

## Governance and Citizen Participation (GCP) Portfolio



The GCP portfolio applies a rights-based approach. It empowers people to participate in planning and decision-making processes at the local and national level. It creates spaces and platforms for exchange at all levels, enables duty-bearers to deliver services, and allows people to access and benefit from public services. The GCP portfolio continues to foster an enabling environment for civil society organizations and supports them in performing key advocacy and service functions. At the local level, the portfolio continues the co-financing of socio-economic infrastructure and community-led development work.

**Objective:** People in the Mekong region, in particular young people, women, and disadvantaged groups in Cambodia and Laos, benefit from responsive public service delivery and actively engage in local and national governance processes.

### Swiss portfolio outcomes:

Outcome 1: People effectively engage in planning and decision-making processes at local and national level.

Outcome 2: Public institutions at all levels provide responsive (public) services, including health services in Cambodia, in an inclusive and accountable manner.

Outcome 3: Policymakers and relevant government authorities draw up inclusive and gender-responsive policies and plans, based on evidence and consultations, and effectively translate them into practice.

The budget for the GCP portfolio amounts to CHF 40 million for the MRCP period 2022-25.

## Climate Change and Natural Resource Management (CCNRM) Portfolio



The CCNRM portfolio tackles complex issues through a multi-sectoral approach. It builds the capacity of public, private and civil society actors at sub-national, national and regional level to engage and address issues related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, resilience, and sustainable natural resources management. It generates research-based evidence to help raise awareness, empower rights-holders, and feed experiences into policy dialogue. Furthermore, processes are facilitated towards the adoption of international standards and proven agro-ecological principles as these are crucial for securing safe access to natural resources and sustainable livelihoods of smallholder farmers and the rural population.

**Objective:** People in the Mekong region, in particular young people, women, and disadvantaged groups in Cambodia and Laos, are more resilient to climate change and disasters, have more secure and equitable access to natural resources (land, forest and water), and manage them sustainably.

### Swiss portfolio outcomes:

Outcome 1: People are more resilient to climate change and disasters, have more secure and safe access to natural resources as well as better control over natural resources.

Outcome 2: Public, private sector and civil society organisations (in particular community-based organisations) are providing more responsive climate change adaptation and mitigation as well as natural resource management support services.

Outcome 3: Policymakers develop and implement policies, rules, and regulations that increase people's access to and control over natural resources and improve climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The budget for the CCNRM portfolio amounts to CHF 46.5 million for the MRCP period 2022-25.

## Inclusive Economic Development (IED) Portfolio



The IED portfolio works along the full spectrum between vocational skills development and employment. It strengthens skills, employability, employment support, and micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprise development services. This contributes to the reinstatement, retention, and creation of decent jobs and self-employment and ensures that people can enter the job market and recover from the COVID-19 induced economic crisis. The portfolio builds on its strengths at the national and Mekong regional level, to stimulate employment, and contributes to safer and more prosperous regional labour migration opportunities.

**Objective:** People in the Mekong region, in particular young people, women, and disadvantaged groups in Cambodia and Laos, have better quality employment and income, and are more resilient to economic crises.

### Swiss portfolio outcomes:

Outcome 1: People have improved skills and are more employable.

Outcome 2: Public and private institutions and civil society organisations provide better quality vocational skills development, employment support, and business development services.

Outcome 3: Policymakers develop and implement, based on evidence and multi-stakeholder consultations, gender-responsive and inclusive policies on vocational skills development, micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprise development, and decent work together with the private sector and civil society.

The budget for the IED portfolio amounts to amount to CHF 46 million for the MRCP period 2022-25.

## Cross-Cutting Themes

Transversal themes are consistently applied throughout the programme and projects, and form an integral part of the cooperation programme's monitoring system. The MRCP period 2022-25 will focus on four cross-cutting themes throughout all of Switzerland's programme activities.

**Gender Equality and Social Inclusion:** Special emphasis is placed on young people, women, and disadvantaged groups (including ethnic minorities), their access to and control over economic and natural resources as well as their engagement in decision-making over the management of such resources. Efforts are made to place gender equality and ethnic diversity more prominently into policy and stakeholder dialogue.

**Good Governance:** A rights-based approach and conflict-sensitive programme management are at the core of operationalisation of good governance. The focus is on enabling rights-holders to claim their rights with regard to basic services, political participation, economic and natural resources at local, national and transnational levels, while at the same time strengthening duty-bearers to provide quality services in a transparent and accountable manner.

**Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation (CCA and CCM) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR):** Increasing awareness of and capacity for CCA, CCM and DRR at all levels and in all portfolios guides the implementation of this transversal theme and ensures the resilience of the populations as well as the sustainability of the results. Climate change issues are placed in policy and stakeholder dialogues related to inclusive economic development, natural resource management, and governance service delivery.

**Support for COVID-19 recovery:** All interventions throughout the portfolio contribute to an inclusive socio-economic recovery of the target population and the respective countries as a whole.



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Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC

# Swiss Cooperation Programme in the Mekong Region 2022–25



Food and Beverage Training Class in Siem Reap Province, Cambodia. Photo © Swisscontact



## SDC IN THE MEKONG REGION

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) is Switzerland's international cooperation agency within the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. In collaboration with other federal offices, the SDC is responsible for the overall coordination of development cooperation and humanitarian aid delivered by the Swiss Confederation.

The SDC supports development projects in the Mekong region since the 1990s, with the first Swiss cooperation office opening in Hanoi in 1992. In 2006, the SDC opened a cooperation office in Vientiane to oversee Switzerland's development cooperation activities in the country, followed by the establishment of a cooperation office in Phnom Penh in 2012.

As a long-standing actor in the Mekong region, the SDC aims to reduce poverty, support equitable and sustainable development, and foster participative and democratic governance. The SDC supports governmental and non-governmental actors to become equal and empowered partners within the Mekong region.

The Swiss international cooperation in the Mekong region comprises of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand (the CLMVT countries), with a country focus on Cambodia and Laos. It includes projects with broader outreach in the Mekong region.

This strategic vision is aligned with and reflects the Mekong region's economic, political, and social interdependency. The region is characterized by its wealth of natural resources, the potential to provide opportunities for sustainable economic development, and by an increasingly digitally literate young population willing to contribute to inclusive development.

Interventions have a strong presence in rural areas, while increasingly engaging along the rural-urban spectrum following the urbanisation trend in the region.

The SDC's programme in the Mekong region is managed by the Swiss cooperation offices in Laos (lead) and Cambodia, in close collaboration with the SDC regional Humanitarian Aid hub in Bangkok, and the Global Programmes on Climate Change and Environment, Water, Food Security as well as Migration and Development.

Switzerland is a medium-sized bilateral development partner in Cambodia and Laos. In both countries, it takes part in the EU joint programming and has established partnerships with the International Financial Institutions, and the United Nations System.

## SDC PROGRAMMING 2018-21

### RESULTS 2018-21

The overall goal of the Mekong Region Strategy 2018-21 was to contribute to inclusive societies through equitable and sustainable development and democratic governance. It did this by engaging with individual project portfolios and results frameworks in Cambodia, Laos, and the Mekong regional level through the three domains of governance and citizen participation (GCP), skills development and employment (SDE), and agriculture and food security (AFS).

The overall budget envelope for the whole strategy period comprised CHF 146 million, spent through 26 larger development projects.

### DOMAIN LEVEL

- › The GCP portfolio contributed to increased access to and utilisation of public services for more than 1.9 million people, or an estimated 8% of the population in Laos and Cambodia combined.
- › The AFS portfolio contributed to increased control over forest resources of around 1.8 million households (more than 30% of the population in Laos and Cambodia), and increased income and food security for more than 100,000 smallholders.

### INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

- › The SDE portfolio supported capacity building of more than 1,600 government employees and teachers, and facilitated the signing of more than 650 agreements with the private sector for collaboration in more inclusive development efforts.
- › The AFS portfolio strengthened teacher capacities at five agricultural colleges and supported 13 provincial authorities in using better community land use planning processes and tools.

### POLICY LEVEL

- › The GCP portfolio contributed to more evidence-based and inclusive policymaking through the introduction of mechanisms for improved access to socio-economic information and data, accountability, transparency, and through maintaining space for civil society.
- › The SDE portfolio contributed to the development of a range of policies and normative frameworks (e.g. Technical Vocational Education and Training law in Laos, Recognition of Prior Learning system in Cambodia).

### REGIONAL LEVEL

Through programmes including the Mekong Region Land Governance, the Mekong River Commission, and the Regional Labour Migration Programme, Switzerland contributed to the preparation and adoption of regional guidelines and policies, for instance, relating to water management, vocational education and training, and land and forest management.

It became clear that while the nation state remains the organising principle in Southeast Asia, regional projects with credible institutions, such as ASEAN and the Mekong River Commission, add value as these institutions can set standards and foster peer learning.

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## SDC PROGRAMMING 2022-25

The region has had impressive economic growth rates and made progress in poverty reduction over the past two decades. However, the CLMVT countries are now facing various challenges that directly affect the region's prosperity and sustainable and inclusive development.

The priorities and objectives for the Mekong Region Cooperation Programme (MRCP) 2022-25 are oriented towards the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-24 and the main regional and national development frameworks. They are built on the opportunities provided by a region that is strongly interconnected in economic, political, and social terms; by a wealth of natural resources providing opportunities for sustainable economic development, and by an increasingly digitally literate young population willing to contribute to inclusive development.

The main challenges the MRCP intends to address are a currently weak inclusion of disadvantaged groups into development and decision-making processes, a lack of shared prosperity for many people in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and limited resilience to socio-economic crises and shocks induced by climate change.

Switzerland will maintain an important role in the testing of innovative approaches to Inclusive Economic Development (IED), Climate Change and Natural Resource Management (CCNRM), and Governance and Citizen Participation (GCP). Its proven ability to engage in a bottom-up manner and reach out to disadvantaged target groups through the creation of institutional and individual capacities, through spaces and platforms for exchange, dialogue and collaboration at sub-national, national and regional levels, while upholding key principles of good governance, gender equality and social inclusion, will remain at the core of its development cooperation in the region.

The overall goal of the MRCP is therefore to enable people, in particular young people, women, and disadvantaged groups in Cambodia, Laos, and the Mekong region, to be more prosperous, resilient, and better included in development processes.

The SDC in the Mekong region will implement projects in three distinctive portfolios:

- Governance and Citizen Participation
- Climate Change and Natural Resource Management
- Inclusive Economic Development

The thematic themes cutting across all portfolios are:

- Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
- Good Governance
- Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction
- COVID-19 Recovery

To complement the above thematic portfolios, targeted support will be given to cultural activities in line with the SDC Culture and Development Policy.

### BUDGET 2022-25

The overall MRCP budget amounts to CHF 133.7 million; with CHF 46 million allocated to IED, CHF 46.5 million to CCNRM, CHF 40 million to GCP, and CHF 1.2 million to other outcomes and interventions.

Geographically, CHF 59 million are allocated to Laos, CHF 46.5 million to Cambodia, and CHF 28.2 million to regional projects.

##### Swiss Cooperation Office and Consular Agency in Laos

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