Poverty Alleviation Cooperation Models under the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Framework: A Comparative Study of Typical Cases in Five Southeast Asian Countries

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Abstract: The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC), proposed by China in 2014 and officially launched in 2015, has evolved into a pivotal platform for regional development over more than a decade. Rooted in the principles of "extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits," it embodies the core values of building a community with a shared future, the "Five Homes" vision, and the dynamic "3+5+X" cooperation framework. As a successful practice of South-South Cooperation (SSC) and a pioneer zone for the Global Development Initiative (GDI) in Southeast Asia, LMC has prioritized poverty alleviation to address the region's pressing development challenges. This study examines poverty alleviation cooperation projects between China and five Southeast Asian countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam) under the LMC framework. Through comparative analysis of typical cases, it identifies the core logic of cooperation: needs-oriented targeting, multi-dimensional empowerment, localization adaptation, and diversified mechanism guarantees. The research finds that these projects, characterized by "small yet beautiful" initiatives, industrial synergy, and experience sharing, have effectively improved livelihoods, activated endogenous development momentum, and promoted regional stability. Looking ahead, LMC poverty alleviation cooperation will advance toward high-quality development, expand into green innovation and digital empowerment, and strengthen multi-stakeholder synergy to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the building of a Lancang-Mekong Community with a Shared Future.

Keywords: LMC; Poverty alleviation cooperation; South-South Cooperation (SSC); Global Development Initiative (GDI)

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1. LMC Framework and Its Core Values

(1) Essentials of LMC framework

The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation initiative emerged at the 17th China-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting in November 2014, with its official mechanism launched a year later at the first Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Yunnan, China. Over the past decade, the six member states—China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam—have translated the vision of "shared rivers and shared destiny" into tangible outcomes through collective efforts.

At its core, LMC aims to foster a closer community with a shared future among neighboring countries. Unlike traditional regional cooperation models, it places people's well-being at the center, responding directly to the core demands of all member states while upholding the principle of "extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits." This people-centered approach has laid a solid foundation for regional cohesion.

In 2021 at the LMC Commemorative Summit, China proposed the LMC "Five Homes" initiative, namely, home of peace, stability, prosperity, beauty, and amity. This vision, focusing on regional stability, collaborative

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risk governance, connectivity, green growth, and people-to-people exchanges, has become the guiding direction of the LMC framework.

The "3+5+X" structure serves as the operational backbone of LMC, with three pillars (political and security cooperation, economic and sustainable development, social, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges), five priority areas (connectivity, production capacity, cross-border economic cooperation, water resources, agriculture, and poverty alleviation) and one optional areas(digital economy, environmental protection, public health, etc.). This dynamic framework continues to expand, driving common prosperity across the Lancang-Mekong region.

(2) LMC as a successful practice of south-south cooperation

LMC stands as a prominent regional manifestation of South-South Cooperation (SSC), embodying the spirit of mutual assistance among developing countries. While SSC encompasses global collaboration among developing nations, LMC narrows its focus to six countries linked by the Lancang-Mekong River, allowing for targeted responses to specific regional challenges.

Both LMC and SSC share the overarching goal of promoting developing countries' development and narrowing the North-South gap. However, LMC distinguishes itself by aligning closely with the geographical and developmental characteristics of the Lancang-Mekong basin, prioritizing issues such as poverty alleviation that directly impact the region's shared interests.

(3) LMC as a model for the global development initiative

LMC serves as a pioneer zone for the Global Development Initiative (GDI) in Southeast Asia, with the two frameworks sharing a deeply integrated relationship of "overall planning and regional implementation." Their core philosophies-including GDI's emphasis on "development-oriented" and "inclusiveness for all"-salign closely with LMC's focus on economic and sustainable development.

In practice, LMC and GDI complement each other: LMC's "3+5+X" framework provides replicable regional experiences for GDI, whereas GDI injects global resources and ideological support into LMC. Both initiatives aim to advance the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and reduce the North-South divide, making LMC a concrete regional expression of GDI's principles.

2. The Necessity of Poverty Alleviation under the LMC Framework

(1) Addressing the region's pressing poverty challenges

Poverty remains a severe and persistent issue across the Lancang-Mekong region, particularly in downstream countries such as Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. These nations face stubbornly high rural poverty rates and significant regional development gaps, which are constrained by three key factors: inadequate transportation infrastructure hindering resource circulation and backward agricultural technology limiting income growth; internal and external challenges including political instability and ecological degradation; and insufficient collaborative mechanisms hampering the efficient coordination of poverty alleviation resources. The inclusion of poverty reduction as a priority area at the 2023 LMC Foreign Ministers' Meeting underscores the urgency and severity of the issue.

(2) Unleashing regional development potential for mutual benefit

LMC poverty alleviation efforts transcend one-dimensional aid, centering on "mutual benefit, win-win cooperation, and coordinated development." Through systematic institutional design, these initiatives integrate the poverty reduction needs of member states with the region's inherent development potential,

creating a sustainable ecosystem that shifts from short-term poverty eradication to long-term common prosperity. This approach has become a key driver of integrated development in the Lancang-Mekong sub-region.

(3) Safeguarding regional stability and fulfilling global responsibilities

Poverty is a root cause of subregional instability, often triggering unregulated population flows, resource conflicts, and social unrest. LMC poverty alleviation cooperation directly addresses these issues by creating stable livelihoods for rural residents in underdeveloped areas, reducing poverty-driven displacement, bridging development gaps to foster mutual trust, and strengthening cross-border collaboration in agriculture and public health.

Furthermore, these efforts reflect the six member states' commitment to global development. Aligned with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, initiatives such as agricultural technology transfer and rural infrastructure construction contribute to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 (No Poverty) and 2 (Zero Hunger). As a model of SSC, LMC offers a practical alternative to one-sided aid, emphasizing equal collaboration and providing valuable lessons for other developing regions.

3. Practical Poverty Alleviation Projects between China and Other LMC Countries

China's poverty alleviation cooperation with other LMC member states focuses on areas closely tied to people's basic livelihoods. Leveraging "small yet beautiful" projects as key vehicles, technology and experience sharing as core drivers, and industrial empowerment as a long-term pathway, these collaborations have yielded numerous replicable successes that benefit grassroots communities across the region.

(1) China-cambodia poverty alleviation cooperation

China-Cambodia poverty alleviation cooperation is built on livelihood projects, centered on industrial collaboration, and supported by experience sharing. This "targeted assistance + long-term empowerment" model has become a benchmark for LMC poverty alleviation efforts.

1) Livelihood projects addressing fundamental needs

Through initiatives like the "Lancang-Mekong Water Action", China has helped Cambodia tackle critical livelihood challenges including access to drinking water, housing, and infrastructure. In the resettlement village for the Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Project in Stung Treng Province, a Chinese-assisted clean water supply system has benefited nearly 2,000 villagers, while supporting roads, schools, and hospitals have significantly improved living conditions. In Kandal Province's Cheat Ip Roth and Svay Ampov villages, a Chinese-built water supply project with a local landmark water tower and 33,000 meters of pipelines has resolved long-standing water shortages for nearly 4,000 residents.

In 2025, China provided production, agricultural, and medical supplies to 5,500 poor households across five Cambodian provinces through the Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, benefiting over 25,000 people and helping vulnerable groups recover their livelihoods post-pandemic.

2) Industrial cooperation activating sustainable poverty alleviation

China and Cambodia have focused on the "Industrial Development Corridor" and "Rice and Fish Corridor" to drive industrial empowerment. The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone, core of the Industrial Development Corridor, has attracted over 200 enterprises and created 32,000 jobs, among these, 70% of local households have secured employment there, with an average monthly income exceeding 300 USD. In addition, the "Rice and Fish Corridor" focuses on agricultural modernization: Technologies such as potted vegetable cultivation

and high-temperature mushroom cultivation have been promoted, with Svay Ampov Village farmers earning nearly 2,000 USD annually from mushroom farming.

3) Localized application of poverty alleviation experience

China has adapted its "targeted poverty alleviation" and "whole-village advancement" experiences to Cambodia's context. In the Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Project resettlement area, three China-Cambodia Friendship Model Villages have enabled residents to achieve poverty alleviation through resettlement and industrial development. In Kandal Province's poverty alleviation pilot village, a village-run detergent factory allows farmers to "farm when busy and work in the factory when free," diversifying their income sources.

(2) China-Laos poverty alleviation cooperation

China-Laos poverty alleviation cooperation is guided by experience localization, centered on industrial empowerment, and grounded in livelihood improvement. This "concept sharing- technical support- long-term development" system supports Laos' goal of graduating from least developed country status by 2026 and advances the China-Laos Community with a Shared Future.

1) Localized "targeted poverty alleviation" models

China has integrated "targeted support and precise measures" with Lao village conditions to develop replicable projects. Jinhua Village in Vientiane's Xaythany District, supported by Guangxi's technical cooperation program, features over 20 vegetable greenhouses and 3 high-standard intelligent greenhouses, and transforms local agriculture from "dependent on weather" to technology-driven. Nearly 60% of village households now engage in vegetable cultivation, with planting area expanding from less than 0.33 hectares to 5.33 hectares, and per capita annual income projected reach 10.27 million Lao Kip by 2025.

This model has been expanded to other areas: Xianglong Village in Luang Prabang Province now has improved roads, clean water, education, and medical services, while Ban Sork Village in Vientiane has a new asphalt road, cross-river bridge, and income-generating cattle breeding and weaving teams. These efforts have contributed to Laos lifting 83% of households and 70% of villages out of poverty.

2) Industrial and corridor linkages driving endogenous development

Dual engines of industrial development and logistics corridor construction have shifted poverty alleviation from "external assistance" to "endogenous growth." In characteristic agriculture, China has promoted improved oil-tea tree breeding and coffee yield enhancement technologies.

The China-Laos Railway has been a transformative force as well, creating over 100,000 direct and indirect jobs. Leveraging railway logistics, 30 types of Lao agricultural products now enter China, with over 80% sold to Chinese markets, providing stable income support for Lao farmers.

3) Livelihood projects addressing root causes of poverty

China has targeted infrastructure and public service weaknesses through initiatives like the "Eight Major Projects" in Laos. Rural water supply, electricity, and road facilities have been upgraded: the "Lancang-Mekong Water Action" solved clean water access in multiple villages, while the "Mekong Sun Village" project provided solar power to remote areas.

Public services have also been strengthened through the construction of hospitals (Luang Prabang, Mahosot) and schools (Phiva Middle School), as well as the establishment of the Laos-China Railway Vocational and Technical College to train professional talents. Emphasizing teaching people to fish rather than direct giving them fish, agricultural technology training in these local Village has been taken over by the Lao Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, ensuring the sustainability of poverty alleviation achievements.

(3) China-myanmar poverty alleviation cooperation

China-Myanmar poverty alleviation cooperation centers on industrial synergy, rooted in "small yet beautiful" livelihood projects and backed by technology and talent empowerment. Following the model of "short-term assistance for foundation stability, long-term industries for income growth, and local capacity-building for sustainability," it advances the China-Myanmar Community with a shared future.

In industrial cooperation, the two sides focus on full-chain agricultural collaboration, shifting from "external assistance" to "endogenous growth." In Takeo Province's Prey Chorngeak Village, Shanghai Ocean University's Rice-Fish Science and Technology Courtyard developed a "rice-Giant River Prawn symbiosis" model, training 20 households that now gain over $3,000 per breeding season. The under-preparation Kampong Thom Cashew Park will process 12,000 tons annually for China, boosting farmers' income by 40%, while the 2025-launched tropical fruit air corridor expands the "Rice-Fish Corridor."

Targeted livelihood projects address rural gaps. At the Kampong Thom agricultural demo zone, hybrid crops yield 30% more than local varieties, with some rice entering the EU. A "Lancang-Mekong Book House" at Hun Sen Kim Chhay High School donated over 2,000 supply sets, and Chinese medical teams provided clinics and health lectures, serving more than 1200 local citizens.

Technology localization and talent cultivation ensure sustainability. The "Lancang-Mekong Rice-Fish Scholarship" trained 6 local technicians, while the China-Myanmar Modern Construction Craftsman College's three-in-one training model has nurtured more than 200 workers (60% from poor families) for stable employment.

(4) China-thailand poverty alleviation cooperation

China-Thailand poverty alleviation cooperation takes cross-border industrial chain synergy as the breakthrough, green technology empowerment as the feature, and multi-stakeholder civil participation as the driving force. This "industrial linkage to expand markets, green transformation to enhance efficiency, and civil interaction to pool strengths" model aligns with Thailand's agricultural modernization needs.

1) Cross-border industrial chain linkage

Leveraging trade and logistics networks, agricultural products have shifted from local cultivation to cross-border value addition. In Rayong and Chanthaburi provinces, Chinese enterprises and Thai agricultural-cooperatives built pre-cooling stations and sorting-packaging centers, introducing vacuum preservation and intelligent temperature control technologies. Integrated with China-Laos Railway cold chain trains and air cargo channels, delivery time of fruits to China was reduced to 48 hours, with loss rates dropping from 25% to below 8%. Thai fruit exports to China increased 32% in the first half of 2025, which benefits 12,000 farming households.

A Sino-Thai joint venture rice deep-processing industrial park in Samut Prakan Province produces high-value-added products, for example, instant rice and rice bran oil, sold to China and Southeast Asia via cross-border e-commerce. The park provides over 800 jobs and guarantees farmer income through an "enterprise + farmer" order model.

2) Green technology empowerment

To address agricultural pollution and energy shortages, Chinese teams collaborated with Mae Fah Luang University in Chiang Mai Province to promote a "rubber wood waste - biomass fuel - organic fertilizer" circular model. This reduces carbon emissions and processing costs, increases tea yield by 12%, and cuts pesticide use by 18%, benefiting over 300 poor households.

In Roi Et and Ubon Ratchathani provinces, "agricultural-photovoltaic complementary" projects install solar

panels above farmland, providing stable electricity to remote villages and training over 500 local technicians (30% from poor families), creating "power generation income + technical employment" opportunities.

3) Multi-stakeholder civil participation

The "China-Thailand Rural Innovator" program, led by the Chinese Embassy and implemented with Kasikorn Bank and China Agricultural University, trains rural youth and women in e-commerce, branding, and digital marketing, providing up to 100,000 Thai baht in micro-loans. By 2025, over 800 innovators were trained, with 60% launching businesses and increasing monthly income by 12,000 Thai baht.

The China-Thailand "Village Friendship" initiative paired 15 Chinese and Thai villages, sharing rural tourism and product development experiences. A Phitsanulok Province village developed a "rice field homestay + organic food tasting" project, attracting over 5,000 tourists annually and increasing collective income by 400,000 Thai baht.

(5) China-vietnam poverty alleviation cooperation

China-Vietnam poverty alleviation cooperation centers on cross-border agricultural industrial chains, livelihood infrastructure upgrading, and poverty alleviation experience sharing. This "industrial synergy to expand markets, infrastructure upgrading to strengthen guarantees, and experience sharing to promote long-term results" framework meets Vietnam's rural development needs.

1) Cross-border agricultural industrial chain development

Leveraging border geographical advantages and agricultural resource complementarity, cooperation has transformed agricultural products from single cultivation to industrial chain value addition. In Lang Son and Cao Bang provinces, China promoted high-quality hybrid rice, sugarcane, and fruit varieties through the LMC Special Fund, providing mechanization and water-saving irrigation training. Hybrid rice yields reach 650 kg per mu (25% higher than local varieties), benefiting over 5,000 households.

At Pu Zhai-Xin Qing and Youyiguan-Youyi ports, China assisted in building cold chain centers and fast customs clearance channels, reducing transportation time for Vietnamese agricultural products to China from 72 to 36 hours and loss rates from 30% to below 10%. Exports increased 40% year-on-year in the first half of 2025, benefiting more than 20 cooperatives and over 20,000 households.

A Sino-Vietnamese joint venture agricultural processing park in Quang Ninh Province produces cassava starch, rubber sheets, and fruit concentrates, exporting 70% to China and creating over 600 jobs (40% for poor households). The "enterprise + cooperative + farmer" model purchases raw materials at 12% above market price.

2) Livelihood infrastructure upgrading

Focusing on the weak links of infrastructure in poor rural areas of Vietnam, China has implemented a series of "small yet beautiful" projects to improve living conditions and lay a solid foundation for poverty alleviation.

In mountainous areas of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces, China supported rural drinking water projects with deep wells and purification equipment, which benefits more than 18,000 villagers, reducing water-borne diseases by 40%, and built biogas digesters and sewage treatment facilities.

In remote rural areas of Dien Bien and Lai Chau provinces, China has assisted in building and upgrading rural roads and cross-river bridges, with a total length of more than 120 kilometers. The newly built roads connect villages to county-level highways, shortening agricultural product transportation time by 2.5 hours and reducing costs by 30%. A Dien Bien Province bridge solved seasonal river-crossing challenges for 800 locals.

3) Poverty alleviation experience sharing

China and Vietnam established regular exchange mechanisms for poverty alleviation policies and practices. From 2023 to 2025, over 300 Vietnamese officials and technicians studied China's rural revitalization experiences, including Zhejiang's rural e-commerce and Sichuan's collective industry models.

In Bac Giang Province, a rural e-commerce pilot project trained local farmers in live-streaming and logistics, building a localized platform that sold more than 5,000 tons of agricultural products (20 million RMB in transactions) and trained more than 200 practitioners, 60% of which are from poor families.

4. The Successful Experiences of LMC Poverty Alleviation

China's poverty alleviation cooperation with LMC countries rests on three core pillars, which are needs-oriented cooperation, multi-dimensional collaborative empowerment, and long-term mechanism guarantees, forming a flexible, sustainable model tailored to regional practices.

(1) Needs-oriented roadmap

Cooperation aligns closely with member states' development stage needs, avoiding the one-mode-fits-all approach. For agricultural nations like Cambodia and Laos, the focus is on food security and livelihood infrastructure. For industrialized countries like Thailand and Vietnam, priority is cross-border industrial chains and technological upgrading. And Myanmar, "small yet beautiful" projects address basic needs like clean water and electricity.

(2) Multi-dimensional empowerment

An industry-technology-livelihood model transforms poverty alleviation from "blood transfusion" to "blood making." Industrial empowerment builds cross-border chains and uses "enterprise + cooperative + farmer" orders; technological empowerment shares targeted poverty alleviation and agricultural modernization experience, cultivating local talents; livelihood empowerment improves infrastructure and public services through initiatives like the "Lancang-Mekong Water Action."

(3) Localization adaptation

China's poverty alleviation experience is integrated with local conditions: Laos' Jinhua Village adopted smart greenhouses suited to local climate; Cambodia's rice-fish symbiosis and cashew processing align with its resources; Vietnam's rural e-commerce pilot adapts Chinese models to local contexts. This avoids acclimatization and enhances sustainability.

(4) Diversified mechanism guarantees

A "government leadership + civil participation + multilateral coordination" mechanism ensures continuity. Government platforms (Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Poverty Alleviation Working Group) clarify priorities; civil stakeholders (chambers of commerce, universities) expand coverage; multilateral resources (Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund, AIIB) provide financial support. Joint acceptance and technical inheritance ensure long-term results.

5. Outlook

As LMC enters its Version 2.0, China's poverty alleviation cooperation will focus on quality improvement, synergy enhancement, and sustainable development, aligning with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

(1) Strategic upgrade: high quality cooperation

LMC 2.0 principles (solidarity, openness, green innovation, peace) will guide the shift from project-driven to systematic empowerment. Under the Lancang-Mekong Agricultural Cooperation Five-Year Plan (2023-2027), poverty alleviation remains a priority, with tailored support for each country's modernization needs. Cooperation will integrate with the Belt and Road Initiative and RCEP to deepen regional economic integration.

(2) Field expansion: three-dimensional upgrade

Industrial poverty alleviation will advance to whole-industry-chain synergy, leveraging railways and freight networks to build cross-border agricultural parks and reduce trade costs. Technological poverty alleviation will focus on green innovation (agri-photovoltaic, waste recycling) and digital empowerment (rural e-commerce, smart agriculture). Capacity building will deepen localization and institutionalization, expanding talent training and experience adaptation.

(3) Mechanism improvement: multi-stakeholder synergy

Multilateral coordination will be strengthened through policy alignment and stable financial support. Multi-stakeholder participation will be expanded, promoting civil society engagement and people-to-people connectivity. An effectiveness evaluation system and experience inheritance mechanism will ensure the sustainability of poverty alleviation achievements.

6. Conclusion

Over the past decade, LMC has established itself as a robust and adaptive platform for poverty alleviation cooperation between China and five Southeast Asian member states, delivering tangible improvements to grassroots livelihoods and regional development. Guided by the core logic of needs-oriented targeting, multi-dimensional empowerment, localization adaptation, and diversified mechanism guarantees, the cooperation has transcended traditional one-way aid by leveraging "small yet beautiful" initiatives, industrial synergy, and experience sharing, effectively activating endogenous development momentum, narrowing regional disparities, and fostering cross-border trust. These practices not only embody the spirit of South-South Cooperation (SSC) but also serve as a vivid regional manifestation of the Global Development Initiative (GDI), offering replicable lessons for developing regions grappling with poverty. As LMC enters its Version 2.0, the shift toward high-quality development will further enhance the resilience and sustainability of poverty alleviation efforts, setting a "golden model" for equitable and inclusive global development cooperation.

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