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MEKONG-AUSTRALIA PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT

2024

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GLOSSARY

ABF	Australian Border Force
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ADB	Asian Development Bank
ADIS	Alumni Development Impact Survey
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AGA	Australian Government Agencies
AGD	Attorney General's Department (Australia)
AML	Anti Money Laundering Department
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investment Commission
ATO	Australian Taxation Office
AUSTRAC	Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre
AWP	Australian Water Partnership
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLTV	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam
CRMN	Core River Monitoring Network
CSA	Climate-smart agriculture
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (Australia)
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CSP	Comprehensive Strategic Partnership
CRxN	Climate Resilient by Nature
DCY	Department of Children and Youth (Thailand)
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DGA	Digital Government Development Agency (Thailand)
DPP	Development Partnership Plan
DSS	Department of Social Statistics (Laos)
DWR	Department of Water Resources (Vietnam)

EbA	Ecosystem-based Adaptation
EEES	Australia-Vietnam Enhanced Economic Engagement Strategy
EGAT	Electric Generation Authority of Thailand
EOPO	End-of-Portfolio Outcome
EPPO	Energy Policy and Planning Office (Thailand)
ERF	Economic Resilience Fund
ESG	Environmental, Social, and Governance
FICG	Financial Intelligence Consultative Group
FPAR	Feminist Participatory Action Research
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
Gi-TOC	Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime
GIA	Gender impact analysis
GRB	Gender-responsive budgeting
GRP	Gender-responsive procurement
HA	Home Affairs
IFC	Intelligence Fundamentals Course
IP2	Inclusion Project Phase 2
IPPIN	Indo-Pacific Plastics Innovation Network
LDPA	Laos Disabled Peoples Association
LEAP	Low Emissions Analysis Platform
LMC	Lancang-Mekong Cooperation
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (Vietnam)
MAP	Mekong-Australia Partnership
MAP-SU	Mekong-Australia Partnership Support Unit
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MFIAC	Mekong Financial Intelligence Analyst Course
MMK	Myanmar kyat
MONRE	Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (Vietnam)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament

MRC	Mekong River Commission
MSME	Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises
NbS	Nature-based solutions
NEMO	Next Energy System Modelling for Optimisation
NIA	National Innovation Agency (Thailand)
NIDIR	Cambodia’s National Institute for Diplomacy and International Relations
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIDIR	Cambodia’s National Institute for Diplomacy and International Relations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSMEP	Office of Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion (Thailand)
P4I	Partnerships for Infrastructure
PDG	Preliminary Design Guidelines
PFR	Public Finance Review
PMU	Project Management Unit
PNPCA	Procedure for Notification, Prior Consultation, and Agreement
RTP	Royal Thai Police
SBV	State Bank of Vietnam
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEA	Southeast Asia
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
VDF	Village Development Fund
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TBEIA	Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment
TNC	Transnational Crime
UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
VCC	Vietnam Competition Commission
WOB	Women-owned businesses
WEP	Women’s Empowerment Principles
WPA	Wine Producers Australia

Executive Summary

In 2024, the Mekong-Australia Partnership (MAP) transitioned to a new phase of implementation, with MAP Phase One ending and a new focus on planning and preparation for Phase Two, including calls for proposals and contracting the MAP Support Unit. MAP Phase One supported sustainable development and environmental and economic resilience in the Mekong subregion (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) through bilateral and regional activities that complemented existing bilateral funding. Previous activities were delivered across the five Pillars – (1) Economic Resilience, (2) Water, Energy and Climate (WEC), (3) Human Capacity, (4) Cyber and (5) Trade and Investment.

The MAP Phase Two (\$222.5 million over five years, 2024-25 to 2028-29) continues to support a more resilient and inclusive Mekong subregion that pursues joint solutions to shared and transboundary challenges. The purpose of MAP Phase 2 is to reinforce that Australia is a trusted and responsible partner in supporting a resilient, inclusive and sustainable Mekong subregion. MAP Phase 2’s five thematic areas replace the previous phase’s pillars. These are: climate resilience; water security; economic resilience and subregional integration; gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI); and preventing and countering transnational crime (TNC). Leadership and Skills is a cross-cutting theme that contributes results to all five thematic areas.

Key findings on progress and achievements at the MAP Portfolio level

MAP has made broad, strategic contributions across the Mekong subregion to strengthen climate resilience, make water governance more inclusive and effective, promote inclusive development and regional integration, and prevent transnational crime. Through 41 targeted investments and partnerships with governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector, MAP has contributed to enhanced climate adaptation practices in communities, improved inclusive and evidence-based water management, strengthened subregional cooperation, implemented foundational activities for improved economic resilience, enabled more effective and coordinated responses to transnational crime and increased participation of women and marginalised groups across all these areas. These efforts reflect MAP’s integrated, evidence-based approach to fostering resilience, equity, and sustainability across the region.

Key findings on progress and achievements at the MAP Thematic level

Summary of Pillar Progress



Thematic Area 1 – Climate Resilience

MAP is contributing to strengthening climate resilience across the Mekong subregion. During the reporting period, ten investments were implemented, focusing on climate-smart agriculture, green economy, nature-based solutions, and resilient urban design, with a strong emphasis on inclusive, evidence-based approaches. These initiatives engaged diverse stakeholders—governments, civil society, academia, and the private sector—and prioritised the inclusion of marginalised groups. Key initiatives included training programs, local adaptation projects in Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, and collaborative research addressing water security and urban resilience. Events like the Mekong Environmental Resilience Week (Bangkok, October 2024), and regional forums, fostered knowledge exchange and policy dialogue, while partnerships with Monash University and the Stockholm Environment Institute supported technical guidance and policy-informing research initiatives. Overall, MAP has contributed to building adaptive capacity, promoting sustainable practices, and enhancing regional cooperation on climate resilience.

01 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Summary of Pillar Progress

 Thematic Area 2 – Water Security	<p>Ten investments, mostly regional, were implemented through partnerships with multilateral organisations, civil society, and academic institutions. Key initiatives included support to the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for transboundary water management, development of fish-friendly infrastructure, improved data sharing through tools like the One Mekong App, and drought monitoring in Vietnam’s Central Highlands. MAP also promoted inclusive governance by empowering women and marginalised groups through Oxfam’s Inclusion Project and supported community-led conservation in Laos. Collaborative research and innovation were advanced through partnerships with Australian institutions, including work on groundwater management, pumped storage hydropower, and plastic pollution solutions. These efforts collectively strengthened regional cooperation in water management, data-driven decision-making in the water sector, and water security in communities.</p>
 Thematic Area 3 – Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion	<p>The Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) thematic area signals MAP’s strategic shift to invest in dedicated GEDSI initiatives alongside mainstreaming efforts across other thematic areas. During this reporting period, data shows that GEDSI outcomes were also integrated into broader MAP activities, including inclusive urban planning, gender-sensitive water governance, and infrastructure projects led by women-owned firms. Notable achievements include gender-responsive procurement training for over 400 women-led businesses, the establishment of women’s committees in Myanmar, and regional platforms like the Asia Women and River Congress, where women, youth, and indigenous peoples participated in, amplifying their voices in regional platforms. MAP also supported the inclusion of indigenous women in global policy dialogues and promoted feminist participatory research to strengthen community resilience. These efforts collectively help promote inclusive development, increased women’s leadership, and laid the groundwork for more equitable participation in economic and environmental decision-making across the Mekong subregion.</p>
 Thematic Area 4 – Economic Resilience and Subregional Integration	<p>This thematic area contributed to strengthened economic resilience for countries in the Mekong subregion. In Laos, comprehensive dissemination of VAT-related measures to over 2,800 stakeholders—including 1,042 women—generated more than \$600,000 in revenue from 26 registered vendors. Cambodia leveraged findings from its Public Finance Review to refine fiscal reforms, optimise public spending, and initiate further studies on service quality in education and health. In Thailand, MAP introduced an ESG toolkit to address barriers faced by SMEs, promoting sustainability, competitiveness, and awareness of government support services. Vietnam advanced gender-responsive procurement and empowered women-led SMEs through tailored handbooks and strategic policy initiatives. Regional dialogues, such as those on clean air cooperation and consumer protection, fostered cross-country collaboration and shared expertise. MAP also facilitated sustainable infrastructure planning, including Cambodia’s Strategic Environmental Assessments and Thailand’s LEAP/NEMO energy optimisation model, providing decision-makers with practical tools to integrate socio-economic and environmental considerations.</p>
	<p>MAP-TNC activities in 2024 demonstrated significant progress in capacity building, policy development, and collaborative initiatives across countries and agencies, to address transnational crime (TNC). Training programs such as AUSTRAC’s Intelligence Fundamentals Course and AFP’s Cryptocurrency Investigations equipped over 185 participants with skills that improved individual and organisational practices, with</p>

Summary of Pillar Progress	
Thematic Area 5 – Transnational Crime	97 per cent of surveyed attendees applying their knowledge in daily work. Targeted research, such as studies on forced criminality and the Citizenship By Investment report, informed legislative changes and policy development. Collaborative efforts across Mekong countries, including regional training and cross-agency workshops, enhanced financial crime investigations and established cross-country collaboration to better counter transnational crime. Efforts to strengthen gender equality, disability, and social inclusion (GEDSI) were enhanced by the introduction of a comprehensive GEDSI Toolkit, which was integrated into training and workshops for a better understanding of vulnerability and intersectionality within TNC contexts.

In 2024, MAP underwent a significant transition period, refining its programmatic focus, structures, and delivery processes to better align with Mekong subregion priorities and Australia’s expertise. The consolidation of key investment themes under MAP Phase 2 enabled a more coherent approach, integrating new areas such as combating transnational crime while sustaining long-term commitments in water security and climate resilience. Australia’s enduring partnerships in the region, built over decades of engagement, have continued to provide a strong foundation for navigating complex governance and development challenges. MAP investments supported capacity strengthening across institutions, communities, and individuals, promoted contextual innovation, and expanded the evidence base for policy and practice. The portfolio also made improvements in mainstreaming and reporting on gender equality, disability, and social inclusion, while recognising the need for better reporting, especially on disability equity. Looking ahead, MAP will focus on consolidating results, deepening collaboration with partners, and ensuring that Australia remains a trusted and effective partner in the Mekong subregion.

02 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Australia is deepening our engagement with Southeast Asia and the Mekong subregion. The Mekong subregion (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) is home to over 240 million people and makes up half of ASEAN. The Mekong subregion matters to Australia and its sustainable development requires additional effort and attention.

The first phase of MAP (\$232 million over four-years, 2020-24), launched in November 2020, aimed to bolster the Mekong subregion's resilience and support inclusive, sustainable growth. The second phase of MAP (\$222.5 million over five years, 2024-25 to 2028-29) aims to promote a more resilient and inclusive Mekong subregion that pursues joint solutions to shared and transboundary challenges. Australia wants to be a trusted partner that supports a resilient, inclusive and sustainable Mekong subregion. The second phase of MAP has five thematic areas that align with DFAT's Southeast Asia Regional Development Partnership Plan (DPP). These thematic areas guide investment selection: climate resilience; water security; economic resilience and subregional integration; gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI); and preventing and countering transnational crime (TNC). Leadership and skills is a cross-cutting theme, contributing to the outcomes in all five thematic areas.

The design of the second phase of MAP articulated five end-of-portfolio outcomes (EOPO), aligned to Southeast Asia DPP objectives:

- Mekong subregion partners reduce vulnerability to impacts of climate change
- Mekong subregion partners manage water resources in a more coordinated and sustainable way
- Mekong subregion partners increase leadership and economic opportunities for women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups
- Mekong subregion partners enable strengthened economic resilience and subregional integration
- Mekong subregion partners better prevent and counter targeted transnational crime

MAP is delivered primarily through long-term partnerships with a diverse range of partners, including local counterparts and, where possible, through locally-led architecture. MAP invests in trilateral, multi-country and subregional activities that respond to shared and transboundary challenges and will seek opportunities for collaboration with likeminded partners. Additionally, MAP funds bilateral Mekong

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programs to deliver solutions to complex transboundary challenges in line with MAP thematic areas. This is in recognition of the importance of these programs in strengthening Australia's reputation as a trusted, pragmatic and reliable partner that provides high quality offerings, delivers on commitments and upholds rules and norms.

In 2024, countries and communities in the Mekong subregion faced a complex mix of opportunities and challenges. Myanmar continued to grapple with deepening instability after the 2021 military coup: a decline in real GDP, increasing poverty, and significant displacement of people that hindered access to jobs, education, and health care¹.

Cambodia invested significantly in health and education, with some incremental improvements. Inequality, human capacity and rural poverty remain a challenge, with roughly 23 per cent of its rural population below the poverty threshold². Laos, on the other hand, suffered severe inflation since 2022, and while the inflation rate dropped to 19 per cent, its devastating impact on the resilience of people and country remained; the debt burden is high at the household and country levels³.

Vietnam's economic performance remained solid in 2024, driven largely by manufacturing, exports, and foreign investment. Vietnam remained the subregion's top-performing economy in 2024⁴ and kept its poverty incidence below 5 per cent⁵.

Transnational crime (TNC) continues to generate tens of billions of dollars a year for organised crime groups through illicit activities in the region. It is alleged that in some Mekong country contexts, TNCs' contribution to domestic economies eclipses that of some formal industries' contributions, undermining regional stability and economic development.

All countries in the Mekong continued to grapple with the growing impacts of climate change and deforestation, including increased extreme weather events and threatening critical ecosystems and protected areas.

Purpose of this Annual Report

This 2024 Annual Report presents the progress of the MAP Portfolio and its five themes from January to December 2024. Results and progress are assessed exclusively based on available activity and completion reports and the results of the DFAT Investment Monitoring Report process.

The report is structured into five parts. This section (Section 2) provides an introduction and overview of the MAP themes and the investments the portfolio is funding. Section 3 describes the overall progress of each end-of-program outcome area, while Section 4 summarises the progress for each thematic area. Finally, Section 5 concludes with lessons learned and recommendations.

¹ TheWorld Bank Group, Analysis on Myanmar, 2024

² Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, Global MPI Country Briefing 2024: Cambodia

³ The World Bank Group, Laos Economic Monitor October 2024.

⁴ McKinsey & Company, Quarterly Economic Review – Southeast Asia Q4 2024.

⁵ Asian Development Bank, Poverty in Vietnam 2024

02 INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

MAP Goal and Outcomes

The objective of MAP Phase 2 is that *‘The Mekong subregion is more resilient and inclusive and pursues joint solutions to shared and transboundary challenges.’* This objective defines Australia’s shared vision for the Mekong subregion to be resilient in the face of existing and emerging global, regional, and national challenges and inclusive of all its citizens.

The purpose of MAP Phase 2 is to reinforce that *‘Australia is a trusted and reliable partner in supporting a resilient, inclusive and sustainable Mekong subregion.’* MAP is a flexible program that responds to partners’ needs and priorities. It also recognises the benefits of a partnership-based approach where sustained commitment, cooperation and coordination among countries are guided by principles of equity, solidarity and shared responsibility. By working together to address common challenges and leverage collective strengths, Australia will contribute to a more peaceful, stable and prosperous Mekong subregion.

Each of MAP’s thematic areas has a set of intermediate outcomes aligned with MAP’s five end-of-investment outcomes. Underneath these, MAP also has portfolio immediate outcomes focusing on networks and coalitions, leadership and capacity building, knowledge and evidence building, partnerships, and meaningful participation of women and marginalised groups⁶. See Figure 1 below for more details.

⁶ The MAP Program Logic has been updated since the design was published to reflect the integration of portfolio intermediate outcomes to thematic intermediate outcomes.

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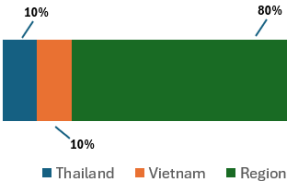
Figure 1: MAP EOPOs, Thematic Intermediate Outcomes, and Immediate Outcomes


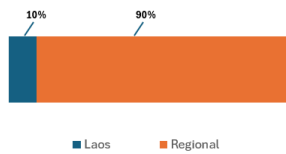



Overview of MAP Thematic Areas


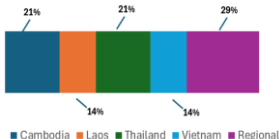
An overview of MAP's five thematic areas is detailed in Table 1 below.


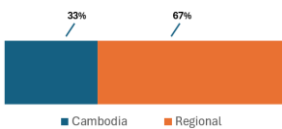
Table 1: Overview of MAP Thematic Areas


	Overview	Implementation arrangements	Types of Investments
 <p>Thematic Area 1 – Climate Resilience</p>	<p>MAP Phase 2 supports Mekong subregion partners to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate change, including through collaborative initiatives with local communities, governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, and other stakeholders. Investments focus on community-based adaptation strategies; nature-based and nature-positive solutions; and disaster risk reduction and management practices. These are delivered through inclusive decision-making processes which consider the voices of people who may be vulnerable or marginalised such as women, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples. This approach promotes adaptation and resilience building measures that are equitable and responsive to the needs of all.</p>	<p>Investments under this theme are a mixture of legacy investments from the previous phase of MAP, the results from the MAP Call for Proposals process, co-funding mechanisms, and collaborative initiatives with other DFAT programs and other Australian agencies.</p> <p>Planning and coordinated decision-making is guided by a thematic strategy and is undertaken through the Climate Resilience and Water Security Thematic Working Group. Given the interconnection between climate resilience and water security, it was decided that both MAP themes would be coordinated under one working group and one thematic lead based at the Mekong Hub.</p> <p>The Working Group is composed of representatives from posts and Canberra, with advisers on MEL, gender, and water security and climate resilience available as support resources.</p> <p>The investments are delivered by a range of partners that include civil society organisations, universities, research institutes, and multilateral organisations.</p>	<p>A total of ten investments were implemented during this period with two country-focused investments (one each for Thailand and Vietnam).</p>  <p>Investments cover a range of sectors and approaches including climate-smart agriculture, resilient urban designs, climate and sustainable development research, nature-based solutions, renewable energy, and bio-circular green economy.</p>

	Overview	Implementation arrangements	Types of Investments						
<div></div> <div>Thematic Area 2 – Water Security</div>	<p>Through MAP support, Mekong subregion partners’ strengthened their efforts to manage water resources in a more coordinated and sustainable way across the subregion. Local communities, governments, civil society organisations, private sector, academia, and other stakeholders are working together to implement integrated water management systems and processes, inclusive initiatives to address water pollution, better river basin management and support for sustainable livelihoods among riverine communities. A coordinated approach will require inclusive and effective water governance structures, data sharing mechanisms, and multistakeholder collaboration to ensure that water resources are managed in a holistic and equitable manner.</p>	<p>In the Mekong subregion, Australia has been active in water and related sectors for many years due to its practical experience. This includes implementing extensive bilateral programs in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam since the 1990s. Australia has also supported the Mekong River Commission (MRC) since its establishment in 1995.</p> <p>A number of prior collaborations and investments from Australia’s wider development portfolio were folded into MAP when it was established. This thematic area is guided by the Climate Resilience and Water Security Working Group with approval by the MAP Steering Committee.</p> <p>Delivery varies significantly, depending on the type of investment. For example, Australia provides core funding support for the MRC to implement its 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, while at the same time contracting private sector capacity to provide additional support via the Australian Water Partnership (AWP). MAP works with ACIAR to enable Charles Sturt University’s cutting-edge research and application on fish passageways. MAP also works with civil society organisations through Oxfam to make water governance in the Mekong subregion more transparent, accountable and inclusive of women, persons with disability, and other marginalised groups.</p>	<p>Most of the investments under this thematic area are multi-country or subregional in nature, except for an action research project that focuses on the Xayaburi and Luang Prabang dams in Laos.</p> <div><table><tr><th>Category</th><th>Percentage</th></tr><tr><td>Laos</td><td>10%</td></tr><tr><td>Regional</td><td>90%</td></tr></table></div> <p>Activities include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support to regional architecture such as the MRC- Implementation of innovative approaches in water management, including fish passes that mitigate the negative impacts of river development on fisheries- Encouraging creative solutions to solve plastic pollution- Strengthening the involvement of civil society and other actors, especially those representing marginalised groups, in water management.- using water management as a catalyst to promote urban climate resilience.	Category	Percentage	Laos	10%	Regional	90%
Category	Percentage								
Laos	10%								
Regional	90%								

Overview		Implementation arrangements	Types of Investments
<div><p>Thematic Area 3 – Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion</p></div>	<p>Mekong subregion partners are supported to help enable greater equality and social inclusion by increasing leadership and economic opportunities for women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups. Under this thematic area, MAP supports partners in facilitating diverse representation in public dialogue and decision-making, strengthening evidence for and participation in inclusive policy, developing organisational capacity for inclusive policy and practice aligned with gender equality and inclusion principles.</p>	<p>GEDSI is a new standalone thematic area in Phase 2 and will now be mainstreamed in MAP investments.</p> <p>The GEDSI Thematic Working Group coordinates decision-making priorities under this theme.</p> <p>Two investments are currently being funded. UN Women implements the WE RISE Together – Advancing Gender-Responsive Procurement in the Mekong subregion. As part of the results of the MAP Call for Proposals process, CARE was selected to implement “MekongElevate - Ethnic minority communities driving gender-just and socially-Just climate action in the Mekong sub-region”. Both investments started negotiations in 2024 and are currently under inception phase.</p> <p>Investments in all thematic areas will have GEDSI outcomes. Coordination with other thematic leads will be led by the GEDSI thematic lead based at the Mekong Hub.</p> <p>The results reported in this annual report are collected from investments in other thematic areas, indicating the degree by which GEDSI has been mainstreamed in other investments.</p>	<p>As GEDSI is a new focused thematic area for MAP, there are currently two investments being funded, both of which are regional in nature and to be implemented in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. The current situation in Myanmar makes implementation challenging for on-the-ground delivery but investments will seek opportunities to involve Myanmar especially in specific learning events.</p> <div><div></div><div>100%</div><div>Regional</div></div>

	Overview	Implementation arrangements	Types of Investments												
<div><p>Thematic Area 4 – Economic Resilience and Subregional Integration</p></div>	<p>With the support of MAP, Mekong subregion partners will actively work together to strengthen economic resilience and subregional integration by pursuing mutually beneficial economic initiatives, increasing economic cooperation, harmonising regulations, and leveraging collective strengths and resources to achieve equitable and inclusive economic growth.</p> <p>Investments in this thematic area will support inclusive economic development, diversification, and integration of Mekong countries to enhance their resilience to external shocks and promote shared prosperity.</p>	<p>The Economic Resilience and Subregional Integration Thematic Working Group oversees strategic direction of this thematic area.</p> <p>Several of the investments that were implemented in 2024 were part of the economic resilience pillar in the previous phase of MAP.</p> <p>The activities are delivered by various partners, including Australian Government agencies (e.g. Australian Securities and Investment Commission), the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Mekong Institute, UN Women, and The Asia Foundation.</p>	<p>Of the 14 activities implemented in the reporting period, four activities were regional (50 per cent) and the remaining six activities were bilateral (50 per cent) as shown in the diagram below.</p> <div><table><tr><th>Category</th><th>Percentage</th></tr><tr><td>Cambodia</td><td>21%</td></tr><tr><td>Laos</td><td>14%</td></tr><tr><td>Thailand</td><td>21%</td></tr><tr><td>Vietnam</td><td>14%</td></tr><tr><td>Regional</td><td>29%</td></tr></table></div> <p>Two activities started in 2024, including one which was part of the MAP Call for Proposals process. Results reported in this annual report do not include these investments.</p>	Category	Percentage	Cambodia	21%	Laos	14%	Thailand	21%	Vietnam	14%	Regional	29%
Category	Percentage														
Cambodia	21%														
Laos	14%														
Thailand	21%														
Vietnam	14%														
Regional	29%														

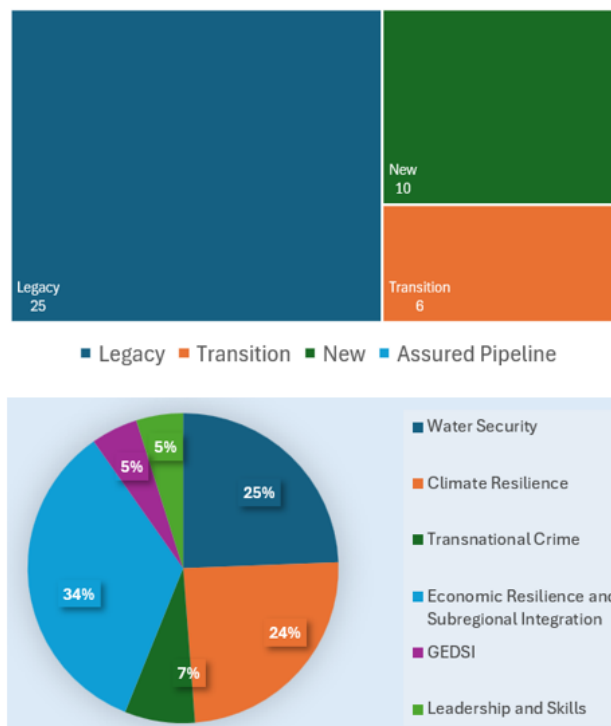
	Overview	Implementation arrangements	Types of Investments						
<div><p>Thematic Area 5 – Transnational Crime</p></div>	<p>Australia is partnering with Mekong subregion partners to better prevent and counter targeted transnational crime.</p> <p>Investments aim to strengthen cooperation between Australia and Mekong countries to counter illicit drug trafficking, child sexual exploitation, and financial crimes.</p> <p>MAP is supporting Australian Government Agencies (AGAs) to build stronger networks and cooperation with Mekong counterparts.</p> <p>Our investments bring together networks; share information, technical expertise, and analysis; and deliver capacity building support for Mekong stakeholders.</p>	<p>Coordination across the Australian Government is undertaken through the pre-existing MAP-TNC Posts and Partners meeting, which is equivalent to a thematic working group.</p> <p>The group discusses transnational crime challenges and opportunities, emerging issues, and ensures activities are strategic, targeted and complementary.</p>	<p>Two of the investments are regional, while one investment is bilateral.</p> <div><table><tr><th>Category</th><th>Percentage</th></tr><tr><td>Cambodia</td><td>33%</td></tr><tr><td>Regional</td><td>67%</td></tr></table></div> <p>DFAT partners with AGAs through MAP-TNC to deliver a range of bespoke activities built to support the region’s enforcement and operational capability. Program enabling support is provided by the MAP Support Unit.</p> <p>DFAT funds GI-TOC to build a Mekong network that produces transnational crime research and analysis, particularly drawing in the voices of civil society and academia, to inform policy and reforms necessary for operational success in the region.</p> <p>DFAT partners with UNODC to support Cambodia to safely dispose of seized drugs and chemicals.</p>	Category	Percentage	Cambodia	33%	Regional	67%
Category	Percentage								
Cambodia	33%								
Regional	67%								

	Overview	Implementation arrangements	Types of Investments
 <p>Crosscutting – Leadership and Skills</p>	<p>Leadership and Skills is a cross-cutting thematic area designed to build capacity and expertise to support sustainable subregional development. It will deepen Australia's engagement with the Mekong subregion (including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam) by facilitating access to Australian education and professional learning, and promotion of knowledge sharing and subregional cooperation. The Leadership and Skills program contributes to the broader MAP Phase 2 outcomes by supporting diverse leaders within the Mekong subregion to tackle complex structural reforms and pursue joint, inclusive solutions to shared and transboundary challenges across all five thematic areas.</p>	<p>The MAP Support Services Unit (MAP-SU) is responsible for delivering the single investment under this thematic area. The MAP-SU will be responsible for: managing the scholarship program; procuring, contracting and managing the delivery of short courses and masterclasses, including facilitating travel and logistics for participants; and managing the delivery of regional dialogues across the program period for key leaders and senior officials from targeted sectors across the Mekong countries.</p> <p>The Leadership and Skills Thematic Working Group provides strategic oversight over this thematic area, and the Leadership and Skills Thematic Lead based at the Mekong Hub coordinates with other thematic leads to identify topics of interest for masterclasses, promote scholarship activities, and provide suggestions on alumni engagement activities.</p>	<p>In 2024, the Leadership and Skills thematic area continued the implementation of the activities from the previous phase, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 47 Masters-level scholarships through Australia Awards Masterclasses and short courses <p>There is only one new investment in this cross-cutting theme, the MAP Leadership and Skills Program.</p> <p>This investment will deliver masters-level scholarships, masterclasses, regional dialogues, and alumni-engagement activities.</p>

03 OVERALL MAP PORTFOLIO PROGRESS

MAP implemented a total of 41 activities in 2024. A large proportion of these (61 per cent) were legacy investments that started in the previous phase of MAP, 15 per cent are legacy investments with additional/top-up funding being continued for a maximum of another two years, of the ten investments in 2024, two have started implementation while the remaining eight are in the inception phase.

Figure 2: Profile of MAP Investments in 2024



Water security, climate resilience, and economic resilience and subregional integration take up the bulk of the investment profile. The majority of these thematic areas are comprised of discrete, small value legacy investments.

At least half of the total number of investments are managed from the Mekong Hub (Bangkok Post). Of these, 20 per cent are completed, 61 per cent are in progress, and 20 per cent are at inception phase.

Assessment of achievement against MAP EOPOs

In 2024, MAP demonstrated its commitment to fostering resilience, inclusion, and sustainable growth across the Mekong subregion. Through a portfolio of investments and collaborative partnerships with governments, civil society, academia, and private sector stakeholders, MAP has supported initiatives that strengthen climate adaptation, promote effective and inclusive

03 OVERALL MAP PORTFOLIO PROGRESS

water governance, and strengthen regional cooperation. By prioritising marginalised communities and addressing transnational challenges, MAP continues to advance its vision of a resilient, integrated, and inclusive Mekong subregion while driving meaningful progress toward its strategic objectives.

04 SUMMARY OF MAP THEMATIC PROGRESS

This section presents a summary of progress of each thematic areas against their intended outcomes.



Thematic Area 1 – Climate Resilience



Thematic Immediate Outcomes:

- **IO 1:** Mekong subregion stakeholders increasingly adopt inclusive and evidence-based mitigation and/or adaptation initiatives.
- **IO 2:** Mekong subregion partners strengthen subregional cooperation to reduce exposure and sensitivities to climate hazards and risks.
- **IO 3:** Australian and Mekong institutions enhance collaboration to facilitate knowledge and technology sharing for strengthened capacity to adapt to climate change.
- **IO 4:** Mekong subregion partners increasingly recognise and integrate of the voices of women, people with disabilities, and other marginalised groups in climate change policy & practice.

MAP Phase 2 supports Mekong subregion partners to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, including through collaborative initiatives with local communities, governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, academia, and other stakeholders. Investments focus on community-based adaptation strategies; nature-based and nature-positive solutions; disaster risk reduction and management practices. These are delivered through inclusive decision-making processes which consider the voices of people who may be vulnerable or marginalised such as women, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous Peoples. This approach promotes adaptation and resilience building measures that are equitable and responsive to the needs of all.

A total of ten investments were implemented during this period with two country-focused investments (one each for Thailand and Vietnam).

Investments cover a range of sectors and approaches including climate-smart agriculture, resilient urban designs, climate and

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sustainable development research, nature-based solutions, renewable energy, and bio-circular green economy. Only one of the ten investments was completed during this period. Nine investments were ongoing, while one investment was selected as part of the NGO call for proposals and was contracted in 2025.

Summary of progress and achievement against outcomes

MAP helped strengthen the capacity of Mekong subregion organisations and individuals to understand climate change, its implications, and how to respond. In 2024, the Mekong Institute organised two regional training programs, training 87 government officials, academics, and private sector representatives (47 per cent women) from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam (CLTV) on climate-smart postharvest technologies and inclusive climate finance. A study visit to Australia was also organised involving CLTV officials. Training alumni assisted local farmers to apply climate-smart agriculture (CSA) practices and technologies that collectively improve soil health, improve water utilisation, enhance soil productivity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and build resilience to climate change impacts. As a result of these trainings, participants were able to conduct 36 localised trainings and awareness-raising events (11 in Cambodia, seven in Laos, ten in Thailand, and eight in Vietnam) to 69,683 individuals (51 per cent women).

In Cambodia, through the Cambodia and Laos Renewable Energy Advocacy and Ecosystem Development investment, EnergyLab engaged with more than 200 stakeholders representing government, civil society, private sector, and development partners during Clean Energy Week on topics such as industrial decarbonisation and financing Cambodia's clean energy transition.

MAP supported Mekong stakeholders to adopt inclusive and evidence-based adaptation and mitigation initiatives. In Vietnam, the Strengthening Climate Resilience investment collaborated with the Soc Trang Department of Agriculture and Environment (DAE) and the Farmers Union to support communities in adopting nature-based solutions in disaster risk management, such as planting trees in coastal areas to prevent riverbank erosion, block waves, and sequester greenhouse gases. The project also supported the implementation of climate-resilient livelihood strategies including piloting eight automatic irrigation models benefiting vulnerable households in Song Phung, Phoung Nam, and An Thanh Dong. These systems have helped reduce household irrigation time, improve crop resilience, and ensure income stability amid drought risks.

In Laos, 838 people (447 men, 391 women) from seven communities involved in nature-based solutions focused on landscape management and freshwater ecosystem restoration through the Climate Resilient by Nature investment implemented by WWF Australia. They implemented conservation or restoration activities in 1,870 hectares and planted 810 trees across 18 sample sites in six villages. In Vietnam's Mekong Delta, 473 people (297 men, 175 women one youth) from four communities participated in nature-based solutions focused on flood-based farming and restoration, with 233 hectares of conservation or restoration activities. The ten hectares of integrated floating rice-fish farming in Vinh Dai commune cultivated during the flood season of 2024 yielded 17 tons of floating rice and were purchased by local companies for export to the United Kingdom.

MAP enabled increased availability of knowledge and evidence to support climate adaptation and mitigation strategies of subregion partners. Under the Mekong Think Tanks program, 11 research studies are being conducted by Mekong universities and research organisations addressing critical environmental issues. These include research on rising sea levels and corresponding adaptation strategies in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam; sustaining shared groundwater resources in transboundary river delta aquifers in Cambodia and Vietnam; and urban heat resilience in Thai and

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Vietnamese cities. Thirty young researchers (60 per cent women, 36 per cent men, and 4 per cent non-binary) have also been awarded fellowship grants to contribute to regional and in-country studies.

Australia's Monash University, in partnership with local universities in Thailand, has been working with the Thai Department of Climate Change and Environment and relevant agencies to develop nature-based solution (NbS) strategies and technical guidance. A case study on transforming former landfillurban forest park has led to the development of a site risk assessment guideline and a flora and fauna survey which will provide evidence to support more than 100 urban parks and potential urban sites planned by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration.

MAP promoted the collaboration of Mekong subregion stakeholders to discuss and address climate challenges in their respective countries. In 2024, The Stockholm Environment Institute-Asia and Chulalongkorn University hosted Mekong Environmental Resilience Week 2024, which brought together over 165 stakeholders from across the Mekong subregion and other Southeast Asian countries. The week also included the Mekong Regional Water, Energy, Climate Policy Forum and the Second Mekong Regional Climate Roundtable. These events served as platforms for Mekong governments and organisations to share experiences in climate change policy and action and consider opportunities for regional cooperation.

Through the MAP Short-Term Awards implemented by the University of Queensland, 20 participants from CLTV attended the regional masterclass on 'Responding to the Climate Change Challenge.' They exchanged insights on critical issues of climate change in the region, incorporating cases studies and knowledge shared by Australian experience and expertise, and fostering the development of valuable connections and enduring networks among participants. Under the same investment, 30 participants (16 women) engaged in extensive discussions during the regional dialogue on 'Cooperation for Clean Air in the Mekong Subregion' in May 2024. The regional dialogue provided an opportunity to create international connections to enhance regional collaboration, explore avenues for transboundary/regional cooperation on the transboundary haze issue and support a proactive, urgent pathway forward.

The Mekong Plastics Innovation Hub supported a total of 19 start-ups and entrepreneurs working on innovative solutions to plastic pollution across the Mekong subregion by leveraging scientific expertise and private-sector mentoring resulting in several ventures securing private sector finance.

Finally, with MAP support, the Asian Development Bank facilitated transboundary discussions to enhance regional power grid integration and support clean energy transition in the Greater Mekong Subregion. This included a study visit to Australia in 2024 for CLTV and Greater Mekong Subregion officials (43 per cent women).



Thematic Area 2 – Water Security



Thematic Intermediate Outcomes:

- **IO 1:** Subregional and national water governance structures, policies, and practices are more effective and inclusive.
- **IO 2:** Mekong partners have improved data, information, and evidence production and sharing to strengthen decision-making in the water sector.
- **IO 3:** Civil society organisations strengthen their capacities and influence on water governance issues.
- **IO 4:** Collaboration between Australian and Mekong institutions for shared learning in water governance is improved.

In 2024, ten investments targeting water security are being implemented; one investment is bilateral, the rest are regional. The investments are being implemented by a range of delivery partners, including multilateral agencies, international and regional organisations, civil society organisations, universities, research institutes, and Australian government agencies.

Several water security issues were addressed, including water science to underpin inter-government negotiations, water scarcity and water accounting, integrated river basin management, water infrastructure governance fish passes, pumped hydropower energy storage, water-sensitive and climate-resilient cities, and the scourge of plastic pollution in waterways. All the investments have a capacity-building element for Mekong stakeholders to enable more sustainable water management.

Summary of progress and achievement against outcomes

MAP has supported the capacity of subregional and regional stakeholders in managing transboundary water resources more effectively. By supporting the MRC, MAP has helped enable the implementation of policies and tools to address transboundary water issues. For example, completion of pilot application of Transboundary Environmental Impact Assessment in Sekong A dam in 2024. Preliminary Design Guidelines (PDG) for proposed mainstream dams in the Lower Mekong Basin were updated to better reflect the needs of riparian communities with river-dependent livelihoods. The Lao Government adopted PDG into its national Standard Operating Procedure for hydropower projects, demonstrating the MRC's influence at the national level. The MRC made considerable progress implementing the Procedure for Notification, Prior Consultation and Agreement (PNPCA) for the proposed Sanakham hydropower project on the Mekong mainstream, overcoming a lengthy impasse between Laos and Thailand.

Through the FishTech investment, MAP partnered with ACIAR to support initiatives to ensure fish-friendly irrigation and infrastructure development, which is critical to protecting both livelihoods and biodiversity. In 2024, Charles Sturt University implemented five capacity building training workshops, including a masterclass in Thailand which included 50 participants from across Thai government (engineers, managers and fisheries scientists, 22 per cent were women). The project also hosted a study tour to Australia in June 2024 for 23 fisheries and irrigation officials from Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. This enhanced knowledge, expertise, team dynamics and connections across the regional program and will contribute to improved implementation of policies

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such as the MRC Guidelines on Fish-Friendly Irrigation and the FAO's Making the Case for Fish Friendly Irrigation, both shaped by FishTech researchers.

With MAP support, Mekong partners have improved data, information, and evidence production and sharing to strengthen decision-making in the water sector. For example, support to MRC through eWater has contributed to improving how water-related data is shared and used across the Mekong River region. This includes tools for sharing information such as new dashboards and guidelines; training of MRC staff and; improvement in forecasting capacity by upgrading the system used to predict river conditions to include data from 88 different climate change scenarios. A number of research projects have demonstrated positive impacts of cooperation, including a Joint Study on Changing Pattern of Hydrological Conditions of the Lancang-Mekong River Basin and Adaptation Strategies between MRC and the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) Water Centre, with experts from six riparian countries visiting the headwaters of the basin in Qinghai Province, China. The Joint Study marked a significant step in entire-basin water management and cooperation as shown by the agreement to establish a Joint Expert Group for Data Modelling and Forecasting. A second Joint Survey was undertaken at Lake Tonle Sap and the Mekong Delta.

To enhance data sharing not just among MRC Member Countries water agencies but with the wider public, the MRC developed and launched the One Mekong App, an innovative tool that supports the sharing of information related to the Mekong River. It provides information from the Core River Monitoring Network (CRMN) which provides real-time monitoring and forecasting data on various aspects such as water quality, hydrology, sediment, environmental health, fisheries, climate, and precipitation.

With co-financing by the FAO under the 'Drought Impact Assessment in the Central Highlands' national project, and in close collaboration with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment (MONRE) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), MAP is supporting the development of operational tools for agricultural drought monitoring using high-resolution remote sensing data. Activities focus on the Dak Lak and Dak Nong provinces, covering a trial block of 1,500 km², with the broader goal of enabling field-scale water accounting and productivity assessments across Vietnam's drought-prone Central Highlands. This work complements national objectives under the Water Resources Law and supports Sustainable Development Goals 2 and 13 by enhancing data-driven decision-making for drought management and water productivity. It also establishes a technical foundation for the economic valuation of water, as part of Vietnam's broader water resource governance reforms.

MAP continues to support civil society's capacity and influence on water security issues and to make water governance in the Mekong subregion more inclusive. The Inclusion Project Phase 2 (IP2) implemented by Oxfam, promoted women's leadership and supported women community members by facilitating their active participation in national, regional, and international governance processes that were not previously feasible. IP2 has achieved a high level of success in promoting the inclusion and leadership of women, including young women and indigenous women in community organisations and leadership while also providing opportunities for engagement in water governance processes at various levels. A total of 96 women exhibited leadership in water governance and spoke in local, national, regional and global gatherings on water and energy issues. However, while women are participating and engaging, their influence on practice and policy at national and regional levels remains unclear.

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In Laos, through the Climate Resilient by Nature investment, WWF worked with civil society partners and target communities alongside national and local government agencies to strengthen village Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA) plans, and drive practical measures for river, riverbank and forest protection in the targeted communities. The project has so far established nine forest conservation zones, covering 86 hectares of the Siphandone riverscape, which include no take zones and periods to allow fish stocks to recover. Regulations are enforced by seven community-led river patrol teams with 56 members, who have conducted over 230 river patrols spanning 1700 hectares of the river system, uncovering 70 instances of law enforcement encroachments (e.g. illegal fishing gear confiscated). Fish catch monitoring data shows an increase in catch per unit from 0.34 kg/hour in 2023 to 0.49 kg/hour in 2024 (44 per cent increase in one year), indicating fish conservation progress.

MAP continues to foster and strengthen collaboration between Australian and Mekong institutions to share practices and lessons learned in water governance. Through the combined efforts of DFAT, ACIAR, CSIRO, Australian universities and Australian Water Partnership, MAP continues to advance strategic partnerships between Australian experts and partners across the Mekong subregion: governments, universities, civil society organisations, multilateral banks, locally-led architecture and key private sector actors.

For example, the Australian Water Partnership (AWP), MAP continues to advance strategic partnerships between Australian expert organisations and individuals with key bilateral partners across the Mekong - the Directorate of Water Resource (DWR) in Vietnam, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) in Laos, and the National Water Resources and the Royal Irrigation Department in Thailand. In 2024, AWP engaged with these and other key partners in the preparation of AWP's strategy for the region while at the same time undertaking specific activities in countries. For example, AWP worked with DWR to support the implementation of the National Groundwater Management Action Plan (NGWAP) and the drafting of Sustainable Groundwater Management Plans for four provinces. AWP will support DWR in training its staff on hydrogeological mapping and groundwater management.

The Australian National University investment supported by MAP has assisted the Pumped Storage Hydro (PSH) team of the Electricity Generation Authority of Thailand (EGAT) on investigating PSH site selection and installation in southern Thailand. At the same time, EGAT has supported the project's regional activities with MRC by hosting and participating in two workshops.

Twelve Vietnamese start-ups focused on addressing plastic pollution received support from Australia through the Indo-Pacific Plastics Innovation Network, an initiative executed by the CSIRO, aimed at establishing a pipeline of scalable innovations to combat plastic leakage in the Indo-Pacific and Mekong sub-region. Venture teams took part in capacity-building sessions to enhance investment and technology readiness. Several teams secured additional investments, signed MoUs, partnered with Southeast Asia's leading plastics recycling company and universities, and initiated export discussions.

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Thematic Area 3 – GEDSI



Pillar outcomes:

- **IO 1:** Targeted national and regional actors are increasingly generating and using GEDSI analysis and evidence.
- **IO 2:** Women, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups are increasingly organised to collaborate on strengthening implementation of GEDSI-related international commitments
- **IO 3:** GEDSI actors, including representative organisations and experts, are increasingly shaping development and implementation of targeted policies and strategies.

GEDSI is a new focused thematic area for MAP Phase Two, where it had been a cross-cutting theme. In the previous phase, GEDSI was expected to be mainstreamed into MAP investments.

Summary of progress and achievement against outcomes

MAP has helped increase the capacity of agencies and organisations to consider GEDSI in the planning and implementation of projects, making development interventions more inclusive. In the Resilient Urban Centres and Surrounds investment, the guiding framework for climate resilient urban investment decisions integrated gender equality principles. For instance, based on the inclusive consultation, the conceptual design of the Akreiy Ksotr project design in Cambodia prioritised provision of additional toilets and improved recreational facilities for female students and staff and considered providing access for wheelchair users. This also led to the consideration of the cost of GEDSI amenities and benefits of women and People with Disabilities (PWDs) in the Nature-based Solutions.

MAP also contributed to the MRC's strengthened GEDSI integration through gender equality trainings delivered by eWater Ltd. In February 2024, eWater supported gender training for 21 MRC staff (7 women, 14 men) from across technical divisions. The training updated staff on GEDSI in their work, familiarised them with the GAP and Gender Handbook, and identified opportunities for strengthening GEDSI integration into the next MRC Strategic Plan. Participants found the training useful and stressed the need for ongoing mentoring and practical guidance. Increasingly, the MRC is strengthening its GEDSI practice; notable examples include the integration of GEDSI aspects in and gender equality data in the State of the Basin Report 2023, and the mainstreaming of gender and vulnerability in the adaptive basin planning process as well as in the Proactive Regional Planning.

MAP investments make use of evidence from targeted GEDSI research to inform policies and practices. FishTech, a MAP investment implemented by Charles Sturt University in partnership with the ACIAR, conducted a targeted gender case study on two fish pass sites in Laos, examining gender, community engagement, and infrastructure development. The projects, led by a woman-owned construction firm, challenged traditional male-dominated procurement processes and provided key insights into inclusive development. The firm's approach emphasized community engagement, employing over 50 per cent local labour and doubling women's participation in non-construction roles. The study highlighted how these inclusive practices improved project sustainability, attracted international interest, and created new economic opportunities, reinforcing the value of women's

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leadership in infrastructure development. Recognising that smaller fish are crucial for subsistence in the community, and are often collected by women, Fishtech's passage designs were developed to accommodate the migration patterns of these fish. Through consideration of these vulnerable communities, these designs promoted their food security and economic wellbeing.

Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR) has been used by Inclusion Project Phase 2 in its project sites, and its toolkit has been translated into multiple Mekong languages, including Vietnamese, Lao, Khmer, and Myanmar, facilitating broader dissemination and active utilisation during numerous workshops and events. In 2024, during an FPAR review, women participants in Myanmar identified their need for well-being and psycho-support during times of crisis. Women's Space Sessions were held with women leaders and community members in four villages and 119 participants (118 female). The sessions promoted self-care and shared reflections on how women have overcome personal and community struggles and discussions on how to collectively meet challenges. The result was the establishment of women's committees in each village with saving and loan initiatives for women to provide livelihood and emergency support. The delivery partner in Myanmar provided a startup fund, 1,000,000 MMK per women's group. Some members also joined environmental conservation and integrated development committees which have been formed at township level. In each case, the core significance is women supporting one another.

MAP, through the Asian Development Bank, is supporting the Lao Statistics Bureau (LSB) to ensure the increased availability of GEDSI disaggregated data in the national census and national surveys. For instance, the 2024 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Progress Monitoring Report includes for the first time a chapter on comprehensive and inclusive GEDSI analysis. In the LSB's efforts to institutionalise intersectional GEDSI data collection and analysis within the national statistical system, significant advancements in survey design and data collection approaches were undertaken. The LSB has also formally proposed to establish a Gender Statistics Division with its Department of Social Statistics.

MAP supported networks of women, including indigenous women, for increased women leadership and promoted more inclusive development policies across countries. In June 2024, Oxfam Inclusion Project Phase 2, with the support of DFAT and other donors, convened the Asia Women and River Congress that gathered 125 participants, 113 of whom were women, from 18 countries, to share stories and learn from experiences related to women-led solutions and perspectives in water, energy and climate resilient decision-making. One key outcome was the development of a Solidarity Statement, which highlights urgent priorities and solutions critical for advancing climate action and ensuring a just and inclusive energy transition.

Women leaders from supported coalitions, including the Asia Indigenous Peoples' Pact, Cambodia's Women Leadership Network, and Laos' Gender and Development Association, were provided opportunities to engage in national, regional, and global dialogues like the 14th MRC Regional Stakeholder Forum, Asia Pacific Women's Forum, and the World Water Forum. Indigenous women and youth affected by large scale energy projects were also supported to attend the Regional Conference for a Just and Sustainable Energy Transition and voice their views on renewable energy projects and share their own renewable energy systems.

MAP has enabled initiatives that aim to ensure that economic development is more inclusive of women. With MAP support, the National Innovation Agency in Thailand, the Vietnam Women Entrepreneur Council and Women's Initiatives for Start-up and Entrepreneurship in Vietnam, have trained a total of 425 women owned businesses (WOB)/gender-responsive enterprises (GREs) on gender-responsive procurement. An initial output level survey from Thailand showed that the

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majority of the participants (95.6 per cent) increased their understanding of procurement and related issues. Through the investment's accelerator programs, WOBs/GREs were able to create connection opportunities with potential buyers in both countries.

With UN Women support, promoting gender-responsive procurement practices have been successfully advocated to private and public buyers. In addition to training a total of 340 buying institutions (190 Vietnam and 150 Thailand) resulting in increased awareness and Gender-Responsive Procurement (GRP) capacity, it also incentivises buying institutions by recognising them through the Women's Empowerment Principles Awards. Vietnam and Thailand awarded six categories in 2024, namely, Leadership Commitment, Gender-inclusive Workplace, Gender-responsive Marketplace, Community Engagement and Partnerships, Transparency and Reporting, and Innovative Financing for Gender Equality. The awardees included companies such as Zuellig Pharma Limited and Electricity Generating Public Company Limited and L'Oreal.

Finally, the Australia-Thailand Economic Resilience Partnership brokered collaboration between the Digital Government Development Agency and the Thai Department of Children and Youth to develop Kids Landmarks, a map of registered private childcare centres available on the Thai Government's Thang Rath public services application. Launched in 2024, the map improves access to information about operational childcare centres for families especially for women in the workforce.

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Thematic Area 4 – Economic Resilience and Subregional Integration



Thematic outcomes:

- **IO 1:** Mekong subregion partners increasingly use evidence and analysis to address external economic shocks and pressures and promote sustainable economic growth.
- **IO 2:** Mekong subregion countries strengthen collaboration to address shared challenges.
- **IO 3:** Vulnerable groups and at-risk communities have increased opportunities to become more resilient to economic shocks and pressures.

The reporting for this thematic area is largely taken from legacy investments that were funded under the first phase of MAP under what used to be known as the Economic Resilience Fund (ERF). Planning for new investments to be funded by the second phase of MAP commenced in 2024 and is still in inception phase as of writing.

Of the 14 activities implemented in the reporting period, four were regional, and the remaining were bilateral. The activities ranged from capacity building on public financial management to technical assistance on gender and social inclusion data, promoting the use and application of environmental and social safeguards, advancing gender-responsive procurement, and enhancing consumer protection and competition.

Activities were delivered in partnership with various organisations, including Australian Government agencies (e.g. Australian Securities and Investment Commission), the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Mekong Institute, UN Women, and The Asia Foundation. All these activities were engaging with relevant government agencies in partner Mekong governments.

Summary of progress and achievement against outcomes

MAP continues to strengthen the institutional capacity of Mekong country partner agencies to manage public finances better. The World Bank Public Financial Management programs in both Laos and Cambodia supported domestic resource mobilisation and promoted reforms and regulatory changes to strengthen institutions and evidence-based policy making. For example, in Laos, the Ministry of Finance introduced Instruction No. 0558 and Notice No. 0560, to address VAT obligations for foreign and domestic digital suppliers. In 2024, MAP supported the dissemination of these documents to over 2,800 tax officials and business representatives, including 1,042 women. As of September 2024, implementation of these measures generated over USD600,000 in VAT revenue from 26 registered vendors. Additionally, a two-year roadmap for implementing GRB was developed to support the Finance Ministry to take a more inclusive evidence-based lens in budgeting. Between March to July, three workshops on raising awareness of GRB, training on gender impact analysis (GIA), and a how-to note on GIA were conducted. Published in March 2024, the Lao PDR Public Expenditure and Institutional Review (PEIR) and Financial Management in Education Analysis (2023) assessed funding of the education sector including taking a stronger gender equality and inclusion equity lens, with the

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World Bank recommending a pro-poor lens to public spending to help reduce poverty and inequality in the following Lao Economic Monitor (April 2024).

In Cambodia, MAP supported the Public Finance Review (PFR) for 2021 to 2024. The report was launched in February 2024 following the last round of consultations in late 2023. The PFR's key findings have helped inform the government's implementation of the Stage 4 of the Public Financial Management Reform Program, focusing on achieving performance accountability and providing an analytical basis for the government's fiscal reform efforts in the post-pandemic period. It has also prompted the government to critically reexamine the quality of public spending, particularly in health and education, with the primary objective of ensuring greater allocative efficiency and value-for-money from public spending. As a result, Cambodia requested further deep-dive studies into the quality-of-service delivery in education and health sectors as a follow-up to the PFR.

MAP supports evidence-based policy making in Mekong countries through targeted research aimed at enriching economic policies and practices. In Thailand, MAP supported the Office of SMEs Promotion in reviewing Thailand's laws, regulations, and policies for startup development, competition, and global best practices in 2022. Following extensive stakeholder consultation, it was determined that the key implementation challenge for SMEs was to build capacity and compliance with Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards, including awareness of existing government support. Building on the outcomes of the above activities, the Asia Foundation developed the ESG toolkit in late 2024 that addresses common barriers—limited resources and complex requirements—by providing practical steps and real-world examples for ESG integration. It consolidates information about available government support services while offering strategies to boost SME competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience.

In Vietnam, the WE RISE Together investment implemented by UN Women completed and disseminated the Policy Summary Report which highlighted key findings on gender responsive procurement, stakeholder mapping, legislative landscape, and capacity assessments. Moreover, MAP supported the development of two Handbooks 1) Women SMEs (WSMEs) access to the Vietnam's supporting policies and 2) WSMEs' participation in domestic and international markets through e-commerce.

MAP strengthened collaboration between Australia and Mekong partners to discuss experiences and lessons in addressing shared economic challenges. For example, with MAP support, eight officials from the Vietnam Competition Commission joined seven Cambodian officials from the Consumer Protection and Fraud Repression Directorate to discuss a range of topics with the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) and external experts. Topics discussed included unfair trade practices; intelligence gathering and using data to drive priorities; Australia's consumer protection model and how the ACCC cooperates with government and non-government agencies to regulate consumer protection; and the ACCC's Sustainability Taskforce.

Finally, MAP promoted more inclusive and sustainable development policies and practices in partner governments in the Mekong subregion. For example, in May 2024, the Mekong Safeguards investment, in collaboration with the Energy Policy and Planning Office, and the Electricity Generating Authority of

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Thailand, partnered in updating Thailand's Power Development Plan to include socioeconomic and environmental considerations using the Low Emissions Analysis Platform/Next Energy Modelling system for Optimisation model. Thai officials, proposed to provide the updated indicators to the Thai energy minister at public hearing events in May 2024.

In Cambodia, MAP helped strengthen strategic environmental assessment (SEA) processes. Mekong Safeguards trained Cambodian environment officials on SEA for energy and transportation infrastructure and conducted a scoping study on gaps and opportunities in the country's legal and institutional mechanisms to effectively apply SEA. These activities provided decision-makers with better tools and knowledge to integrate SEAs into infrastructure planning.

Mekong Safeguards also worked with multiple companies to address gaps in their ESG policies and practices. With MAP support, Thai power developer B.Grimm Power revised its ESG standards to improve policies on climate, water management, biodiversity, and stakeholder engagement. Wind energy developer, The Blue Circle, strengthened its gender inclusive policies and practices. Lastly, Vietnam-based Saigon Asset Management developed an Environmental and Social (E&S) risk management tool to strengthen investment screening criteria and processes. Successful adoption of strong ESG standards by private sector developers and investors creates best-practice case studies that can be replicated in other Mekong subregion projects.



Thematic Area 5 – Transnational Crime (TNC)



Thematic outcomes:

IO 1: Mekong subregion partners demonstrate a commitment to develop and nurture institutional relationships with Australian Government Agencies (AGAs) to combat TNC.

IO 2: Mekong subregion partners enhance TNC operational capabilities, drawing on lessons learned and inputs from AGAs and local stakeholders.

IO 3: Mekong subregion partners increasingly use GEDSI analysis and evidence to strengthen TNC responses.

IO 4: Mekong subregion partners increase information sharing and alignment of operational approaches to combat transnational crime.

MAP-TNC is an eight-year (Mar 2021 – Mar 2029) \$30 million program. It is the only Australian government-to-government development program in the Mekong sub-region addressing transnational crime (TNC), applying a development lens to the traditional operational approach.

DFAT partners with Australian Government Agencies (AGAs), supporting them to deepen and strengthen their engagement with their Mekong counterparts and enhance efforts to address TNC. The program is specifically focused on countering financial crime, illicit drugs, and child sexual exploitation. AGAs deliver bilateral and regional activities in Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. Engagement with Myanmar has been restricted since the February 2021.

MAP-TNC's key AGAs include the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the Attorney General's Department (AGD), Home Affairs (HA), and the Australian Border Force (ABF). These agencies liaise with their direct counterparts to ensure activity development is consultative and needs-based, and that activities implemented align with their strategic interests. MAP-TNC has also provided opportunities for AGAs without a direct footprint in the Mekong, such as the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (AUSTRAC), to expand their international programming and networks.

Summary of progress and achievement against outcomes

During the reporting period, a total of 30 activities were funded in 2024: Cambodia 5 (17 per cent), Laos 6 (20 per cent), Thailand 6 (20 per cent), Vietnam 3 (10 per cent) and Mekong/regional 10 (33 per cent). Of the total number of activities, 37 per cent were combatting financial crime; 33 per cent combatting narcotics, 10 per cent combatting child sexual exploitation (CSE) and 20 per cent of activities worked across all three crime types.

In 2024, capacity building activities initiated by MAP-TNC resulted in increased capacity among participants in targeted agencies. On average more than 95 per cent of participants (women and men) who completed MAP-TNC activities were satisfied with the quality of training and technical support. Over 95 per cent of training participants (women and men) also reported improved knowledge and "know-how" from technical training.

Capacity building activities have also resulted in concrete application of knowledge gained by attendees and improved practices of the agencies they work for. For example, AUSTRAC's Intelligence Fundamentals Course (IFC) and Mekong Financial Intelligence Analyst Course (MFIAC) have trained 185 individuals (96 men and 89 women) since MAP-TNC started. In 2024, MAP-TNC

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surveyed a sample of 58 people (29 men and 29 women). 97 per cent of respondents reported that they have been able to apply the knowledge and skills gained through AUSTRAC's training in their daily work. A further 91 per cent indicated their work practices and approaches have also changed and been enhanced as a result. Finally, 77 per cent indicated that work unit practices have also been adjusted and enhanced since the training.

Responding to requests from the Thailand Customs Intelligence Centre to assist Thailand to meet international customs standards, ABF supported a Customs Intelligence Life Cycle Review, identifying gaps and providing recommendations to Thailand to strengthen systems. Senior figures were engaged in the review and participated in training activities. Through this engagement, there was a noted increase in referrals, which led to the arrest of a high-profile target (drug courier).

Capacity building included provision of tools to improve work systems and make applications sustainable. For example, AFP's Cryptocurrency Investigations demonstrated a sustainable approach to its training by providing the ability to access discounted software licenses, creating an opportunity to deliver additional training and for local agencies to budget and purchase license extensions to undertake their own training as needed. The AFP is confident that agencies will see the benefits and maintain licenses to assist them in their work. AUSTRAC worked with the Anti Money Laundering Department (AMLD) and State Bank of Vietnam to install TAIPAN software to upgrade their systems to enable more efficient collection and analysis of financial data. AUSTRAC found that capacity to use the software was high and that the upgrade would significantly enhance the AMLD's operational capacity and allow the Financial Intelligence Units (FIU) to evolve into a more mature and sophisticated entity.

MAP-TNC activities continue to build the evidence base on transnational crime through targeted research to inform policy. For example, the AFP supported the Thai Department of Special Investigations and Chulalongkorn University in researching forced criminality in online scams, producing evidence-based research to influence decision makers and politicians for legislative change in this rapidly evolving TNC area. There is scope to link with other AFP work, specifically related to cryptocurrency and money laundering, and potential for broader outreach across the Mekong.

Additionally, the Home Affairs-led Citizenship by Investment (CBI) Research report presented key findings and recommendations from their research to the Cambodian Government, which were shared and validated during an exploratory workshop. CBI has been increasingly misused for identity laundering and generating additional illicit proceeds. The report aims to contribute to a small but growing body of knowledge that can influence policy and support addressing legislative gaps.

Through MAP-TNC activities, collaboration between AGAs across Mekong countries has improved.

For example, ATO collaborated with the AFP and AUSTRAC on the curriculum on Foundation Tax Crime Investigation course in Vietnam to identify counterpart needs to support better financial crime investigations. This is aimed at strengthening Vietnam's bid to graduate from the Financial Action Task Force's 'grey list'. In the same way, participants in the AFP's Cryptocurrency and Blockchain and Cryptocurrency Asset Workshop are now tracing illicit cryptocurrency trading using their training in Transaction Monitory (TRM) technology, a software that tracks cryptocurrency flows. Activities emphasised the importance of cross-agency collaboration, essential for effectively addressing TNC.

Following a successful inception meeting, the AFP convened the Transnational Serious Organised Crime Working Group with Mekong operational officers. The central focus was on disrupting criminal syndicates and their activities and coordinating responses across the region. One of the activities included a dialogue that identified high value targets and how to disrupt their capabilities in the

04 SUMMARY OF MAP THEMATIC PROGRESS

region. Counterparts have now committed to hold regular Working Group Meetings and to rotate hosting duties, demonstrating the value they see in this AFP-led platform.

AUSTRAC supported senior Financial Intelligence Units (FIUs) representatives to attend the regional Financial Intelligence Consultative Group meeting to understand emerging regional money laundering/terrorism financing threats. As part of this event, AUSTRAC encouraged Mekong counterparts to participate in the Collaboration, Learning, Exchange, Operations (CLEO) regional information sharing platform; Vietnam requested to join CLEO shortly after the event.

The theme for the 2024 ABF-supported Asia Pacific Customs Leadership Program was ‘Engaging Partners with Purpose’ and highlighted the crucial role customs can play in combatting TNC and the importance of regional collaboration.

Finally, the AFP Mekong Drug Investigations Program Regional Workshop was a valuable platform to exchange information and raise awareness about emerging drug trafficking trends, high-profile targets, and regional concerns. Participants engaged in discussions aimed at enhancing coordination and exploring opportunities for joint operations to tackle drug-related challenges more effectively in the future. The Drug Investigation Methodology Program introduced by the AFP provided an essential platform for intelligence sharing among law enforcement agencies from Lao, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. In an activity implemented in early 2024, Thailand used this platform to seek cooperation with Laos police in locating Thai criminals who had fled to Lao.

MAP-TNC strengthens gender equality, disability, and social inclusion in activity implementation, resulting in practical outcomes. In 2024, the MAP GEDSI Adviser developed a detailed GEDSI Toolkit, to build AGA knowledge and capacity to integrate GEDSI considerations through activity design to delivery. The GEDSI Toolkit was used to tailor crime, country, and audience-specific GEDSI modules for three Pilot activities.

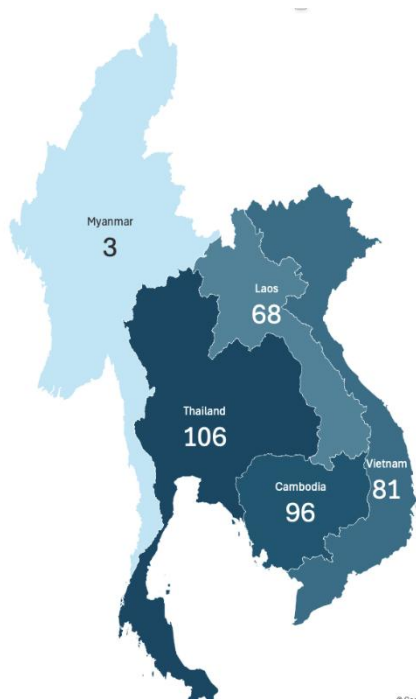
Initial feedback has highlighted the effectiveness of this approach, with participants and AGA’s indicating improved knowledge of not only basic GEDSI concepts, but greater understanding of the interconnected nature of GEDSI regarding both vulnerability to and perpetuation of TNC. The introduction of the Power Walk (an activity that invites participants to “walk” in someone else’s shoes and experience what it feels like to be powerless or powerful based on gender, occupation, education level, disability, age, health, etc) helped to establish a baseline of participant knowledge of GEDSI concepts, and provide a practical, culturally relevant method to explain intersectionality and vulnerability. The Power Walk is being delivered by Country Coordinators in local language, ensuring a comprehension-centred approach is adopted.

Two months after the AFP Cryptocurrency and Blockchain Investigations Training in Bangkok, where the GEDSI Toolkit was piloted for the first time, the media monitoring process observed a media release from the Royal Thai Police (RTP) providing a gender breakdown of victims of cybercrime. This was the first time the RTP had publicly shared gender disaggregated data.

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Stakeholder Engagement

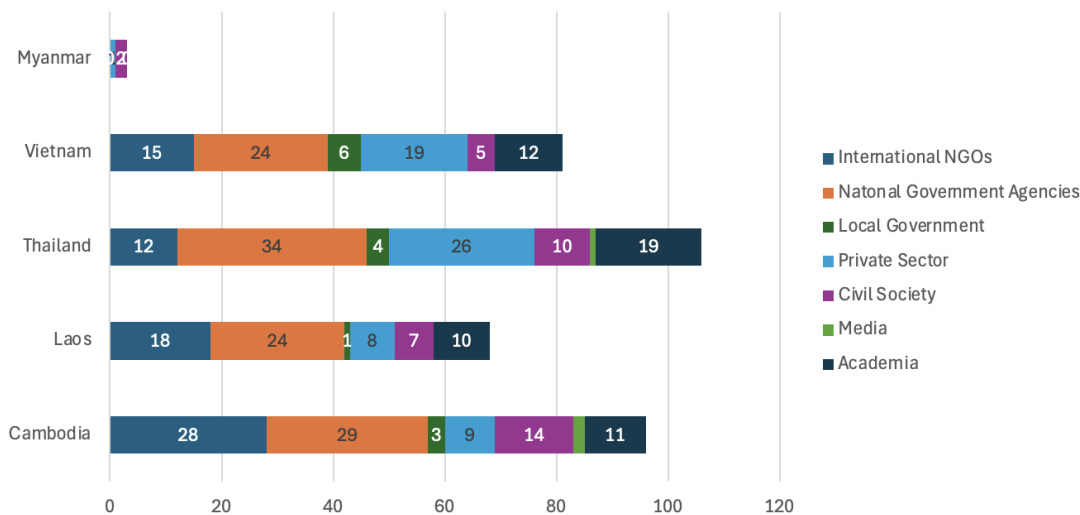
Figure 3 MAP Stakeholder Engagement



Engaging and building relationships with stakeholders across the Mekong subregion is critical for MAP to deliver results.

MAP’s investments under the five thematic areas have proven instrumental in strengthening economic, political, and developmental cooperation across the Mekong subregion. By working with partners that adopt a demand-driven, practical, and flexible approach, MAP has helped position Australia as a reliable and practical partner in addressing regional challenges and promoting mutually important policy priorities.

MAP engaged at least 354 stakeholders from different groups in 2024, predominantly in Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The number of stakeholders engaged is positively correlated with the number of investments implemented in these countries: regional programs have enabled wider reach and complemented Australia’s bilateral footprint. Myanmar engagement was limited, with Australian investments focused on civil society partners and individuals engaged through training and scholarships.



Stakeholder engagement is vital to developing and implementing programs that promote collaboration and sustainability through fostering resilience, sustainability, prosperity, and inclusive processes. MAP engages most with governments (35 per cent) but has also strengthened relationships with international organisations (21 per cent), the private sector (18 per cent), academia (15 per cent), and civil society (11 per cent).

05 CONCLUSION

2024 was a year of transition for MAP as it entered a new phase, with revised thematic areas, and engaged new stakeholders. Phase 2's portfolio consists of fewer, longer-term investments that are aligned with the priorities of Mekong partners. Australia's investments to assist Mekong partners to combat transnational crime have been brought into the broader MAP portfolio while continuing with transformative investments promoting water security and climate and economic resilience.

MAP's flexible implementation is appropriate for the dynamic context of the Mekong subregion. The chosen project delivery modalities best suit the local context and are responsive to the needs and priorities of partners and communities. Delivery partners succeeded in adapting project strategies, approaches, and technologies to local realities.

Strengthening organisational, community, and individual capabilities yielded significant positive results. Government agencies, civil society organisations, community-based associations, and universities were assisted in 2024 to gain knowledge, skills, and capabilities across MAP thematic areas to achieve significant results. MAP also enabled Australian agencies with a minimal footprint in the subregion to establish connections with Mekong counterparts to share expertise and experiences. MAP has contributed to research and evidence to inform policy and practice across the subregion in each thematic area.

In 2024, MAP continued to strengthen GEDSI implementation and results. Gender equality reporting improved significantly, especially for investments where gender equality is not a principal objective. More can still be done to ensure that investments address disability equity and this will be a focus in 2025.

In 2025, MAP will strengthen efforts to consolidate results in each thematic area, sustain effective engagement with Mekong counterparts, improve GEDSI mainstreaming and reporting, and promote closer collaboration between Australia and its partners. With new investments being implemented, MAP will ensure that Australia remains a reliable and practical partner in the Mekong subregion, delivering on partner countries priorities and needs.