USAID | RDMA

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION STRATEGY (RDCS)

DECEMBER 2020 – DECEMBER 2025

Original Cover Page Art by Suphasuk Pradubsuk, Ph.D., Program Development Specialist

Description: Lotus – the flower of life. The painting of a fully bloomed lotus represents an enlightened quality in USAID's program cycle and RDMA's ability to co-create solutions with key stakeholders to address transnational challenges. Each petal meaningfully depicts the combination of various activities under RDMA's Regional Development Objectives, and the golden pollen center symbolizes human well-being and achievements. Together we are much like the lotus, whose roots start in the muddy earth, self-regenerate and rise up through the water to the sun.

Table of Contents

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A&A	Acquisition and Assistance
AMP	Award Management Practicum
AOR/COR	Agreement Officer's Representative/ Contracting Officer's Representative
ARTC	Asia Regional Training Center
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian States
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CLA	Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CTIP	Countering Trafficking in Persons
DFC	U.S. International Development Finance Corporation
EDGE	Enhancing Development and Growth through Energy
EPPR	Effective Partnering and Procurement Reform
FSN	Foreign Service National
FSNC	Foreign Service National Committee
FSR	Financing Self-Reliance
FY	Fiscal Year
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GID	Gender and Inclusive Development
GMS	Greater Mekong Subregion
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IR	Intermediate Result
ITAN	Infrastructure Transaction and Assistance Network
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated
J2SR	Journey to Self-Reliance
KOICA	Korea International Cooperation Agency
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersexed
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MSM	Men who have sex with men
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPI	New Partnerships Initiative

NUP	New and Underutilized Partner
OU	Operating Unit
PEPFAR	President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRC	People's Republic of China
PSE	Private Sector Engagement
RDCS	Regional Development Cooperation Strategy
RDMA	Regional Development Mission for Asia
RDO	Regional Development Objective
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TICA	Thailand International Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government
USTDA	United States Trade and Development Agency

ASIA REGIONAL MAP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The priorities for USAID's Regional Development Mission for Asia (RDMA), as described in this five-year Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (RDCS), were founded upon the U.S. vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. To support these priorities of enhancing economic prosperity and ensuring peace and security in the region, RDMA will partner with regional organizations to address transboundary challenges in a manner that supports countries on their journeys to self-reliance (J2SR). With a laser focus on advancing U.S. priorities in the Indo-Pacific, RDMA's RDCS goal is <u>a more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia</u>.

A more "<u>resilient</u>" Southeast Asia is better prepared to respond to shocks and stressors including economic, environmental, demographic, health, and political factors. An "<u>inclusive</u>" Southeast Asia increases opportunities for marginalized and underrepresented populations to claim their voice, assert greater power, and demand more equitable and meaningful engagement in charting the region's development agenda. A "<u>secure</u>" Southeast Asia is manifested by a region free to choose its own development path and capable of resisting malevolent influences and manipulation. These three mutually reinforcing themes define a region with the capacity and commitment to determine its own development journey.

RDMA's goal of <u>a more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia</u> will be achieved through four regional development objectives, each of which focuses on regional programming (a distinction from the previous RDMA strategy). As a regional Mission, RDMA will not take a bilateral approach to J2SR. Instead, RDMA will engage at the regional level to advance U.S. priorities and support the enabling conditions for countries across the region to pursue their own self-reliance. To accomplish this, RDMA will take a three-pronged approach. First, RDMA will leverage its regional role to engage directly with like-minded counterparts to champion American values in multilateral forums. RDMA's engagement will interface with the formal and informal regimes, policies, organizations, and networks that exist at the regional plane, advancing fundamentally new mutually beneficial relationships and strengthening existing ones with partner countries. RDMA will collaborate with like-minded donors, such as Australia, Japan, Korea, and Thailand, as well as global and regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Asian Development Bank, and UN entities, to further inclusive and responsible investments for the region's development. Second, RDMA's programs will engage regionally, transcending domestic development challenges and creating the enabling environment for countries to pursue their own self-reliance. This programming will help activate agreements reached through RDMA's direct engagement in regional forums. Our regional programs will expand partnerships with other donors and regional organizations to advance shared values and mutual development objectives, particularly those around the Mekong-U.S. Partnership. As such, regional programs will serve to support and amplify USAID bilateral priorities, not to supplant or imitate them. Third, RDMA will encourage aspiring, like-minded partners, such as Thailand, by elevating

their role within the region and co-designing programs focused on trilateral cooperation. This will serve as an important counterweight to authoritarian influence within the region. In summary, RDMA will convene like-minded stakeholders; muster and mobilize regional resources; marshal transborder, regional attention and action; assemble, share, and promote transnational best practices and experience; and engage aspiring, like-minded partners to elevate their role within Southeast Asia.

By promoting regional cooperation to advance American influence, RDMA's regional development objectives will contribute to the National Security Strategy and goals two and three of the Joint Strategic Plan. Furthermore, RDMA's efforts will prioritize alignment with other U.S. Government priorities and initiatives, including the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security, the Declaration of Principles for the International Religious Freedom Alliance, and the Mekong-U.S. Partnership.

Representing a more narrowed geographic focus as compared to the previous strategy,[1] RDMA's core geographic coverage is Southeast Asia, with particular emphasis on the Lower Mekong subregion.[2] Addressing some USG strategic priorities, as outlined in this RDCS, may require extending beyond Southeast Asia.

The geographical breadth and diversity of this region present both significant development challenges and opportunities for regional programming. The Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis highlights several trends, including broadly lower scores on several criteria (e.g., Liberal Democracy, Open Government, Media Effectiveness, Export Sophistication) for the Lower Mekong subregion. In particular, Southeast Asia's regional context is framed by five interlinked challenges—inefficient economic integration, COVID-19 and emerging pandemic threats, strategic competition with PRC, resurgent authoritarianism, and weak collective approaches by stakeholders. These challenges—which derail a country's Journey to Self-Reliance—offer opportunities and form the foundation for the selection of RDMA's Regional Development Objectives (RDO).

---

[1] RDMA's 2014-2019 Regional Development Cooperation Strategy has a goal statement of "A More Sustainable, Inclusive, and Prosperous Asia, with Particular Emphasis on Southeast Asia."

[2] The Lower Mekong subregion countries include Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia. The Greater Mekong subregion includes the Lower Mekong countries + China. Southeast Asia includes the Lower Mekong countries and Indonesia, the Philippines and Timor-Leste.

THE GEOPOLITICAL CHESSBOARD

REGIONAL CONTEXT

GOAL	A more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia

RDO 1 Regional Collective Action to Defend Human Rights Increased	RDO 2 Regional Economic Connectivity Strengthened	RDO 3 Regional Environmental and Energy Systems Strengthened	RDO 4 Regional Response to Health Threats Improved
IR 1.1 Support for regional civil society networks strengthened	IR 2.1 Inclusive Digital Ecosystems Integrated Among Regional Stakeholders	IR 3.1 Security of Regional Energy Sector Increased	IR 4.1 Regional partnerships strengthened to address regional health threats
IR 1.2 Cross border protection of vulnerable populations harmonized	IR 2.2 Regional Supply Chains Are Better Prepared to Respond to Shocks	IR 3.2 Transnational Environmental Crime Reduced	IR 4.2 Health policy harmonization enhanced
IR 1.3 Public engagement with human rights issues increased	IR 2.3 High-Quality and Transparent Cross-Border Investments Promoted	IR 3.3 Regional Sustainable Natural Resource Management Strengthened	

The U.S. National Security Strategy, released in December 2017, recognizes that the most consequential challenge to U.S. and partner interests is the growing competition between free and repressive visions of the future international order. Authoritarian revisionist powers seek to advance their parochial interests at others' expense. Indo-Pacific nations face unprecedented challenges to their sovereignty, prosperity, and peace.[3] Within the Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia, home to more than 650 million people,[4] is one of the world's most culturally diverse and economically dynamic sub-regions. Over the past few decades, sustained economic growth and rapidly modernizing societies have transformed daily life for tens of millions of people, especially for a rising middle-class with its growing cultural and economic influence. According to one estimate, by 2022 Southeast Asia's middle-class will grow to more than 350 million people.[5] Additionally, by 2030 the number of affluent people in the region will surpass 130 million, with two-thirds under 40 years of age.[6] This economic success has resulted in, and is fed by, improved health, sanitation, education, and

---

[3] A Free and Open Indo-Pacific (2019)
[4] South Eastern Asia Population 2020 (Demographics, Maps, Graphs)
[5] The Rise of the Southeast Asian Tigers (2019)
[6] Beyond the "Crazy Rich": The Mass Affluent of Southeast Asia (2018)

housing infrastructure and outcomes across the region.[7] The general trend is for living standards to continue to rise, poverty to decline, and gender gaps between men and women to close.[8]

Despite the impressive data for the region as a whole, there are challenges inhibiting continued economic and social development. A significant obstacle is identifying shared transnational challenges and building consensus for regional collective action. For example, while some countries like Laos must contend with a sizable youth bulge[9] and lack of employment opportunities, others, such as Thailand and Vietnam, have rapidly aging populations and must make critical resource decisions in health, infrastructure, and natural resource management. The aging societies will also need to rely on unskilled, low, and medium skilled workers to fill key positions to sustain economic growth and to retrain workers in sectors where current employment will be made redundant by technology and innovation. A recent report by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime linked ageing populations and growing labor demand to irregular migration and trafficking in persons.[10] An individual country on its own may not sufficiently address the demographic migration challenge. Collective regional action, such as through ongoing ASEAN coordination on migration and other regional bodies, is required to manage population mobility in a manner that strengthens all countries involved and mitigates potential negative impacts.

Recent research warned of similar challenges that would require effective transnational responses. Examples included violent extremism, fed by porous borders and criminal enterprises,[11] such as wildlife trafficking; the threat of infectious diseases;[12,13] threats to religious freedom,[14] and the importance of regional cybersecurity[15] to protect privacy and counter threats. Many of these transnational challenges are exacerbated by income inequality, gender inequality, and social exclusion,[16] which are in turn shaped by ongoing environmental degradation and ineffective governance. Climate change is an ongoing risk to the region, with impacts being felt now that will intensify in the future. Unless the region manages climate change collectively, the development gains of recent decades will be lost. COVID-19 is also profoundly affecting the region, exacerbating and deepening these challenges while threatening Southeast Asia's short-term economic growth.[17]

As a key driver of global politics and economics, maintaining influence in Southeast Asia is critical to U.S. foreign policy goals related to national security and trade. Robust economic growth, rapid technological change, and increasing interconnectivity make the

---

[7] Public health and social progress (2019)

[8] USAID Regional Gender Analysis and Mapping for Southeast Asia (2019, 2020 Add.)

[9] USAID Regional Youth Empowerment Analysis (2019)

[10] Trafficking in persons from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar to Thailand (2017)

[11] Counternetwork: Countering the Expansion of Transnational Criminal Networks (2017)

[12] Lancet. 2011 Feb 12;377(9765):599-609. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(10)62004-1. Epub 2011 Jan 25.

[13] Strengths and Vulnerabilities in Southeast Asia's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020)

[14] Many Identities, Many Communities: Religious Freedom amidst Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia (2016)

[15] Regional Cybersecurity: Moving Toward a Resilient ASEAN Cybersecurity Regime (2014)

[16] Introduction: Inequality and Exclusion in Southeast Asia (2019)

[17] Southeast Asia dodged the worst of COVID-19, but the economic devastation may last for years (2020)

Asia-Pacific a progressively important market for U.S. exports.[18] Highlighting the importance of the region to

the United States, in November 2017 the President of the United States laid out America's vision for a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific region in which all nations are independent, strong, and prosperous.[19]

RDMA is poised to advance this vision, particularly in the Lower Mekong, and to engage with regional and global transnational bodies to support Southeast Asia's growth and social development, foster regional collective action to overcome transnational challenges, and amplify and augment USAID bilateral Missions' efforts as they work with partner countries to build a region of self-reliant nations.

JOURNEY TO SELF-RELIANCE

Southeast Asia has become a land of opportunity and prosperity for some people, with many countries in the region well advanced on their Journeys to Self-Reliance (J2SR). While still a developing democracy, Thailand is an exceptional example of this. However, individual nations' journeys to self-reliance have taken divergent economic, social, and political pathways.

Relative to other lower-to-middle income countries, the Regional J2SR East Asia Landscape Analysis of commitment and capacity reveals several key data points, reflecting both the broad economic strengths of Southeast Asia and identifying many of the most intractable problems in the Lower Mekong, including ongoing threats to liberal democracy and civil society, growing inequality and lack of social inclusion, and weak export sophistication.

However, while the roadmap captures many of the most pertinent variables, it does not measure the effect of transnational pressures on a country's J2SR. For example, the Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis does not reveal a country's capacity and commitment to effectively utilize regional and global forums to identify common issues, build consensus, develop solutions, mobilize resources, and then raise domestic support for implementation. These forums are critical to effectively addressing transboundary issues, such as climate change, rising levels of ethnonationalism across the region, infectious diseases, gender inequality, and transnational crime, among others.

---

[18] USAID/RDMA: Asia Regional Profile (2015)
[19] The Trump administration and the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (2020)

Table 1: Regional J2SR East Asia Landscape Analysis Trends

		Lower Mekong*	The Rest of Southeast Asia
Commitment	**Liberal Democracy**	▼	▲
	Open Government	▼	▲
	Economic Gender Gap	▲	▲
	Social Group Equality	▼	
	Business Environment	▲	▲
	Biodiversity and Habitat Protections	▲	▲
Capacity	**Safety & Security**	▲	▲
	Civil Society & Media Effectiveness	▼	▲
	Poverty Rate**	▼	▼
	ICT Adoption	▲	▲
	Export Sophistication	▼	

*Lower Mekong includes Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Myanmar
**Excludes Thailand and Vietnam

The snapshots highlighted in Table 1 emphasize several trends, particularly in the broad comparison between the Lower Mekong subregion and the other countries of Southeast Asia. However, RDMA also recognizes the data are national and do not always represent the regional perspective. For instance, the closing of space for civil society, highlighted above, is contributing to less transparency and inclusion within the region's natural resource governance space. Additionally, biodiversity and habitat protection policies within the region may be relatively strong on paper, but the implementation and enforcement of those policies (and protection of environmental defenders)[20] is unevenly applied and an area for RDMA to support from a regional perspective.

Similarly, while the score on the Economic Gender Gap placed Southeast Asia well above the global average, the reality demands a more nuanced understanding. In Southeast Asia, social and gender norms limit female empowerment in the economic and political sectors, women's access to capital, and women's ability to enter more skilled occupations, including in the STEM fields.[21] Almost all segments of the economy

---

[20] Global Witness records the highest number of land and environmental activists murdered in one year (2020)
[21] USAID Regional Gender Analysis and Mapping for Southeast Asia (2019, 2020 Add.)

(formal and informal) are characterized by occupational sex segregation and wage discrimination.[22] During a crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, women have had to shoulder a disproportionate burden of unpaid domestic care, suffer greater risks as they constitute the majority of healthcare workers, are at a heightened risk for gender-based violence, and have fewer social protections for job loss.[23] In addition, the concentration of women in the informal sector, with less access to technology and the Internet, means women are at risk of being excluded with the shift to virtual workspaces.[24] Other vulnerable groups, such as LGBTI and persons with disabilities, often live with social and economic insecurity and are at risk of increased violence and economic discrimination.

The Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis and other evidence indicate a region susceptible to political, environmental, economic, and health-related shocks and stressors. To augment the J2SR Landscape Analysis, RDMA further identified four interlinked challenges: inefficient economic integration, resurgent authoritarianism, COVID-19 and emerging pandemic threats, and weak collective approaches.

Inefficient Economic Integration: Southeast Asia has a $9 trillion economy (GDP(PPP)),[25] maintains close economic and political ties to the United States and is a growing hub for consumer demand. Nevertheless, it is the only sub-region in the Asia Pacific with worsening inequalities.[26,27] The growing inequality heightens gender-based violence and curtails access and opportunities for the most vulnerable populations across almost every sector. For example, digital technology—as evidenced by the strong ICT Adoption scores in the Landscape Analysis—has increased the risks young people, women, and religious and ethnic minorities face, through the creation of new platforms that enable bullying, hate speech, sexual abuse, exploitation, victimization, recruitment into trafficking, and radicalization to violence.[28] COVID-19 has exacerbated all of this.[29] These inequalities are due to inefficient economic integration, reflected in incongruent and disharmonized regional economic systems and structures, threatening regional resiliency and fueling inequitable economic growth.

Regional integration creates winners and losers, notably within countries. Policies and institutions are needed to ensure that regionalism is inclusive and achieved in a way that manages social, environmental, and governance risks.[30] Closely linked to environmental degradation, social and political upheaval, and slower economic growth, inequality also shapes susceptibility: the most vulnerable suffer disproportionately[31] from the effects of air pollution, climate change, natural disasters, and infectious diseases. In addition, political inequalities and the marginalization of the most vulnerable are perpetuated by poor public investments and resource allocation.

---

[22] Women in Business and Management: Gaining Momentum in Asia and the Pacific (2015)
[23] COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers (2020)
[24] COVID-19 and the Gender Digital Divide (2020)
[25] The World Factbook (2017 est.)
[26] Southeast Asia's widening inequalities (2018)
[27] Inequality of Outcomes in Asia and the Pacific: Trends, Drivers and Costs (2018)
[28] USAID's Digital Strategy (2020)
[29] Gender Equality in the Wake of COVID-19 (2020)
[30] World Bank - Regional Integration Overview (2020)
[31] World Social Report Chapter 3 (2020)

Furthermore, while some Southeast Asian women may have more access to and control over assets and resources than their mothers, they continue to be underrepresented in decision-making and leadership in many segments of society, and entrenched gender norms and gender-blind policies continue to impede progress to gender equality and female empowerment.[32] Southeast Asian citizens consider economic cooperation and good governance as the most important principles for regional stability and economic prosperity.[33]

Resurgent Authoritarianism: There is high support within Southeast Asia for democratic values, and many consider democratic values beneficial for regional stability and prosperity.[34] Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic is testing the resiliency of democracies in the Indo-Pacific.[35] While the region is home to path-breaking and renowned civil society and media outlets, across much of Southeast Asia, governments have passed repressive laws to stifle independent voices and crack down on political opposition; the Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis' low Liberal Democracy scores emphasize this. A lack of transparency and public participation in resource allocation and decision-making perpetuate vulnerability to corruption and conflict and threaten development gains. In addition, the region continues its governance backsliding, eroding transparency and citizen-responsive governance—highlighted by the low Open Government scores—and leading to imprudent resource management, all threatening hard-fought development gains. Exacerbated by the challenge of inefficient economic integration, poorly informed public investment and resource allocation decisions precipitate political inequalities and the marginalization of vulnerable communities, while at the same time aggravating the ethnic and religious intolerance that fuels the transborder spread of conflict. Addressing these concerns at a regional, transnational level encourages a more <u>inclusive</u> Southeast Asia. The COVID-19 global pandemic will become yet another vehicle for great power competitors, such as China, to further exacerbate existing democratic backsliding, corruption, and disinformation.[36]

COVID-19 and Emerging Pandemic Threats: The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated development problems and has exposed new transnational challenges that threaten the region and beyond. The underlying weakness of the health sector has also become apparent - inadequate and poor-quality health service delivery, weak surveillance systems, limited access to services for migrant and stateless persons, and gaps in regional cooperation. By strengthening regional programming to improve the region's response to future pandemic threats, USAID will support a more <u>resilient</u> Southeast Asia that can more effectively respond to future shocks and stressors.

Weak Collective Approaches: Addressing shared development challenges traversing borders requires a coordinated transnational approach. When individual countries struggle to respond to pandemic threats, counter anti-democratic forces, and address complex issues such as climate change, transnational crime, and migration pressures, while also managing domestic agendas, inefficient and insufficient response may

---

[32] USAID Regional Gender Analysis and Mapping for Southeast Asia (2019, 2020 Add.)
[33] Powers, Norms, and Institutions - CSIS (2020)
[34] CSIS - Powers, Norms, and Institutions (2020)
[35] CSIS - Post-pandemic Governance in the Indo-Pacific: Adapting USAID's Strategy in the Face of Covid-19 (2020)
[36] CSIS: Post-pandemic Governance in the Indo-Pacific: Adapting USAID's Strategy in the Face of Covid-19 (2020)

actually heighten the severity of the development challenge and further spread the negative effects. Similarly, recent research on coordination among ASEAN members noted that weak collective approaches and lack of capacity rendered ASEAN more vulnerable to powerful outside actors.[37] In response, programming through and in partnership with regional and global organizations contributes to the harmonization of policies and coordinated implementation of best practices, which in turn strengthens bilateral efforts to address regional development challenges. These challenges are manifested in many of the region's development issues and form the foundation for the selection of RDMA's strategic priorities.

---

[37] Jones, David & Jenne, Nicole. Weak states' regionalism: ASEAN and the limits of security cooperation in Pacific Asia. (2015)

STRATEGIC APPROACH

Under this RDCS, USAID/RDMA will focus on three key principles to advancing <u>a more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia</u>:

1. <u>Partner with regional bodies</u>: Transnational bodies play a key role in developing, harmonizing, and implementing policies and programs from a regional perspective. To address development challenges, RDMA will directly engage and partner with these organizations to foster self-reliance within the region in a manner based on shared values, free market principles, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

   Partnering with regional bodies will also mean improving our relationships with other donors engaged in strengthening regional and global bodies. RDMA will expand collaboration with like-minded donors, such as Australia, Japan, Korea, and Thailand.

   RDMA will leverage donor funding, expertise, and influence to increase the impact of our efforts and support a free and open Indo-Pacific. By leveraging other development partners, RDMA will directly contribute to USAID's Redefining Our Relationships priorities, as described throughout this strategy.

2. <u>Amplify and augment the work of bilateral USAID Operating Units (OUs)</u>: Bilateral OUs and RDMA form a virtuous circle, in which ongoing coordination and collaboration reinforce one another. Effective regional programming, limited to activities deemed truly transnational in nature,[38] lays the foundation for successful bilateral programming. The regional space is where capacitated and committed nations share best practices and research, dialogue on mutually beneficial solutions to complex shared challenges, build the infrastructure for further regional engagement, and commit to addressing regional priorities. These regional commitments, lessons, and dialogue set the framework for individual nations to address domestic issues. Targeted improvements at the regional level add value and support bilateral objectives. Simultaneously, regional forums—and the space they create to apply soft pressure—provide an important check to ensure regional agreements are successfully implemented in the domestic space.

   RDMA's success occurs when our regional engagement and programming amplify and augment bilateral development efforts. Therefore, transboundary programs will be designed in close coordination with bilateral OUs, be flexible enough to respond to windows of opportunity and changing regional dynamics, offer flexibility to bilateral OUs customized to their needs, and ultimately serve to augment and amplify the reach of bilateral OUs and the Asia Bureau's collective

---

[38] "Transnational" references development challenges and opportunities that cannot be effectively addressed by individual country-specific programming.

contribution to U.S. Government foreign policy priorities in Asia. Ultimately, the locus of foreign assistance is in the bilateral space, where issues are identified, capacity and commitment are enhanced, development outcomes are achieved, and implementation occurs.

3. <u>Elevate Thailand's role within the region</u>: USAID (and the U.S. Government) benefit from a strong, long standing relationship with the Royal Thai Government. This relationship creates opportunities for USAID to expand coordination and cooperation to help foster Thailand's development as an emerging donor. For example, given Thailand's strong capacity, RDMA will partner closely with Thailand to develop trilateral cooperation programming to strengthen other partners' capacity and commitment to inclusive development across the region. RDMA will seek to elevate Thailand's role through both trilateral cooperation and regional forums.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT WITH U.S. GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

U.S. priorities in the Indo-Pacific are the foundation for RDMA's strategic priorities under this RDCS. To counter anti-democratic forces, RDMA's approach is directed toward strategic partnership, not dependence. Similarly, RDMA's approach of working through regional institutions and networks enables partner nations to advance and strengthen their own governance institutions, rules, and practices as respected members of, and full participants in, the international community and global economy. These partner nations will be their own advocates for free, open, and enterprise-driven development, citizen-responsive governance, democratic norms and institutions, and the strengthened resilience of vulnerable communities and their environments.

By promoting regional cooperation to advance American influence, uphold the rule of law, empower women and vulnerable populations, and respect individual/citizen rights, each of RDMA's regional development objectives contributes to the National Security Strategy and goals two and three of the Joint Strategic Plan. Furthermore, guided by the Women Peace and Security Act of 2017, the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace and Security, the Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act of 2018, and the Declaration of Principles for the International Religious Freedom Alliance, RDMA will focus on enhancing women's and youth leadership in regional and global bodies, addressing obstacles to full inclusion for vulnerable populations, and encouraging religious tolerance and freedom of religion across all sectors of this strategy.

ACCELERATING AND ALIGNING AROUND THE CONCEPT OF SELF-RELIANCE

USAID/RDMA will strengthen partners' capacity to sustainably support their own development agendas through activities that align incentives to accelerate J2SR.

Redefining our Relationships with Partner Governments: A regional approach is necessary to effectively solve transnational problems. Across all RDOs, RDMA will partner with regional institutions, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its constituent bodies, multilateral organizations, like-minded donors, and other organizations that are regional and global technical leaders. In particular, RDMA will support the Mekong-U.S. Partnership to increase the political and economic self-reliance and sustainable growth of Mekong partner countries. To incentivize stronger and more responsible partnerships, RDMA will engage regional and global forums and networks to advance cost-sharing principles and the employment of sound tools and processes to enhance fiduciary oversight, including co-development of shared goals with clear metrics. USAID's approach also commits RDMA to holding partners and ourselves accountable for performance, improved capacity, and continued commitment.

Financing Self-Reliance: RDMA will utilize its transnational programming and convening authority to amplify and augment bilateral Missions' efforts to build financial self-reliance in their respective countries by building the capacity of regional and global institutions, when appropriate, to mobilize financing and manage resources to advance regional priorities. In addition, RDMA will serve as a platform for sharing lessons and best practices, particularly around innovative financing models (including those requiring greater investment from regional bodies) and partnering with the private sector.

Private Sector Engagement (PSE): Private sector engagement (PSE) is essential to RDMA's goal of <u>a more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia</u>. A healthy mix of large corporations and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is driving Asia's positive economic growth, providing opportunities for partnerships globally, regionally, and nationally, where appropriate. Across the portfolio, and in alignment with RDMA's Private Sector Landscape Analysis, RDMA will partner with the private sector to find new solutions and/or scale proven, market-oriented solutions to regional and global development challenges. RDMA's PSE efforts focus on achieving shared goals related to encouraging and supporting regional and global business growth, increasing investment into sectors that are critical to development, and/or promoting the adoption of sustainable, profitable, and inclusive low-emission business practices. Ultimately, development needs to be enterprise-driven with the private sector serving as co-creators of market-oriented solutions. For example, in alignment with the Agency's Private Sector Relationship Management approach, RDMA will seek out private sector partnerships to address deforestation-free supply chains, supply chain transparency, ethical labor practices, a safe and secure digital economy, sustainable infrastructure investments, and market-driven disease intelligence and threat monitoring, among others.

Collaboration among U.S. Government agencies is enormously beneficial in furthering private sector engagement, including in countries where USAID does not have missions, like Singapore and Malaysia. RDMA will collaborate closely with our Embassy Thailand colleagues, including the Foreign Commercial Service (FCS), the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the United States Trade and Development Agency (USTDA), and the Embassy Economic Section.

New Partnerships Initiative (NPI): RDMA will foster and capitalize on the vibrancy of networks and alliances in the region by lowering barriers for New and Underutilized Partners (NUPs) and diversifying our partner base. RDMA will use co-creation and enhanced capacity development to strengthen regional networks and stakeholders along their journey to self-reliance and expand their reach to vulnerable populations or previously hard-to-reach geographies. By diversifying our partner base and building the capacity of key partners, RDMA is ultimately increasing its own resilience and ability to quickly adapt to unanticipated contextual shocks.

Furthermore, RDMA will seek out opportunities to work more with responsible U.S. small businesses by establishing closer ties with USAID's Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization and holding small business-focused events for Asia. RDMA will also tap into existing Mission expertise to build capacity of local organizations in various managerial aspects, including MEL, gender and social inclusion, financial management and procurement, and strategic planning.

Lastly, RDMA will convene new and underutilized partners across all stages of the program cycle to support the J2SR. Through in-person and virtual events, RDMA will facilitate co-creation, bring regional partners together to establish new linkages, and/or share lessons learned with the partner community.

RESULTS FRAMEWORK

GOAL: A more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia

RDO 1 — Regional Collective Action to Defend Human Rights Increased	RDO 2 — Regional Economic Connectivity Strengthened	RDO 3 — Regional Environmental and Energy Systems Strengthened	RDO 4 — Regional Response to Health Threats Improved
IR 1.1 Support for regional civil society networks strengthened	IR 2.1 Inclusive Digital Ecosystems Integrated Among Regional Stakeholders	IR 3.1 Security of Regional Energy Sector Increased	IR 4.1 Regional partnerships strengthened to address regional health threats
IR 1.2 Cross border protection of vulnerable populations harmonized	IR 2.2 Regional Supply Chains Are Better Prepared to Respond to Shocks	IR 3.2 Transnational Environmental Crime Reduced	IR 4.2 Health policy harmonization enhanced
IR 1.3 Public engagement with human rights issues increased	IR 2.3 High-Quality and Transparent Cross-Border Investments Promoted	IR 3.3 Regional Sustainable Natural Resource Management Strengthened	

REGIONAL MISSION GOAL AND NARRATIVE

GOAL:	A MORE RESILIENT, INCLUSIVE, AND SECURE SOUTHEAST ASIA

The current COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have exacerbated fundamental development challenges across the region, demonstrating the need for a more "resilient" region that is better prepared to respond to shocks and stressors, including those from economic, environmental, demographic, health, and political factors. An "inclusive" region increases opportunities for marginalized and underrepresented populations to claim their voice, assert greater power, influence political agendas, and demand more equitable benefits in the charting of the region's development agenda. A "secure" Southeast Asia region   is manifested by a region free to choose its own development path. These three mutually reinforcing themes define a region that has the capacity and commitment to determine its own development journey.

To contribute to this goal, RDMA developed four Regional Development Objectives.

1. Regional Collective Action to Defend Human Rights Increased

2. Regional Economic Connectivity Strengthened

3. Regional Environment and Energy Systems Strengthened

4. Regional Response to Health Threats Improved

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES (RDO)

RDO 1: REGIONAL COLLECTIVE ACTION TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS INCREASED

RDO 1	**Regional Collective Action to Defend Human Rights Increased**	
IR 1.1 Support for regional civil society networks strengthened	**IR 1.2** Cross border protection of vulnerable populations harmonized	**IR 1.3** Public engagement with human rights issues increased
Sub-IR 1.1.1 Civil society and media coordination and knowledge sharing across borders deepened	**Sub-IR 1.2.1** Implementation of regional frameworks and standards focused on rights protection strengthened	**Sub-IR 1.3.1** Research and analysis on regional challenges to human rights and fundamental freedoms increased
Sub-IR 1.1.2 Emerging leaders integrated in regional networks	**Sub-IR 1.2.2** Vulnerable populations' access to information and services enhanced across borders	**Sub-IR 1.3.2** Dissemination of objective information on regional human rights and fundamental freedoms challenges broadened
Sub-IR 1.1.3 Sources of funding for civil society diversified	**Sub-IR 1.2.3** Private sector engagement in protecting the rights of vulnerable populations expanded	**Sub-IR 1.3.2** Dialogue with citizens on human rights and fundamental freedoms expanded regionally

Development Hypothesis: *IF* strengthened civil society networks can effectively engage regional institutions and the private sector, and increase public engagement with human rights issues, *THEN* more effective collective action will empower institutions and actors across the region to influence policy and decision making and hold leaders to account.

Development Narrative: Across the Southeast Asia region, resurgent authoritarianism poses a threat to civil society, media freedoms, and other democratic institutions. While research demonstrates high levels of civil society commitment to human rights,[39] J2SR scorecards show rising illiberalism and democratic backsliding and indicate that civil society and media have few mechanisms to hold governments accountable.[40] Access to information is increasingly restricted, and the risks journalists face have escalated to unprecedented levels.[41] In a region where minorities and other vulnerable groups are often marginalized, information on the challenges these groups face, and opportunities to engage citizens and policymakers in addressing these challenges, are also limited. The COVID-19 pandemic presents additional challenges to existing governance issues and has implications for fragile democracies in the region. Governments are using the pandemic as an excuse to impose draconian measures that restrict movement and expression, disempower local governments, limit public protests, increase invasive surveillance, and delay elections.[42] For civil society organizations working on democratization and human rights issues, the operating environment has become even more constrained.[43] The economic and social fallout from COVID-19 has also exacerbated conflict dynamics in several countries in the region, exposing religious and ethnic minorities to renewed discrimination and threats of violence. COVID-19 and the quarantine have significantly increased gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence against women and children,[44] which was already pervasive across the region. Gender inequality and violence against women and children are strong predictors of whether a society is prone to violent conflict.[45]

RDO 1 addresses resurgent authoritarianism in the region by expanding human rights networks and deepening networks' engagement with regional institutions, the private sector, and the public. Deepening civil society networks at the regional level reduces the risks for human rights advocates by providing opportunities for mutual support, multiplying channels through which research, data and advocacy can be shared, aggregates efforts to pressure human rights abusers to play by the rules, and fosters coordinated regional action. This, in turn, will strengthen human rights protections and improve access to information on the region's human rights challenges, in line with the goals of the Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative.[46] RDO 1 aims to support civil society's role in decision-making and development in order to increase Southeast Asia's resilience to conflict stemming from social exclusion. RDO 1 will also contribute to enhanced regional security by improving cooperation on transnational human rights challenges like human trafficking, as well as strengthening regional civil society networks that work in conflict zones. This development approach aims to save lives and increase the resilience of vulnerable communities and their environments.

---

[39] Iglesias, Sol. The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Peacebuilding: Southeast Asia in Focus (2013)
[40] USAID East Asia Journey to Self-Reliance FY 2020 Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis
[41] IFJ Media Freedom Report for South East Asia 2018
[42] Post-pandemic Governance in the Indo-Pacific: Adapting USAID's Strategy in the Face of COVID-19 (2020)
[43] The Asia Foundation: Civil Society in Southeast Asia During the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020)
[44] The Impact of COVID-19 on South-East Asia (2020)
[45] Crespo-Sancho, C. 2017. "The Role of Gender in the Prevention of Violent Conflict." Background paper for the United Nations-World Bank Flagship Study, *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict*. World Bank, Washington, DC.
[46] Indo-Pacific Transparency Initiative (2019)

RDO 1 represents an evolution in RDMA's approach to protecting and promoting human rights regionally. It was designed to align with the IPS and address the impact of malign actors on human rights across the region. RDO 1 will leverage regional platforms and programs to convene, broaden, and deepen regional networks and institutions to reinforce democratic norms, strengthen informational integrity, and promote human rights. Regional programs will also strengthen cross-border civil society, academic, and media networks in order to expand access to datasets and research, as well as to enable the exchange of effective approaches to data collection and dissemination in an increasingly challenging environment.

RDMA will continue to strengthen coordination to protect the rights of vulnerable populations, but activities will now focus on cross-border coordination of services and information; this will be a key priority for the region given the impact of COVID-19 on mobility and economic opportunities.[47] Widespread economic shutdowns have led to mass job losses and stranded vulnerable populations both in their home countries and in the countries to which they have migrated in search of work. The lack of economic opportunity has increased the risk of trafficking across the region.[48] Regional efforts to improve cross-border coordination to better address the needs of these groups will complement and support bilateral USAID OU efforts within their respective countries. Recognizing employment opportunities as a push/pull factor in migration, RDO 1 will partner with the private sector to strengthen the protections of vulnerable groups across their supply chains. Through our efforts to engage citizens, civil society organizations, regional government actors and the private sector in addressing human rights challenges, collective action to defend human rights across the region will be increased.

In summary, RDO 1 will expand civil society networks by bolstering connections between civil society actors across the region and among Asian civil society, media and academic institutions, strengthen these networks' engagement of regional institutions and private sector actors, and improve public access and engagement with human rights issues. These efforts to strengthen the connections, capacities and awareness of regional stakeholders will catalyze collective action on transnational human rights issues. It will promote an alternative, more inclusive development model through regional programming that empowers our institutions and stakeholder partners across the region to influence policy and decision-making. This will complement bilateral programs that are working to deepen partner countries' accountability and enhance partner country leadership on key human rights challenges.

IR 1.1: Support for regional civil society networks strengthened

Civil society organizations in Southeast Asia are committed to protecting human rights. They play a key role in managing and mitigating conflict and violent extremism, and in supporting the participation of, and government accountability to, citizens of all backgrounds. At the same time, civil society organizations have few mechanisms to influence and hold governments accountable. In fact, in recent years, countries throughout the region have promulgated legal and financial restrictions on their civil

---

[47] GovAsia: Civil society in Southeast Asia during COVID-19 (2020)
[48] Peace and the Pandemic: The Impact of COVID-19 on Conflict in Asia (2020)

society sectors, making it increasingly difficult to gather and disseminate research and analysis on human rights, including religious freedoms.[49] Therefore, IR 1.1 will focus on increasing transnational civil society networks to increase information sharing, integrating emerging leaders into regional forums, and diversifying funding sources to increase the sustainability of civil society organizations.

This trend was supported by the East Asia J2SR Landscape Analysis score for Civil Society & Media Effectiveness, which placed the Lower Mekong countries below the global average. In order to address these challenges, RDO 1 will focus on strengthening regional civil society networks in order to identify, promote, and scale up effective solutions to the region's human rights challenges. Efforts will be aimed at expanding networks to engage emerging leaders, including women, youth, and representatives of vulnerable communities and groups, to ensure their needs and interests are incorporated and addressed through regional dialogue and engagement. RDO 1 will seek to identify sustainable sources of financing for the region's civil society sector through engagement of regional private sector and like-minded donors to ensure a more viable foundation for their role in rights promotion and protection. RDMA's approach to strengthening regional networks is aligned with the U.S. support of inclusive governance, supporting programs that build resilience and empower the region's citizens and civil societies.[50]

IR 1.2: Cross border protection of vulnerable populations harmonized[51]

Vulnerable populations[52] remain challenged by inequitable economic development, protracted conflicts, and a lack of inclusion in decision-making and policy formulation on issues affecting their communities. COVID-19 has increased xenophobia and intolerance across the region, and its economic impacts have increased pressures on vulnerable groups.[53] Economies decimated by the pandemic have pushed millions to seek work abroad at a time when restrictions on movement are extensive and unpredictable and little information is available on migrant worker rights and services. This, combined with a lack of regional cross-border cooperation to address the needs of vulnerable workers, is deepening the risks that these workers could fall victim to trafficking as well as domestic violence.[54] RDO 1 will engage regional institutions and regional private sector actors to improve cross-border protections, harmonize the

---

[49] The Role of Civil Society in Peacebuilding: Southeast Asia in Focus (2013)

[50] Advancing a Shared Vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (2019)

[51] Harmonized cross-border protection requires that each country implement policy, as defined through regional frameworks, in a similar manner. A consistent approach across borders helps minimize opportunities for vulnerabilities in one country to be exploited and adversely impact human rights efforts throughout the region. RDMA will jointly monitor "harmonization" progress with key regional institutions.

[52] Vulnerable Populations are defined as individuals or communities that are typically excluded, disadvantaged or marginalized based on their economic, environmental, social, or cultural characteristics and those who are more susceptible to adverse effects from shocks or stresses such as natural hazards, infectious diseases, economic shocks, and conflict and who do not have adequate coping mechanisms or support systems. This includes four well-recognized categories of vulnerable groups: 1) ethnic and religious minorities; 2) people with disabilities; 3) individuals denied enjoyment of rights due to their sex, gender or sexual orientation/gender identity and expression; 4) and migrants. It also includes key populations, namely those who are at higher risk of being infected or affected by a disease, who play a key role in how the disease spreads, and whose involvement is vital for an effective and sustainable response.

[53] Peace and the Pandemic: The Impact of COVID-19 on Conflict in Asia (2020)

[54] International Monetary Fund: Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia (2018)

implementation of regional frameworks, and implement solutions to trafficking across their supply chains.

RDO 1 will promote linkages between regional human rights networks, regional institutions, and private sector actors to strengthen incentives for them to engage in addressing regional human rights challenges. As RDMA leverages regional forums to exchange promising practices and foster agreement on common standards to protect vulnerable populations, individual countries will be better equipped to adopt those standards nationally. Similarly, RDMA's efforts to engage multinational supply chains in addressing trafficking risks can promote common approaches to protecting human rights that can impact vulnerable workers throughout the region. Furthermore, by strengthening cross-border cooperation and improving data exchange in source, transit, and destination countries for migrant workers at risk of being trafficked, RDO 1 will enable the provision of coordinated services and information to these vulnerable groups.

IR 1.3: Public engagement with human rights issues increased

Independent media are struggling in the face of increasing legal and economic restrictions, with some of the region's preeminent media being shuttered and others unable to publish as a result of pressures from governments and local elites.[55] Governments, corporations, and other actors employ a variety of digital, legal, physical, and psychosocial methods to monitor, intimidate, and threaten journalists and stifle their reporting.[56] RDMA's consultations with bilateral Missions in the region highlighted that there is limited public access to information about the implications of authoritarian development models across Southeast Asia.[57] To address these challenges, RDO 1 will support a diverse range of civil society and academic actors to make their research and investigative reporting more accessible and relevant to the public.[58] These networks will be key in supporting the efforts of civil society, media, and academic institutions to develop and disseminate research on the human rights challenges they face across the region; they can also help counter personal security threats civil society activists and media might face in their own countries. In addition to supporting the broad dissemination of research, RDMA will strengthen civil society engagement on digital and social media platforms, working through regional networks to amplify research and advocacy and promote regional engagement on key human rights challenges.

Accelerating and Aligning Around the Concept of Self-Reliance

RDO 1 will play an essential role in advancing the **Journey to Self-Reliance** by strengthening regional cooperation to address cross-border human rights challenges.

---

[55] Freedom and the Media 2019 Media Freedom: A Downward Spiral (2019)
[56] IFJ Media Freedom Report for South East Asia 2018: Underneath the Autocrats
[57] Internal USAID consultations.
[58] RDO 1 will also complement RDO 2 and RDO 3 efforts by strengthening knowledge exchange and coordination among the region's human rights organizations. These organizations play a key role in advocating for inclusive policy development and monitoring implementation related to digital and infrastructure development, and also provide oversight of natural resource governance. Moreover, the development and dissemination of objective information can support IR 3.3 efforts to increase transparent and inclusive natural resource governance.

Efforts will focus on information sharing by government stakeholders across the region on services available to vulnerable groups, which will both enhance regional efforts to coordinate cross-border assistance to vulnerable populations while also delivering on regional governments' commitments to open data.

Per RDMA's **Private Sector Engagement** Plan, RDO 1 will expand engagement with the private sector across RDMA's human rights portfolios. Multinational private sector actors have already begun to engage with RDMA in addressing CTIP vulnerabilities across their supply chains in key sectors such as fisheries and agriculture through partnerships that employ technology to enable communication and follow up with vulnerable workers. RDMA also sees opportunities to engage the digital and media private sector in our efforts to combat disinformation and to strengthen the financial sustainability of local organizations.

RDO 1 will advance **Financing Self-Reliance** by strengthening regional knowledge exchange and supporting the scaling up of successful models of civil society advocacy for budget allocations to address key human rights challenges. RDMA programming has already supported successful efforts by civil society organizations in Thailand to advocate for increased budget allocations for provincial CTIP response; regional programming provides opportunities to share these approaches and enables network members in other countries to replicate these approaches in their own contexts. This will contribute to the efforts of CSOs across the region to influence the allocation of government resources to support human rights and government accountability.

RDO 1 will **Redefine our Relationships with Partner Governments** by bolstering regional cooperation and coordination on transnational human rights issues. Efforts will be aimed at deepening partnerships with governments across the region to share successful strategies for addressing key transnational human rights challenges such as countering trafficking in persons and interreligious conflict. This will strengthen their role as key partners to the United States in addressing regional human rights and security challenges. Furthermore, by working through regional networks to develop the capacity of civil society to influence regional policy development and implementation and support civil society efforts to advocate for improved human rights protections, civil society organizations will be better equipped to hold regional institutions to account. RDMA will also continue to collaborate with like-minded donors, such as Australia, the European Union, and JICA, to develop a cross-donor approach to addressing CTIP challenges in Southeast Asia. RDMA will pursue similar partnerships in the development of new human rights and civil society programming.

To contribute to the **New Partnership Initiative**, RDO 1 will strengthen the capacities of local organizations by expanding regional civil society partnerships to include new voices such as women, youth, and faith-based groups. RDO 1 will leverage regional networks to amplify research and advocacy on human rights issues, forge new partnerships in support of civil society, and strengthen linkages between civil society and citizens, building the resilience of the region's civil society organizations and shoring up their ability to advance a more inclusive model of development in Asia.

USAID | ASIA

RDO 2: REGIONAL ECONOMIC CONNECTIVITY STRENGTHENED
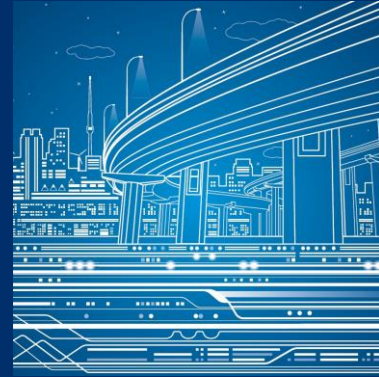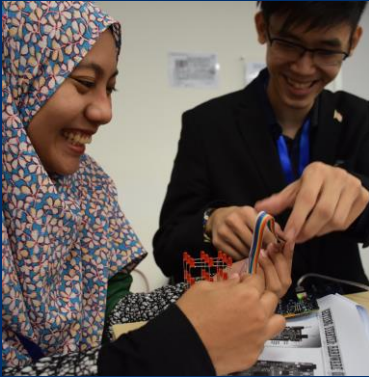
RDO 2	Regional Economic Connectivity Strengthened	
IR 2.1 Inclusive Digital Ecosystems Integrated Among Regional Stakeholders	**IR 2.2** Regional Supply Chains Are Better Prepared to Respond to Shocks	**IR 2.3** High-Quality and Transparent Cross-Border Investments Promoted
Sub-IR 2.1.1 Regulatory frameworks aligned with global best practices for digital policies adopted	**Sub-IR 2.2.1** Barriers to efficient flow of goods and services reduced	**Sub-IR 2.3.1** Public/private policy dialogues around regional investment challenges strengthened
Sub-IR 2.1.2 Regional opportunities for broad-based participation in digital economies promoted	**Sub-IR 2.2.2** Opportunities for supply chain diversification promoted	**Sub-IR 2.3.2** Viable regional private sector investment opportunities supported

Development Hypothesis: *IF* Southeast Asian private sector, civil society, and government stakeholders are enabled to work collaboratively and have access to coordinated platforms that promote best practices around emerging economic priorities, *THEN* economies in the region will be more resilient to shocks and countries will have higher capacities for economic self-reliance.

Development Narrative: Since the late 1960s, Southeast Asia has been steadily moving towards greater regional integration.[59,60] Regional economic integration has

---

[59] By Chance or by Virtue? The Regional Economic Integration Process in Southeast Asia; Jean-Raphaël Chaponnière, Marc Lautier (2016)
[60] UNDP: South-East Asia Regional Economic Integration and Cooperation (2006)

allowed individual countries and the overall region to position themselves as major players in the global economy. However, economic integration has also had the unanticipated effect of making the region one of the most vulnerable to global disruptions, such as environmental, economic, and health-related shocks that continue to intensify.[61,62] The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and its negative impacts on virtually all sectors illustrate how economic integration can lead to further vulnerabilities and risks.[63] The Indo-Pacific region faces challenges, such as unsustainable debt levels, digital transformation needs, and collapsing supply and value chains; all of this has been exacerbated by COVID-19.[64] Regarding global value chains, COVID-19 has also exposed weaknesses, such as an overreliance on production in the PRC, that further impacts hard-hit economies.[65]

The demand for infrastructure investments, both digital and traditional, is increasing at a rapid pace in Southeast Asia.[66] China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an attempt to meet this demand, but critics say that it is being pursued in a non-transparent manner that could leave countries saddled with unsustainable debt and potentially exposed to China's more authoritarian model.[67] This is exacerbated by the fact that many traditional donors and development banks have reduced their exposure to infrastructure investments in the region.

There is a similar case to be made around the advent of digital policies and practices that have competing models to those preferred by the United States. In the digital space, policymakers have struggled to keep up with rapidly morphing digital technology practices, such as with social media and the use of data. While the region has strong ICT adoption, as highlighted in the Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis, much still needs to be done to strengthen digital technology usage policy making and promote practices that are open, inclusive, and secure.[68]

Strengthening economic connectivity among Southeast Asian nations will address problems with inefficient integration and rapidly developing economic operating environments. While economic integration is a part of economic connectivity, the concept in the context of this RDCS more broadly includes "any form of informal economic relationship among states or regional groupings, including trade, business activities, financial relationships, human mobility, and state-sponsored economic relations."[69] Inefficient regional economic integration, including over integration in some

---

[61] According to the United Nations Trade and Development Board, "As countries open up and deepen their integration into the global economy, their economies become interdependent but also exposed to external risks. Combined with the absence of alternative means, the process of integration could lead to a state of vulnerability for countries dependent on particular forms of trade, finance, products, markets, suppliers, transport routes and infrastructure, due to their natural endowments and specialization patterns, which could have profound implications for their economic welfare and development paths."
[62] UNESCAP: Asia Pacific Disaster Report 2019
[63] Bangkok Post: Asean's Virus Dilemma (2020)
[64] International Finance Corporation (IFC): COVID-19 Economic Impact: East Asia and the Pacific (2020)
[65] UNESCAP Policy Brief Beyond the COVID-19 Pandemic: Coping with the 'new normal' in supply chains (2020)
[66] OECD: Southeast Asia Going Digital (2019)
[67] Brookings Institute: China and the West Competing Over Infrastructure in Southeast Asia (2020)
[68] USAID's Digital Strategy (2020)
[69] Economic Connectivity: A Basis for Rebuilding Stability and Confidence in Europe? International Peace Institute (2016)

instances, has also left the region vulnerable to pressure from anti-democratic actors, despite the region's economic success. RDMA will focus on regional approaches to transnational economic development challenges in order to reduce vulnerability and increase regional resilience (both to shocks and anti-democratic influence). Specifically, RDMA has identified digital policy, supply chains, and infrastructure investments as areas that are strategically important to increasing Southeast Asia's economic connectivity which is a necessary precondition to building resilience in the region.

A regional approach is necessary to provide greater transparency around digital development and infrastructure investments such as those under the BRI that could have implications on multiple countries. Greater transparency enables the identification and scale up of more open, inclusive development models. Similarly, a regional approach to supply chain diversification will enhance connectivity by supporting countries to identify alternate sources of supply or creating flexibility of their supply chains in response to shocks. By doing so, USAID will support free, open, and enterprise-driven development to build resilient market economies that preserve the sovereignty of states and the dignity and rights of individuals.

RDO 2 builds on prior RDMA successes with ASEAN on trade facilitation. The newly signed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement between ASEAN member states and other regional countries will open up opportunities for improved market access.[70] Strengthening regional economic connectivity in Southeast Asia is the logical progression of RDMA's engagement to strengthen inclusive economic growth in the region.[71,72] To strengthen regional economic connectivity, and thereby help regional economies become more resilient to shocks and anti-democratic influence, RDMA will address three key priorities—ensuring that digital ecosystems are inclusive and responsible, strengthening the resilience of regional supply chains, and supporting high-quality, transparent investments. Given the rapidly evolving economic situation in Southeast Asia discussed above, including the encroachment of anti-democratic forces, RDO 2 will prioritize engagement with public and private institutions to develop regional policies and practices that promote long-term economic resilience. RDO 2 will augment the work of bilateral Missions by supporting transparent development approaches. RDO 2 will strengthen digital connectivity, advance supply chain resilience, and promote infrastructure investments by supporting regional multi-stakeholder networks and platforms. RDO 2 will promote and institutionalize principles of transparency, public accountability, environmental responsibility, and gender equality and inclusive development to fortify the integrity of economic connectivity. As regional bodies prioritize supply chain diversification and economic cooperation,[73] RDMA will closely coordinate with other regional actors, such as ASEAN, around shared policy objectives towards economic connectivity.

---

[70] ASEAN: ASEAN hits historic milestone with signing of RCEP (2020)

[71] The International Peace Institute defines "economic connectivity" as "any form of informal economic relationship among states or regional groupings, including trade, business activities, financial relationships, human mobility, and state-sponsored economic relations."

[72] UNESCAP: Regional Connectivity for Shared Prosperity (2014)

[73] OECD: Connecting Southeast Asia (2019)

RDO 2 will pursue three approaches to take advantage of these three opportunities to strengthen regional economic connectivity:

IR 2.1 Inclusive digital ecosystems integrated among regional stakeholders

Southeast Asian countries are rapidly adopting new technologies that will help them achieve necessary digital transformations,[74] as also evidenced in the East Asia J2SR Landscape Analysis. These transformations will usher in new ways of living and working and will provide new opportunities for inclusive economic development. Regulatory and policy frameworks are not keeping pace with the advent and adoption of digital technologies, resulting in increased privacy and security vulnerabilities. The policies that do exist are not favorable to private investment or the widespread use of digital services.[75] RDO 2 will promote open and interoperable digital policies and practices so that Southeast Asian countries have a shared defense against   actors who are either promoting less transparent policy development or who are exploiting the lack of clear policies that guide the rapidly evolving digital space. This exposes Southeast Asian countries to greater levels of inequality, repression, and instability.[76] A shared understanding of digital economy best practices and subsequent efforts to harmonize digital policies will necessarily interconnect the countries in the region and increase the safety and security of digital trade, data sharing, e-commerce, and financial services.

RDMA's approach to integrating inclusive digital ecosystems among regional stakeholders is guided by the IPS objectives for the Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership,[77] USAID's Digital Strategy,[78] and RDMA's Private Sector Engagement Plan. RDO 2 will foster more open, interoperable, reliable, and secure communications that will allow more citizens to reap the economic and social benefits of the digital economy.[79] RDMA will strengthen multi-stakeholder models of internet governance to encourage competitive and investment-friendly regulations and policies. RDO 2 will also expand public awareness of digital safety issues to generate meaningful participation in the digital economy. RDO 2's work on responsible development of digital practices and policies will also support RDO 1, especially around social media usage. RDMA will reduce barriers that prevent women and underrepresented groups from fully participating in the digital economy[80] by working through platforms to increase women's capacity and leadership in this fast-growing sector at the regional level. COVID-19 has pushed the region to more online and virtual platforms which have, in turn, exposed many to increased online gender-based violence.[81,82] The region's human rights organizations, supported under RDO 1, will also benefit directly from RDO 2's efforts to promote a more open and secure digital ecosystem in the region.

---

[74] OECD: Southeast Asia Going Digital (2019)
[75] OECD: Southeast Asia Going Digital (2019)
[76] USAID's Digital Strategy (2020)
[77] USAID Fact Sheet: Advancing Digital Connectivity in the Indo-Pacific Region (2019)
[78] USAID's Digital Strategy (2020)
[79] Deloitte: Value of connectivity Economic and social benefits of expanding internet access (2014)
[80] McKinsey & Company (2018): The Power of Parity: Advancing Women's Equality in Asia Pacific
[81] Rapid Gender Analysis during COVID-19 Pandemic (2020)
[82] Coronavirus fuels cybersex trafficking fears for children in Southeast Asia (2020)

Private-sector investments in digital infrastructure often exclude areas and populations for which the business case cannot be readily justified, or the risk is too burdensome. When private sector investments are solely focused on larger markets, this can adversely impact already vulnerable populations. USAID is well-positioned to ensure more inclusive digital infrastructure, particularly through partnerships with technology companies, technical expertise, and our convening power.[83]

IR 2.2 Regional supply chains are better prepared to respond to shocks

Economic, political, environmental, and health shocks continue to reshape how regional economies operate. For example, months after COVID-19 was first reported, the long-term ripple effects of the pandemic continue to reverberate throughout all sectors. The Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis suggests lower than average scores for export sophistication in Southeast Asia which contributes to lower economic resilience. A primary driver of this is over-reliance on single supply sources for goods within the region, which increases exposure to shocks—as evidenced during the COVID-19 pandemic—and further complicates economic recovery. These exposed supply-side vulnerabilities have been disproportionately affecting small and medium-sized enterprises, especially in Least Developed Countries in the region.[84] As evidenced in the COVID-19 recovery, successful businesses were those with diverse supply sources, allowing them to pivot and ensure a steady base of available goods. This can and has created new benefits for other countries in the region and will create new investment opportunities. RDMA has identified an opportunity to increase resilience and improve economic growth in the region by addressing these supply vulnerabilities.

RDO 2 will address these supply vulnerabilities by strengthening regional supply chains to become more resilient to unanticipated, long-term shocks like COVID-19. To strengthen resilience to unanticipated, long-term shocks, RDMA will prioritize policy development that a) supports private sector efforts to promote supply chain resiliency, and b) reduces barriers to using open platforms for knowledge-sharing and network strengthening. Furthermore, by supporting sustainable, reliable, and secure supply chains that adhere to green growth strategies, RDO 2 will complement RDO 3 efforts. Supporting RDO 4, secure and reliable data management is key for strengthening regional health networks. Reliable and timely supply of healthcare products, including personal protective equipment, is even more of a priority as the region experiences more and more health shocks.

IR 2.3 High-quality and transparent cross-border investments promoted

While unsustainable debt has been an increasing concern for Southeast Asian countries, COVID-19 is pushing Southeast Asian economies into recession and exacerbating debt burdens. As debt increases and countries struggle to meet their financial commitments, including those around infrastructure and digital development, the private sector will be less likely to invest (or will require a greater return when they do) due to the higher risk. Furthermore, if the PRC is the holder of the debt, an

---

[83] USAID's Digital Strategy (2020)
[84] UNESCAP Policy Brief: Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic: Coping with the 'new normal' in supply chains (2020)

environment of increasing debt burdens dramatically increases PRC leverage over the borrower.[85] There is also a lack of transparency on where investments are going and what their social and environmental impacts will be for neighboring countries.

USAID will catalyze private investment to address these debt challenges. In alignment with CSIS recommendations for USAID,[86] RDO 3 will work with the DFC and the USTDA to create a reliable pipeline of investable (bankable) projects to take advantage of the large infrastructure gaps in the Indo-Pacific. RDO 3 will utilize concessionary finance and other tools available to the U.S. Government to attract financing and restructure debt. This will improve operation of the infrastructure assets and allow for stakeholders to prioritize key infrastructure projects.

RDMA will strengthen public-private dialogues around regional investment challenges, foster policy development, and support viable, high-quality private sector investment opportunities, including those in the energy sector (and therefore complementing RDO 3). In alignment with the U.S. Government's Blue Dot Network definition, "high-quality" infrastructure investments are open and inclusive, transparent, economically viable, financially, environmentally and socially sustainable, and compliant with international standards, laws, and regulations.[87,88] RDMA will raise awareness on bilateral infrastructure investments   that are likely to have negative spillover effects on neighboring countries. A particular emphasis may be on viable deals that inject capital into value chains that are evolving, or are forced to evolve, within the new COVID-19 economy, such as cross-border infrastructure, medical equipment supply chains, or digital economy investments with regional implications. IR 2.3 will look to leverage the U.S. Government's Infrastructure Transaction Advisory Services (ITAN)[89] to assist with regional project preparation, business case development and planning, and ad hoc transaction advisory support. In addition, USAID can coordinate with the DFC to develop financing mechanisms that reduce risk and incentivize private-sector investment in areas with a disproportionate number of vulnerable persons.

Accelerating and Aligning Around the Concept of Self-Reliance

RDO 2 was developed to align closely with the principles of **Journey to Self-Reliance**. Regional trends suggest an openness to a regional approach to economic development that would supplement what is happening at the country level. RDMA will support networks and platforms that can be used to provide bilateral Missions and countries in the region with expanded tools for coordinated policy development and implementation of best practices that will improve J2SR metrics. This will be especially important for ICT adoption, export sophistication, and business enabling environment practices around infrastructure investment.

---

[85] Brookings: China and the West Competing Over Infrastructure in Southeast Asia (2020)
[86] CSIS: Post-pandemic Infrastructure and Digital Connectivity in the Indo-Pacific (2020)
[87] State Department: Blue Dot Network
[88] The International Labour Organization (ILO) and the German development agency, GIZ, have also been involved in financing responsible supply chain initiatives: Responsible supply chains in Asia, Four ASEAN countries prepped to improve Ecolabels and Green Public Procurement
[89] State Department: Infrastructure Transaction Advisory Services

Advancing **Private Sector Engagement** priorities, RDO 2 will convene a broad set of stakeholders—micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises; multinational companies; and financial institutions of all sizes—to expand and deepen both commitment and capacity to the region's economic self-reliance. As one example, Facebook, which has been the leading driver of e-commerce in Cambodia, has shown commitment to safe digital policy development in the country.[90] Facebook has conducted trainings for government officials and even helped the government develop a cybersecurity law to protect its citizens from exploitation by the PRC.[91] RDMA will learn from these examples and facilitate replication within the region. RDO 2 will also engage with suppliers at all levels to, for example, influence environmental and safety practices that directly impact their customer base.

RDO 2 will advance **Financing Self-Reliance** by seeking to harness domestic and international private investment that can fund development needs. RDO 2 will accomplish this by supporting enabling environment reforms, particularly those that create more investment transparency, at the regional level to attract high-quality private investment. This would include liaising with the DFC to fill financing gaps the private sector cannot.

RDO 2 will **Redefine our Relationships with Partner Governments** by partnering with Thailand's International Cooperation Agency (TICA) to promote balanced development in the Mekong region. There are opportunities to leverage the parallel work of TICA and others to advance USAID's regional goals. For example, through its support of the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy, TICA would like to support development projects in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and supply chain strengthening. As appropriate, USAID will work with TICA or other regional bodies to develop jointly agreed upon mechanisms (Memorandums of Understanding, Regional Development Objective Assistance Agreements, action plans, etc.) to increase accountability. In addition, one of the largest donors for infrastructure in the region is the Asian Development Bank, and RDMA will coordinate appropriately with them as we implement the strategy. In addition, UNESCAP is very active in value chain work and will be a close partner in developing interventions to diversify supply chains. The Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) is moving aggressively to support responsible digital development in the region and RDMA has already begun coordinating with them in our digital connectivity work.

RDO 2 will advance the **New Partners Initiative** by incorporating robust organizational capacity development of emerging regional entities, such as private sector partners or entities being championed by ASEAN. As we progress through the strategy, there will likely be a host of new partners operating in the digital space that will benefit from similar organizational capacity development around the implementation of shared goals.

---

[90] Techwire Asia: Facebook & the boom of the internet economy in Cambodia (2020)
[91] Phnom Penh Post: Facebook trains officials on best digital platform practices (2019)

RDO 3: REGIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL AND ENERGY SYSTEMS STRENGTHENED

RDO 3 — **Regional Environmental and Energy Systems Strengthened**

IR 3.1 Security of Regional Energy Sector Increased	IR 3.2 Transnational Environmental Crime Reduced	IR 3.3 Regional Sustainable Natural Resource Management Strengthened
Sub-IR 3.1.1 Deployment of clean, smart, and secure energy technologies increased	**Sub-IR 3.2.1** Demand for illegal environmental products reduced	**Sub-IR 3.3.1** Responsible investments for NRM increased
Sub-IR 3.1.2 Energy sector performance, inclusivity, and resilience [flexibility] improved	**Sub-IR 3.2.2** Regional policies, standards, and regulatory frameworks harmonized	**Sub-IR 3.3.2** Transparent and inclusive NRM governance improved
Sub-IR 3.1.3 Regional energy trade and system connections expanded	**Sub-IR 3.2.3** Response to transnational environmental crime by regional actors increased	**Sub-IR 3.3.2** Regional institutions and networks strengthened to conserve natural resources
Sub-IR 3.1.4 Open, fair, and competitive energy sector procurement increased		

Development Hypothesis: *IF* regional institutions, the private sector, and civil society work collaboratively to create open, transparent energy markets, reduce transnational environmental crime, and strengthen natural resources management, *THEN* regional environmental and energy systems—including ecosystems, markets, and networks—will be more resilient to shocks and other threats.

Development Narrative: The U.S. vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific prioritizes enhancing economic prosperity and ensuring peace and security in the region.[92] Addressing energy and environmental security, as well as countering transnational environmental crime, is critical to achieving these objectives. These are transboundary challenges and require partnership and engagement with regional organizations and principled[93] networks that provide foundational support to country-level activities. RDO 3 will strengthen regional environmental and energy systems across Southeast Asia, assisting the region to better respond to emerging threats and promote the sustainable use of shared natural resources.

Inherently, natural resources are not restricted by political boundaries, require shared stewardship and management, and are vital for shared long-term growth. The transboundary nature is especially true with energy sources (renewable and non-renewable), water, air, minerals, fisheries, wildlife, and forests. Activities such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, mining, urbanization, and infrastructure development will have a significant impact on the environment and the region's future.[94] Likewise, all forms of energy generation for electricity have an environmental impact on air, water, and land,[95] and increases in greenhouse gas emissions in Southeast Asia are driven primarily by the energy sector. For example, the BRI includes an expansive network of highways, railways, and energy pipelines that often necessitate the destruction of natural habitats for their construction.[96] Many environmental issues stem from imprudent resource extraction, ageing infrastructure, and unsustainable energy practices, often with direct adverse effects on the surrounding ecosystem. Similarly, the mismanagement of natural resources can result in irrevocable damages, severely limiting energy generation capacity and undermining long-term economic development. Given the intrinsic relationship between energy and the environment, they must be prudently balanced. To successfully increase the resilience of energy and environmental systems, countries must collectively manage, bolster, and advance regional environmental and energy outcomes under agreed upon principles and development objectives.

From 1970 onwards, Southeast Asia's economic growth is directly related to reforms that increased global and regional integration.[97] The region's economic gains have often overshadowed the remaining development challenges. For example, the PRC's dominance of infrastructure and energy sector development, increased environmental crimes, and unsustainable extraction of natural resources have resulted in unreliable energy networks and degraded natural resources. This is further impacted by the increasing intensity, duration, and frequency of extreme weather events in the region. Lastly, women and indigenous people often lack representation in leadership and decision making in the energy and natural resource management sectors.[98] This can

---

[92] A Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Advancing a Shared Vision (2019)
[93] Reflections on American Grand Strategy in Asia (2018)
[94] USAID Environmental and Natural Resource Management Framework (2020)
[95] Environmental Protection Agency: Learn about Energy and its Impact on the Environment
[96] CSIS: Post-pandemic Natural Resource Management in the Indo-Pacific (2020)
[97] Regional Integration and Economic Growth in Southeast Asia (2017)
[98] Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. and Boyer, A.E. (2020). Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality.

lead to large infrastructure and land use projects having negative impacts on their lives and lands, sometimes inadvertently resulting in violence.[99] These issues translate into a projected regional energy deficit,[100] biodiversity loss, and rising economic inequality. The situation is exacerbated by climate, economic, political, and health shocks, such as COVID-19, demonstrating how human well-being and the planet's health are deeply interconnected.

RDMA plays an important role fostering regional cooperation to promote sustainable growth while ensuring equitable access to natural resources. RDMA will advance the U.S. approach towards strategic partnership, not dependence. Our collaboration with regional organizations, civil society, and private sector networks builds capacity and increases commitment to counter anti-democratic forces to promote an inclusive, open, and resilient environment that safeguards the region's natural resource base.

Across the region, U.S. assistance supports a path to greater self-reliance so that countries are better equipped to determine their own futures and to improve the lives of their citizens. Previously, RDMA helped address natural resource management issues and climate change in the region, with a focus on strengthening international institutions, promoting women's participation and leadership, and serving vulnerable populations.

Looking forward, RDMA will partner with regional institutions, civil society, and the private sector to protect Asia's natural resources and biodiversity against exploitation, pollution, and increased risk of degradation or loss. By strengthening natural resources management while fostering inclusive economic growth, RDO 3 will build the region's resilience to future shocks and strengthen countries' capacity to plan and finance their own development solutions.

IR 3.1: Security of regional energy sector increased

Southeast Asia, home to more than 650 million people, has gone through a rapid economic transformation and emerged as an important global force. Economic growth is expected to continue as the region's population is estimated to exceed 780 million by 2040, reflecting an annual average growth rate of 0.9 percent. Two-thirds of projected global energy growth over the next 20 years will occur in developing countries within the Indo-Pacific region.[101] To support this growth, the region needs to upgrade and expand its energy systems, modernize its infrastructure, and build regional markets for the exchange of energy commodities. Government reforms and private sector investment are crucial to meeting these needs in a way that ensures a path to self-reliance and resilience.[102]

To that end, open and transparent energy systems will help the region better respond to, and manage, shocks and stresses. To help meet Southeast Asia's rapidly growing

---

[99] USAID Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2020)
[100] Asia Edge Factsheet
[101] Remarks by Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Asia Gloria Steele at the Asia EDGE Virtual Workshop: Supporting Indo-Pacific Industry Engagement through Asia EDGE | June 25, 2020
[102] RDCS Knowledge Capture: Energy

energy demand, and accelerate a regional clean energy transition, RDO 3 will collaborate with the private sector to encourage investment in energy efficiency, deploy advanced technologies, and champion open and transparent markets. The launch of the Asia EDGE initiative   S enabled RDMA to pivot from a narrow focus on clean energy to a more holistic approach to energy security in the region. RDMA will help the U.S. Government's Indo-Pacific partners expand energy access while promoting environmental safeguards, diversifying trade and energy sources, and strengthening energy security. As effective energy planning often involves ensuring that multiple parts of society are adequately represented, USAID and its partners will focus on reducing the barriers for women entering the energy sector workforce and promoting women in various aspects of the energy value chain.

IR 3.2: Transnational environmental crime reduced

Southeast Asia is a biodiversity hotspot, holding approximately 20 percent of global plant, animal, and marine species.[103] Consequently, RDMA is a USAID Biodiversity Tier One Operating Unit, with key investments in illegal wildlife trade, the Coral Triangle Initiative, and the Mekong river basin.[104] Although transnational crime related to the illegal wildlife trade and illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing continues to increase in the region, effective information sharing and robust prosecution of these crimes remains uneven at best. Globally, International Wildlife Trafficking is the second biggest threat to biodiversity, after habitat destruction,[105] and the fourth most lucrative illegal activity following narcotics, human trafficking, and arms. The recent involvement of organized criminal networks linking trade in the Mekong region to the PRC and Africa have prompted government, civil society organizations, and law enforcement stakeholders to reconsider how these crimes are framed and addressed.[106]

In response, RDO 3 will, under the Natural Resource Safeguards and Security objective of the IPS, elevate and expand our cutting-edge efforts to reduce demand for illegal wildlife in critical consumer, and non-presence, countries such as China and Thailand. Recognizing the regional aspects of illegal wildlife trafficking, this will be complemented by efforts to support a community of practice across the region to encourage adoption and application of research-driven demand reduction approaches. We will also cultivate political will, through regional for a like the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and ASEAN working groups on transnational crime and wildlife enforcement,[107] to decrease crimes such as illegal wildlife trafficking, fishing, and logging, and water and air pollution. At the commercial level, our activities will reduce purchases and/or consumption of illegal environmental products. By promoting transparent government policies and regulations which adhere to internationally accepted standards through regional institutions, RDMA will support legal, sustainable fishing and logging, as well as efforts to combat transnational crime associated with wildlife and wildlife products in the

---

[103] https://unu.edu/publications/articles/unraveling-the-drivers-of-southeast-asia-biodiversity-loss.html#info
[104] USAID: USAID Biodiversity Policy
[105] Unsustainable and illegal wildlife trade
[106] Lawson, Katherine and Vines, Alex. 2014. Global Impacts of the Illegal Wildlife Trade: The Costs of Crime, Insecurity, and Institutional Erosion. Chatham House.
[107] Focused on implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

region. We will also further strengthen the leadership and commitment of regional organizations to advance sustainable fisheries management and provide a counterweight to growing maritime lawlessness fueled by countries such as the PRC, resulting in stronger regional security and shared economic growth. As environmental defenders oftentimes face the same threats as human rights defenders, RDO 1's efforts to protect human rights defenders will be an important complement to RDO 3's focus on reducing transnational environmental crime.

IR 3.3: Regional sustainable natural resource management strengthened

Southeast Asia is home to 15 percent of the world's tropical forests which are critical to the support of the region's biodiversity.[108] As indicated by the Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis, Southeast Asian countries' biodiversity and habit protection policies may be relatively strong on paper. Regrettably, implementation and enforcement of those policies, as well as the growing threat to environmental defenders[109] are challenges and the region is a hotspot for habitat loss, with deforestation and loss rates for biodiversity among the most severe globally.[110] At the same time, the international community is increasingly aware of forests' importance to the global economy and the threat forest loss poses to productivity, supply chains, and economic sustainability. To strengthen natural resource management as the demand for developable land grows, the region must balance conservation with economic gain. Thus, there is a growing shift towards the adoption of a "Green Economy" model[111] using enterprise-driven solutions to advance low-emission development strategies, improve human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. There is also a growing understanding of the importance of a Green Economy for long-term economic stability. Green growth strategies and new tools and approaches to address deforestation, climate change, and sustainable supply chains offer hope to the Asia Pacific region for inclusive growth.[112]

RDMA recognizes the complex relationships between sound ecosystem management, the determinants of poverty, and the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts. With a singular focus on RDMA's transboundary mandate, RDO 3 will work collaboratively with regional institutions, the private sector, academia, and civil society to increase responsible investment, champion transparent and inclusive governance, and strengthen regional institutions and networks to safeguard natural resources for the future. In addition, given the large amount of biodiversity under their stewardship, RDMA will emphasize inclusivity of marginalized and indigenous communities in natural resource decision making by identifying opportunities for groups to engage in advocacy, participate in natural resource decision-making, and monitor environmental challenges

---

[108] Nature.com: The Future of Southeast Asia's Forests (2019)
[109] Global Witness records the highest number of land and environmental activists murdered in one year (2020)
[110] NYDF Assessment Partners. 2019. Protecting and Restoring Forests: A Story of Large Commitments yet Limited Progress. New York Declaration on Forests Five-Year Assessment Report. Climate Focus
[111] UN Environment: A green economy is defined as low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. In a green economy, growth in employment and income are driven by public and private investment into such economic activities, infrastructure and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
[112] Asian Development Bank: Sustainable Land Management in Asia: Introducing the Landscape Approach. (2017)

at a regional level. At the same time, RDO 3 recognizes the importance of sustainable, reliable, and secure supply chains, and will coordinate with RDO 2.2 to support businesses with green growth strategies.

Sub IR 3.2.4 and IR 3.3.4

Intersecting the efforts to improve natural resource safeguards and security in the Indo-Pacific, is the need to address emerging infectious disease threats which lie at the nexus of animal, human and environment health. COVID-19 has revealed the deep interconnectivity between human well-being and the planet's health. Given the role that wildlife trade may have played in the COVID-19 pandemic, coordinated and inclusive regional efforts are essential in guiding approaches to reduce demand for wildlife products, counter transnational environmental crime, and strengthen natural resource management. In alignment with global and regional efforts and in coordination with RDO 4.1, RDO 3 will collaborate across disciplines in environmental, animal, and human health to mitigate current and future infectious diseases, and their impacts.

> In late 2019, the novel coronavirus was first detected in Wuhan, China. It is generally agreed that it originated from animal consumption in a market. Increased human interaction with wildlife—be it through the destruction of habitats, the consumption of animals, or other means—increases exposure to diseases, and 58 percent of all pandemics are zoonotic in origin, transmitted through an animal source. COVID-19 should be seen as a wake-up call to the importance of proper natural resource management.
>
> - Center for Strategic & International Studies

Accelerating and Aligning Around the Concept of Self-Reliance

As recognized by the **Journey to Self-Reliance**, sound management of environmental and natural resources is integral to a country's development, resilience, and self-reliance. Sustainable economic growth that incorporates the responsible use of natural resources and applies environmental safeguards proactively is critical for the Journey to Self-Reliance. To advance J2SR, RDO 3 will work with regional institutions and networks as well as the private sector to help build and support free and open environments across the region, resilient to shocks and stresses such as COVID-19   .

Per RDMA's **Private Sector Engagement** Plan, RDO 3 will harness the private sector and private finance mechanisms to drive sustainable and responsible investment in the region. RDMA will use its geographical proximity to other regional bodies to build the capacity of regional institutions and networks to partner effectively with the private sector. For instance, the UN Environmental Programme has identified $3 trillion in unmet demand for green investments in the environment and energy sectors across the ASEAN region by 2030.[113] It will be impossible to meet those needs with limited public and donor resources. RDMA will leverage our private sector engagement expertise and convening power to bring together a broad range of stakeholders to collectively meet investment opportunities in the region.

---

[113] Green Finance Opportunities in ASEAN (2017)

RDO 3 will advance **Financing Self-Reliance** by building the capacity of regional institutions to mobilize public and private finance and manage resources effectively. We will also strengthen regional institutions, private sector, and civil society capacity to influence the allocation of financial resources to support sustainable environmental and energy systems. RDMA has a proven record harnessing the private sector and private financing to expand responsible and sustainable investment and will use this to accelerate financing the region's self-reliance. For example, in 2019, USAID Clean Power Asia brokered a deal between B. Grimm, a leading Thai energy company, and a Vietnamese local partner that led to the development of a $251 million solar plant, one of the largest in Vietnam.

RDO 3 will **Redefine our Relationships with Partner Governments** by partnering with regional entities, as well as Thailand, to support them to take a stronger leadership role in the region. For example, building on over a decade of partnership with Thailand, we will redefine our relationship to support their efforts to successfully advocate within ASEAN to harmonize counter wildlife trafficking policy and the criminalization of wildlife trafficking across the region. With many Southeast Asian governments already demonstrating strong commitment in the environment sector, as highlighted in the Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis, USAID will focus on using regional forums to encourage collaboration and share lessons learned rather than holding partners to account. In the energy sector, these regional forums can serve as a tool for raising awareness around large-scale infrastructure activities that do not comply with internationally accepted standards, thus increasing pressure on country-specific infrastructure activities that adversely impact the region. In addition, RDMA works closely with like-minded partners, such as Japan, to address jointly prioritized development challenges in Southeast Asia's energy sector, such as coordination on master planning efforts, promoting regional energy trade and integration, and supporting the deployment of advanced energy technologies such as electric vehicles.

Under the **New Partnerships Initiative**, RDO 3 will provide capacity support to emerging regional institutions and networks. For example, and in support of the Mission's NPI Action Plan, RDMA will provide capacity building support for multilateral platforms such as the Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Center and the Coral Triangle Initiative. Our support will help these institutions serve as regional leaders for sustainable fisheries management and scale up USAID investments in traceability.

RDO 4:	REGIONAL RESPONSE TO HEALTH THREATS IMPROVED

RDO 4 — **Regional Response to Health Threats Improved**

IR 4.1 Regional partnerships strengthened to address regional health threats

Sub-IR 4.1.1 Regional health networks strengthened

Sub-IR 4.1.2 Regional prevention, detection and response systems for public health threats/infectious diseases bolstered and harmonized

Sub-IR 4.1.3 Regional health standards and guidelines adopted

IR 4.2 Health policy harmonization enhanced

Sub-IR 4.2.1 Regional platforms for health policy and advocacy leveraged

Sub-IR 4.2.2 Models of excellence and evidence-based best practices on health promoted across the region

Development Hypothesis: *IF* regional partnerships and cooperation on health systems and policies are enhanced, *THEN* the commitment and actions of regional stakeholders will be strengthened, enabling the region to more effectively address public health threats.

Development Narrative: Health status in Asia varies as greatly as the histories, cultures, economic development, environmental landscapes, and opportunities and challenges for growth.[114] Despite this enormous diversity, the region has achieved significant progress in key infectious disease areas such as malaria and HIV. Importantly, Burma, Kyrgyz Republic, Nepal, Tajikistan, and Thailand are close to

---

[114] World Health Organization: World Health Statistics 2020

achieving HIV epidemic control, while Cambodia is already at HIV epidemic control. The Lower Mekong countries are poised to eliminate malaria by 2030.[115] As evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring Southeast Asia can respond to health threats is foundational to the success of all the other RDOs and to successfully achieving a free and open Indo-Pacific. As RDMA utilizes its regional approach to amplify and augment the efforts of USAID bilateral OUs in the region, many of the improved health outcomes will be achieved at the country level.

Asia also remains a "hotspot" for new, emerging, or re-emerging zoonotic diseases such as avian influenza, SARS, MERS, and most recently, COVID-19. The complex interactions between population growth, mobility, urbanization, and environmental changes such as agriculture and livestock intensification, deforestation, and climate change have created an environment that is uniquely susceptible to these risks.[116] Although countries in the region have made great strides in strengthening prevention, early detection, and rapid response, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the urgent need for a well-coordinated, robust, equitable, inclusive, and sustainable public health response across Asia. As indicated in the Regional J2SR Landscape Analysis, vulnerable populations[117] continue to face barriers to accessing culturally sensitive and inclusive high-quality prevention, treatment, and care services. The COVID-19 crisis and lockdown measures have also exacerbated pre-existing social and gender norms with negative consequences, including limited access to health services and gender-based violence.[118] As vulnerability in one country is a vulnerability to the entire region, RDMA's contributions to improving the regional response to the vast array of health threats will enable the region to more effectively address these transnational health issues, and to protect the health of all.[119]

Over the past ten years, USAID's investments in the region, both bilaterally and regionally, have contributed to promising health developments. USAID, through RDMA, has supported efforts to increase regional capacity and coordination to prevent, detect, and respond to disease threats. RDMA has also strengthened regional laboratory networks, treatment guidelines, health surveillance and procurement and supply chain systems, and increased health worker capacity to manage disease outbreaks, prevention, and elimination, all of which contribute to a safer, more secure, and resilient Indo-Pacific region. The USG approach to health saves lives, prevents the spread of diseases, and strengthens the resilience of vulnerable communities and their environments. And this is achieved in part through working relationships with USAID bilateral OUs who contribute to the overall improvement of health outcomes in the region.

RDMA's health strategy has evolved from health systems strengthening, improving access to care, and effective policy implementation to focus on elevating and supporting greater collaboration across regional partnerships to address pressing health threats

---

[115] World Health Organization: Strategy for malaria elimination in the Greater Mekong Subregion: 2015-2030
[116] Coker, R. J., Hunter, B. M., Rudge, J. W., Liverani, M., & Hanvoravongchai, P. (2011). Emerging infectious diseases in southeast Asia: regional challenges to control.
[117] Vulnerable population includes women, girls, migrants, men who have sex with men, and transgender persons.
[118] UNWomen: Impact of COVID-19 on Violence against Women and Girls (2020)
[119] Greater Mekong Subregion: Health Cooperation Strategy 2019–2023

and promoting resilient regional responses.[120] As such, RDMA will work closely with regional partners—from the community level to multi-country institutions and the private sector—applying lessons learned in areas such as health financing, gender and social inclusion, and health policy advocacy to scale-up evidence-based models in the region.

Looking forward, improving coordination of the region's response to health threats is critical given the tremendous movement of goods, services, and people across Southeast Asia (e.g., cross-border trade) and within the global economy.[121,122] Cooperative strategies to manage the impact of migration and urbanization will continue to be crucial in preventing the spread of disease across the region especially with the increasing risks of climate variability and change. And, in light of the devastating impact COVID-19 had on the economy as well as on women and vulnerable populations, there is a clear need for countries to collaborate to control the spread and mitigate the impacts of infectious diseases.[123,124] Leveraging regional partnerships to harmonize health policies will foster consistent policy implementation, strengthen the regional network, and ultimately help make the public health response to transnational health threats more sustainable and equitable.

RDO 4 will use a dual approach to improve the regional response to health threats:

IR 4.1: Regional partnerships strengthened to address regional health threats

To accelerate a future where the region can fully determine their own health outcomes, RDO 4 will improve health response systems by enhancing regional partnerships and cooperation. RDMA will strengthen the commitment and actions of regional stakeholders—including community level, private sector, academia, and multilateral organizations—to enable the region to more effectively address public health threats. RDMA will also leverage the reach of existing networks, such as the Southeast Asia One Health University Network, to identify new partnerships with both the private and public sectors. These partnerships will be designed to build response capacity and improve the management of future public health challenges.

RDMA will harness the expertise of regional bodies, including the USAID-supported Asia Regional Public Health Laboratory Network, Asia Pacific Malaria Elimination Network, and Asia Pacific Coalition on Male Sexual Health, to share experiences and promote the adoption of technical guidelines and standards to address common challenges across the region, such as supply chain management of health commodities, which aligns well with RDO 2 efforts. In collaboration with RDO 3, RDO 4 will also engage in discussions among regional stakeholders and health decision makers on the health impacts of climate change.

RDO 4 will also work with regional partners to identify transboundary infectious disease threats and regionally align surveillance efforts. For example, RDMA, working with U.S.

---

[120] USAID/RDMA: Regional Development Cooperation Strategy (2014-2020)
[121] IMF: The Future of Southeast Asia (2018)
[122] WE Forum: Southeast Asian countries are realising the importance of high-skilled immigration (2019)
[123] World Bank: East Asia and Pacific: Countries Must Act Now to Mitigate Economic Shock of COVID-19 (2020)
[124] ASEAN: ASEAN Health Ministers enhance cooperation in fighting COVID-19 pandemic (2020)

Government and UN Agencies, will convene zoonotic influenza dialogues to better understand the existing landscape of pandemic-prone influenza in Asia, identify key knowledge gaps, and develop an actionable plan for regionally harmonized surveillance and data analyses. In collaboration with RDO 3, RDO 4 will strengthen regional networks to mitigate the health impacts of air pollution and effectively address the intersection between zoonotic diseases and countering wildlife trafficking. To accelerate malaria elimination in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) by 2030, RDMA will work closely with National Malaria Control Programs; The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria; and other technical partners to enhance surveillance platforms across the region, particularly as migrants and mobile populations along the GMS borders are at high-risk of malaria. Successfully controlling transboundary health threats in one country requires coordination with its neighbors, and RDMA will expand health networks and harmonize regional efforts across Asia to improve the quality of life for vulnerable populations.

IR 4.2: Health policy harmonization enhanced

Harmonized[125] health policies allow for a collective approach to preventing, detecting, responding to, and controlling transboundary health threats. As this collective approach is carried out, it ensures that vulnerabilities in one country's implementation do not adversely impact the positive developments in another. Harmonization in this way is critical to addressing transnational priorities that require a cohesive collective approach, such as malaria elimination. RDMA will help standardize health policy in the region by leveraging health-oriented regional platforms, such as the Asia Pacific Leaders Malaria Alliance which coordinates regional action and brokers policy for malaria elimination in the region. Complementing RDO 1 efforts to promote citizen-responsive governance and support vulnerable populations, RDO 4 will strengthen regional advocacy efforts on priority shared issues such as universal health coverage, domestic health financing, and inclusive health services for vulnerable populations. RDO 4 will also facilitate the promotion of models of excellence and evidence-based best practices on health across the region in partnership with stakeholders, including regional UN Agencies, USAID/ASEAN, and other bilateral cooperating agencies, e.g., Japan International Cooperation Agency, KOICA, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. In HIV/AIDS, RDMA will continue to convene regional workshops to accelerate epidemic control by exchanging best practices and exporting evidence-based models for key populations (e.g., men who have sex with men, transgender persons) to replicate Thailand's successful models to other countries.

RDO 4 will capitalize on the commitment and country-level health gains made in Southeast Asia. For example, Thailand's health system has benefited from both national growth and long-term investments made by donors, including USAID. Thailand and Vietnam have also responded effectively to the silent, slow-burning issue of antimicrobial resistance, an area in which RDMA's technical assistance has created surveillance systems and globally recognized reference centers. RDO 4 provides an

---

[125] Harmonization occurs when countries share information and actively engage and invest in regional health cooperation.

opportunity for USAID to leverage the success of Thailand as a model for public health leadership and success in the region.

Accelerating and Aligning Around the Concept of Self-Reliance

RDO 4 will advance **Journey to Self-Reliance** priorities by using modest regional funding to enhance existing regional entities, mature existing regional networks, and serve as a convener for sharing evidence-based best practices on priority public health threats across the region. And this will become increasingly important as climate change exacerbates existing regional health challenges, e.g., changing temperatures and rainfall patterns may increase transmission of malaria and other vector-borne diseases; displacement due to climate impacts and/or shifting migratory patterns may increase human-wildlife interactions and pathogen emergence. RDMA's ability to engage these regional entities and promote mainstreaming climate change adaptation into regional sustainable development policies and plans will provide an opportunity to build resilience and reduce vulnerability.

Per RDMA's **Private Sector Engagement** Plan, RDO 4 will continue to leverage the private sector to solidify the sustainability of regional public health responses and explore private sector commitments to enhance health capacity, health innovations, and service delivery. For example, RDO 4 will facilitate market-driven disease intelligence and analytic platforms that will enable more near real-time monitoring of disease threats and inform targeted disease risk interventions.

RDO 4 will advance **Financing Self-Reliance** by supporting and sharing innovative models for domestic health financing and building upon increasing evidence that shows high returns on investment when the government prioritizes health budgets. Thailand has made impressive gains in its J2SR through harnessing its national growth and commitment to its people by directly funding community-based and civil society organizations to provide HIV services, with advocacy support from RDMA and partners. RDMA will also promote economic analyses grounded in the best available evidence to advocate the economic case for financing preparedness, early disease detection, and outbreak response capacities. In addition, RDMA will explore opportunities for trilateral assistance activities in the health sector with TICA as part of the Mission's ongoing efforts to expand Thailand's role as a leader within the region. Potential areas for collaboration where Thailand has demonstrated technical leadership and high-level commitment include global health security, HIV/AIDS, malaria, and COVID-19.

Thailand proves that Financing Self-Reliance can be achieved, and their success can elevate public health financing as a core element of strong and resilient infectious disease prevention and response systems as well as broader public health systems in Asia.

RDO 4 will **Redefine our Relationships with Partner Governments** by coordinating with USAID/ASEAN, other regional health bodies, and regional health networks to develop more sustainable public health responses. RDO 4 will leverage the role of development partners, such as ASEAN, regional UN Agencies, and other donors (e.g., JICA, TICA, Australia) to advance efforts to harmonize health-related policies in the

region. In coordination with RDO 2's work to create an inclusive and integrated digital ecosystem, RDO 4 will work with development partners to support sustainable and interoperable digital health platforms across multiple countries to strengthen regional capacity and nurture regional commitment to public health.

RDO 4 will advance the **New Partnerships Initiative** by exploring new, creative, and innovative partnerships to elevate cross-cutting issues such as migration and urban health through stronger regional collaboration.

MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING

In close collaboration and consultation with internal and external stakeholders, USAID/RDMA will place an emphasis on Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) principles and approaches to fill knowledge gaps, improve use of existing evidence, and inform strategic and programmatic decision-making. Where relevant, and to the extent possible, the Mission will use and/or align its learning agenda and key performance measurements with U.S. Government and Agency priorities, as highlighted below. RDMA's learning agenda will initially focus on key knowledge gaps, including:
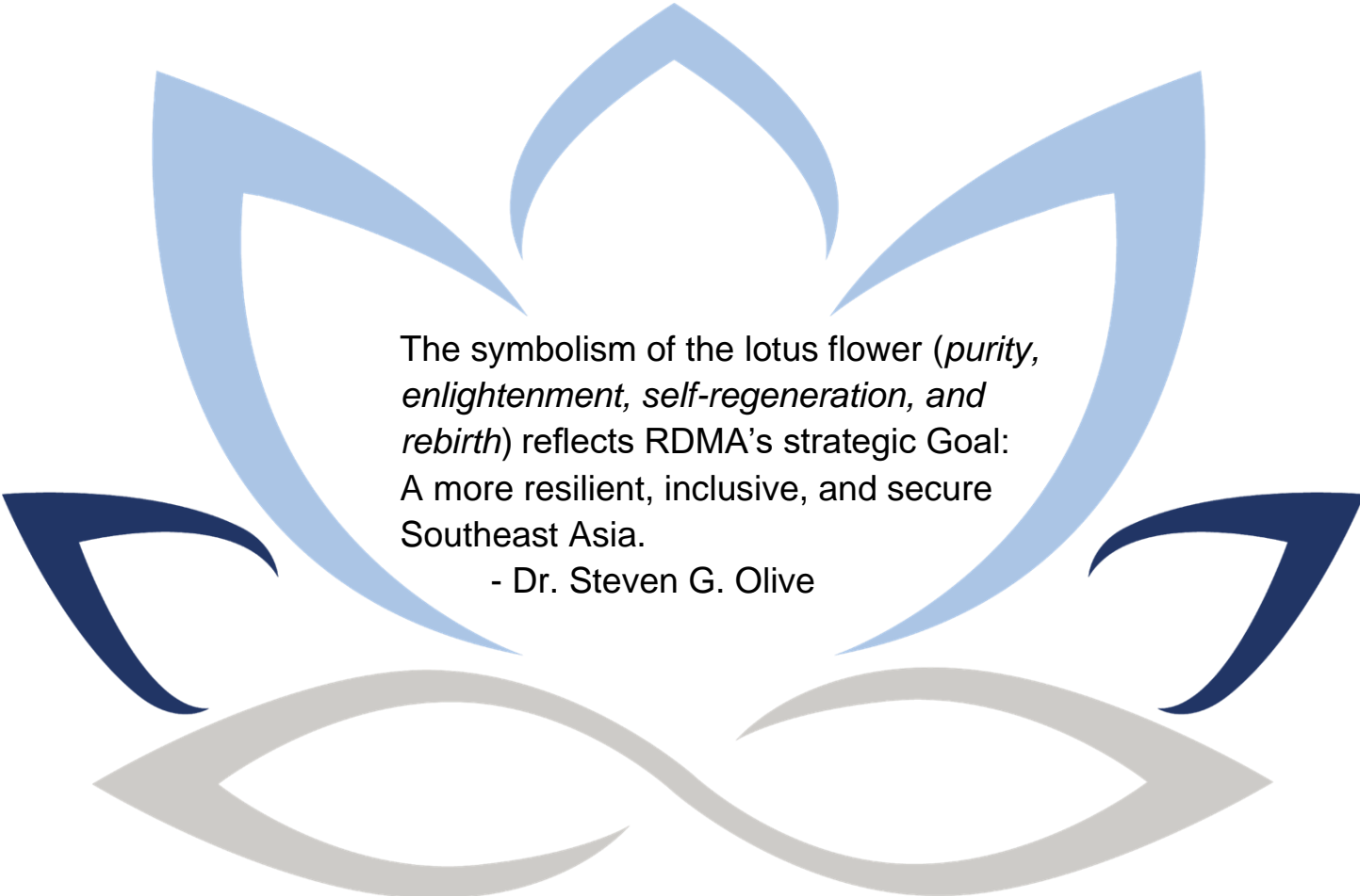
- What does self-reliance look like (and/or entail) for the Southeast Asia region? (J2SR)

- How can RDMA apply evolving approaches to FSR in a regional context? (PSE, J2SR)

- How can PSE and/or Gender and Inclusive Development (GID) support regional actors in advancing the region's self-reliance/priorities in the Indo-Pacific? (PSE, GID, J2SR,   NPI)

- How can RDMA use knowledge and convening power to advance the region's self-reliance/Indo-Pacific priorities/PSE? (J2SR, PSE, GID, NPI)

- How can local, sub-national, national, and regional voices, priorities, and contributions be integrated into how USAID fosters the region's self-reliance/Indo-Pacific priorities? (J2SR, GID, NPI)

The CLA plan, along with monitoring and evaluation plans, will be articulated in the Mission's Performance Management Plan (PMP) and be monitored through conventional performance management opportunities (e.g., annual reports, mission-wide portfolio reviews) and ad hoc performance management efforts (e.g., special studies, pause-and-reflect exercises). This monitoring will also entail a stocktaking exercise to review progress against the RDOs. Based on performance management information, the PMP will be revisited and adjusted, as appropriate, over the life of the RDCS to ensure that it is adapted to any contextual changes or revisions to the Mission's strategic direction.

In carrying through RDMA's focus on building capacity and commitment of key regional partners, the Mission will identify opportunities to strengthen its partners capacity in relation to MEL, focusing on relevant existing and potential regional partners/actors.

The Mission will leverage expertise and capacity of its existing Asia Regional Training Center (ARTC) to advance the CLA efforts to generate and share learning among multidimensional stakeholders such as relevant USAID operating units, other relevant USG agencies, private sectors, national/regional/international government and non-government bodies/institutions/ organizations, and civil society.

The symbolism of the lotus flower (*purity, enlightenment, self-regeneration, and rebirth*) reflects RDMA's strategic Goal: A more resilient, inclusive, and secure Southeast Asia.
- Dr. Steven G. Olive

ANNEX 1: REGIONAL OPERATIONS MAP (RDMA), AS OF OCTOBER 2020

USAID/RDMA Regional Activities & Support Services to USAID Bilateral Missions and Offices										
	Regional Programming & Engagement[126]				Pooled Support Services[127]					
Country	RDO 1	RDO 2	RDO 3	RDO 4	Other Support	Regional Office of Financial Management	Regional Office of Acquisition & Assistance	Regional Legal Office	Regional Executive Office	Program Office & Budget Support
Lower Mekong										
Cambodia					GID, REA					
Laos					GID, MEL, MEO, REA					Transition to Client (2020)
Myanmar (Burma)					GID, REA					
Vietnam					Engineer, REA		Transition to Client (2021-2022)			
Thailand (non-presence)					GID, MEL, MEO, DOC, REA					
Other Southeast Asia										
Indonesia					REA					

---

[126] **Regional Programming and Engagement**: The coordination of cross-border development efforts and engagement with governmental and nongovernmental regional organizations.

[127] **Pooled services** include limited technical, legal, administrative, financial management, and contracting support for bilateral Missions.

Other Support: The provision of support on a limited range of issues that are specific and in high demand (including support to LPCs/NPCs). RDMA has defined this as support that requires more than 15 percent of one FTE. (GID = Gender and Inclusive Development; REA = Regional Environment Advisor; DOC = Development Outreach and Communications; MEO = Mission Environment Officer)

Philippines					REA				
Timor-Leste					GID, MEL, MEO, REA				Transition to Client (2019-2020)
Other Asia Missions									
Bangladesh					Engineer, REA				
China (non-presence)					GID, MEL, MEO, DOC, REA				
India					GID, REA				
Central Asia Regional					REA				
Kyrgyzstan					REA				
Nepal					Engineer, REA				
Sri Lanka					REA				
Region-wide									
Regional Convening 128					GID, MEL, DOC, REA				

---

128 Includes bringing OUs together, hosting trainings, strengthening regional MEL/CLA, and acting as a region-specific data aggregator

Operations Map Narrative

Support Services

In alignment with the Optimizing Operational Platforms Action Plan, and as outlined above, RDMA will support five core clients in Southeast Asia (Burma, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, and Timor-Leste). Driven by demand, and in conjunction with USAID/W, RDMA will also provide limited and targeted services to non-core client Missions. RDMA will not provide services to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Programs

RDMA's core programmatic geography is Southeast Asia, with particular emphasis on the Lower Mekong region. This region represents a highly strategic nexus of U.S. foreign policy interests, particularly in regard to global power competition. Depending on the needs of particular sectors and guided by bilateral mission objectives, some regional programming reaches beyond the Lower Mekong. As appropriate, USAID/RDMA will design mechanisms to ensure that other Operating Units (OU) within the region are able to access and tailor them to advance the achievement of their bilateral development objectives. USAID/RDMA designs and manages a select number of mechanisms that are available for client mission buy-in across several sectors, and USAID/RDMA focuses these designs on areas where there is high demand from bilateral OUs. For example, USAID/RDMA has buy-in mechanisms in the following sectors: Environment (Wildlife, Natural Resources Preservation, Climate Change, and Energy); Program Cycle Support (Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning, and Outreach and Communications); Counter Trafficking in Persons; and Local Solutions.

Furthermore, USAID/RDMA's Program Office serves as the Subject Matter Expert and Trainer on the Agency's recently launched Development Information Solutions (DIS). The Regional Office of Acquisition and Assistance aims to leverage the regional A&A Lab, through which it provides NPI support to OUs and shares learning and knowledge across Missions in Asia.

Convening/Training

RDMA will serve as a regional convener by leveraging the existing A&A LAB, Asia Regional Training Center (ARTC) and regional networks to further advance this role with concrete plans and anticipated results in collaboration with bilateral missions, regional stakeholders, and relevant counterparts in Washington, DC. Through this convening role, RDMA will aim to bolster outcomes of both RDMA's and bilateral missions' programming and promote the region's resilience by convening south-south pluralistic alternatives to the People's Republic of China.

The ARTC exists to provide training opportunities for Federal Employees located the furthest from the United States. It is a modern, world-class training facility easily accessible to all Missions in the Asia, Eurasia, Middle East, and East Africa regions. ARTC represents an efficient, low-cost approach to the delivery of core professional training and advanced technical training enhancing the career development of

government personnel in the field. It is a cost-effective, easily accessible alternative to individual Mission-hosted training, or to sending employees on long, costly trips to the U.S. for training. In addition to USAID and the Department of State, ARTC classrooms are utilized by the Peace Corps, Departments of the Treasury, Commerce, and Defense, as well as other U.S. Government agencies. The sharing of the ARTC facility has resulted in significant savings for the U.S. Government.

Throughout the last ten years, ARTC has served 20+ countries in Asia. More than 1,400 training courses, workshops, seminars, and special events, which involved more than 32,000 Federal employees and partners, have been conducted by ARTC. Moreover, ARTC has developed the curriculum for **"ARTC Homegrown Learning Events,"** which are designed and implemented by technical advisors, operational service providers, or subject matter experts (SMEs) regionally to promote learning within the Agency. This initiative continues to serve the high demands of professional development in the Asia region and beyond.

In 2020, ARTC increases its potential as a regional learning and development platform by adding the Instructional Design and Delivery team and Client Outreach and Data Analysis team to actively work with SMEs throughout the Asia region and to strengthen ARTC regional reach. The new team will help ARTC to proactively identify training needs for the region through various outreach activities and systematically analyze ARTC training and development data using cutting-edge data visualization software to forecast the training trends and improve decision-making.