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# **Progress of Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Greater Mekong Subregion and Vietnam's Contribution**

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**Abstract**--The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) includes the territories of the following countries: China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, established in 1992 because of the common flow of the Mekong River. With the goal of sustainable development, the operation of GMS has made many positive contributions to the general development of the region as well as the socio-economic development of the member countries. The article presents the process of Vietnam joining the GMS since 1992 and being a founding member of this organization with its advantages and limitations. It is a country located in the lower Mekong River, very vulnerable and vulnerable if the GMS cooperation process takes place without sustainability. As a country with a position in the region, a responsible member to the international and regional community, Vietnam participates in the GMS process with the desire to build the GMS into a region of peace and stability and develop. Therefore, overcoming barriers and difficulties, Vietnam has actively enhanced multilateral and bilateral cooperation and has made many positive contributions to GMS cooperation programs and projects. Vietnam's contribution shows the spirit of positive and proactive international integration.

**Keywords**--- cooperation, Mekong sub-region, positive contributions, sustainable development, Vietnam's contribution.

## **Introduction**

China (Although China has two provinces Yunnan and Guangxi in the subregion, China participates as a country, in which Guangxi province participated in GMS activities in 2005 at the request of China), Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia

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and Vietnam. In 1992, with the help of ADB (Asian development Bank), six countries started to establish the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program to promote economic relations between countries. The cooperation program focuses on priority areas, including: transportation, agriculture, energy, environment, human resource development, tourism, trade and investment, cooperation in exploitation of resources at Mekong River water (Wittayakorn-Puripunpinyoo, 2005; Tran et al., 2019).

The birth of GMS was based on many factors, including: In terms of geographical location, the first factor that binds countries together is the Mekong River. The Mekong River is like a rope linking the countries in the region together. The Greater Mekong Subregion is the geographical area through which the Mekong River flows. With a length of about 4,800 km (The Tibetans believe that the upper Mekong River is divided into two branches: the northwest branch (Dzakar chu) and the northern branch (Dzakar chu). The northwest branch is better known, located near Lungmug pass with a length of 87.75 km. The northern branch flows down from the Guosongmucha mountain range. This branch, from an altitude of 5224m – east longitude 94°41'44", north latitude 33°42'41". Consists of two sub-branches with lengths of 91.12 km and 89.76 km. Through explorations in the 90s of the twentieth century, the headwaters of the Mekong River were clearly identified. In 1994, a Chinese and Japanese delegation arrived at the northern source at the same time as the French delegation, led by M. Peissel, and went together to the western source with the aim: to demonstrate the main source of the Mekong River. After that, the next expeditions until 1999 under the cooperation of Chinese, American and Japanese explorers officially verified the source of the Mekong River in the northern tributary. Numbers for the length of the river range from 4,200 km to 4,850 km), the Mekong is the 12th longest river in the world and the 10th in terms of flow. It originates in Zhuo Tuo County, Tibet Autonomous Region of Qinghai Province of China, flows through the Changdu area of Yunnan Province, then flows into Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and then flows into the Pacific Ocean. The Mekong River Basin consists of two parts, the upper Mekong River and the lower Mekong River. Upstream is the part located on the territory of China and Myanmar, with an area of 189,000 square kilometers (24%) (Le et al., 2020; Yorth, 2014).

The downstream is located in the territory of four countries: Laos, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam, with an area of 606,000 square kilometers (accounting for 76%). While most of the territory of Laos (97%) and Cambodia (86%) lies in the Mekong River Basin, 36% of Thailand's area (mainly the Northeast) is in the basin, part of Vietnam have for about 11%. For the peoples of mainland Southeast Asia, the Mekong River is seen as a source, a thread connecting all member countries in the sub-region into a unified territory and culture in difference. This river has brought great values to the countries in the sub-region, it is associated with the "survival" of the GMS countries (Dao, 2015; Molle et al., 2012).

Total area, "The Mekong River Basin covers 795,000 square kilometers. In which, Myanmar: 24,000km<sup>2</sup> (accounting for 3%); China: 165,000km<sup>2</sup> (21%); Laos: 202,000km<sup>2</sup> (25%); Cambodia: 155,000km<sup>2</sup> (20%) and Vietnam downstream: 65,000km<sup>2</sup> (8%) (Tran Cao Thanh, 2000, p.43). The lower part of the Mekong

basin is calculated from the golden triangle, which is the boundary between Thailand, Myanmar and Laos, accounting for 77% of the total basin area. The Mekong Delta is a floodplain from the lower reaches of Kratie (Cambodia) with an area of 49,520 square kilometers (Pukinskis & Geheb, 2012; Mekong River Commission, 2003; Renaud & Kuenzer, 2012). In which, the delta area of Vietnam is 39,000km<sup>2</sup>, accounting for 79% of the total area of the Mekong Delta (Nguyen, 2000).

Surrounding the GMS area are two large oceans, the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, with favorable terrain, becoming a connection point for many large markets and dynamic economies of Asia such as China, India and Asia. ASEAN countries, forming an important link in the global value chain, playing the role of a transport, trade and investment bridge between Asian countries. In terms of politics, the GMS is a diverse region in terms of political institutions. There are countries that have built republican and people's democratic political institutions, such as China, Vietnam, and Laos, etc., oriented towards socialism; There are countries under the Federal system like Myanmar; there are republican countries like Cambodia (Olson & Spelke, 2008; Evans & Rand, 2019). It is the diversity of political institutions that requires countries to strengthen cooperation in order to ensure the building of a long-term stable and peaceful region that can call for, attract investment capital for the general development of the region (Yu, 2003; Watcharejyothin & Shrestha, 2009).

Socially, the GMS region has a large population, specifically: Cambodia had a population of more than 16 million in 2017, and this number is forecast to continue to increase to 22.5 million by 2050 (Korean) Environmental Institute, Korea). The total population of Vietnam is more than 96 million people in 2019. Vietnam is the third most populous country in Southeast Asia (after Indonesia and the Philippines) and the 15th in the world. Thailand's population increased to 69 million people in 2017 (Dai et al., 2014; Baker, 2006). With a large population, it will be an opportunity for GMS countries to expand their markets and contribute to the redistribution of the labor force. In particular, countries like Vietnam are entering the period of golden population structure, which is an opportunity for Vietnam to attract investment capital from outside. Since its establishment in 1992 until 2018, the GMS Economic Cooperation Program has organized 22 Ministerial Conferences and 5 Summits. In particular, the 6th GMS Summit was held in Vietnam from March 29 to 31, 2018. In the process of such activities, Vietnam has always actively participated and made great contributions to the development process (Moran et al., 2008; Dincer, 2000).

## **Method**

### **Method and data**

This study mainly use a combination of qualitative methods including synthesis, inductive and explanatory methods. To obtain conclusion and suggestions, in this study the analysis process was carried out by using historical information and with historical and dialectical materialism methods (Taillardat et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2018).

## Research results

### Vietnam's participation process in GMS

Vietnam's participation in the GMS process has the following characteristics: In terms of geographical location, Vietnam is located on the east coast of the subcontinent, adjacent to the East Asia-Southeast Asia international sea routes, connecting Asia with other continents in the world. Therefore, Vietnam has the outstanding advantage of being the frontage of the Sub-region, the gateway to the sea and the closest to international shipping lanes. With that position, Vietnam is seen as a factor of regional growth, playing a key role in transforming GMS transport corridors into economic corridors (Hilary & Dumebi, 2021; Fedorchenko et al., 2021).

However, because Vietnam is located in the lower Mekong River, it is most affected by all natural fluctuations and human activities in the countries upstream (Nasution et al., 2021; Wesnawa & Sudirta, 2017). According to the Mekong mainstream hydropower strategic environmental assessment report by the International Center for Environmental Management (ICEM), Vietnam has "the greatest potential for economic loss" due to potential impacts. If the mainstream dams are built. The losses that Vietnam can suffer cannot be fully calculated, but some impacts can be predicted, including: Reducing the amount of alluvial accretion in the delta from 26 million tons/year to 7 million tons/year; Marine, freshwater and aquaculture fisheries are all affected with estimated losses of at least \$500 million to \$1 billion per year (Vocroix, 2021; Suwija et al., 2019).

About 50% of the Mekong River Basin is used for agricultural production. In Vietnam, "The Mekong Delta is the region with the highest agricultural output, with farmers growing three rice crops a year. The output of each crop is from 1 to more than 5 tons per hectare. In 2005, about 33.8 tons of rice were produced in the Lower Mekong Basin, of which more than half were in Vietnam" (<http://www.tuanvietnam.net>, 2009). The trend of globalization and the development of the industrial revolution 4.0 have put developing countries like Vietnam in front of fierce challenges in international competition. In terms of politics and security, Vietnam is faced with the fact that major powers are dominating the economy and politics in international relations, ethnic and religious conflicts and the fight against terrorism are being taken advantage to violate international law and national sovereignty, the epidemic situation is developing very complicatedly in many countries, etc. Therefore, the Asian region contains hidden factors if not controlled. It is likely to break out and destroy the stability of regional economic and political development. Especially now, the issue of disputes in the East Sea is emerging and the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic is very strong, which is very difficult to control in countries.

In the development reality of the region, there are also the emergence and impact of many problems, showing that, "not only wars and armed conflicts are capable of threatening the security of a country but also the security of other countries. Non-traditional security issues such as religious and ethnic conflicts, environmental pollution, epidemics, economic recession, etc. can also push a country to the brink of collapse" (Nguyen, 2012). More than anyone else, Vietnam

is deeply aware that countries and ethnic groups, regardless of political regimes, ideology, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc., need cooperation to be able to cope, to deal with non-traditional security issues that have been appearing more and more in recent decades.

From the reality of its situation, Vietnam highly appreciates the GMS Cooperation Program and has actively participated in all GMS cooperation frameworks in order to build an effective working mechanism and promote the strengths of the GMS and stakeholders and meet the development needs of the region. In the process of participating in cooperation, Vietnam has demonstrated its role as an active member of GMS through outstanding contributions such as:

- *Firstly*, Vietnam has a sense of responsibility in seriously implementing the goals and commitments set by the GMS. At the same time, coordinate with other countries to successfully implement cooperation programs and projects.

To fulfill the responsibilities of a member country, Vietnam has fully participated in GMS meetings such as: GMS Summit, Ministerial Conference and cooperation forums in the fields of transportation, tourism, trade and investment, cooperation in the protection of water resources of the Mekong River, etc. Vietnam strictly implements the commitments set out by the GMS, including: Commitment to cooperation in facilitating the transit of people and cross-border goods related to the transport sector; Sub-regional electricity purchase and sale agreement; Commitment in Energy Cooperation Roadmap; Trade and investment cooperation; Committed to cooperation in sustainable development of sub-regional tourism.

Aware of the importance of efficient use of water resources in the Mekong River, Vietnam has seriously implemented the Agreement on Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Mekong Sub-region signed in 1995, promoting cooperative activities in the Mekong Delta in environmental cooperation and water resource management within the frameworks of Mekong cooperation. At the same time, Vietnam actively cooperates with member countries to negotiate and complete regulations and procedures on data sharing, monitoring of water use, notification and exchange of opinions in advance on use water, maintaining the flow on the mainstream of the Mekong River to concretize the Mekong Agreement and bind member countries' responsibilities in protecting the Mekong River's water resources.

- *Second*, Vietnam shows initiative and has many initiatives to contribute as well as positive actions to contribute to the sustainable development of the GMS. Proactivity and positivity are shown in attending GMS Summits and Ministerial Meetings, and Vietnam has always actively discussed and proposed many valuable cooperation initiatives to promote development the GMS. Specifically, at the 6th GMS Summit held in Hanoi in 2018, Vietnam proposed to build quality, green and smart infrastructure, using advanced materials and technologies environmentally friendly, associated with environmental factors. Most recently, at the 7th Greater Mekong Subregion Cooperation (GMS) Summit held on September 9, 2021 in an online format in Cambodia, Vietnam asked countries to continue promoting digital transformation, contributing to creating new driving force for growth,

economic recovery and narrowing the development gap on the basis of digital infrastructure development; Enhance e-commerce and digital commerce; Promoting the role of digital technology to accelerate the recovery process after the pandemic, especially in the field of trade in services; Enhancing digital skills and qualifications for businesses and employees; Develop an appropriate legal framework; Building a green, safe and effective GMS adaptive to climate change...Vietnam affirms its commitment to continue making effective contributions to the implementation of the GMS' common goals and vision, and to work with neighboring countries to build building an increasingly open, safe, peaceful, prosperous and sustainable GMS region (<https://www.sggp.org.vn>, 2021). Vietnam highly appreciates the close cooperation between GMS member countries as well as the important role of development partners, especially ADB as the GMS Cooperation Program Secretariat for providing resources, technical assistance, and experience sharing to assist GMS countries in achieving their socio-economic development goals.

In addition, Vietnam has proposed initiatives to increase the mobilization of resources for the development of the GMS, especially the resources of the private sector, and to strengthen cooperation between local governments and businesses between the two countries. GMS countries in promoting investment, trade, tourism and other socio-economic fields. Vietnam's point of view is that countries continue to promote the spirit of solidarity and coordination with each other to well implement GMS programs and projects, especially those in the field of transportation, in order to each and every day. Steps to improve socio-economic infrastructure in localities along the transport corridors of GMS such as: East-West Economic Corridor, North-South Economic Corridor... Besides, Vietnam also calling on countries to strengthen cooperation in economic development in association with solving hunger eradication and poverty reduction, contributing to improving the material and spiritual life of the population living in the sub-region, and at the same time strengthening linkages between the two countries to protect the environment, create sustainable development for all countries in the region.

- *Third*, with a favorable geographical position in connection with members, Vietnam shows its role as a bridge, a catalyst between member countries in the GMS. Vietnam has joined all three economic corridors, including the East-West Economic Corridor, the North-South Economic Corridor and the Southern Economic Corridor. In addition, many urban areas and trade centers in bordering provinces with economic corridors passing through have formed and grown strongly, contributing to the growth of economic exchanges of Vietnam with other countries in the region.
- *Fourth*, participating in cooperation with GMS countries, Vietnam actively contributes to the process of consolidating regional peace and security.

In 1992, when GMS was established, Vietnam became a member of this organization. Vietnam's participation marks the country's initiative and active participation in the process of regional and world integration as well as demonstrating its independent foreign policy; multilateralization and diversification of Vietnam.

In the process of developing the country, Vietnam has always set the central task of socio-economic development and environmental protection, so it is very necessary to have a peaceful and stable environment in order to have conditions to concentrate all activities resources for the implementation of the above key tasks. Especially, in the current period, Vietnam, China and Cambodia are the countries in the GMS that have become members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), this is a favorable condition for Vietnamese goods and other countries. Other countries in the region can easily penetrate the regional market as well as the world. In addition, at present, ASEAN countries, including Vietnam, have joined the ASEAN-China free trade area, which promises a good prospect for the liberalization of trade and investment between the member countries, creating new opportunities for international cooperation between countries to continue to develop.

In the international and regional context as above, in the past time, it is required that Vietnam promote more comprehensive cooperation with GMS countries to ensure that this place becomes a peace zone creating a solid foundation for cooperation in economic development and social issues. To fulfill that requirement, Vietnam continuously strengthens its role in the GMS through initiatives to contribute in high-level meetings and ministerial meetings to address difficulties and challenges of the GMS, and strictly implement the commitments set forth by the GMS as well as call on countries to unite and cooperate to resolve disputes on the basis of harmony between national interests and the common interests of the region, including solving well the problem of exploitation and effective use of Mekong river water resources, the East Sea dispute, the problem of epidemic prevention and control, etc. With specific actions and actions, the positive contributions of Vietnam has contributed to protecting peace and security in the region, and through that has also enhanced the role and position of Vietnam.

### **Vietnam's contributions in GMS sustainable development**

Vietnam's participation has yielded many results in the following areas:

- *Cooperation on transportation:* Vietnam participates in all three economic corridors, including the North-South economic corridor, the East-West economic corridor and the southern coastal corridor. There are many traffic projects that have been completed and put into use in Vietnam such as: the Ho Chi Minh City - Moc Bai route was in operation in 2005; The project to finance the East - West corridor of the road from Dong Ha - Lao Bao was completed in 2005; The project to build Hai Van road tunnel and upgrade Da Nang port is funded by Japan, as well as the completion of construction of the second Mekong international bridge connecting Muc Dahan and Savannakhet by the end of 2006. Several other projects such as the Northern Corridor valued at \$75 million, the section from Thanh Hoa connecting Laos and Thailand, the Southern Corridor worth \$25.5 million, sectioning national highways 80 and 63 connecting Vietnam and Cambodia. Vietnam's longest highway, the Noi Bai-Lao Cai route, opened in 2014 and as part of the North-South economic corridor project supported by ADB, has brought great economic value.

Over 3 decades of establishment and development, the GMS Economic Cooperation Program has obtained many results, including construction and renovation of 11,000 km of roads, 500 km of railways, 3,000 km of electricity lines, production and supply, provide more electrical energy for more than 200,000 homes. The GMS partnership program also provides technical assistance to enhance hardware and software connectivity through cross-border transport and trade coordination; regulating the health and quarantine system; conservation of biodiversity and environment; development of agricultural value chains (<https://nhandan.vn>, 2021). The connection of corridors through the territory of Vietnam has facilitated Vietnam to maximize the economic benefits derived from transport connections, increase trade and investment in the regions along the corridors economy.

- *Trade and investment cooperation:* In trade activities, Vietnam and GMS countries have signed the Strategic Framework and Trade Promotion and Investment adopted during the GMS Summit 2 (2005) in Kunming (China). In addition, Vietnam cooperated with the GMS of the country to establish a "Business Forum", set up a group on customs and develop a "one-stop" service system to create favorable conditions for consultants to come to Vietnam Male. Every year, Vietnam coordinates with other GMS organizations in the GMS Business and Consulting Conference with the participation of many businesses.
- *In the field of consulting:* Vietnam cooperates with other GMS organizations in the Mekong Subregion Investment Cooperation Forum to promote economic cooperation, introduce and connect investors with each other, methods of GMS countries in the fields of consulting - commerce - tourism.
- *Tourism cooperation:* Vietnam actively participates in tourism projects such as developing the tourism industry in the Cambodia - Laos - Vietnam Green Development Triangle and the Red River Delta tourism area. Vietnam also participates in the project "Development of sustainable tourism GMS" with 3 phases, in which phase 1: total capital for Vietnam is 8.5 million USD, phase 2 is 10 million USD, phase 3 with a capital investment project of 50 million USD. (<http://baochinhphu.vn>, 2021). In 2018, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) approved a \$45 million loan to help Vietnam transform second-tier urban cities into more competitive and equitable tourism destinations on economics (<https://baochinhphu.vn>, 2021). The project will build an urban and transport infrastructure center that can adapt to the climate change system to help increase the number of visitors and invest in tourism services in the provinces of Hoa Binh and Nghe An , Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue with the desire to attract about 8 million visitors per year.
- *Cooperation in human resource development:* Vietnam participates in developing the GMS strategic framework and human resource management plan for the 2009-2012 period and the 2013-2017 period with the aim of promoting human resource development in a sustainable way, supporting the implementation of architectural regions on human resource cooperation and handling cross-border human resource issues between GMS countries. Together with partner GMS, Vietnam is focusing on poverty alleviation and gender equality, supporting cute workers to benefit from national training programs, while strengthening protection for migrant workers, both within

and across borders. Especially, in the context of the COVID-19 disease, which is taking place very attractive variations in other countries, Vietnam has increased its impact to respond to the pandemic, sharing and supporting each other in research, production and marketing. Access to effective vaccines for disease prevention and control.

- *Cooperation in environmental protection:* In order to get out of the protected environment, Vietnam participates in the implementation of an important Environmental Program in both phase I and phase II. This is the Program by the group environment export ADB built in month 9-2004. The objective of the program is to protect the environment and ecological system of the economic corridor; ensure solid development consultancy in the fields of transport, hydropower and tourism; implement strategies to conserve the nature of Vietnam as well as the GMS countries; development and application of digital environments only to assess the development level of the development environment. The program environment is divided into two phases:
  - Phase I: From 2005 - 2012: during this period, ADB conducts a survey of countries to develop the program.
  - Phase II: From 2012 - 2016: Phase II objective is to secure all natural capital, optimize work of rare resource allocation and manage competition, enhance supply chain efficiency based on scarce resources, promoting integrated management of transboundary resources for national GMSs. Investment in phase II is 26.5 million USD. In which, “ADB has secured USD 14,800,000; Special technical support (\$800 thousand) and \$14.0 million from the Government of Finland” ([Asian Development Bank, 2012](#)).
- *Cooperation in Mekong River Water Resources Management:* In order to strengthen cooperation in the management of Mekong River water resources, the four member countries of the Mekong River Commission including: Vietnam, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia continue to participate in the signing of the agreement. Hua Hin Declaration, adopted at the first Summit of the Mekong River Commission held on April 5, 2010 in Thailand. In the Declaration, the countries committed to building the "Mekong River Basin with a prosperous economy, a just society and a good environment". The Declaration was adopted with the objective of promoting and coordinating water resources, sustainable exploitation and management of related resources, seeking the common interests of the nation and the welfare of the people.

It can be seen that the achieved results have demonstrated a strong degree of cooperation between Vietnam and GMS countries, not only at the state level but also attracting the participation of domestic and foreign private partners. The region (through the GMS Business Forums) has seen many new developments. This is the result and also a necessary premise to create a solid foundation for sustainable development cooperation between Vietnam and GMS in the future.

### **Some limits and challenges for Vietnam**

Besides the achieved results, the process of participating in cooperation between Vietnam and GMS countries also has limitations and weaknesses.

- *Firstly*, there is a conflict of national interest in the exploitation of water resources in the Mekong River, affecting the effectiveness of GMS cooperation.

When exploiting resources from the Mekong River, due to different needs and purposes, there are conflicts of national interests among GMS member countries. Most countries want to make the most of the Mekong River's water resources for economic benefits. This has strongly affected the flow of the Mekong River and the ecosystems in the basin, pushing millions of people to face many difficulties and challenges. Hydroelectric dams are considered to be the main factors that directly threaten the ecology and biodiversity of rivers and lakes, severely affecting water quality. Dam development can also cause significant transboundary adverse effects on sediment transport, exacerbating delta erosion and agricultural production, fishing and underwater biodiversity (Dao Trong Tu, 2014)

- *Second*, the challenge of climate change. Climate change causes environmental pollution, drought in the dry season leads to a lack of water for agricultural production and daily living.

According to the forecast of the International Center for Environmental Management, by 2050, the average daily maximum temperature in the GMS area may increase in the range of 1.6 to 4.1 degrees Celsius; Rainfall could increase by 3% to 14%, increasing river discharge, especially in the lower Mekong region (USAID, Main Report, 2013).

The average temperature increase will lead to a prolonged dry season, and the rainy season with storms and floods will also be more severe and frequent, affecting human health due to lack of clean water or depletion of water sources, and an increase in disease outbreaks. In Vietnam, due to the effects of climate change, over 12% of the coastal plain of Vietnam will be submerged 1 meter below sea level. The Mekong River Delta and the Red River Delta are low-lying areas, so they will be most affected when flooding, saline intrusion and bad weather events occur (<https://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn>, 2021).

- *Third*, the process of participating in cooperation with GMS countries affects the security situation in the region and directly affects Vietnam.

The strengthening of links between economic corridors has facilitated traffic and trade between Vietnam and GMS countries. But on the other hand, it also causes social constraints, especially the increase in criminal gangs in the area. In recent years, "criminal organizations, terrorist elements, trafficking in people and drugs are increasing in the region, making it difficult to maintain security and social order, especially in border areas" (Nguyen, 2015).

- *Fourth*, cooperation between Vietnam and GMS countries also faces difficulties and challenges due to the rise of China.

In recent years, the world has witnessed the strong development of China, the process of China's rise is becoming a significant challenge for regional countries. Over the years, China has exerted its power and position to lead and dominate the development of neighboring countries in its favor. With great ambitions, China has been increasing economic aid to GMS member countries. "From 2013-2017, China invested 5.3 billion USD in Cambodia, equivalent to nearly 1 billion USD per year. In 2018, foreign direct investment capital into Cambodia reached US\$3.1 billion, of which China is

the largest investor” (<https://dantri.com.vn>, 2021). China's forms of support for Cambodia are within the framework of the Lancang - Mekong cooperation initiative. Through the form of investment cooperation, China has persuaded, manipulated and dominated the GMS countries to pressure and force countries to make political decisions in their favor. Typically, the South China Sea dispute, at the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting held in 2012 in Cambodia, for the first time in ASEAN's 45-year history, a ministerial meeting ended without a statement being issued, joint statement because Cambodia does not accept to include the issue of disputes in the East Sea in the joint statement. At the same time, China arbitrarily built hydroelectric dams on the main stream of the Lancang River without consulting the GMS member countries. China's blatant construction of hydroelectric dams has caused downstream countries like Vietnam to suffer severe environmental impacts due to changes in the flow of the Mekong River, affecting the goal of sustainable development and the firmly established by the GMS.

- *Fifth*, the disparity in development level makes it difficult for Vietnamese enterprises to compete with enterprises in some GMS countries, namely China and Thailand.

Among the GMS member countries, there are two countries with strong economic growth, namely Thailand and China. In general, Chinese and Thai enterprises have abundant capital, good business management skills and experience, good product promotion and deep market integration ability. Meanwhile, Vietnamese enterprises have small scale, limited market share limited ability to develop product strategies, weak scientific and technological potential. Not to mention the quality of human resources of Vietnamese enterprises has not yet met the requirements of the period of opening up and integration. Thereby, making Vietnamese enterprises face competitive pressure from imported goods, products, services and investments from China and Thailand when entering the markets of GMS countries.

### **Discussion on improving the efficiency of sustainable development cooperative progress**

To contribute to improving the efficiency of cooperation between Vietnam and GMS, it is necessary to focus on basic solutions such as:

- *Firstly*, Vietnam needs to continue to strengthen cooperation with GMS countries to resolve conflicts of national interests in using the Mekong River's water resources, especially upstream countries that need to provide and share fully database related to the construction of hydropower projects on the mainstream and tributaries of the Mekong River in order to effectively manage and use the water resources of the Mekong River. At the same time, calling on member countries to strictly implement the 1995 Mekong River Basin Cooperation Agreement and the 2010 Hua Hin Declaration in order to improve the implementation of the commitments set out by the GMS, ensure the implementation of the GMS region's sustainable development goals.

- *Secondly*, to solve the problem of climate change, on the Vietnamese side, it is necessary to issue synchronously and systematically guidelines and policies on climate change. Thereby, helping Vietnam to develop plans and strategies to adapt to climate change. In addition, it is necessary to strengthen the capacity to forecast and warn about drought and saltwater intrusion early, especially monthly and seasonal forecasts to promptly take proactive solutions. Focus on developing and implementing the master plan on water resources in the context of climate change and impacts caused by exploitation and use of water resources of countries upstream of the Mekong River. In addition, Vietnam needs to strengthen cooperation with GMS countries in implementing commitments on emission reduction, financial and technological support for countries heavily affected by climate change.
- *Third*, in the area of regional security, Vietnam needs to continue to strengthen and strengthen cooperative relations with GMS countries; study and expand bilateral cooperation mechanisms with member countries related to transnational crime prevention and control in order to take advantage of all resources, support and assistance from the Governments and police of other countries in training, improving professional capacity, foreign language skills, providing equipment for forces directly fighting transnational crimes. Drug trafficking and trafficking are on the rise in the region.

Regarding disease prevention: Vietnam should coordinate with GMS countries in preventing and increasing the scale of disease prevention activities. In particular, in the current complicated situation of the COVID-19 epidemic, Vietnam needs to call on countries to share experiences and measures to prevent and control the disease as well as effective forms of cooperation in the fight against the epidemic, citizen protection, medical equipment supply, capacity building and purchasing of vaccines for people in order to limit the number of infections and deaths in the country.

- *Fourth*, in the face of the strong rise of China and the problem of building hydroelectric dams on the upper Mekong River, Vietnam needs to strengthen multilateral and bilateral cooperation with GMS countries as well as ASEAN organizations to restraining, resisting division, manipulation, and even pressure imposed by China. Continuing to effectively implement the foreign policy of independence, self-reliance, multilateralization and diversification; proactively and actively integrate into the world comprehensively and deeply; be a responsible member of the international community; maintaining a peaceful and stable environment for the development of the country; improve Vietnam's international prestige and position. At the same time, through the new mechanism established in 2016, which is the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism, Vietnam needs to strengthen cooperation and fight to require China to provide a full range of related to hydropower projects that China is building to study its feasibility as well as its impact on the environment. It can be seen that the approval of the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism is very important, promising many good prospects for cooperation between the two countries as well as between the member countries of the GMS, firmly to ensure that GMS countries exploit water sources in a fair and reasonable manner, and

also serve as a legal basis for Vietnam when resolving disagreements related to the Mekong River's water resources.

- *Fifth*, in order to improve the efficiency of competition between Vietnamese enterprises and enterprises from other countries in the GMS, the State of Vietnam needs to continue researching and promulgating policies on business development, in order to form a force of enterprises with the highest standards, medium and large scale, playing a leading role in economic sectors, creating strategic national products, affirming Vietnam's brand in the international arena. At the same time, supporting the formation and development of supply chains and linkage chains led by Vietnamese enterprises; have special preferential policies for FDI projects with a large degree of participation of Vietnamese enterprises in the value chain as well as perfect the system of agencies and focal units to support enterprises, increasing the linkage among ministries, branches, between the central and local governments in supporting businesses. Thereby helping to improve the competitiveness between Vietnamese enterprises and enterprises in GMS member countries.

## Conclusion

After more than 20 years of joining the GMS, Vietnam has made important contributions to the formation and development of the GMS. With a favorable geographical position, Vietnam has an area accounting for 11% of the Mekong River basin, but Vietnam is located downstream, so Vietnam has to suffer a disadvantage, and hurt, if the process of cooperation and sharing in the GMS process goes unfavorably. Therefore, more than anyone else, the Government of Vietnam is always aware of the importance of sub-regional cooperation and international integration in realizing its socio-economic development goals. Participating in cooperation with GMS promises to open up many opportunities for Vietnam in improving infrastructure, especially transport infrastructure with traffic connection projects between countries in the GMS, expanding the market including the large market of China. This cooperation will attract more investment capital and develop human resources as well as promote economic relations with GMS countries with external partners. However, opportunities always go hand in hand with challenges. Vietnam needs to seize opportunities and proactively deal with difficulties and challenges to ensure that the country's economy continues to develop.

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