

About SCF

SEI Asia, with support from the Swedish government (SIDA), launched the Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2 (SCF2) programme in 2018 to enhance the current 2030 Agenda efforts in Asia and the Pacific. SCF2 aims to foster regional cooperation and policy dialogue for sustainable development and environmental sustainability, through capacity building, knowledge sharing and increased collaboration.

Human rights and gender equality are central to SCF2, as it champions regional and inter-regional collaboration for transboundary environmental policy development.

Learn more about the programme [here](#).

Theme

Practical actions in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems for sustainable use and climate change adaptation.

Specific focus/priority

This call attempts to demonstrate practical action to protect, restore and safeguard freshwater ecosystems functions including wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes for multi-benefits at the community level in rural areas and demonstrate scaling-up to integrate the value of ecosystem services into development plans and planning process of water-related sectors at local, national and regional scales as well as transboundary basin scale. Special consideration goes to proposals that include indigenous ecological knowledge, promote gender equality and women's role in managing ecosystem services and practical relationships between ecosystem services and human rights.

Rationale

The biodiversity ecosystem services of the Asia-Pacific region are important for providing food, water, energy, and health security, regulation of local climate and flood and drought control, as well as cultural and spiritual fulfilment to its 4.5 billion inhabitants. Ample evidence demonstrates that human well-being in the region is deeply connected with nature, although there is much variation in dependency across the region¹.

Our heavy reliance on ecosystems over time has led to overuse and destruction, making freshwater ecosystems among the most extensively altered ecosystems on Earth². Major

drivers and threats to freshwater ecosystems are entirely due to human activity: land-use change, water extraction, hydrologic flow modification, exploitation, pollution, climate change and invasive species.

The region is home to almost 52% (400 million) of the 767 million global poor, and as much as 75% of the global population of 370 million indigenous people. The region has experienced a rapid growth both in population and economic activity that has extensively transformed its natural and managed ecosystems³.

Who is most affected?

Loss of freshwater ecosystem services highly impact poor, indigenous peoples and women, 70-80% of the population in the region are highly dependent on ecosystem services and natural resources⁴ and most of them are living in rural areas. Unstable development and uses of freshwater ecosystem services have limited access to natural resources of the rural poor and local communities and increased their poverty. For example, water level fluctuation regime of the Mekong River in 2014-2017 differs considerably from the fluctuation regime of 1960-1990 due to large water infrastructure development in the basin as well as impacts of climate change⁵. This flow alterations result in negative impacts on environmental habitats, fish migrations, sediment transport and local livelihoods along the Mekong River such as fisheries, navigation, eco-tourism, and riverbank agriculture, etc.

The region is also recognised as the most water-related disaster-prone such as flood, drought and storm⁶. Climate change and associated extreme events are impacting species distribution, population sizes and the timing of reproduction or migration, habitat degradation and loss of ecosystem functions such as water supply. Poor people, women and indigenous groups are not only more vulnerable to climate-related shocks, but they also have fewer resources to prevent, cope with, and adapt to disasters. Women, the elderly, and children also face greater risks to their survival and recovery in the aftermath of water-related disasters such as flood and drought.

These group of people have lower access to resources or their exclusion from management and participatory processes undermine their ability to respond and protect natural resources. The vulnerability of women and children to natural disasters can be further aggravated by other forms of discrimination such as those based on race, poverty, and disability. There is also a lack of disaggregated data, especially gender-disaggregated data, in disaster risk management and natural resources management strategies. Nature-based solutions and ecosystem-based adaptation that are underpinned by human rights considerations and gender are therefore important for disaster risk reduction, protecting ecosystem services and maintaining local livelihoods and well-being.

How can we address the gaps?

Local communities, particularly the most vulnerable groups and higher-level stakeholders collaborating in decision-making processes that involve the conservation of freshwater ecosystems are the best positioned to underline barriers to effective community decision-making processes and ensure the sustainable use of ecosystem services. Sharing and building lessons on practical actions for scaling-up policy influence at all levels in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems for sustainable use, water-related disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation in the rural areas is crucial to address above gap and directly relevant to the following SDGS and Aichi Targets.

SDG 5: Gender Equality. Target 5.A to undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic and natural resources.

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. Target 6.6 to protect and restore water-related ecosystems, including mountains, forests, wetlands, rivers, aquifers and lakes.

SDG13: Climate Action. Target 13.1 to strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries.

Aichi Target 2: Mainstreaming biodiversity values into national and local development and poverty reduction strategies and planning processes.

Aichi Target 14: Safeguard and restoring ecosystem services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.

Aichi Target 19: Sharing biodiversity knowledge on its values, functioning, status and trends, and the consequences of its loss.

Additionally, resilience freshwater ecosystem is also directly relevant to address gaps on human rights that can be impacted through the loss of ecosystem services (i.e. right to safe drinking water and sanitation and right to life) and to be further strengthened human rights to protect environment and ecosystems.

Regional Strategic Collaboration

We invite proposals to support activities, events, and processes that attempt to push values of freshwater ecosystems into water-related sector plans through effective community decision-making process. The proposal expected to show success stories, identify key challenges and barriers, and engage local communities, indigenous peoples, and women groups in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems for sustainable use, water-related disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation as well as provide practical approaches and policy recommendations to scale up.

The proposal should include a variety of different stakeholders in water-related sectors, disaster risk management and climate change adaptation at national level that foster

regional and local collaboration and contribute to international level with a focus on the Southeast Asia region, not just a single country.

The types of regional strategic collaboration could include, but are not limited to:

- Strengthening coordination and collaboration between countries, across water-related sectors, across the scales and beyond watershed boundaries to accelerate the progress to achieve global and regional goals such as Sustainable Development Goals and Aichi Biodiversity Targets.
- Sharing and build lessons on good practices and implementable actions in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems for sustainable use, water-related disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation at the local level in the rural areas by taking into account the knowledge, practices and experience indigenous peoples and women have toward ecosystem-based approaches and showcasing a rights-based and gender sensitive approach to nature-based solutions.
- Filling the gaps in mainstreaming biodiversity and freshwater ecosystem services into local development polices, upscaling into national and regional policies and the growing gaps in funding to finance conservation efforts by partnerships with the private sector, individuals and non-governmental organizations.
- Demonstrating importance of ecosystem services and biodiversity for the full enjoyment of human rights, contributing to gender equality and social equity in managing and restoring freshwater ecosystems.

The proposal could be linked with an ongoing project and initiatives that need to be scaled up or scaled out. The outcomes of the event should feed into larger policy processes and framework at country and regional scales such as CBD, Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity, ASEAN-China Strategy on Environment Cooperation, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, Mekong River Commission, etc. Ideally, the outcome of the event(s) would be an input to preparations for the Post-2020 Biodiversity Framework of CBD, World Water Week 2021, IUCN World Conservation Congress, and COP26 on climate change, water and inland water biodiversity.

Expected results

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Theory of change			
Outputs	A report outlining key findings of the event, the outcomes and key messages for policy influence.	Increase meaningful participation and inclusion of women, indigenous people, and the poor in rural areas in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems.	Communications products about the event to promote and build awareness among the target groups in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems and integration of gender equality, social equity and human rights in environmental conservation.
Outcomes	Better informed planning process and decision makers in converting policies at the national and regional levels to practical actions on ground at the local level (top-down) as well as scaled up local practices and knowledge into the national and regional levels (bottom-up)	Enhancing capacity of women, indigenous people, and the poor in rural areas to share their local knowledge and access to information to protect freshwater ecosystems and maintain their livelihood and well-being.	Improve scientific and local knowledge and changes in attitudes of key stakeholders about the importance of freshwater ecosystem services, ecosystem-based adaptation, that are based on gender equality, social equity and human rights.
Impacts	Key information of the event feed into larger policy processes and framework of wa	Strengthen local communities, and especially vulnerable groups within them, and higher-level stakeholders collaborating in decision-making processes that involve the	Strengthened regional partnership and multistakeholder collaboration to achieve related SDGs, Aichi Target,

ter-related sectors at country and regional scales related to freshwater ecosystem conservation and restoration.

conservation of freshwater ecosystem.

and related gender equality and human rights frameworks as well as joint events to put water, freshwater ecosystem and climate change in international/global agenda setting.

Theme-specific criteria

The successful event proposal will meet the following criteria:

Programme design: The event should clearly set the programme to highlight good practices and implementable actions in protecting and restoring freshwater ecosystems for sustainable use, water-related disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation at the local level in the rural areas by taking into account indigenous and local practices and knowledge, gender equality, social equity, and human rights.

Multi-stakeholder engagement: The event format should allow meaningful participation by designing, facilitating, and involving diverse range of stakeholders, particularly local communities and policy makers as well as ensuring inclusive and innovative approaches in participation and engagement that facilitate the inclusion of vulnerable groups into decision-making.

Clear directions for policy influence: The event should set clear target policies and larger regional or global platforms to be influenced and provide clear steps after the event to influence policy and/or decision-making processes.

Communication and public awareness: The event should have a clear communication plan to raise public awareness to the target groups on the importance of freshwater ecosystem services and ecosystem-based adaptation based on principles of gender equality, social equity and human rights.