

# Thailand and Japan Working Together for the Mekong Region

Pattarat Hongtong

Director-General of the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA)

The Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) was established in 2004 as a national focal agency under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand to administer, plan, promote, manage and evaluate the international development cooperation between Thailand and other countries and international organizations. In practice, TICA strategically coordinates and conducts both short-term and long-term international development policies and international assistance, by matching Thailand's expertise and capacities with the needs of partner countries.

Japan, and JICA in particular, has been a long-standing development partner of Thailand by providing Official Development Assistance since the 1950s; which set the foundation for its close relationship with TICA and its role in the region. JICA works as a model, development partner and mentor organization to TICA, helping establish the institutional knowledge and developmental materials required. In 1994, JICA and TICA became co-development partners, providing technical assistance to other countries to make the most of Thailand's potential to expand its 'appropriate technology' and 'best practices' to other developing countries. Since then, both sides have launched the Japan-Thailand Partnership Programme (JTTP) as a framework for the transfer of technical knowledge to promote the integration of the Mekong Region into the ASEAN. Developments of note include jointly conducting the Third Country Training Program (TCTP) in Thailand; and recently, the country-focused trilateral cooperation projects that emphasize capacity building and human resource development.

With differing national interests, working to build policy consensus among the countries of the Mekong Region can be a



challenge for TICA. However, working together with JICA under the "3Cs", or the principles of Cohesion, Coordination, and Complementarity, is helping to bring about integrated policymaking, whereby concerned agencies can support each other and work more effectively. JICA's long experience and success in development cooperation, especially in bolstering project management, monitoring and evaluation, as well as reporting methods, could be very beneficial in bolstering TICA's role as a development partner to other countries. TICA plans to further develop this area of development cooperation and looks forward to continued close

cooperation with JICA to help make this a reality.

TICA and JICA will gear their cooperation to promote ASEAN integration, and push toward the realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific, the Tokyo Strategy 2018 for Mekong-Japan Cooperation, The ACMECS\* Five-Year Master Plan (2019-2023), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. It is safe to say that TICA and JICA's joint development cooperation in the Mekong Region is a critical element in being able to attain these regional and global goals. As partner development organizations that serve as a bridge between countries and regions, we look forward to overcoming the challenges and achieving tangible development in the years ahead.

\* the Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy

Profile:

Pattarat Hongtong was appointed as the Director-General of the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA) in April 2019. She is a diplomat with the extensive overseas experience, which includes missions in Switzerland, Russia, and Japan. She has also held positions in bilateral affairs with European and East Asian countries and in multi-lateral affairs with the ASEAN and the UN. She is a graduate of Sophia University in Japan, and her expertise is in international relations.