

CONCEPT NOTE

Regional Forum

“The Impact of COVID-19 on the Mekong Subregion: *An emphasis on social protection and economic inclusion*”

The Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), with financial and technical support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada, is coordinating a consortium of research institutes in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to implement a three-year research project on “*The Impact on COVID-19 on Inclusive Development and Governance: Rapid and Post-Pandemic Assessment in The Mekong Subregion*”.

1. Background and objectives

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented social, political, and economic effects on both developing and developed countries. Global recession is projected should the pandemic continue to persist. The impacts are disproportionately distributed across countries, including the countries in the Mekong subregion. Being composed of small and low-income economies, this region faces severe consequences given its fragile public health systems, limited fiscal and monetary policy options, and a relatively strong reliance on external trade. The impact of COVID-19 is multi-faceted, disrupting various significant industries, such as services and garment manufacturing, as well as compounding the existing gender gap and further widening inequality. The poor and vulnerable struggle to offset decreased employment opportunities and reduced incomes. As the future unfolds, sufficient, realistic and scientific-based research is crucial to navigate and set direction for policymaking and programme intervention. With this purpose in mind, the CLMV research consortium, comprised of research think tanks based in Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar, was established to explore three main research pillars. Pillar One focuses on examining policy responses to the pandemic. Pillar Two focuses on the pandemic’s impacts on individuals, households and micro, small and medium enterprises. Pillar Three focuses on coordination mechanisms in the implementation of the policy responses. After the project began in late 2020, the research team has conducted rigorous data collection and analysis on three common sectors: agriculture, garment manufacturing and tourism with two cross-cutting themes, namely, gender and social protection.

This regional forum is part of the research project and serves as an opportunity to bring together research evidence and lessons learned from the region. The objectives of the regional forum are to:

- (1) Create a platform for sharing research findings to support evidence-based policymaking and programme intervention

- (2) Stimulate policy discussion on three main areas: social protection, gender-sensitive impacts, and migration
- (3) Provide an opportunity for engagement and networking between policymakers, relevant stakeholders, and researchers

2. Format

The forum will feature three different types of discussion:

1. Keynote addresses by expert: To present an overview from macroeconomic perspective on COVID-19 recovery pathway in the region and set the theme for the following discussions
2. Presentations from research team: To showcase research findings from research institutes in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam.
3. Panel discussions: To promote active discussion between participants that consist of policymakers, researchers, and policy practitioners from government, think tanks, and NGOs.

3. Thematic focuses

Panel Discussion 1: *Social protection and its contribution to mitigating the impacts of COVID-19*

- What are the impacts of COVID-19 on peoples' socio-economic well-being?
 - o Highlights from Cambodia's and Vietnam's findings (employment and income, consumption, and mental well-being) – triggering presentation from Cambodia with additional inputs from the Vietnam and Myanmar teams, if there are any.
- What are the core elements of a social protection system that would make it responsive to the pandemic? To what extent does such a system contribute to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic based on real practice in the studied region?
- Drawing from these experiences, how could we establish and improve a social protection system that is inclusive and resilient in times of crisis?

Panel Discussion 2: *Gender sensitive impacts and support in the context of COVID-19 in CLMV countries*

- What are the common regional trends in gender-differentiated impacts that are noticeable during the COVID-19 pandemic? Are these impacts new or are they just exacerbated versions of existing impacts?
 - o Highlight findings from Vietnam (wage gap, unpaid care, conflict and GBV) – triggering presentation from Vietnam with additional inputs from the Cambodia and Myanmar teams, if there are any.
- What are the measures issued in response to these impacts? How do the measures differ from one country to another?

- What approaches should relevant stakeholders take to rebuild efforts to reduce the gender gap?

Panel Discussion 3: Migration trends and policy during and post COVID-19

- How does the movement restriction policy affect domestic and international labour mobility?
 - o Highlight findings from Myanmar (international migration trend, remittances, and impact on national economy) – triggering presentation from Myanmar with additional inputs from the Vietnam and Cambodia teams, if there are any.
- What are the policies implemented to facilitate employment mobility across the Mekong sub-region during COVID-19 and what are the support measures provided to returned migrants? How do these policies help maintain employment stability for workers?
- Between labour migration and focusing on creating more employment opportunities at home, which approach should be prioritized in the effort to achieve economic recovery?

*****Agenda for this regional forum is attached in Appendix A.***

4. Support

For further information on the regional forum and other arrangements, please contact Ms. Benghong Siela Bossba, Research Assistant at the Centre for Development Economics and Trade of CDRI via (+855) 92 618 363 or bossba@cdri.org.kh.

Appendix A: Final Agenda

Date: Monday 05 December 2022

Venue: Oakwood Premier Phnom Penh

Time	Agenda	Speakers
8:00 – 8:30 AM	Registration	CDRI Team
8:30 – 9:30 AM	Opening Session	
8:30 – 8:45 AM	Welcoming remarks	Dr. ENG Netra , Executive Director of Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)
8:45 – 9:00 AM	Opening remarks	H.E. Dr. Phan Phalla , Secretary of State, Ministry of Economy and Finance and Secretary-General of the Committee on Economic and Financial Policy
9:00 – 9:30 AM	Keynote Address: Overview of the Consortium	Dr. Teng Delux , Research Fellow, CDRI
9:30 – 10:00 AM	Coffee Break	All participants
10:00 – 10:20 AM	Presentation: Macroeconomic Perspective on COVID-19 Recovery Pathways in ASEAN	Dr. Jayant Menon , Visiting Senior Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute) in Singapore
10:20 – 10:30 AM	Q&A Session	All participants
10:30 – 11:35 AM	Panel Discussion 1: Social Protection and Its Contribution in Mitigating the Impacts Of COVID-19 Moderator: Dr. Edgard Rodriguez , Senior Program Specialist, International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC)	Panellists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mr. Roth Vathana, Research Consultant- H.E. Samheng Boros, Minister attached to the Prime Minister and Secretary of State, Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation- Ms. Phean Sophoan, National Director of Oxfam Cambodia- Ms. Vu Thi Thu Thu, Research Fellow, Centre for Analysis and Forecasting (CAF) Vietnam
11:35 – 11:45 AM	Q&A Session	All participants
12:00 – 1:30 PM	Lunch Break	All participants

1:30 – 2:35 PM	<p>Panel Discussion 2: Gender Sensitive Impacts and Support in the Context of COVID-19 in CLMV Countries</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, Professor of Gender and Development Studies at Department of Development and Sustainability, School of Environment, Resources and Development, Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand</p>	<p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dr. Pham Minh Thai, Research Fellow, CAF Vietnam - H.E. The Chhunhak, Director General, Gender Equality & Economic Development Directorate, Ministry of Women Affairs - Ms. Ei Mom Khin, Researcher at Centre for Economic and Social Development (CESD), Myanmar - Ms. San Sophany, Director of the Centre for Governance and Inclusive Society, CDRI
2:35 – 2:45 PM	Q&A Session	All participants
2:45 – 3:15 PM	Coffee Break	All participants
3:15 – 4:20 PM	<p>Panel Discussion 3: Migration Trends and Policy During and Post COVID-19</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Jayant Menon, Visiting Senior Fellow, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute) in Singapore</p>	<p>Panellists:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ms. Ngu Wah Win, Senior Policy Coordinator, CESD Myanmar - Ms. Kristin Parco, Chief of Mission, International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Cambodia - Dr. Teng Delux, Research Fellow, Centre for Development Economics and Trade, CDRI - Dr. Kyoko Kusakabe, Professor of Gender and Development Studies, AIT Thailand
4:20 – 4:30 PM	Q&A Session	All participants
4:30 – 4:45 PM	Closing Session	
4:30 – 4:45 PM	Closing Remark	Dr. Edgard Rodriguez, Senior Program Specialist, International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC)