



## SUMERNET Public Seminar on “*Listening to voices on the margins: lessons from the COVID-19 crisis for improving access to clean water for drinking and hygiene in the Mekong Region*”

Date/Time: 10:00 - 11:30 am, Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> May 2022

Access: Using online mode via Zoom

### **Background**

Access to enough quantity and suitable quality of water in the Mekong Region is a key factor in sustainable production, livelihoods, wellbeing, and the environment. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated unequal access to safe water, especially for vulnerable populations.

As part of ongoing effort to reduce water insecurity for all, in particular for the poor, marginalized and socially vulnerable groups of women and men in the Mekong Region, the Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) under SUMERNET 4 All programme (2018-2023) is supporting 21 multi-country collaborative research and joint action projects involving more than 100 researchers and other stakeholders to co-produce knowledge that is useful for the decision makers and public to consider for better policy and practices on addressing water insecurity in the region.

SUMERNET will organize a series of public seminars by the project teams to share their findings, recommendations, success and lessons learned on project implementation including multi-stakeholder engagement with SUMERNET network members and others widely. Feedback from the project boundary partners and other participants would be valuable for project teams and for the overall network to consider in planning future action to address water insecurity for all.

### **SUMERNET Public Seminar on Listening to Voices on the Margins**

The COVID-19 outbreak has been a disruptive crisis, including the impacts on systems of provision. What lessons can be learned from the COVID-19 crisis for reducing water insecurities in the Mekong Region, in the event of other disruptive crises, for instance disruption of clean water supplies arising from climate-related disasters?

This public seminar will highlight the study results from the project “*Listening to voices on the margins: Lessons from the COVID-19 crisis for improving access to clean water for drinking and hygiene in the Mekong Region (VOICES)*”. The purpose of this study was to understand the challenges and identify effective ways to improve access to clean water for drinking and hygiene, especially for vulnerable communities. The project attempted to engage with communities, documenting responses to the pandemic and the challenges they faced, comparing their perspectives with current practices and policy in the five countries of Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam in the Mekong Region.

VOICES project was led by the Unit for Social and Environmental Research (USER) of Chiang Mai University, Thailand, and involved partners from University of Yangon, Myanmar, National University of Laos (NOUL),

Lao PDR, Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute (IFReDI), Cambodia, and Western Highlands Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (WASI), Vietnam.

## Agenda

Time	Description	Lead/Remarks
Overall moderators: Mr. Boripat Lebel (VOICES Project Coordinator) and Ms. Sushmita Mandal (SUMERNET Research for Policy and Practice Coordinator) Technical supporters: Ms. Variya Plungwatana (Communications Assistant), Mr. Oungkham Oo (SUMERNET Fellow)		
10:00 am -10:07 am (7 min)	Welcome remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embassy of Sweden</li> <li>• SUMERNET Steering Committee (SSC)</li> </ul>	Dr. Eren Zink, First Secretary, Senior Research Advisor, Embassy of Sweden Prof. Dr. Chantana Wungaeo, SUMERNET Steering Committee (SSC)
10:07am - 10:10 am (3 min)	Introduction to SUMERNET Public Seminar	Dr. Chayanis Krittasudthacheewa, SUMERNET Programme Director
10:10am - 10:40 am (30 min)	Sharing research project findings: Panel of the study team, who will focus on the following aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Research project motivation</li> <li>- Methodology, challenges, innovations</li> <li>- Findings: country specific, impacts on vulnerable groups in each country and implication for the Mekong region</li> <li>- Recommendations to address water access inequities in the study countries</li> <li>- Success stories and lessons learned from research project implementation and engagement with the policy actors and other stakeholders in time of COVID-19 crisis</li> </ul>	Presentation by VOICES Project team led by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Louis Lebel, Thailand (Project lead)</li> <li>• Ms. Hap Navy, Cambodia</li> <li>• Dr. Phoummixay Siharath, Lao PDR</li> <li>• Dr. Nilar Aung, Myanmar</li> <li>• Ms. Chau Thi Minh Long, Vietnam</li> </ul> Moderated by Ms. Sushmita Mandal, SUMERNET Research for Policy and Practice Coordinator
10:40am - 10:50 am (10 min)	Reflections from project boundary partners <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Water access (for drinking and hygiene) issues/ challenges during COVID-19</li> <li>- How were the study findings useful</li> <li>- Any examples how they have used in their work/ future planning</li> </ul>	1. Mr. Mulu Songphonsak, Pgakenyaw Association for Sustainable Development, Thailand 2. Mr. Noupheuk Virabouth, former Deputy Director General, Department of Water Supply, Laos 3. Mr. Sengsavath Sidlakone, Department of Water Supply, Laos 4. Mr. Y Hu Nier Kdam, 333 Hospital, Daklak province, Vietnam  Moderated by Mr. Boripat Lebel

10:50am - 11:00am (10 min)	Reflections from project mentor and SUMERNET Advisors	Dr. Chu Thai Hoanh (project mentor), Dr. Cynthia McDougall, Gender advisor, SEI
11:00am - 11:20am (20 min)	Q&A and open discussion	All
11:20am - 11:25am (5 min)	Feedback through online survey	Mr. Agus Nugroho, SUMERNET Programme Manager
11:25am - 11:30am	Concluding remarks	Ms. Sushmita Mandal
<b>End of SUMERNET Public Seminar</b>		