in Thailand through Myanmar. The Trilateral Highway is further proposed to be extended to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. The TH is presently is under construction and likely to be completed by 2021.

Table 7: Direct Air Connectivity between India and Mekong Subregion

Indian Cities	Bangkok Thailand		Yangon*/Mandalay** Myanmar		Ho Chi Minh Viet Nam	
	Direct Flight	Frequency per week	Direct Flight	Frequency per week	Direct Flight	Frequency per week
Delhi	√	7	√**		√**	6
Mumbai	√	7				
Bengaluru	√	7				
Chennai	√	7				
Kolkata	√	7	√*	7	√	7
Hyderabad	√	7				
Guwahati	√	1				
Jaipur	√	7				
Lucknow	√	7				
Nagpur	√	1				
Varanasi	√	7				
Gaya	√	7	√*	4		
Imphal			√**^			

Notes: # via Kolkata; ^ proposed route by Myanmar's private carrier Air KBZ to operate twice a week.

Source: Authors' own

Air Connectivity

India has several flights with Thailand all through the week. Bangkok is connected with major major tier-I and tier-II cities in India by direct flight (Table 7). Air connectivity between India and Myanmar is becoming more popular due to religious tourism (Buddhist Circuits) and medical tourism. For instance, people from Myanmar are interested to visit Bodh Gaya. Kolkata and Yangon and New Delhi to Yangon via Gaya are the direct air connections between the two countries. Imphal and Mandalay is likely to be connected by air. There are direct flights between Kolkata and Ho Chi Minh City and Kolkata and Hanoi, which have started operating recently. Guwahati is also connected with Bangkok. However, India is yet to be connected with Cambodia and Lao PDR.

Digital Connectivity

Myanmar has set up cross-border fibre optic networks with many of its neighbouring countries including India. The first cross-border fibre optic link between India and Myanmar was set up in February 2009, running from Moreh in Manipur to Mandalay in Myanmar, for a distance of 500 km. The 640-km-long link passes through Tamu, Kambatwa, Kyi Gone, Shwebo, Monywa and Sagaing. The optic link is a high-speed broadband link for voice and data transmission.⁸ Besides, India has also extended over US\$ 1 billion Special Fund to CLMV countries to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity and a Project Development Fund (PDF) with a corpus of US\$ 77 million to develop manufacturing hubs in CLMV countries, which can be utilized to strengthen digital connectivity between India and Mekong subregion. India has set-up IT centres in Myanmar: India-Myanmar Centre for Enhancement of IT Skills (IMCEITS) and Centre of Information & Communication Technology Training (CICTT) in Yangon. However, there is ample scope to promote digital connectivity between India and Mekong countries, particularly in the areas of Industrial Revolution 4.0.

Table 8: Tourists Flow between ASEAN and India, 2017
(in '000)

	Arrivals from ASEAN to India	Departures from India to ASEAN
Brunei	*	7.19
Cambodia	*	59.57
Indonesia	43.97	422.05
Lao PDR	*	8.25
Malaysia	322.13	638.58
Myanmar	56.95	63.86
Philippines	53.96	90.82
Singapore	175.85	1097.20
Thailand	140.09	1415.19
Viet Nam	23.77	109.46
ASEAN	824.58	3912.17

Note: *Negligible

Source: India Tourism Statistics, 2018

⁸ Refer, www.globaltimes.com

People to People Connectivity

Table 8 presents the tourists flow between India and ASEAN countries for the year 2017. The tourists flow between India and Mekong countries is skewed. It is Thailand which attracts most of Indian tourists. Outflow of tourists from India has been more than inflows. Of recently, passenger movement through Tamu (Myanmar) and Moreh (India) border posts has gone up due to Myanmar's liberalization of visa for third country nationals. The year 2019 was celebrated as ASEAN-India Tourism Cooperation year. With rising number of direct flights between India and Mekong countries, tourism is likely to grow fast.

The Seventh Meeting of ASEAN and India Tourism Ministers, held on 18 January 2019 in Ha Long City, Viet Nam, has recommended several programmes to promote two-way tourism between India and ASEAN: (i) both ASEAN and India agreed to further enhance ASEAN-India cooperation in tourism under the framework of the 2012 Memorandum of Understanding between ASEAN and India on Strengthening Tourism Cooperation with intensified efforts and activities; (ii) sharing best practices for the development of responsible and/or sustainable tourism, particularly in sharing information in the development of the ASEAN Sustainable Tourism Assessment Tools (ASITAT); (iii) sharing resources and facilities to provide mutual assistance in tourism education and training for quality tourism development, including the development of the Concept Paper on the ASEAN-India Tourism Training Program, as well as the invitation from India for ASEAN countries to depute their tourism professionals to join short courses, workshops or seminars in India; (iv) crisis communications to protect the reputation and credibility of the relevant tourism organisations and/or tourist destination, particularly through the establishment of the ASEAN-India Crisis Communications Team; (v) exchange information pertaining to statistics and development strategies, investment opportunities and economic data, including the 5th India-CLMV Business Conclave held in May 2018 as a platform for cooperation with all tourism related cross sectors such as MSMEs, manufacturing, and information; and (vi) international Buddhist Conclave held on 22-25 August 2018, and the development of the Buddhist Tourism Story Book and website of Buddhist Tourism in ASEAN and South Asia.

3.4 India's Development Cooperation Initiatives in ACMECS

Aid and development cooperation have facilitated the expansion of economic and cultural relations in Mekong subregion and vice versa.⁹ Mekong countries have been receiving country-specific bilateral aid, subregional and regional assistances through MGC and ASEAN, respectively. India has extended over US\$ 1 billion Line of Credit (LoC) to CLMV countries in recent years, bulk of which went into Myanmar, followed by Viet Nam and Lao PDR. India also provides a substantial amount of ITEC assistance to developing countries across the world. Mekong countries are too recipients of ITEC assistance. Other Mekong countries have also been receiving such generous support. Under the MGC Scholarship schemes, India offers 50 seats every year to the Mekong countries for pursuing under graduate (UG), post graduate (PG) and Ph.D. courses in India (Table 9). India's expenditure on MGC scholarship scheme has been increased to US\$ 166,420 in 2015-16 from US\$ 50.64 thousand in 2006-07. Therefore, three types of development cooperation projects can be categorised: physical and digital connectivity (e.g. Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, GPON digital links, etc.), people-to-people connectivity (e.g.

⁹Refer, Chaturvedi (2016) for a discussion on aid and development cooperation in context of South-South Cooperation with particular reference to Mekong subregion.

scholarships and fellowships, restoration of temples, visual and performing arts, etc.), science and technology (e.g. satellite launching station), training and capacity building (e.g. EDI centres, language training centres, etc.), business and networking (e.g. SMEs cooperation, business fairs, etc.). Some of the iconic projects those India supported in Myanmar are (i) renovation of Thanlyin refinery and upgradation of Thanbayakan refinery in 2016 (US\$ 40 million); (ii) setting up manufacturing plant of heavy turbo truck in 2012 (US\$ 20 million); and (iii) rice bio park at Yezin Agriculture University in 2018 (US\$ 2 million)¹⁰.

Table 9: Mekong-Ganga Cooperation Scholarship Scheme*

Year	Number of Seats Allotted	Number of Seats Utilised	Total Expenditure ('000 US\$)
2006-07	50	31	50.64
2007-08	50	13	104.28
2008-09	50	28	140.46
2009-10	50	17	135.53
2010-11	50	23	195.10
2011-12	50	38	223.32
2012-13	50	33	262.74
2013-14	50	20	208.15
2014-15	50	17	186.78
2015-16	50	24	166.42

Note: Courses include under graduate, post graduate and Ph.D.

Source: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India.

India has been supporting CLMV countries under the Initiatives for ASEAN Integration (IAI), which includes projects on Training of English Language for Law Enforcement Officers in CLMV countries and Training of professionals dealing with capital markets in CLMV by National Institute of Securities Management Mumbai. To boost People-to-people contacts, India has been organising various programme including Training Programme for ASEAN diplomats, Exchange of Parliamentarians, Participation of ASEAN and Mekong students in the National Children's Science Congress, ASEAN-India Network of Think Tanks, ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Lecture Series, etc. India is establishing four Centres of Excellence in Software Development & Training (CESDT) in CLMV countries, including the setting up of an IT Resource cum Study Centre at CDAC, Noida consisting of one existing Lab and one new Lab as well as the development of 12 e-learning courses in six identified areas. Overall, India's has strong and progressive relation with ACMECS countries and has made several contributions in terms of trade, investment, connectivity projects, capacity building programmes and strengthening cultural linkages with Mekong region.

To restore the cultural and traditional textile affinities of the South and Southeast Asian region, an MGC Museum of Asian Textiles has been established in Siem Reap, Cambodia in 2014. Another milestone is the revival of Nalanda University. India has announced several dozens of ITEC scholarships for MGC countries in areas of culture, tourism, engineering, management, teachers training; film directing, sound, lighting and stage management in addition to over 1000 scholarships already given every year. New Centres of excellence in Software Development and Training were announced. Existing capacity building programmes in law enforcement, financial markets, ICT and space, to supplement the requirements of MGC partners was also announced. Three Quick Impact Projects in Lao PDR

¹⁰ Source: MEA

and two in Myanmar are under consideration in addition to nine in Cambodia and five in Viet Nam already under implementation.

4. Synergy between ACMECS and MGC Plan of Action (POA)

Both MGC and ACMECS have been engaged in several activities, which are reflected in their respective Plan of Action (PoA) such as ACMECS Plan of Action (2019-2023) and MGC POA (2019-2022). As a development partner, India can possibly build synergy of the MGC POA with the ACMECS POA in the possible areas for better implementation and also helping to mobilize the funding and human resources. Reduction of overlaps may help better utilize the financial and technical resources.

Table 10: Areas of ACMECS and MGC Plan of Action (POA)

Sr. No.	Areas of Action	ACMECS	MGC
1	Trade	√	√
2	Connectivity	√	√
3	Soft Infrastructure	√	√
4	FinTech	√	
5	Education		√
6	Environment		√
7	Health		√
8	Human Resources	√	√
9	Culture		√
10	Tourism		√
11	Forum	√	√

Note: see detailed table are given Appendix 3

Source: Authors' own

Table 10 illustrates the common areas in the POAs, suggesting where both India and Thailand can work together to better implement the respective POA. The common areas in ACMECS and MGC POAs are connectivity, soft infrastructure and development of human resources. ACMECS POA also has included FinTech to promote financial literacy and cooperation between banks and other financial service providers; whereas MGC POA has included larger areas such as education, environment, health, culture and tourism.

4.1 Assistance in Soft Infrastructure

In both the ACMECS and MGC POA, there is a scope for building synergy and complementarities in terms of India's support as a developing partner to the ACMECS. For instance, India can support in strengthening soft infrastructure in the areas of Information Technology in the Mekong subregion. India's successful implementation of 98 per cent of digitalization in custom clearance of import and export via single window system (SWIFT) exhibit how India has used digitalization in the trade facilitation. India's experience in dealing ITeS and knowledge can be shared with the Mekong countries in terms of assisting ACMECS POA on developing soft infrastructure. Since India has extended over US\$ 1 billion Special Fund to CLMV countries to promote digital connectivity, India-ACMECS cooperation in soft infrastructure will strengthen the implementation of MGC POA as well as ACMECS POA. What follows is that ACMECS countries should welcome India's digital leadership and jointly harness advanced technologies to thrive in the digital age.

4.2 FinTech Cooperation

India can offer lot more in terms of financial technology and financial inclusion in the Mekong subregion. India can lend its support to ACMECS in terms of financial technology and adoption of digitalization in financial inclusion. India's success in implementing the Fintech related products such as UPI, mobile banking, linking Aadhaar to bank account for direct cash transfer to the beneficiaries, opening millions of bank account for the financial inclusion in the rural areas, etc. under the Digital India scheme offer many vital lessons to ACMECS countries. These are the initiatives which transform the livelihood of the people in MGC or ACMECS subregion.

4.3 Resources Mobilization

India has initiated the Quick Impact Projects (QIP) scheme for the Mekong countries, which has well progressed since its inception in 2014. Till date, 24 projects have been completed. The QIP scheme has received overwhelming responses in the CLMV. So far, 10 such projects have been successfully completed in Cambodia and another five projects are being launched with Indian government assistance of US\$ 50000 for each project. In 2019, 18 QIPs are being implemented in Cambodia, Viet Nam and Lao PDR at a cost of US\$ 900,000. Myanmar is urged to identify projects of mutual interest under the QIP Scheme. Ongoing development partnership projects between India and Viet Nam has been continued and new projects have been initiated. Viet Nam continues to be a large recipient of training programmes under the ITEC programme. Similarly, Thailand has also proposed to establish ACMECS Fund to promote innovative financing mechanism in support of funding the projects under ACMECS POA. In this regard, India and Thailand can mobilize the resources for generating funds and human resources in order to effectively channelize the resources for the focused areas and provide training and capacity building. In this way, joint areas of cooperation will bring out the implementation of POAs in an effective way.

5. Potential Areas of Cooperation for India as Development Partner

In the Mekong subregion, in addition to India and Thailand, countries such as South Korea, Japan, China and USA are also engaged in several projects and have been covering multiple areas for cooperation and development activities through technology sharing, funding, knowledge sharing and capacity building in various fields to upgrade the skills of CLMV countries. Thailand is the closest associate of Mekong countries, which has formed the ACMECS. To further strengthen the ACMECS, Thailand has invited India, South Korea, Japan and China has a development partner. In 2019, India accepted the invitation and joined has a development partner. Since its establishment in 2000, India has been actively engaged with ACMECS countries and initiated several projects. In addition to the existing areas of cooperation, India may consider new areas such as blue economy, disaster management, climate change, renewable energy, education, skill development, etc. (Table 11).

Table 11: Major Initiatives by Countries in Mekong Subregion

Indicators	Thailand	India	Japan	USA	China
	ACMECS	Mekong Ganga Cooperation	Mekong Japan Cooperation	Lower Mekong Initiative	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
Countries covered in ASEAN	CLMV+T	CLMV+T+ India	CLMV+T+ Japan	CLMV+T+ USA	CLMV+T+ China
Development Partners (DP)	Japan, South Korea, USA, Australia, China, and India			Japan and South Korea, Australia	
International Organizations (IO)		ADB, ERIA	ADB, ERIA		
Areas of Cooperation					
Connectivity	√	√	√	√	√
Soft connectivity	√	√	√		√
Industrial promotion	√	√	√		√
Tourism		√	√		√
Human Resources and Capacity Building	√	√	√	√	√
Health		√	√	√	√
Education		√	√		
Water Resources		√*	√	√	√
People-to-People connectivity			√		√
Disaster Management		√*		√	√
Agriculture		√		√	
Energy			√	√	√
Climate Change		√*	√		√
Blue Economy			√		
Science and Technology		√			
Forestry and Environment				√	√
Culture		√			√

Note: *No specific project or programme; Detailed Summary Table are given in Appendix 3

Source: Authors' own

5.1 Blue Economy

Oceans hold a place of prominence among the countries of Mekong regions (except Lao PDR) and India from ancient times. India and Myanmar in the Mekong region share both maritime and land boundary with each other. Given the maritime and economic potentials, India and Mekong region can engage in dialogue and policy initiatives on Blue Economy for the sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs, and ocean ecosystem health. India has endorsed the 'Blue Economy' as a new and central pillar of the country's economic activities. It encompasses both the coastal areas and the linked hinterland. Indian Prime Minister emphasized the 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) at the *Shangri La Dialogue* in Singapore in 2018, which reaffirmed India's

key role in strengthening the Blue Economy in the India-ASEAN region¹¹. Blue Economy has become one of the important aspects of the India-ASEAN strategic partnership. In this regard, Mekong-India Blue Economy programme could strengthen the regional and sub-regional cooperation in promoting maritime safety and security as well as sustainable exploration of ocean resources. India's support can be extended as the development partner in knowledge sharing and assistance such as Early Warning Centres, including for *tsunami* warnings, HADR Exercises and SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) for HADR, capacity-building and capability-enhancement in the areas related to Blue Economy.

5.2 Disaster Management

India can also support the ACMECS in the area of Disaster Management. Natural disaster covers a wide range of events such as earthquakes, floods, landslides, cyclones, tsunamis, heat wave, pandemic like COVID-19 etc, Both India and ACMECS are disaster prone region. Disaster management and emergency response requires a people-centred multi-sectoral approach, building resilience to multiple hazards and creating a culture of prevention and safety. Disaster risk reduction can provide a mechanism to reduce poverty, safeguard development and adapt to climate change, with beneficial effects on broader global stability and sustainability. India's vast experience in dealing post-disaster operations would provide rich lessons to ACMECS countries. India and ACMECS countries may open a formal dialogue in disaster management.

5.3 Renewable Energy

India and ACMECS countries have vast unmet potentials in renewable energy. Both have wide access to ocean, wind, solar and other forms of renewable energy sources. Energy cooperation is a plausible scope to share the technological knowledge and renewable energy resources. Since renewable energy sources produce very negligible or zero global warming emissions, deeper cooperation in renewable energy may help countries moving towards low-carbon growth path. India has initiated International Solar Alliance (ISA), which is now having more than 121 prospective member countries. Most of the ASEAN countries are prospective members of ISA, among which Cambodia has signed and Myanmar has signed and ratified the ISA Framework Agreement. Thailand and Lao PDR may consider signing the ISA. In addition, wind power dominates the renewable energy industry in India, representing 70 percent of its total renewable energy capacity. In this regard, Energy cooperation is the potential area through which India can extend its support to the ACMECS in terms of technology sharing and capacity building leading to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). To expand energy access, it is crucial to enhance energy efficiency and to invest in renewable energy.¹² These targets may seem ambitious, but with better cooperation, it will help meet the targets on SDG as well as climate change.

5.4 Development of Physical and Digital Connectivity

India may continue with digital and physical connectivity projects in the Mekong subregion. The connectivity programme shall consider air, land and maritime connectivity as identified in the ACMECS Master Plan of Connectivity. Some of the projects worth mentioning: (i)

¹¹ Refer, Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue (June 01, 2018)

¹² Refer, Gielen et. al (2018)

extension of TH to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam; (ii) India-ACMECS cyber security dialogue; (iii) projects on Industrial Revolution 4.0, smart cities, start ups, Fintech, etc.

6. Conclusions and Way Forward

ACMECS acts as a catalyst to build upon existing regional cooperation programmes and complement bilateral frameworks with a view to transform the border areas of the five countries into zones of economic growth, social progress and prosperity. To further strengthen the ACMECS, Thailand has invited India as a development partner. India has overwhelmingly accepted the invitation and joined as a Development Partner on 29 July 2019. Since its establishment in 2000, India is actively engaged with ACMECS countries via MGC and initiated several projects.

This paper identifies specific projects from the list of ACMECS priority projects for joint implementation, focusing particularly on projects that can also complement joint projects already being undertaken by India with the ACMECS countries both under bilateral and other multilateral frameworks such as the MGC, BIMSTEC and ASEAN-India Dialogue Relations.

MGC and ACMECS have been engaged in several activities through their respective of Plan of Action such as ACMECS POA (2019-2023) and MGC POA (2019-2022). Common areas in both POAs are connectivity, soft infrastructure and human resources. ACMECS POA also includes FinTech to promote financial literacy and cooperation between banks and other financial service providers. MGC POA has included areas like education, environment, health, culture and tourism. The MGC Plan of Action (POA) correctly reflects India's deeper engagements with the Mekong subregion (Table 12).

Table 12: India's Agenda based on MGC POA (2019-2022)

Sr. No.	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
1	Assist to set-up MGC Asian Traditional Textiles Museum (ATTM) in Siem Reap, Cambodia	Complete India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway	Further strengthen the cooperation in the education sector and capacity building and human resource development
2	MGC Conference on Heritage Conservation Techniques in Siem Reap, Cambodia in 2020.	Finalize India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicle Agreement (IMT MVA)	Work towards possible extension of the Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.
3	Prepare Visitor's Guide for Mekong-Ganga Buddhist Pilgrimage Sites on the eve of the "India-ASEAN Tourism Year"	Call for proposal and utilize India's USD 1 billion Line of Credit (LOC) for connectivity projects in CLMV	Establish Centres for Excellence in Software Development and Training (CESDT) in Mekong countries.
4	Develop a joint calendar of important Travel Fairs and Cultural Festivals for information dissemination and promotion.	Utilise Project Development Fund (PDF) of USD 72.5 million to facilitate Indian investments in CLMV	Establish Common Archival Resource Centre (CARC) at Nalanda University.
5	Quick Impact Projects for poverty reduction and generate basic infrastructure facilities to improve the livelihood of the CLMV		Look for potential new areas of cooperation such as water resources management, climate change, disaster management, blue economy, energy cooperation to benefit CLMV

Source: Authors' own

In addition to the India's engagement with the ACMECS via MGC and its ongoing MGC POA (2019-2022), India can lend its support as the development partner in the areas where India has comparative advantage in terms of technical knowledge and capability. India can also jointly implement the project in support of Thailand to mobilize the resources both financial and human skills, in which both ACMECS and MGC POAs have synergy. Some of the areas where India can offer its support are (i) assistance in soft infrastructure; (ii) supporting FinTech; and (iii) resources mobilization. In addition to the existing areas of cooperation, India has potential to engage in other areas for cooperation such as blue economy, disaster management, climate change, renewable energy and physical and digital connectivity.

India is celebrating 20 years of MGC in 2020. With a maturing ASEAN-India relation, India's foreign policy achievements in eastern neighbourhood are remained remarkable. India's joining ACMECS as a development partner will certainly boost up MGC and ASEAN-India partnership.

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Appendix 1: Summary of Completed, On-going and Proposed Projects under ACMECS Areas of Cooperation

Projects Under Areas of Cooperation	Number of Multilateral Projects	Bilateral Projects	Total Number of Bilateral Projects	Project Area
Agricultural Cooperation Projects	9	Cambodia-Thailand- 4; Lao-Thailand- 3 (2 New Proposals); Myanmar-Thailand- 2; Thailand-Viet Nam- 1; Cambodia-Lao- 2; Cambodia-Myanmar- 2; Cambodia-Viet Nam-3; Lao-Mynamar-4; Lao-Viet Nam-1; Myanmar-Viet Nam-7 (3 New Proposals)	34	Study of environmental impact from inland fishery promotion; post harvest in fisheries of catch and culture; Management of fishery production; Livestock production development; Animal health development; Agro-processing and agribusiness; Technical exchange and economic cooperation on animal health, food processing, seed production and forestry and fishery; Information Exchange on plant genetic resources and crop production technologies.
Human Resource Development Projects	13	Cambodia-Thailand- 7; Lao-Thailand- 10; Myanmar-Thailand-6; Thailand-Viet Nam- 1; Cambodia-Lao- 2; Cambodia-Myanmar- 2; Cambodia-Viet Nam-3; Lao-Viet Nam-1	32	Human resource development programs to support the various projects; Training and Transfer of Technology and Technical Know-How of Industry and farm production; Training courses related to priority sectoral cooperation under ACMECS framework; Joint workshops and arranging training exchange programmes; Transfer of information technology and cooperation in human resource development; Project on Trade Point/Trade net, trade service information, power generation etc.
Industrial and Energy	10	Cambodia-Thailand- 10; Lao-Thailand- 9; Myanmar-Thailand- 6; Thailand-Viet Nam- 2; Cambodia-Lao- 1; Cambodia-Myanmar- 1; Cambodia-Viet Nam-8; Lao-Mynamar-1; Lao-Viet Nam-3; Myanmar-Viet Nam- 2	43	Exploration of Mineral resources, Feasibility Study on Industrial Estate; establishment of the center for commodity processing and distribution, agro-based industries in border areas, Special Border Economic Zone; Exchange of information on industrial sector, energy and mining; Cooperation in the development of protected areas and wildlife sanctuaries in the border areas; Development Study of Hydro Power Project; Establishment of Electricity Network; Cooperation in energy sector; Project on Photovoltaic Cell and Energy Conservation and solar battery; Exchange of information on industrial sector, energy and mining; Evaluation of environmental impact of downstream flow of rivers; Development of Power transmission line
Public Health	16			Human resource development for disease surveillance and control; Health information system and information sharing; Strengthen National Pandemic Preparedness Plan; Promote Other Emerging Infectious Disease Control at the Borders; Consumer Protection and Drug Initiatives; Establishment of Collaborative Mechanism

Tourism Cooperation	12	Cambodia-Thailand- 7; Lao-Thailand- 7; Myanmar-Thailand- 11; Thailand-Viet Nam- 6; Cambodia-Lao- 4; Cambodia-Myanmar- 5; Cambodia-Viet Nam- 5; Lao-Myanmar-6; Lao-Viet Nam- 3; Myanmar-Viet Nam- 3	57	Tourism and marketing promotion; Facilitation of travel, including the introduction of border pass; Development of eco-tourism, airport; Feasibility study of the introduction of joint visa; including visa fees; Organizing of friendship caravan tours and cross country tours; Development of air linkages; Joint promotion of potential tourist sites of nations; Joint promotion of potential tourist sites of both nations, investment; Establishing tourist information center, cooperation working group; Upgrading of border check points; Relaxation of entry formalities
Trade & Investment Projects	11	Cambodia-Thailand- 10; Lao-Thailand- 11; Myanmar-Thailand- 12; Thailand-Viet Nam- 4; Cambodia-Lao- 4; Cambodia-Myanmar- 3; Cambodia-Viet Nam- 7; Lao-Viet Nam-9; Myanmar-Viet Nam- 1	51	Investment and trade mission program; Agreement on border trade; Agreement on border trade; Promotion of export oriented investment opportunities to enhance investment; Cooperation between Customs Department; Promotion of export oriented investment opportunities, Strengthening cooperation in trade promotion
Transport Linkages	5	Cambodia-Thailand- 3; Lao-Thailand- 8; Myanmar-Thailand- 3; Thailand-Viet Nam- 4; Cambodia-Lao- 2; Cambodia-Myanmar- 3; Cambodia-Viet Nam-7; Lao-Myanmar- 2; Lao-Viet Nam-4; Myanmar-Viet Nam- 1	37	Road Improvement and Development Projects; Construction of Mekong Bridge; Establishing road connections; Improving air linkages between existing airports; Cooperation on river transport

Source: AIC's compilation from ACMECS webpage

**Appendix 2:
Comparing Plan of Action of both ACMECS and MGC**

Areas for Action	ACMECS	MGC
Trade		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MGC Trade Fair either in India or any other MGC country in conjunction with a prominent trade exhibition focusing on MSMEs.
Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote multi-model transport connectivity links. Special emphasis will be on filling all the missing links in the sub-region, particularly, railway network connecting the East-West Economic Corridor (EWEC) and Southern Economic Corridor (SEC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway – ongoing. Target to finish the project by 2021. Proposal to extend the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway to Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam, and its development as an economic growth corridor. Early conclusion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) to facilitate seamless movement of goods and passengers across borders, thus leading to greater trade and tourism.
Soft Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote software connectivity for harmonization and simplification of rules and regulations to facilitate movement of people, free flow of goods, services and investment to leverage integrated value and supply chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote exchange of experiences and information on policies and management regulations of ICT industry, popularization of public services, development of ICT infrastructure, e-governance, e-commerce, e-education and other related e-services. Enhance connectivity and cross-border ICT services to promote e-commerce as well as social and cultural exchanges. Organize workshops and training programmes in digital connectivity and ICT infrastructure development for government officials from MGC countries. India's initiative on Digital Connectivity with CLMV region
FinTech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To promote financial literacy, FinTech and cooperation between banks and other financial service providers. 	
Education		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the 50 MGC scholarships offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Promote training in traditional systems of medicine through exchange of faculty and students among national institutions. Offering 10 scholarships annually to MGC countries for students interested in pursuing under-graduate/ post-graduate/ Ph.D in Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy and Yoga. Launch a website dedicated to MGC which would contribute to branding of the regional grouping and provide useful information on the various joint programs and activities.
Environment		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake collaborative projects in the areas of sustainable water management, water harvesting, water data collection, climate change adaptation and mitigation, integrated water resources management, groundwater management, transboundary basin management, water quality monitoring, flood and drought management and disaster reduction etc.
Health		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By sending Indian Ayurveda specialists under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) to Mekong countries upon request. Organize various workshop related to health and traditional medicine

Human resource	Develop human capacity in the areas of entrepreneurship (MSMEs/Startups), agriculture, tourism, medical services and education, and also promote environmental cooperation including sustainable water resource management and other strategic fields including agriculture, industry, tourism, health, renewable energy, climate change, disaster-risk management, and natural resources conservation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organise workshop on agriculture and allied issues Conduct training programme on water management. Organise training and scholarship programmes in the areas of national accounts statistics and large scale socio-economic sample surveys. Facilitate knowledge sharing through exchange visits by experts from vocational training institutions and skill development authorities. Organise annual training programmes on the topics related to MGC areas of cooperation as well as other relevant issues which are in line with the SDGs under Thailand's Annual International Training Courses – AITC.
Culture		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A textile exhibition along with cultural activities to showcase at the MGC Asian Traditional Textile Museum (ATTM) Promote capacity building and exchange best practices in preservation of historical and cultural monuments Establish a Common Archival Resource Center (CARC) at Nalanda University Cooperate in the field of radio and television broadcasting through exchange of content and programmes, exchange of personnel for training purposes, sharing of technical expertise and joint production of documentaries Develop a joint calendar of important Travel Fairs and Cultural Festivals in MGC countries for information dissemination and promotion. Invite craftsmen and cultural troupes from MGC countries to participate in prominent cultural fairs and festivals in India
Tourism		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage to visit Buddhist sites in MGC countries Organise food festival to showcase the rich culinary traditions Encourage exchange of students through offer of scholarships for diploma and certificate courses in tourism and travel management, hospitality management etc. To this end, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India will offer 5 scholarships (one to each MGC country) at Indian Institute of Tourism Management or Indian Institute of Hotel Management. Develop institutional contact between National Hospitality/ Tourism Management Institutes or related agencies through exchange of experts, training collaboration and exposure visits of students.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thailand's initiative in proposing the establishment of an ACMECS Fund as innovative financing mechanism to address the need for funding of projects under the ACMECS Master Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host an Innovation Forum in one of the MGC countries to promote social innovations in agriculture, transport, communication, industrial know-how transfer, e-commerce, information and communication technology (ICT), health, energy and environment, food etc. India's pledge of Indian Rupees 5 billion (equivalent to USD 72.5 million) under a Project Development Fund to facilitate Indian investments in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Viet Nam.
Forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ACMECS CEO Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> MGC Business Forum focusing on MSMEs Organize an MGC Business Forum focusing on MSMEs on the sidelines of ASEAN-India Business Expo and Summit to be organized by Viet Nam in 2020.

Note: for more details see MGC Master Plan of Action. Available at <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/31712/Mekong+Ganga+Cooperation+MGC+Plan+of+Action+20192022>

Source: Author's compilation based on several source

**Appendix 3:
Major Initiatives by Countries in Mekong Subregion**

Indicators	India	Japan	USA	China
	Mekong Ganga Cooperation	Mekong Japan Cooperation	Lower Mekong Initiative	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
Countries covered in ASEAN	CLMV+T	CLMV+T	CLMV+T	CLMV+T
Development Partners' (DP)			Japan and South Korea, Australia	
International Organisations' (IO)	ADB, ERIA	ADB, ERIA		
Connectivity	Ongoing India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project that can connect with East-West corridor Explore ways and means for the conclusion of the India-Myanmar-Thailand Motor Vehicle Agreement to facilitate seamless connectivity.	Connecting missing links of the East-West and Southern Economic Corridors. Promote "Partnership for Quality Infrastructure" and the "Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure."	Dam Safety Inspection and Monitoring in Lao PDR Public-Private Partnership Training for LMI regions Training on Best Practices in Engineering to LMI regions	Infrastructure upgrade and construction, such as railway, highway, waterway, ports, power grid, information network and aviation. Increase application of global satellite navigation systems, including the Beidou System, in Lancang-Mekong countries in areas such as infrastructure construction, transportation, logistics, tourism and agriculture.
Soft Connectivity	Promote exchange of experiences and information on policies and management regulations of ICT industry, popularization of public services, development of ICT infrastructure, e-governance, e-commerce, e-education and other related e-services. Enhance connectivity and cross-border ICT services to promote e-commerce as well as social and cultural exchanges. Organize workshops and training programmes in digital connectivity and ICT infrastructure development for government officials from MGC countries. India's initiative on Digital Connectivity with CLMV region	Support modernization of customs infrastructure Facilitate cross-border security and customs clearance. promote cooperation in the field of ICT, especially cooperation in telecommunication, cybersecurity and broadcasting. improving institutional frameworks for digital economy including E-commerce. promote cooperation in the postal field, especially for the modernization of postal network and services.		facilitate of visa application, customs clearance and transportation Discussion on implementing the "single window" model for cross-border clearance

Industry Connectivity	Mekong India Business Council Organize an MGC Trade Fair on MSMEs. MSMEs sector with special focus on Youth and Women empowerment. Special Purpose Vehicle Project Development Fund	promote the investment of both manufacturing/ service industries in Mekong sub-region and business matching between Japanese and Mekong countries companies including SMEs and innovative Start-ups, and the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs).		Establish a Lancang-Mekong business council. Promote International Trade Fair and Exhibitions and business matching sessions
Tourism	Encourage to visit Buddhist sites in MGC countries Organise food festival to showcase the rich culinary traditions Encourage exchange of students through offer of scholarships for diploma and certificate courses in tourism and travel management, hospitality management etc. To this end, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India will offer 5 scholarships (one to each MGC country) at Indian Institute of Tourism Management or Indian Institute of Hotel Management. Develop institutional contact between National Hospitality/ Tourism Management Institutes or related agencies through exchange of experts, training collaboration and exposure visits of students.	Two-way tourism between Japan and the Mekong countries.		Promote the training of tourism talents, and encourage to participate ASEAN Tourism Forum, Mekong Tourism Forum and China International Tourism Mart (CITM). Enhance the recognition on Promoting ASEAN Tourism Standards.
Human Resource/Capacity Building	Health, Education Encourage exchange of students through offer of scholarships for diploma and certificate courses in tourism and travel management, hospitality management etc. Training programs on preparation of feasibility studies and detailed project reports for highway projects and construction and maintenance of highways.	Industrial Human Resource Development Cooperation Initiative. Technical cooperation between Financial Services Agency of Japan and its counterparts in the region through tailored trainings and fellowship programs like the Global Financial Partnership Center (GLOPAC).	Climate change Professional Communications Skills for Leaders Project Connecting the Mekong through Education and Training Young Scientist Research Program Lao PDR Women's Entrepreneurial Center	Set up Production Capacity Cooperation Forum to enhance production capacity and investment cooperation Environment protection and related forestry management.

Health	India Have initiated some Capacity building programmes interims of workshop, ITEC programmes etc.	Universal Health Coverage (UHC). redouble the efforts for promoting UHC and all healthcare related industries including medical care, elderly care, prevention and society development which enables healthy living under the Asia Health and Wellbeing Initiative (AHWIN) in collaboration with ERIA.	Smart Regional Tool Development (2017-2018) Vector Surveillance and Control Info Sharing Program Anti-Microbial Resistance (AMR)	Establish and improve the mechanism for early warning, joint surveillance, prevention and control for cross-border emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases. Enhance cooperation among hospitals and medical institutions to facilitate technical exchanges and health personnel training.
Education	50 MGC scholarships offered by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations Scholarship/training in different areas like Laguage, ICT, traditional medicine/higher study in traditional medicine Government of India will offer 10 scholarships annually to MGC countries for students interested in pursuing under-graduate/post-graduate/Ph.D in Ayurveda, Unani, Siddha, Homeopathy and Yoga. Launch a website dedicated to MGC to provide useful information on the various joint programs and activities. To offer scholarships to 1,000 ASEAN students who will pursue Phd at IITs	promotion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), higher education cooperation and sharing of expertise.		
Water Resource	Undertake collaborative projects in the areas of sustainable water management, water harvesting, water data collection, integrated water resources and groundwater management, transboundary basin management, water quality monitoring.	Given importance to this issue and stressed the necessity to coordinate with the LMI.	Improve Flood Early Warning System. Mekong Water Data Initiative On Water and Environment issues	Water Resource cooperation river flood and drought disaster emergency management, support to organise joint study Promote technical cooperation and exchanges on water resources management,carry out joint research and analysis Develop and improve water quality monitoring system

People to people connectivity		sports and cultural exchanges, exchanges among youth, exchanges between local authorities, tourism exchanges, cooperation in broadcasting programs.		Promote youth exchanges and build flagship youth exchange projects. Enhance gender equality, women's exchanges and cooperation by developing various forms of activities including training courses and exchange of visits. Mobilize the local/regional governments to participate in projects.
Disaster Management	Undertake collaborative projects in the areas of flood and drought management and disaster reduction etc.		Public Participation & Conflict Transformation III in Lao PDR LMI Disaster Response Exercise & Exchange in Myanmar and Thailand	carry out joint assessment of flood control and drought relief in Mekong basin, and carry out joint study on the early setting up of communication line/channel for sharing information in emergency case of flood and drought in Lancang-Mekong river.
Agriculture and Allied	workshop on preservation of rice germplasm and productivity, sustainable fisheries and dairy		Promote collaboration in agricultural research, institutional capacity building, human resources development, trade, and investment.	
Energy Cooperation		importance of enhancing energy infrastructure interconnection considering an eco-friendly, economical and stable power supplying system in this region.	Power Sector Program in LMI Regional Assistance Foundations for Strategic Lower Mekong Hydropower and Water Resources Management Air Conditioning Efficiency Program Power Sector Program for Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam	cooperation in regional power grid planning, construction, upgrading and renovation establishment of an integrated regional power market. actively push forward construction and expansion of cross-border terrestrial fiber optic cables and international submarine cables.
Climate Change	Undertake collaborative projects in the areas of climate change adaptation and mitigation	Japan's continued support under "ASEAN-Japan Environmental Cooperation Initiative" including the development of quality environmental infrastructure addressing waste management, sustainable cities and wastewater treatment as well as marine pollution, marine litters, chemicals, biodiversity and climate change. strengthen the response capability and to work together to tackle climate change in this region.		The Green Lancang-Mekong Plan, with the focus on cooperation in better managing air and water pollution as well as ecosystem management and enhance communication with other related sub-regional mechanisms.

		decided to advance the Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM).		
Blue Economy/ Marine Cooperation		Stressed the importance of sustainable use of aquatic fishery resources, including cetaceans, based on scientific evidence.		
Science and Technology	promote social innovations in agriculture, transport, communication, industrial know-how transfer, e-commerce, information and communication technology (ICT), health, energy and environment, food etc			
Forestry/Environment			Environmental Code Drafting Assistance in Cambodia Assist in Air, Water, Waste Management	Improve capacity building of Lancang-Mekong countries in forestry management and scientific research, promote forestry-related higher-education
Culture	India will continue to offer ten scholarships, two each to Mekong countries for training in museology and conservation techniques at National Museum Institute, New Delhi. Establish a Common Archival Resource Center (CARC) at Nalanda University as a repository of information on areas such as archeological sites, world heritages, history of trade, population and religious distribution data, and historical linkages between India and Southeast Asia for the use of academicians, researchers and scholars. Invite craftsmen and cultural troupes from MGC countries to participate in prominent cultural fairs and festivals in India Cooperate in the field of radio and television broadcasting			Cultural exchange and cooperation Make full use of cultural centers set up by governments of LMC countries to host such cultural activities among LMC member states. Strengthen exchanges and cooperation among mainstream media, and encourage the hosting of TV and film festivals or screening activities. Encourage to set up Lancang-Mekong Cooperation official websites or to provide official information about LMC on their websites. Using social media platforms as basic platforms to publish information and handle public affairs as deemed appropriate.

Source: Authors' compilation based on several sources

About AIC

Considering the work of the ASEAN-India Eminent Persons Group (AIEPG), and its Report with recommendations for forging a closer partnership for peace, progress and shared prosperity, the Heads of the State/Government of ASEAN and India at the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit 2012, held at New Delhi on 19-20 December 2012, recommended the establishment of ASEAN-India Centre (AIC), which was formally inaugurated by the Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of the Government of India on 21 June 2013 at RIS. AIC serves as a resource centre for ASEAN Member States and India to fill the knowledge gaps that currently limit the opportunities for cooperation. AIC is closely working with the Indo-Pacific Division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Government of India to undertake and disseminate evidence based policy research and provide policy recommendations.

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