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GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION DIGITALIZATION ACTION PLAN (2025-2027)

NOVEMBER 2024



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Notes:

In this report, “\$” refers to United States dollars.

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Acknowledgments



The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Digitalization Action Plan (2025–2027) was prepared by consultants Jonathan Gonzalez, Yu Jing Kew, and Carlo Agdamag, from Access Partnership, with invaluable inputs and feedback from the GMS national secretariats and other GMS ministries and government agencies that participated in the consultative process. The inputs and support from staff of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Steven Schipani, principal tourism industry specialist, Sector Group, Srinivasan Ancha, principal climate change specialist, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department, Jeong Yoonee, senior digital tech specialist, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department, and Yuya Yamamoto, trade specialist, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department, are gratefully acknowledged. Finally, the GMS Secretariat with the special support and guidance from Antonio Ressano Garcia (principal regional cooperation specialist, GMS Secretariat, ADB), Alfredo Perdiguero (unit head, Regional Cooperation and Integration, Southeast Asia Department, ADB), Lucia Martin Casanueva (consultant, GMS Secretariat, ADB), Josephine Duque-Comia (senior programs officer, GMS Secretariat, ADB), and Cira Rudas (senior operations assistant, GMS Secretariat, ADB).

1. Introduction



Digital dynamism of GMS. A young woman checks status of flights from an airport's digital information display. The GMS region has a young and tech-savvy population with a marked appetite for digital innovation (photo by iStock.com/JJ. LIM).

Key Highlight

The *Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Digitalization Action Plan (2025–2027)* leverages the findings of the Scoping Study: Formulating a Digitalization Action Plan for the GMS to **provide actionable steps for GMS policymakers and stakeholders to create the ideal conditions for digitalized economic sectors to flourish and thrive in the region.**

The action plan provides thorough guidance for **GMS governments to prioritize, operationalize, and concretize the digitalization of their economies.** It does this by providing **a set of overarching actions, as well as sector-specific initiatives, that GMS economies can implement collectively and individually** while considering the specific needs and capabilities of individual GMS countries.

1.1 The Greater Mekong Subregion Program

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) is a natural economic area formed by the six countries along the Mekong River—Cambodia, People’s Republic of China (PRC), specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhang Autonomous Region, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR), Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam—encompassing 2.6 million square kilometers and comprising a combined population of about 326 million people.

Launched in 1992, the *GMS Economic Cooperation Program* employs a three-pronged approach: (i) improving **connectivity** through physical infrastructure and the creation of economic corridors, (ii) increasing **competitiveness** through market integration and the facilitation of cross-border trade and travel, and (iii) cultivating a sense of **community** through the resolution of shared social and environmental concerns.

Overarching initiatives such as the *GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030)* have helped set the strategic directions and priorities of the program in the medium to long term.

Likewise, the *GMS Gender Strategy* has provided entry points to ensure efforts to achieve gender equality in the region are both achievable and sustainable. Meanwhile, plans such as the *GMS COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan 2021–2023* have helped GMS economies navigate specific challenges—facilitating economic recovery and fostering long-term resilience.

These encouraging trends are closely tied to the volume, scope, and pace of projects financed and implemented in the region. Between 2020 and 2023 the GMS program mobilized \$5.9 billion for 21 projects across key sectors, including agriculture and natural resources, wind power, health, industry and trade, tourism, and transportation. Of that total financing, \$4.2 billion was provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), \$1.2 billion was mobilized from development partners and the private sector, and \$500 million came from GMS governments.¹

¹ ADB. 2024. *Asian Economic Integration Report 2024*. https://aric.adb.org/pdf/aeir/AEIR2024_complete.pdf

1.2 The Digital Dynamism of GMS Economies

The digitalization of societies and economies offers unprecedented opportunities to spur economic growth, enhance competitiveness, and tackle longstanding challenges. From improving quality of life to securing livelihoods, the economic opportunity presented by digitalization is multifaceted, encompassing a wide array of sectors including agriculture, health care, education, energy, transport, urbanization, and climate change. In this regard, the GMS is ready to embrace the disruptions created by the digitalization of the global economy.

Home to a young, dynamic, and tech-savvy population with a marked appetite for digital innovation and entrepreneurship, the GMS is better-positioned than more mature economies with aging populations to leapfrog into new realms of economic development.

Given the current size of the digital economy in GMS countries, there is a diverse landscape of digital economic development within the region. The PRC stands out, with its digital economy constituting 42% of its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022, underscoring a rapid digital transformation and a global presence in digitally enabled sectors.² On the other hand, countries like the Lao PDR showcase smaller proportions

of their economies being digital—3% in 2022—indicating varying stages of digital adoption and infrastructure development across the region. Thailand’s digital economy, at 12.2% of GDP, and Viet Nam’s, representing 14.3% of GDP, reflect their growing significance within the GMS.³

Looking at growth potential, digitalization represents a major opportunity for all economies within the broader Southeast Asian region. According to projections by the Boston Consulting Group,⁴ the region’s digital economy could triple by the end of the decade, growing from about \$300 billion to almost \$1 trillion by 2030.⁵ According to Google & Temasek, this figure could double to \$2 trillion by 2030 if region-wide enabling initiatives such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) are implemented and sustained.⁶ A more optimistic estimate by UnaFinancial sees the gross value added of Southeast Asia’s digital economy reaching \$2.35 trillion in 2027, representing 55.7% of the region’s projected GDP for that same year.⁷

But to fully realize its digital potential, GMS economies must overcome several major barriers, including yawning disparities and persistent divides in income, education levels, health outcomes, and economic opportunities. From digital infrastructure gaps and skill shortages to non-harmonized regulatory frameworks and cybersecurity

² This a nationwide figure that includes all regions and provinces, not just Yunnan Province or Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

³ ADB. 2023. Scoping Study: Formulating a Digitalization Action Plan for the GMS, not disseminated yet. To be published on the GMS website.

⁴ Boston Consulting Group. 2023. *Study on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement*. https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/ASEAN-Digital-Economy-Framework-Agreement-Public-Summary_Final-published-version-1.pdf

⁵ ASEAN. 2023. Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA): ASEAN to leap forward its digital economy and unlock US\$2 Tn by 2030. 19 August. <https://asean.org/asean-defa-study-projects-digital-economy-leap-to-us2tn-by-2030>

⁶ Google & Temasek. 2023. *e-Conomy SEA report – Reaching new heights: navigating the path to profitable growth*. https://services.google.com/fh/files/misc/e-conomy_sea_2023_report.pdf

⁷ C. Knowles. 2024. *Southeast Asia’s digital economy to reach 56% of region’s GDP by 2027*. UnaFinancial. 31 January. <https://cfotech.asia/story/southeast-asia-s-digital-economy-to-reach-56-of-region-s-gdp-by-2027>

concerns, GMS economies must address complex, multifaceted challenges to effectively create an enabling environment that nurtures digital transformation and ensures its benefits are widely distributed across societies.

1.3 The GMS Digitalization Action Plan

This *GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025-2027)* leverages the findings of the *Scoping Study: Formulating a Digitalization Action Plan for the GMS* to provide actionable steps for GMS policymakers and stakeholders to create the ideal conditions for digitalized economic sectors to flourish and thrive in the region (footnote 3).

This includes driving economic dynamism and competitiveness by leveraging digital innovations to improve productivity, streamline supply chains, facilitate cross-border trade and investment, and open new markets. It also entails harnessing the economic potential of digitalized products, platforms, and services by fostering digital literacy, innovating regulatory approaches, and investing in critical digital infrastructure—thus setting the foundations for integrated and inclusive growth models that impact populations and communities in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

The action plan provides guidance for GMS governments to prioritize, operationalize, and concretize the digitalization of their economies. It does this by providing a set of overarching actions, as well as sector-specific initiatives, that GMS economies can implement collectively while considering the specific needs and capabilities of individual GMS countries.

2. Scope and Approach



Digital transformation in agriculture. A young farmer uses digital technology to increase the productivity of his farm. The GMS Digital Action Plan recognizes the importance of ensuring that digital transformation leads to improving lives and securing the livelihood of GMS nationals (photo by iStock.com/Mr.Tong <086-8527192>).

Key Highlight

The action plan takes a **holistic approach to digitalization**. It also aims to spur and support actions that **balance the recognition of GMS countries' unique needs, priorities, and capabilities with the need to uphold a collective vision toward regionally empowering digitalization**.

2.1 Approach

The *GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025-2027)* recognizes that digitalization does not happen in a vacuum: there are complex, interrelated factors at play that make it necessary to simultaneously address all the gaps, barriers, and challenges that are in the way of digital systems, technologies, and services contributing to the well-being and empowerment of people, businesses, and governments in a resolutely digitalized global economy.

Thus, the action plan takes a holistic approach to digitalization, emphasizing the importance of ensuring that the digital transformation of the economy is not reduced to the pursuit of technological advancement, but is focused on improving lives and securing livelihoods—all while ensuring no one is left behind.

The action plan aims to spur and support actions that balance the recognition of GMS countries' unique needs, priorities, and capabilities with the need to uphold a collective vision toward regionally empowering digitalization. This entails proposing actions for which the targets, methods, and outcomes take into consideration the specific needs and capabilities of individual GMS countries, while ensuring the framework within which they are pursued emphasizes regional harmonization, standardization, and interoperability.

In this context, the action plan is not designed to replace or undermine existing national, regional, or multilateral digitalization. Rather, it aims to complement them by providing actionable, sector-specific guidance for GMS economies to launch digitalization mechanisms in accordance with their specific needs, priorities, and capabilities—all while avoiding common design and implementation pitfalls.

For example, the action plan is developed to complement and support the GMS Program's ongoing work on digitalization—the *GMS Strategic Framework 2030 (GMS-2030)*⁸ and the *GMS Innovation Strategy*,⁹ both of which identify the harnessing of the digital revolution as a key driver of regional cooperation and integration for the GMS Program. The action plan is also designed to complement and support the digitalization initiatives that have been agreed on and committed to through other multilateral frameworks (e.g., the *ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, DEFA*; the *APEC Digital Economy Steering Group*; or the *AIIB Digital Infrastructure Sector Strategy*).

The action plan is envisioned as a consultative, participative, collaborative, and iterative endeavor, drawing from the feedback and input of a wide range of ADB experts and GMS stakeholders at every stage of development.

⁸ ADB. 2021. *The Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program - Strategic Framework 2030*. www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/678631/gms-economic-cooperation-strategic-framework-2030.pdf

⁹ To be published. It is the main deliverable during the 2024 Summit of Leaders.

2.2 Scope

The *GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025-2027)* is developed to directly address the gaps, challenges, strengths, and opportunities identified by the *Scoping Study: Formulating a Digitalization Action Plan for the GMS* (footnote 3). It leverages and expands on the six initial entry points that were identified and shared with GMS stakeholders in late 2023 and that are also included in the Scoping Study.

It focuses on three key sectors that the scoping study identified as vital to both the overall economy of GMS countries and the digitalization of many key industries.¹⁰

Looking into individual GMS economies, agriculture, tourism, and trade and investment are rapidly digitalizing sectors that have a wide range of promising initiatives being launched and are thus increasingly contributing to the growth and dynamism of the region's digital economies. Looking more broadly at the GMS level, these three sectors are also the object of a wave of long-term strategies and commitments that make them especially receptive to digitalization entry points.

These three sectors were selected in the first instance to effectively support the momentum of digital innovation in

the GMS, and to ensure they continue improving people's lives and livelihoods. The rest of the sectors of the GMS, equally important, will be addressed in the second stage of this action plan.

- **Agriculture.** Most people in the GMS depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. From digital solutions that increase farm yields to digital platforms that improve value chains and agricultural trade, the introduction of more efficient production management tools can benefit millions of people across the region. The digitalization of this sector can deliver short-term benefits (increased incomes in rural areas), as well as more long-term ones (food security issues, resilience to climate change and other risks).
- **Tourism.** The digitalization of the tourism sector within GMS economies contributes to the revitalization of one of the sectors that suffered the most during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. From innovative experiences and more convenient administrative processes for tourists to more sustainable tourism initiatives that promote the region's cultural and culinary heritage, there are many ways the digitalization of the sector can contribute to the livelihoods of populations across the GMS.

Key Highlight

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These three sectors were selected in the first instance to **effectively support the momentum of digital innovation in the GMS**, and to ensure they continue improving people's lives and livelihoods.

¹⁰ Many other sectors, such as energy, environment, health care, or transport may be the object of future iterations of the *Digitalization Action Plan (2025-2027)*.

- **Trade and Investment.** Digitalization provides interconnected solutions for the order and delivery of goods and services based on regional and global supply chains. Cooperation between GMS governments on standards for trade digitalization leading to mutual recognition of digitalized trade documents, as well as on facilitating investments in digital infrastructure, would clearly strengthen such supply chains. Furthermore, GMS countries can embrace cross-border e-logistics platforms to share paperless information and improve efficiency at checkpoints and borders by adopting automated payment systems for cargo movements. These platforms offer interconnected logistics solutions, which can improve trading networks.
- **Reduced disparities and attenuated divides.** Addressing pervasive disparities and overcoming persistent divides are vital to ensuring the benefits of digitalization are broadly shared and sustainable. This comprises digital access, financial inclusion, and skill development.

The action plan comprises the five key opportunities that the scoping study highlighted in terms of effectiveness of regional cooperation and multilateral collaboration:

The action plan also addresses the four main priority areas identified by the scoping study as central to the successful and durable implementation of digitalization measures and initiatives in GMS economies:

- **Enhanced institutions and supportive public sector.** The need for capable, resilient, and flexible institutions is central to the success of digitalization plans and objectives. This comprises modernizing governance, accessibility and efficiency, and intragovernmental cooperation.
- **Secure digital transactions and reliable digital ecosystems.** The security and integrity of all types of data are vital to the effective operationalization of current and future digital solutions. This comprises infrastructure security, data protection mechanisms, and cybersecurity measures.
- **Ethical governance and transparent processes.** Strong governance frameworks are essential for fostering trust in digital services, products, platforms, and economic actors. This comprises responsible innovation, user-centricity, and literacy and awareness.
- **Harmonization and interoperability.** Ensuring frameworks for cooperation are nimble and comprehensive to address the full suite of technologies and associated norms that are critical to digital development.
- **Implementation and strategic alignment.** Avoiding an overlap of objectives and a duplication of resources, especially when efforts diverge in terms of implementation strategies.
- **Inclusion and digital divide.** Ensuring that the significant barriers to access that rural and underserved populations still face are the focus of digitalization efforts, as opposed to an outcome or side-effect.
- **Duration and timeframe.** Specifying the duration (short-term, long-term), defining success metrics (when can a project be considered “completed”), and adopting comprehensive timelines (for example, “digitalization to 2030”).
- **Scope and coverage.** Focusing efforts, attention, and resources on the GMS’s specific digitalization needs, priorities, and capabilities, as opposed to broader blocks such as the Asia and Pacific region or Southeast Asia.

2.3 Timeline

The action plan covers 3 years (2025–2027), a time frame that is expected to allow GMS policymakers and stakeholders to both implement initiatives and assess their on-the-ground effectiveness.

3. The GMS Digitalization Action Plan



Digital dynamism of GMS. A traveler uses his mobile phone to check travel restrictions and health and climate warnings in his destination country. Under the GMS Digital Action Plan, one recommendation is for the tourism sector to build mobile applications to collate and consolidate tourism-related solutions and services for visitors to GMS countries (photo by iStock.com/whitebalance.oatt).

Key Highlight

The action plan focuses on **five main entry points** drawn from an earlier identification of key barriers to digitalization of societies and economies in the GMS. They include:

- (i) Entry Point 1 – Planning and Strategy
- (ii) Entry Point 2 – Training and Capacity-Building
- (iii) Entry Point 3 – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation
- (iv) Entry Point 4 – Innovation and Piloting
- (v) Entry Point 5 – Cross-Cutting Activities

These entry points aim to **address the gaps, barriers, and challenges** in the way of digital systems, technologies, and services contributing to the well-being and empowerment of people, businesses, and governments in a resolutely digitalized global economy; while ensuring that the digital transformation of the economy is focused on **improving lives and securing livelihoods**.

3.1 Entry Points and Actions

The scoping study completed in late 2023 provided invaluable insights on the various gaps, challenges, strengths, and opportunities that the action plan would need to address and cover to ensure digitalization contributes to the economic prosperity of both GMS economies and the GMS as a whole.

As a result, the scoping study identified an initial selection of 11 key barriers determinant for the scope, scale, and pace of the digitalization of societies and economies in the GMS (Table 1). In March-April 2024, a first round of consultations with GMS experts, focals, and sectoral taskforce members highlighted the fact that many digitalization initiatives are already underway in the GMS region, and that many of them cut across these 11 key barriers.

Table 1: Main Digitalization Challenges Faced by GMS Economies

1.	Digital infrastructure and connectivity gaps
2.	Insufficient digital skills and inadequate education
3.	Limited access to digital financial services and digital identities
4.	Cybersecurity threats and data privacy concerns
5.	Non-harmonized regulatory frameworks and policies on digitalization
6.	Lack of trust due to environmental and sustainability concerns
7.	Unavailable, inaccessible, or unreliable digital government services
8.	Low digital inclusion and representation that lead to unequal access to opportunities
9.	Uncoordinated approaches to cross-border trade, commerce, and data movements
10.	Unsupported innovation and stunted entrepreneurship
11.	Insufficient transnational cooperation and regional collaboration

Source: ADB. 2023. Scoping Study: Formulating a Digitalization Action Plan for the GMS, not disseminated publicly.

These insights allowed the initial entry points to be grouped under targeted, outcomes-driven categories that aim for achievable and impactful results.

These insights allowed the initial entry points to be grouped under targeted, outcomes-driven categories that aim for achievable and impactful results. The action plan thus focuses on five main entry points that have been highlighted as essential to ensuring digitalization continues to deliver both short-term benefits and long-term outcomes for the GMS (Table 2).

Table 2: Revised and Refined List of Entry Points under the Action Plan Post-Consultation

Entry Point 1	Planning and Strategy Regional plans, strategies, and roadmaps that allow countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) to collectively and holistically plan and coordinate efforts for common objectives, outcomes, and results (i.e., a GMS Digital Agriculture Strategy to 2030)—structuring their efforts in a way that converges toward common objectives.
Entry Point 2	Training and Capacity Building Regional efforts that provide the skills, knowledge, and opportunities that are essential to design, implement, and sustain digital transformation across the value chain (i.e., digital skills capacitation for government employees of agricultural administrations).
Entry Point 3	Policy Dialogue and Cooperation Regional initiatives that prioritize the exchange of information, knowledge, and best practices in terms of policymaking in the digital age; this includes adjusting policies and regulations to the technical, financial, organizational, and institutional capabilities of GMS countries so that they can better implement regional initiatives.
Entry Point 4	Innovation and Piloting Regional efforts to design, plan, launch, support, and sustain innovative and impactful pilot programs and investment that have a transformative effect on the way sectors digitize and function, especially across jurisdictions within the GMS region (e.g., cross-border digital platforms, pilot smart farms, regional interoperability mechanisms, etc.)
Entry Point 5	Cross-Cutting Activities Regional activities and initiatives that can be undertaken or coordinated by the GMS Secretariat to facilitate the implementation of the <i>GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025–2027)</i> .

Note: These are initial entry points identified in the scoping study and have been refined and refocused through in-depth consultations to better address the needs of the stakeholders.

Source: GMS Secretariat.

For these five entry points, the action plan proposes the following 15 targeted actions specifically developed for the three sectors selected for this first stage of the Digitalization Action Plan (Table 3):

Table 3: Proposed Actions per Priority Sector under the Action Plan Post-Consultation

Agriculture	<p>Entry Point I – Planning and Strategy Digitalization at the Top of GMS Agricultural Priorities Expand and extend the upcoming GMS 2030 Kunming Strategic Framework for the Transformation of Agrifood Systems in the GMS, so that it covers and prioritizes digitalization issues and support the implementation of these initiatives.</p>
	<p>Entry Point II – Training & Capacity-Building Financial Inclusion Through Financial Literacy Training Launch localized and/or targeted training programs on digital and financial literacy to enhance rural and agricultural populations’ access to and usage of digital financing platforms and products (loans, insurance, accounts).</p>
	<p>Entry Point III – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation Events Around Interoperable Food Traceability Standards Launch roundtable events to discuss best practices and the way forward to make export and import digital standards more interoperable, enhancing the digital traceability of agricultural products across the GMS.</p>
	<p>Entry Point IV – Innovation and Piloting GMS Traceability and Early Warning System Develop and launch digital traceability pilot projects as part of a wider goal to establish a cross-border and collaborative digital warning system for agricultural authorities to communicate on multifaceted risks (e.g., sanitary risks for crops or cattle, climate and environmental risks, etc.).</p>
Tourism	<p>Entry Point I – Planning and Strategy GMS Tourism Strategy 2030 Drive and support the implementation of the Digital Transformation pillar of the upcoming updated <i>GMS Tourism Strategy 2030</i>.</p>
	<p>Entry Point II – Training and Capacity-Building GMS Train the Trainers Program on Digital Skills for Digital Tourism Work with regional knowledge and implementation partners (universities, think tanks, industry associations, private sector entities) to develop digital capacity-building and training programs that can be replicated locally.</p>
	<p>Entry Point III – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation Cross-Border Interoperability Launch cross-border dialogues and policy discussions on building cross-border linkages and interoperable digital systems (digital payments systems, QR codes for smart ticketing and information systems, etc.).</p>
	<p>Entry Point IV – Innovation and Piloting Digital platform and/or mobile application that promotes, facilitates, and supports tourism in the GMS Build a digital platform and/or mobile application to collate and consolidate a wide range of tourism-related solutions and services for visitors to GMS countries (major events, travel documents and requirements, travel restrictions, health and climate warnings, natural resources, sustainable options, accommodation, activities, and local and regional attractions).</p>

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Table 3 *continued*

Trade and Investment	<p>Entry Point I – Planning and Strategy GMS Digital Trade Strategy 2030 Support the implementation and operationalization of national plans and strategies for the digitalization of trade to find areas of convergence that may potentially become a comprehensive <i>GMS Digital Trade Strategy to 2030</i>.</p>
	<p>Entry Point II – Training and Capacity-Building Capacity-Building to Implement Digital Trade Launch regional training events that focus on capacity building for stakeholders and decision-makers in charge of the design and implementation of digital trade and trade digitalization, including government agencies and trade industry groups.</p>
	<p>Entry Point III – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation Multi-stakeholder Coordination for Digital Trade Launch a series of regular policy dialogue and/or knowledge-sharing events, ideally twice a year, to tackle pressing issues (harmonization of sanitary and phytosanitary standards across the GMS, creating interconnected, transparent, and responsive supply chain ecosystems across the GMS, facilitate the interoperability of paperless trade systems across the GMS, security of digital trade, promote the application of digitalization of trade documents, facilitate cooperation on standards regarding trade digitalization, etc.).</p>
	<p>Entry Point IV – Innovation and Piloting Integration of Advanced Technologies Develop a digital platform (website, mobile application) that compiles and indexes all cross-border digital trade enablers and stakeholders (including but not limited to single window systems, e-payment, e-certifications, and paperless/e-invoicing/e-bill of lading measures) across GMS economies; provide an interactive module for trade officials that identifies harmonization gaps in a comparative manner; accelerate digital transformation at border-crossing points by incorporating these systems.</p>
Entry Point V Cross-Cutting Activities	<p>Statistical index for long-term monitoring of digitalization efforts Develop and launch a digitalization readiness assessment methodology that quantifies and tracks the progress made by GMS economies in their digitalization efforts, with a wide range of digitalization and integration indicators (including connectivity measures such as the speed, cost, and accessibility of internet infrastructure).</p>
	<p>Institutional arrangements for long-term implementation and coordination Support the digitalization activities and initiatives launched by the upcoming Innovation Task Force, ensuring it has the mandate and the resources to oversee and coordinate all digitalization endeavors across the GMS and facilitate cooperation across national and regional focals, working groups, and other experts and stakeholders.</p>
	<p>Internal coordination and external cooperation on major digitalization issues and challenges Launch a series of regularly scheduled events and dialogues to exchange knowledge and best practices with digitalization stakeholders, possibly in partnership with other multilateral organizations (with a focus on those that GMS economies are members of, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, World Bank).</p>

Source: GMS Secretariat.

3.2 Implementation Details

While all 15 of these actions are equally important for the balanced and sustainable digitalization of GMS economies, they differ in two fundamental ways:

- They cannot all target the broad digitalization of the economy, nor should they attempt to; some of the actions are better suited to elevate certain priority sectors, while others serve a much more crosscutting function.
- They cannot all be implemented in the same manner, nor should they be expected to; some of the actions can be launched quickly, while others require other elements to be in place before being deployed. Likewise, some of the actions will yield results relatively soon, while others will take time to have a visible and measurable impact.

The entry points and actions presented here are the product of an iterative process involving thorough consultations with diverse stakeholders during the months of May and June 2024.¹¹

The entry points and actions presented in the Action Plan are the product of an iterative process involving thorough consultations with various GMS stakeholders.

Table 4 provides details on the main actions that GMS economies could implement to drive and support the digitalization of their economies. It also includes an overview of the proposed sub-activities that each of the 15 actions may entail, as well as some proposed timeframes that could be used to track and assess their progress and impact over time.

¹¹ See section 4 for more details on the key dates and milestones of the consultation process.

Table 4: Detailed Breakdown of Proposed Actions and Sub-Activities for the GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025-2027)

AGRICULTURE				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
<p>Entry Point I – Planning and Strategy</p> <p>Digitalization at the Top of GMS Agricultural Priorities</p>	<p>Expand and extend the upcoming <i>2030 Strategy for the Transformation of Agri-Food Systems in the GMS</i> so that it covers and prioritizes digitalization issues, and support the implementation of these initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage and support the launch of national agricultural digitalization strategies within GMS economies, with technical and expert support from ADB, and/or the GMS Secretariat where relevant. Leverage national digitalization strategies to find convergence and divergence points and use these to support the implementation of digitalization initiatives within the upcoming <i>2030 Strategy for the Transformation of Agri-Food Systems in the GMS</i>. Integrate digitalization into the regional agricultural policy framework, setting guidelines for data governance, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure standards. Set the foundations for a regional, voluntary digital reporting and compliance mechanism for agricultural projects that is based on ongoing national efforts. 	<p>Short (6–12 months)</p>	<p>ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework and Strategic Plan of Action on Food Security encourages the use of digital technology in achieving food security goals, such as digital tools for market access, supply chain management, and precision farming.</p>
<p>Entry Point II – Training and Capacity-Building</p> <p>Financial Inclusion Through Financial Literacy Training</p>	<p>Launch localized and/or targeted training programs on digital and financial literacy to enhance rural and agricultural populations’ access to and usage of digital financing platforms and products (loans, insurance, accounts).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create user-friendly online learning platforms specifically designed for rural and agricultural users, emphasizing simplicity and ease of use. These platforms should offer modules on digital literacy, financial literacy, and how to navigate digital financing platforms. Use digital financial literacy as an entry-level training subject that can yield results as a first step, where relevant or possible, combine or extend the training to other key digitalization topics/issues (i.e., smart agriculture, sensors, AI, robotics, digital platforms, data governance, etc.). 	<p>Long (18–36 months)</p>	<p>Strategy for Promoting Safe and Environment-Friendly Agro-Based Value Chains in the GMS and Siem Reap Action Plan, 2018 – 2022 Output 3</p> <p>3.1 Develop agribusiness incubators in the GMS that are focused on growing start-up and innovative SMEs for SEAP, including physical entities that nurture the growth of small and medium-sized agro-enterprises through access to finance.</p>

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Table 4 continued

AGRICULTURE			
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer training materials in local languages and dialects to overcome language barriers, using cultural references familiar to the rural population to increase relatability and comprehension. • Facilitate the creation of digital forums and communities where rural and agricultural users can share experiences, challenges, and tips on using digital financial services. • Form collaborations with local government units, NGOs, and civil society organizations and agricultural extension support services to offer consistent support and engagement with agricultural and rural users, ensuring the longer-term viability and sustainability of engagements. • Develop train-the-trainers programs so that the knowledge and information generated by such programs can be easily and effectively spread to as many people as possible in rural areas (better reach in local languages and through local organizations, etc.). • Include public sector workers, government officials, and the civil service in training, skilling, and/or capacitation activities so that they gain the knowledge and skills that will allow them to implement and sustain digitalization activities. 	<p>Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented</p> <p>ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry 2015–2025 <i>Strategic Thrust 5</i></p> <p>5.1 Assist small-scale producers and SMEs in the FAF sector to become viable and competitive enterprises by provision of better technology, inputs, finance, and extension services, access to higher value markets.</p> <p>5.3 Provide credit, insurance, market information, quality control and certification facilities to enable small-scale producers and SMEs to comply with food safety and quality standards in both domestic and foreign markets.</p> <p>Complementarity: Digital financing platforms are widely known to make financial services accessible for traditionally underserved populations, thus directly targeting financial inclusion outcomes for agricultural and rural users, complementing both GMS and ASEAN strategies above. However, access to these platforms depends on digital access and literacy, which can be bolstered by capacity building.</p>
<p>Entry Point III – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation</p> <p>Events Around Interoperable Food Traceability Standards</p>	<p>Launch roundtable events to discuss best practices and the way forward to make export-import digital standards more interoperable, enhancing the digital traceability of agricultural products across the GMS.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a permanent forum allowing recurrent roundtable events and dialogues, to ensure longer-term sustained cooperation and multilateral engagement. • Identify a comprehensive list of stakeholders involved in the agriculture supply chain, including government regulatory bodies, farmers’ associations, agribusiness companies, tech providers, and trade organizations. 	<p>Medium (12–18 months)</p> <p>Strategy for Promoting Safe and Environment-Friendly Agro-Based Value Chains in the GMS and Siem Reap Action Plan, 2018–2022 <i>Output 1</i></p> <p>1.1 Harmonize standards related to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) good practices for crops, livestock, and aquaculture; (ii) food safety and quality assurance; (iii) certification and accreditation agencies; (iv) quarantine procedures; (v) surveillance systems and laboratories.

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Table 4 continued

AGRICULTURE				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The agenda for such events could include the presentation of demonstrations of technologies and/or best policy practices that can potentially aid in achieving interoperable digital standards and enhanced traceability. Conduct workshops focusing on specific aspects of digital traceability, such as technology adoption, data privacy, and compliance with international standards. Policy discussions could also include the development of national digitalization strategies for agriculture. 		<p>GMS Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security Program Output 2: Key outputs include the adoption of harmonized crop and livestock safety and quality systems, through platforms to aid information exchange, coordination, and food risk communication strategies.</p> <p>GMS Core Agriculture Support Program Phase II Pillar 1: Building global competitiveness by promoting food safety and modernizing agricultural trade through harmonized food safety standards and system; paper free trade and IT traceability systems.</p> <p>ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry 2015–2025 Strategic Thrust 2 2.2 Harmonize accreditation, inspection and certification so that uniform requirements will prevail ASEAN-wide, enabling the recognition of equivalence. 2.3 Streamline and improve quarantine systems and procedures and harmonize standards and regulations.</p> <p>Complementarity: Food safety and quality concerns have been consistently identified to be among the challenges to the agricultural sector in the GMS across all associated strategies, ranging from the lack of harmonized safety and quality assurance systems to transboundary animal diseases. This action aligns directly with the outputs many strategies set out to achieve, fostering support through policy coordination and collaboration.</p>

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Table 4 continued

AGRICULTURE				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
<p>Entry Point IV – Innovation and Piloting</p> <p>GMS Traceability and Early Warning System</p>	<p>Develop and launch digital traceability pilot projects as part of a wider goal to establish a cross-border and collaborative digital warning system for agricultural authorities to communicate on multifaceted risks (e.g., sanitary risks for crops and cattle, climate and environmental risks, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform detailed assessments to understand the specific risk communication needs of agricultural stakeholders across borders, particularly prioritizing inputs gathered through regular stakeholder consultations. Build upon stakeholder engagements with country representatives and technical experts to develop common data exchange protocols and define common technical specifications for digital traceability pilot projects (including digital reporting mechanisms and data sharing policies across authorities), ensuring interoperability with existing agricultural and meteorological data systems across the GMS countries. This endeavor would be coordinated, hosted, and managed by ADB or the GMS Secretariat. Pilot the use of technologies such as blockchain, IoT sensors, and mobile applications to enhance traceability in food production, processing, and distribution, allowing for the real-time monitoring and identification of potential hazards. The development of such pilots or platforms is a complex, long-term endeavor, but it can be built step-by-step if it leverages existing initiatives as a basis (e.g., ongoing bilateral/trilateral frameworks on durian and dragon fruit trade). Leverage existing regional initiatives and partnerships, such as the ASEAN Rapid Alert System for Food and Feed, to streamline development, operationalization, and implementation of the pilot project. This endeavor would be coordinated, hosted, and managed by ADB or the GMS Secretariat. Organize initial live demonstrations of the pilot through smaller-scale demonstrations in food items and districts within the GMS, before scaling up to policy events and larger locales across the GMS. 	<p>Medium (12-18 months)</p>	<p>Strategy for Promoting Safe and Environment-Friendly Agro-Based Value Chains in the GMS and Siem Reap Action Plan, 2018–2022 Output 2</p> <p>Activity 2.2 Develop border livestock disease control zones. To support this action, various forms of supporting infrastructure include risk-based surveillance systems.</p> <p>GMS Core Agriculture Support Program</p> <p>Pillar 2: Promoting climate-friendly agriculture via a market-based strategy to ensure food security through carbon financing, climate-resilient farming systems, and weather-based insurance system.</p> <p>ASEAN Cooperation in Food, Agriculture and Forestry 2015–2025</p> <p><i>Strategic Thrust 4:</i> To increase resilience to climate change, natural disasters, and other shocks.</p> <p>4.3 To build competencies, share information, technologies, and assistance packages with a focus on small scale producers.</p> <p>Complementarity:</p> <p>With many agricultural export value chains closely intertwined across the GMS, risks relating to livestock sanitation, climate and institution are likely to result in exponential impacts on subsequent products down the value chain. To ensure food security and supply chain resilience across agricultural value chains, an early-warning system allows relevant authorities to preemptively act on imminent risks.</p>

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Table 4 continued

TOURISM				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
<p>Entry Point I – Planning and Strategy</p> <p>GMS Tourism Strategy 2030</p>	<p>Drive and support the implementation of the digital transformation pillar of the upcoming <i>GMS Tourism Strategy 2030</i> (once completed in August 2024).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an economic impact analysis of the digitalization priorities outlined in the <i>GMS Tourism Strategy 2030</i>, and assess potential implementation gaps. Review current and upcoming national tourism strategies (e.g., Cambodia’s upcoming national strategy) and assess areas of divergence and convergence for the development of an aligned and inclusive Implementation Roadmap. Drive and support the <i>GMS Tourism Strategy 2030</i> by developing an Implementation Roadmap for the Digital Transformation pillar, including key areas on emerging technologies (AI governance, cybersecurity, digital payments/IDs, IoT, etc.). Develop compendium of international best practices and case studies in the implementation of innovative and transformative digital initiatives in the tourism sector. Establish digital reporting and compliance mechanisms for tourism projects. 	<p>Short (6–12 months)</p>	<p>Building on the <i>GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025</i> and aligning with the <i>GMS Regional Investment Framework 2023–2025</i>, two documents that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pursue and extend or sustain strategic regional activities to 2030. Prioritize activities and structure new objectives.
<p>Entry Point II – Training and Capacity-Building</p> <p>GMS Train the Trainers Program on Digital Skills for Digital Tourism</p>	<p>Work with regional knowledge and implementation partners (universities, think tanks, industry associations, private sector entities) to develop digital capacity-building and training programs that can be replicated locally.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perform a comprehensive assessment to identify digital skill gaps and training needs specific to the tourism sector in the GMS. Conduct a gaps assessment study on the barriers and challenges faced by past and existing train-the-trainers tourism programs; in parallel, collate international best practices and case studies exemplifying success factors. Build on the experience of hackathons conducted around the region to launch similar events or experiences across different technologies for tourism (AI, cybersecurity, fintech, digital IDs, virtual reality, etc.). 	<p>Medium (12–18 months)</p>	<p>GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025, <i>Strategic Direction 1 on Human Resource Development</i>:</p> <p>1.1 Implementing regional skills standards, including ASEAN Common Competency Standards for Tourism Professionals;</p> <p>1.2 Capacity building for public officials to implement policies, programs, and projects that engender sustainable destination development;</p> <p>1.3 Strengthening Tourism Enterprise Support Services to improve business development advice and training for SMEs.</p>

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Table 4 continued

TOURISM				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
Entry Point III – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation Cross-Border Interoperability	<p>Launch cross-border dialogues and policy discussions, ideally biannually or quarterly, on building cross-border linkages and interoperable digital systems (digital payments systems, QR codes for smart ticketing and information systems, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify expert partners in key tech areas (universities, think tanks, industry associations, corporations, banks, start-ups) and initiate engagement to design training programs on digital technologies, tourism management, and adult education. Develop a modular curriculum focused on digital skills for tourism, including digital marketing, online booking systems, virtual tour technologies, and customer relationship management systems. Ensure the curriculum can be adapted for different local contexts and languages and is continually updated according to the needs of the tourism sector. Regional training courses should target local communities and local tourism stakeholders particularly in remote areas. 		<p>ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016–2025 SD 1.4 Raising Capacity and Capability of Human Capital</p> <p>Complementarity: Insufficient finance and limited skills needed to design and manage smart tourism solutions, particularly for MSMEs to adopt digital marketing solutions in tandem with the accompanying transition to smart tourism. Aligns strongly with regional strategies of promoting tourism-specific skills, ranging from skills standards to digital skill development.</p>
	<p>Launch cross-border dialogues and policy discussions, ideally biannually or quarterly, on building cross-border linkages and interoperable digital systems (digital payments systems, QR codes for smart ticketing and information systems, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for the accelerated harmonization of regulatory frameworks for cross-border digital transactions and payments. Suggest frameworks that advance and strengthen interoperability and standardization for digital transactions and identities systems. Finance or support initiatives aimed specifically at improving and sustaining digital payment infrastructure. Promote the adoption and development of digital automated entry clearance systems, including the applications of QR code immigration clearance at busy and congested borders. Encourage bilateral dialogues and events around initiatives aimed at developing and implementing digital solutions to streamline border-crossing processes, especially between countries that share a physical border. 	<p>GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025, <i>Strategic Direction 5 on Facilitating Regional Travel</i></p> <p>5.1 Advocating implementation of air services agreement; 5.2 Address tourist visa policy gaps through the expansion of visa-on-arrival eligibility and visa exemption schemes; 5.3 Improving border facilities and management through information technology upgrades such as improving border management, enabling single-window passenger and vehicle clearance.</p> <p>ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016–2025 SD 1.5 Implement and expand ASEAN Tourism Standards for facilities, services, and destinations; SD 1.6 Implement and expand connectivity and destination infrastructure; SD 1.7 Enhance travel facilitation.</p>	<p>Short (6–12 months)</p>

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Table 4 continued

TOURISM				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
<p>Entry Point IV–Innovation and Piloting</p> <p>Digital platform and/or mobile application that promotes, facilitates, and supports tourism in the GMS</p>	<p>Build a digital platform and/or mobile application to collate and consolidate a wide range of tourism-related solutions and services for visitors to GMS countries (major events, travel documents and requirements, travel restrictions, health and climate warnings, natural resources, sustainable options, accommodation, activities, local and regional attractions).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct a gaps assessment study of the GMS tourism website mekongtourism.org; provide recommendations based on best practices for improvements on usability, accessibility, structure, and content. Conduct an analytical review of existing single-stop and regional platforms and applications for tourism, including national initiatives (i.e., ‘Travel to Guangxi in One Click’); and regional initiatives (i.e., ‘Six Countries One Destination’); identify gaps, barriers, challenges, synergies, as well as success factors. Organize live demonstrations of the platform’s features and functionalities for visitors through roadshows and policy events across the GMS. Initiate and support discussions with stakeholders to discuss the collective and bilateral measures that would be needed to extend the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Visa Exemption to the PRC (including the adoption and development of digital automated entry clearance systems). 	<p>Medium (12–18 months)</p>	<p>Complementarity: In general, the fragmentation in standard operating procedures, practices, and incompatible digital technologies across countries can inhibit the development of a smart tourism ecosystem development.</p> <p>This action aligns strongly with existing regional strategies on facilitating seamless and smooth regional travel across GMS countries, while targeting the absence of interoperable payment methods in these strategies that are nonetheless integral to promoting greater regional travel.</p> <p>GMS Tourism Sector Strategy 2016–2025, Strategic Direction 5 on Facilitating Regional Travel</p> <p>5.2 Address tourist visa policy gaps by widening the availability and ease of obtaining an electronic tourist visa;</p> <p>5.3 Improve border facilities and management to improve passenger and vehicle clearance efficiency, safety, and security.</p> <p>ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan 2016–2025 SD 1.7 Enhance Travel Facilitation.</p> <p>Complementarity: This action aligns strongly with regional strategies that look to improve the efficiency, ease, and affordability of passengers and vehicles at borders and checkpoints, wherein restrictive visa policies and cumbersome customs processes can deter travel.</p> <p>In particular, the ASEAN Tourism Strategic Plan looks beyond regional travel to expand multiple entry e-visa to non-ASEAN countries to further position ASEAN as a price competitive destination.</p>

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TRADE & INVESTMENT				
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
<p>Entry Point I – Planning and Strategy</p> <p>GMS Digital Trade Strategy 2030</p>	<p>Support the implementation and operationalization of national plans and strategies for the digitalization of trade to find areas of convergence that may potentially become a comprehensive <i>GMS Digital Trade Strategy to 2030</i>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage and support the launch of national trade digitalization strategies within GMS economies, including the GMS Cooperation Framework on Digitalization of Trade Documents. • Leverage national digitalization strategies to find convergence and divergence points and leverage these to develop a regionwide GMS strategy for the trade sector. • Integrate digitalization into the regional trade policy framework, setting guidelines for data governance, cybersecurity, and digital infrastructure standards. • Establish voluntary and collective digital reporting and compliance mechanisms for trade-related projects. 	<p>Short (6–12 months)</p>	<p>This action goes towards complementing the GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategic Framework 2030; Under Pillar 3, modernizing customs; establishing sanitary and phytosanitary regulations; strengthen links to the private sector; and support the development of e-commerce platforms in the subregion.</p>
<p>Entry Point II – Training and Capacity-Building</p> <p>Capacity-Building to Implement Digital Trade</p>	<p>Launch regional training events that focus on capacity-building for stakeholders and decision-makers in charge of the design and implementation of digital trade and trade digitalization, including government agencies and trade industry groups.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify all key stakeholders involved in digital trade, including government officials, trade associations, industry representatives, and civil society organizations and initiate dialogue with them. • Survey stakeholders to pinpoint specific knowledge gaps and training needs related to design and implementation of digital trade. • Based on the assessment, create a curriculum that covers fundamental knowledge, digital skilling, use of digital platforms and services, digital trade infrastructure, legal and regulatory frameworks, and best practices in digital trade, including trade facilitation metrics such as time release studies. • Build on the experience of hackathons conducted around the region to launch similar events and experiences across different technologies across trade and investment (AI, cybersecurity, digital IDs, etc.). 	<p>Medium (12–18 months)</p>	<p>ASEAN Digital Integration Framework Action Plan: DIFAP has initiatives focused on digital trade, e-commerce, and enhancing the digital ecosystem. The training and capacity-building activities in the program aim to equip decision-makers with the necessary tools and knowledge to implement effective digital trade policies and practices.</p> <p>Complementarity: The action aligns directly with the ASEAN DIFAP to ensure that policymakers and relevant stakeholders directly involved in implementing digital trade are well equipped with the necessary digital skills and knowledge to enact informed, forward-looking and sustainable digital trade policies.</p>

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TRADE & INVESTMENT			
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe
<p>Entry Point III – Policy Dialogue and Cooperation</p> <p>Multi-stakeholder Coordination for Digital Trade</p>	<p>Launch a series of regular policy dialogue/ knowledge-sharing events, ideally twice a year, to tackle pressing issues (harmonization of sanitary and phytosanitary standards (SPS) across the GMS, creating interconnected, transparent, and responsive supply chain ecosystems across the GMS, facilitate the interoperability of paperless trade systems across the GMS, security of digital trade, promote application of digitalization of trade documents, facilitate cooperation on standards regarding trade digitalization, etc.).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and engage a broad range of stakeholders, including government agencies, trade associations, businesses, technology providers, and NGOs, academic representatives to participate and contribute to the dialogues. Collaborate with regional and international organizations that have expertise in trade facilitation, digital transformation, and policy advocacy to enhance the quality and reach of the events, while ensuring that synergies align with higher-level coordination with existing cooperation frameworks such as ASEAN and ASEAN- People’s Republic of China. Encourage and support GMS stakeholders to engage in advocacy efforts for the adoption of harmonized standards, improved supply chain connectivity, and digital trade facilitation measures. 	<p>Short (6–12 months)</p>
			<p>Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented</p> <p>ASEAN Business Advisory Council: The ASEAN-BAC facilitates private sector feedback and input into the economic policymaking process of ASEAN. Regular meetings and dialogues between business leaders and policymakers help align business interests with trade and investment policies.</p> <p>ASEAN Solutions for Investment, Services, and Trade: This is a nonbinding, consultative mechanism for the expedited resolution of operational issues encountered by ASEAN-based enterprises engaged in cross-border trade. It facilitates dialogue between the private sector and government agencies.</p> <p>GMS Transport and Trade Facilitation Action Program: <i>Core Area 4: Strengthening Capacities of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agencies</i> Activity 11: Strengthening capacities of SPS agencies; Activity 12: Improving cooperation and coordination between SPS agencies and Customs administrations in the GMS.</p> <p>Complementarity: The differences in SPS institutional frameworks, capacities, and standards across GMS economies have been a barrier in participation in export value chains, cumulating in high costs of compliance. By facilitating policy dialogue to harmonize these standards, this action contributes directly to the realization of the above objectives.</p>

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TRADE & INVESTMENT			
Entry Point	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe
<p>Entry Point IV – Innovation and Piloting</p> <p>Integration of Advanced Technologies</p>	<p>Develop a digital platform (website, mobile application) that compiles and indexes all cross-border digital trade enablers and stakeholders (including but not limited to single window systems, e-payment, e-certifications, and paperless/e-invoicing /e-bill of lading measures) across GMS economies; provide an interactive module for trade officials that identifies harmonization gaps in a comparative manner; accelerate digital transformation at border-crossing points by incorporating these systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Survey existing digital trade facilities, identify gaps in information sharing, and gather user requirements for a digital platform. Create AI algorithms to efficiently compile, index, and update information on digital trade and trade digitalization enablers from diverse sources and in varying formats. Collect detailed information on existing digital trade enablers across the GMS, including documentation requirements, procedural guides, and contact points. Organize live demonstrations of the pilot through roadshows and policy events across the GMS; use these on-the-ground events to raise awareness and advocate for palpable change. Fast-track the operationalization of digitalization initiatives at the relevant borders and provide adequate training to the staff therein. Encourage and support GMS stakeholders to engage in digital trade related fairs and expos. Explore opportunities for investment projects in digital infrastructure, to advance connectivity and narrow the digital divide for facilitating trade digitalization. 	<p>Medium (12–18 months)</p>
			<p>Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented</p> <p>GMS Cross-Border E-Commerce Cooperation Platform: This platform aims to enhance e-commerce development through the policy dialogue and cooperation among the GMS member economies, focusing on issues like digital payment systems and e-commerce regulations.</p> <p>Complementarity: The harmonization of digital trade enablers is critical in streamlining trade processes and deepening digital trade integration across GMS economies. The use of advanced technologies in informing best practices helps to strengthen digital infrastructure and facilitate cross-border e-commerce, as set out in the GMS Cross-Border E-Commerce Cooperation Platform.</p>

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CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES				
Area	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
Statistical index for long-term monitoring of digitalization efforts	Develop and launch a digitalization readiness assessment methodology that tracks the progress made by GMS economies in their digitalization efforts, with a wide range of digitalization and integration indicators (including connectivity measures such as the speed, cost, and accessibility of internet infrastructure).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect relevant/available datasets that accurately reflect the state of digitalization of GMS economies; work with ADB and GMS statisticians to gather and harmonize datasets. Develop a framework and/or methodology that provides an effective overview of digitalization. This tool shall not be used to evaluate GMS countries or their performance, but to provide an accurate picture of the digitalization process over time, as well as to identify any barriers and/or challenges that may not otherwise be visible. Assess and track changes over time to best identify gaps, barriers, strengths, and opportunities, with findings to be used for monitoring and effectiveness purposes. GMS countries shall not be ranked or compared using the statistics; the data will be used as an evidence-based policymaking tool only. Formulate and adjust digitalization approaches based on the quantitative evidence. 	Long (18–36 months)	<p>Some existing quantitative methodologies that could be leveraged as benchmarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN Digital Integration Index WBA Digital Inclusion Benchmark World Bank Digital Adoption Index Portulans Network Readiness Index WEF Global Competitiveness Index WEF Smart Industry Readiness Index
Institutional arrangements for long-term implementation and coordination	Support the digitalization activities and initiatives launched by the upcoming Innovation Task Force, ensuring it has the mandate and the resources to oversee and coordinate all digitalization endeavors across the GMS; and facilitate cooperation across national and regional focals, working groups, and other experts and stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help define the task force's roles and responsibilities on digitalization-related initiatives, ensuring consistency and complementarities with existing working groups (including the Working Group on Innovation) and avoid overlap or duplication of efforts and resources. The role of the task force will be to coordinate the implementation of action plan activities and to support GMS countries as they overcome implementation challenges and barriers; not to evaluate the performance of countries. 	Short (6–12 months)	

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CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES				
Area	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work closely with ADB and GMS stakeholders to ensure alignment with existing and upcoming GMS strategies (<i>GMS Innovation Strategy, GMS Economic Cooperation Program Strategy 2030, Regional Investment Framework 2023-2025</i>, etc.) and to avoid overlap or duplication of efforts and resources. Ensure there is adequate representation of national agencies in charge of digitalization, as well as of sector experts and bodies; ensure the task force promotes and integrates the digitalization agenda into other discussions and events. Explore ways in which the task force can prioritize and allocate resources for digitalization initiatives through related pipelines such as the Regional Investment Framework, to allow for greater alignment between regional and national planning and generate new sources of financing. Explore partnership and collaboration initiatives that the task force can initiate and sustain with development partners (including the World Bank, AIIB, Government of Japan, Government of the Republic of Korea, the Government of Luxembourg, etc.). 		

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CROSS-CUTTING ACTIVITIES				
Area	Action	Sub-Activities	Timeframe	Existing initiatives/strategies that can be leveraged or complemented
Internal coordination and external cooperation on major digitalization issues and challenges	Launch a series of regularly scheduled events and dialogues to exchange knowledge and best practices with digitalization stakeholders, possibly in partnership with other multilateral organizations (with a focus on those that GMS economies are members of, such as ASEAN, APEC, AIIB, World Bank).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch internal coordination events for GMS experts, specialists, and stakeholders to exchange knowledge and best practices on digitalization strategies and approaches. Identify key multilateral organizations (and key bodies and agencies within them) that should be approached for knowledge- and experience-sharing framework. Launch external cooperation events to discuss and identify common and converging digitalization priority areas. Develop a mechanism for the systematic alignment of objectives, activities, and outcomes. 	Long (18–36 months)	<p>Some organizations/bodies that could be contacted in a first wave of coordination efforts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (negotiators); ASEAN sectoral plans, strategies, road maps; APEC Digital Economy Steering Group; AIIB Digital Infrastructure Sector Strategy.

ADB = Asian Development Bank; AI = artificial intelligence; AIIB = Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank; APEC = Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation; ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations; BAC = Business Advisory Council; DIFAP = Digital Integration Framework Action Plan; FAF = Food, Agriculture, and Forestry; GMS = Greater Mekong Subregion; IOT = Internet of Things; MSME = micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises; NGO = nongovernment organization; SEAP = safe and environment-friendly agriculture products; SME = small and medium-sized enterprises; SPS = sanitary and phytosanitary; WBA = World Benchmarking Alliance; WEF = World Economic Forum.

Source: GMS Secretariat.

Greater Mekong Subregion Digitalization Action Plan (2025–2027)

The digitalization of societies and economies of the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) offers unique opportunities for supporting inclusive growth, enhancing competitiveness, and addressing environmental challenges. With a young, tech-savvy population, the subregion is well-positioned to leverage digital advancements for economic development and improved quality of life. The GMS Digitalization Action Plan (2025–2027) provides a framework for promoting regional cooperation in digitalization and includes a set of actions and initiatives to deliver both immediate and long-term benefits across three sectors of the GMS Program—agriculture, tourism, and trade and investment. By fostering capacity building, policy dialogue, and innovative pilot programs, the plan supports GMS governments in their goal of becoming a digitally advanced subregion.

About the Greater Mekong Subregion Economic Cooperation Program

The Greater Mekong Subregion is made up of Cambodia, the People’s Republic of China (specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. In 1992, with assistance from the Asian Development Bank and building on their shared histories and cultures, the six countries of the GMS launched a program of subregional economic cooperation—the GMS Program—to enhance their economic relations. The GMS Program covers the following priority sectors: agriculture, energy, environment, health, tourism, transport, trade and investment facilitation, and urban development.



GMS SECRETARIAT

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