

## Theme: Gender

# Women environmental defenders: Empowerment for transformative change

### 1. Rationale

The SEI Gender, Environment and Development research cluster applies a gender and social equality perspective to environment and development issues in order to help achieve transformative social change. Environmental defenders play a key role not only in protecting the vital ecosystems that humanity relies on to fulfil fundamental human rights, but also in challenging the power structures that underlie environmental destruction and climate change. However, Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs), throughout the world face discrimination, violence, and high risks including to their lives (Knox 2017; Global Witness 2019).

Women EHRDs are facing an additional layer of discrimination because of their gender, which also interacts with other social characteristics such as class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality, leading to differentiated social marginalization and shaping the capacities of people to engage in contestation. These intersecting discriminations have been recognized in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which calls to ‘implement measures to prevent and address threats and attacks against rural women human rights defenders, with particular attention to those engaged on issues related to land and natural resources’ (CEDAW 2016, C/GC/35, 25(e)).

We seek to support events that underscore not only the key barriers and politically insecure conditions that women environmental defenders face, but crucially, to showcase how their empowerment and mobilization is transforming the power imbalances that lead to gender and social inequality.

### 2. Description

Acknowledging that truly transformative research and action must represent the concerns of affected communities, this call seeks to mobilize knowledge from women environmental defenders. The **format** of the events should be as collaborative, participative and innovative as possible with the aim of giving the voice and centre stage to those who are often underrepresented and unable to participate meaningfully. Events that aim to build networks between women environmental defenders from different countries across the region will be prioritized. Successful applications should be sensitive and aware of the particular challenges of women environmental defenders in an Asian context and aim to address them.

**Themes** that are of strategic importance to the Gender, Environment, and Development research cluster include, but are not limited to: climate change and disaster risk; displacement and migration in the context of climate change; land grabbing and natural resource

management. This call welcomes contributions that highlight experiences of women environmental defenders working across one, or several, of these topics.

### 3. Expected results

The **aim** of the events supported under this call should be to underscore not only the key barriers that women environmental defenders are facing in diverse sectors and across diverse sociopolitical, economic and cultural contexts, but importantly, to showcase how their empowerment and mobilization is transforming the deeply entrenched power imbalances that lead to gender and social inequality. By mobilizing knowledge from the ground, the events should encourage cross-national collaboration between environmental defenders. Following the event, the successful applicant will be expected to produce the following outputs:

- A report that synthesizes the key lessons of the event and the opportunities to scale up good practices
- A communications product (e.g., video, booklet, interactive tool) that showcases the outcomes of the event for a broad audience
- A policy brief that can appeal to regional and/or global policymakers and policy platforms
- A detailed workplan of how the networks and outcomes of the event will be mobilised through longer term partnerships between participants and SEI

### 4. Theme-specific criteria

The successful proposal will meet the following criteria:

1. Focus on **human rights** with an **intersectional approach** highlighting and promoting rights to life, self-determination, non-discrimination, participation, and proposing **avenues to challenge unequal power relations** through environmental activism
2. **Scalable practices**: the event should be an exploration and sharing of good practices by women environmental activists in environmental protection and advocacy for human rights
3. **Innovative event formats and context awareness**: the format of the events should show understanding of the common barriers to participation for grassroots organizations and propose innovative solutions to enable all participants to share their experience. The events should also consider necessary precautions to ensure the security of the participants
4. **Project sustainability**: the events should create opportunities for women environmental defenders to connect and create new networks to address the larger sustainability agenda during and after the timeframe of the project