

# SEI STRATEGY 2015–2019



# FOREWORD

For 25 years SEI has helped to drive the sustainable development agenda. We established the Advisory Group on Greenhouse Gases – the forerunner to the IPCC, while our pivotal contributions to the Montreal Protocol, and our pioneering work on sanitation, energy transitions and air pollution have brought about real change. The next 25 years will present new challenges and offer new opportunities for building a sustainable world, and there is also much unfinished work – new and innovative approaches are urgently required to tackle sustainability problems that have persisted for decades.

This strategy steers SEI's research direction, policy engagement, and capacity development for the coming five years. It also sets out our goals for communication, our signature tools and information technology, management and finances, and how we learn as an organization and monitor our work. Each of the elements in this strategy feeds into and supports the others, and all of them underpin the outcomes we strive for.

Our ambitions build on our stronger position in terms of finance, human resources, organization, and management. We are now benefiting from increased institutional core support from the Swedish Government and broader programmatic funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). These changes allow us to make strategic institutional investments, for example in establishing globally significant research initiatives, in recruitment, infrastructure, skills and knowledge, and in honing our policy impact. Partnerships, with decision-makers, governments, research bodies and civil society groups, are a cornerstone of SEI's work, and further investment in these will help us make our work even more relevant and applicable.

This document is based on thorough consultations with our staff, Board, Scientific Advisory Council and external partners. It also builds on SEI's previous strategy and the experience gained from the past five years of successful development. All our staff were invited to contribute, both individually and through consultations through the centres and research themes, while our Scientific Advisory Council provided essential guidance and direction on scientific quality. Feedback was provided by our extensive network of partners in research, policy, civil society, and the private sector at different scales and from all parts of the world. We are very grateful for the support and constructive contributions from our staff and stakeholders during the process.

Our diverse people make our organization what it is – they are our core strength, and we cannot achieve anything without their dedication, professionalism, creativity and entrepreneurship. Ultimately it is they who will drive our development and achievements in the coming years, and they who will determine whether our organization can deliver on our goals and live up to SEI's mission.

We are confident that this strategy gives our staff the strong framework and direction needed to harness the opportunities of a rapidly changing world, and to do the urgent work needed to bring about change for sustainable development.



Johan Kuylenstierna  
*SEI Executive Director*



Kerstin Niblaeus  
*Chair of the Board*



# CONTENTS

2	<b>FOREWORD</b>
7	<b>PART 1 INTRODUCTION</b>
8	Challenges, Old and New
9	Consolidating and Innovating – Our New Agenda
11	About this Strategy
14	About Our Centres
19	<b>PART 2 DELIVERING RESULTS</b>
20	Scientific Research
30	Policy Engagement
34	Capacity Development
39	<b>PART 3 ENABLING OUR DELIVERY</b>
40	Communications
44	Tools, Platforms, and ICT
50	Organization and Finance
56	Monitoring and Learning



PART 1

# INTRODUCTION

SEI has been providing knowledge and solutions for sustainability for the past 25 years – a period of dizzying economic, social, and environmental change. Our strategy for 2015–19 builds on our strengths and supports innovation so that SEI can better respond to emerging challenges – and harness opportunities – to contribute to a better future for all.



## CHALLENGES, OLD AND NEW

The world has changed dramatically since SEI was established in 1989. While 25 years of economic growth have lifted billions out of poverty, its rewards have been unequally distributed and brought unprecedented environmental impacts. Urgent development challenges remain, and the poorest and most vulnerable communities, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America, still lack access to basic services needed to lift them out of poverty, such as clean water, food and nutrition, sanitation, modern energy, and education.

Globalization continues apace, and at the same time as providing widespread development benefits it also introduces new governance challenges – both political and regulatory. The rise of emerging economies, a more politically active and globalized private sector, and a stronger middle class in many countries are all features of a radically reshaped geopolitical situation. SEI thus op-

erates in a completely different context than 25 years ago, with a much more diverse, dynamic, and interdependent governance system – a multipolar world in which the “western hegemony” is fast disappearing.

Undoubtedly, many changes in terms of human development have been positive. But many problems remain unresolved, and indeed many have become more urgent. Evidence increasingly suggests that development can only succeed over the long term if perilous environmental trends – from climate change to air pollution, from loss of biodiversity to overuse of natural resources – are halted and reversed, and if social priorities such as livelihoods protection, gender equality, empowerment of the vulnerable, and human security are integrated into sustainable development strategies.

Back in 1972 the UN Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm established the insight that long-term development depends on our relationship with nature. But

still today the environment and development communities within the multilateral system, nation states, and civil society remain too separate and do not interact enough to find solutions and handle trade-offs. Also, integrating environmental issues into mainstream social and economic decision-making, corporate strategies, and physical planning is at the heart of achieving sustainable development and improving human wellbeing. But this integration remains far too rare, and is a clear opportunity to be seized.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be critical in the coming five years. SEI supported their preparation during 2013–2014 and, starting in 2015, international development efforts will be geared towards implementation. SEI is well placed to support these efforts, particularly goals on energy access, water and sanitation, gender equality, and cities, as well as to contribute new knowledge on sustainable consumption and production, trade, and investment.



*Now more than ever we must challenge conventional wisdom and develop new ideas and approaches to tackle problems that appear increasingly intractable.*

## CONSOLIDATING AND INNOVATING – OUR NEW AGENDA

SEI has grown and changed with the world around it over the past 25 years. We’ve built a reputation as a source of rigorous and impartial research for sustainable development, delivering integrated knowledge, supporting policy- and decision-making, building capacity, and providing spaces for dialogue in line with the mandate set down by the Swedish Parliament. This work will continue.

But now more than ever we must also challenge conventional wisdom and develop new ideas and approaches to tackle problems that appear increasingly intractable.

We are formulating a new research agenda that takes a fresh look at what we do and how we do it, and using new perspectives that 20 years ago we didn’t know we needed, such as analysis of geopolitics, and of human psychology, behaviour and choice.

Over the next five years we will build on our partnerships with other major sustainable development research and knowledge organizations around the world; rather than competing for funds and attention, we will work together to reach key audiences more effectively.

And we will respond to the dramatic rise in global connectivity and the spread of information and communications technology (ICT). We are living in a new era of large-scale information flows, and decision-makers and analysts are already struggling with



*This increased support allows us to invest in globally significant research initiatives; in recruitment, infrastructure, skills and knowledge; and to enhance our policy impact.*

information overload. Acting at the science and policy interface will require dealing with knowledge production, communication and engagement in new ways. Rather than publishing yet more reports, it means making communications a central part of our projects, and facilitating learning and dialogue.

Monitoring and institutional learning are critical to our ambitions. We will invest more in this area, apply new mechanisms and software tools, and keep learning to do our work better. Our Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Communication system (PMEC, see page 56), which is custom built and now used to manage all our projects, allows us to systematically set goals and identify target audiences for our work, measure its outcomes, and draw lessons to help us increase SEI's impact around the world.

And we will sharpen our impact by investing institutional resources in a focused set of research streams. Our new SEI Initiatives draw on some of our greatest assets and bring

them together in new ways, such as connecting resource assessments of water-energy and land use, or linking strategies to improve air quality with low-emissions development planning. At the same time we are developing new expertise, delving deeper into institutional and social processes of change, geopolitical and economic aspects of action on energy and climate, production and trade systems, and behavioural responses to development interventions. The SEI Initiatives connect the biophysical and socio-economic research domains.

Naturally we cannot clearly predict what will happen in politics, international relations, the environment or the economy over the next five years, and this strategy does not spell out exactly what we and our partners will work on. But it is clear that the period up to 2019 will be a defining one for human development and the environment, and never before have we been so well prepared to engage with change.

A combination of our deeper understanding of the role of science in a changing world and on-going improvements across the organization give us the confidence to chart our new direction, and underpin our conviction that it will make a meaningful difference on the ground.

We will build on the strengths of our organization to become even more flexible and adaptable so that we can better respond to new and emerging challenges – and harness opportunities.

This strategy gives us the platform to do so.

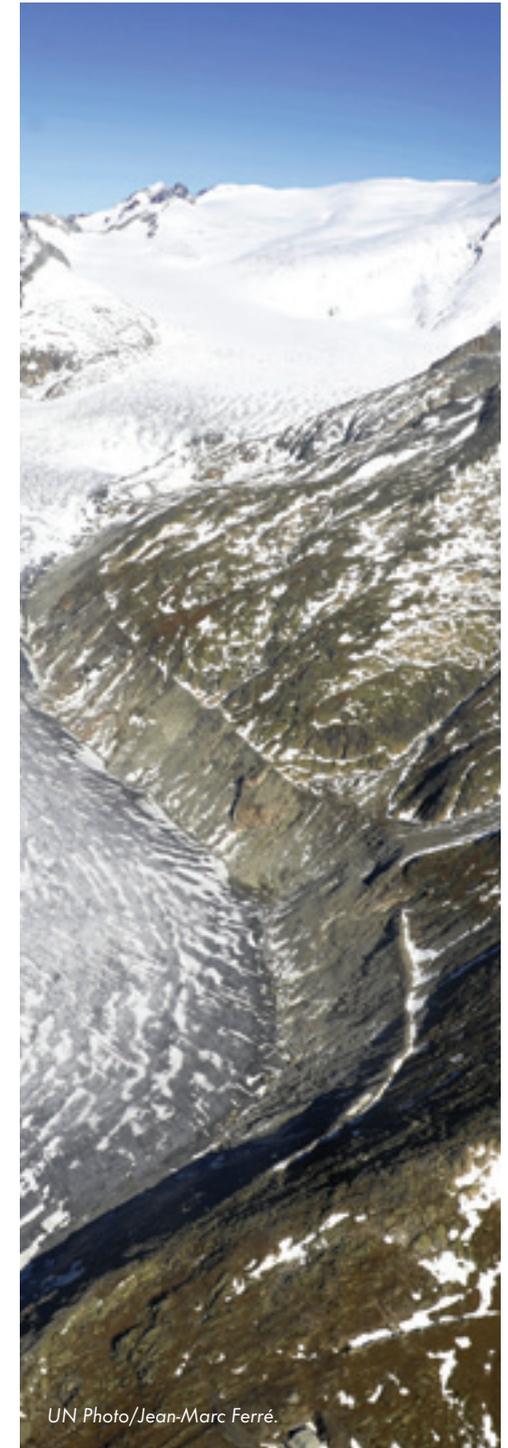
## ABOUT THIS STRATEGY

SEI's vision is: "A sustainable, prosperous future for all". Our mission is: "To support decision-making and induce change towards sustainable development around the world by providing integrative knowledge that bridges science and policy in the field of environment and development."

This strategy is structured around seven performance areas through which we work to fulfil our mission. Figure 1 (overleaf) illustrates the overall structure of the strategy.

Part 2 presents the three performance areas where we directly deliver results: Scientific Research, Policy Engagement, and Capacity Development. Part 3 presents areas that enable us to deliver. These are: Communications; Tools, Platforms and ICT; Organization and Finance; and Monitoring and Learning. Each of the seven areas has an overarching objective (see below), and a set of goals that will drive us towards that objective. Collectively these goals will steer the direction of the institute in the next five years.

But in reality we cannot pursue our goals in isolation. We strive for integration not just in the content of our research but also in how we work. While our research is the keystone for most of our activity, communications is bound up with how we engage with decision-makers. Policy engagement and capacity building also go hand-in-hand, while how we use our tools and ICT cuts across capacity building, research, administration, and communication. Monitoring and evaluation is increasingly integrated into all we do.



UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré.

## VISION

A sustainable,  
prosperous future for all

## MISSION

To support decision-making and induce change  
towards sustainable development around the world  
by providing integrative knowledge that bridges science  
and policy in the field of environment and development.

SCIENTIFIC  
RESEARCH

POLICY  
ENGAGEMENT

CAPACITY  
DEVELOPMENT

DELIVERING RESULTS

COMMUNICATIONS

TOOLS,  
PLATFORMS, & ICT

ORGANIZATION  
& FINANCE

MONITORING  
& LEARNING

ENABLING OUR DELIVERY

# STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

In order to transform the strategy into concrete outcomes, we have developed a set of work plans for our centres and teams. These plans are based on a comprehensive results-based framework that outlines measurable targets for achieving our goals. In 2015 we will establish a baseline for these targets, and each year up to 2019 we will set a new benchmark for progress.

### Overarching objectives for 2015–19

#### *Scientific Research (page 20)*

To enhance the quality and impact of our problem- and solution-driven scientific research.

#### *Policy Engagement (page 30)*

To provide effective decision support and engage in key policy arenas

#### *Capacity Development (page 34)*

Overarching objective: To strengthen the capacity of individuals, organizations and institutions to make decisions that promote sustainable development

#### *Communications (page 40)*

To produce and share knowledge more effectively, in partnership with decision-makers.

#### *Tools, Platforms, and ICT (page 44):*

To advance the technical development, accessibility, and application of our tools, platforms, and ICT environment.

#### *Organization and Finance (page 50)*

To be a diverse, attractive, and financially robust organization where the best researchers and professionals can thrive.

#### *Monitoring and Learning (page 56)*

To be a learning organization that – alongside our partners – continuously takes stock and learns from experience to deliver ever better results.

Figure 1

The structure of the SEI 2015–2019 Strategy. Goals on scientific research, policy engagement, and capacity development will deliver results, while goals for communications, tools, platforms, and ICT, organization and finance, and monitoring and learning will enable our delivery.



# ABOUT OUR CENTRES

SEI is a global and decentralized institute that has seven centres in six countries, with its headquarters located in Stockholm. Our distributed structure makes us a truly international organization, complemented by a staff composed of more than 30 nationalities. Our projects and partners around the world offer us vital local knowledge and experience, helping us to

identify the right questions and to ground-truth our work, as well as enabling us to apply our results and knowledge at a range of scales.

In 2015–2019 we will draw on this diversity so that we continue to develop as one organization that is greater than the sum of its parts.

SEI's engagement in Latin America is growing. The region is undergoing rapid economic and social change, with big implications for natural resource use and management. Our aim over the strategy period is to explore the potential to establish SEI more firmly in this dynamic part of the world so that we are better placed

to contribute solutions. We will also bolster our presence at our existing centres in Africa and Asia, and seek opportunities and new ways to grow our presence in other regions.

# WHAT OUR CENTRES DO

## *SEI Stockholm and SEI HQ*

SEI in Stockholm comprises SEI headquarters and the Stockholm Centre. SEI HQ serves all the SEI centres and includes the Executive Director, Deputy Directors, and the communications, finance and human resources departments. The Stockholm Centre is divided into three operational units: Natural Resources, Environment and Development; Governance and Institutions; and Climate Energy and Society. Key areas of expertise include energy access and system planning; sanitation; the water-energy-food nexus; climate mitigation and adaptation; and private sector engagement for sustainable business models.

## *SEI Africa*

SEI's Africa Centre collaborates closely with African organizations and networks on key environment and development issues, acting as a hub for SEI's engagement across the continent. The SEI Africa is based in Nairobi, Kenya, and is hosted by the World Agroforestry Centre. The centre's work focuses on four key areas: climate change adaptation; sustainable energy development; agriculture, livelihoods and rural development; and urbanization.

## *SEI Asia*

The SEI Asia Centre in Bangkok has a multinational staff with strong connections across the region. Its work is focused on two key areas: climate change and resilient development in Southeast Asia and the governance of disaster risk and adaptation at multiple scales. The centre prioritizes building a strong network of research and policy organizations in the region and to provide platforms to share knowledge and engage stakeholders.

## *SEI Tallinn*

SEI Tallinn focuses on policy analysis and implementation via applied research, stakeholder engagement and capacity building in the contexts of the Baltic Sea Region and the EU. Key areas of expertise include environmental governance, policy impact assessment, nature conservation, urban biodiversity, climate adaptation, renewable energy, transport, resource efficiency, waste management, sustainable development indicators, ecosystem services valuation and analysis of market-based instruments.

## *SEI U.S.*

SEI U.S. is affiliated with Tufts University in Massachusetts, and its main office is on the Tufts campus. The centre also has two other offices in Davis, California, and Seattle, Washington. The centre conducts applied research drawing on engineering, economics, ecology, ethics, operations research, international relations and software design. It also builds capacity in the developing world through training and collaboration, while its decision-support tools are used widely around the globe.

## *SEI Oxford*

SEI Oxford has expertise in vulnerability assessment, adaptive planning and risk governance in the fields of climate change, water and food security, agriculture and ecosystems management. It also focuses on the synergies between climate change adaptation and mitigation, and hosts weADAPT, a collaborative platform for climate adaptation (see pages 46–47).

## *SEI York*

The SEI York Centre is embedded in the Environment Department at the University of York. The centre's research falls into four broad categories: atmosphere, climate change and biogeochemical cycling; agricultural water management and governance; sustainable consumption, production and trade; and human wellbeing and behavioural change.



PART 2

# DELIVERING RESULTS

Our ambitions for scientific research, policy engagement, and capacity development – the three areas of action where we deliver results – reflect our deeper understanding of the role of science in a changing world. Our goals will renew our research agenda, and sharpen how we work in partnership with decision-makers and empower people to bring about change.



Photo: Andreas Heinemeyer/SEI (York)

## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Overarching objective: To enhance the quality and impact of our problem- and solution-driven scientific research.

Decision-makers face many challenges. The purpose of our research is to support them with knowledge and analysis that contributes to solutions at the appropriate scale, whether they work in global governance, national public policy, regional cooperation, local planning, or the private sector. Our interdisciplinary and systems approach and regional focus help us to better understand the context in which decision-makers operate.

The strength of our research is the foundation of what we do, providing the credibility we need to work effectively with decision-makers and build capacity in society. We develop and conduct our research with partners in academia, policy and practice who we seek to support, influence, and learn from,

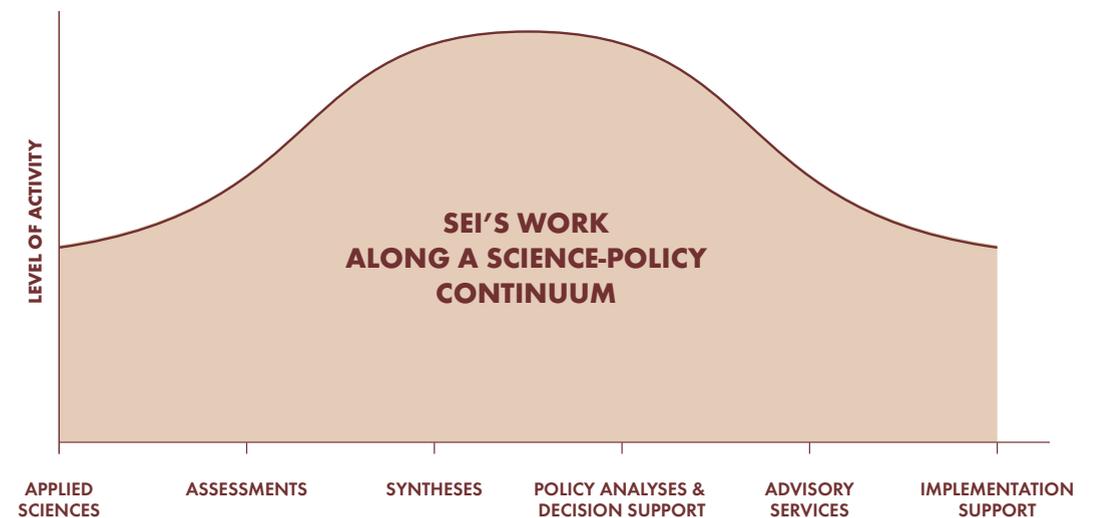
and it is through implementation that we develop capacity. The resulting knowledge reflects the political and economic situation experienced by our partners and stakeholders.

Our research agenda bridges the science-to-policy “continuum” (see figure 2). Therefore, not all of our research is directly oriented to decision-making challenges. It spans the range from applied science (in both social and natural science); assessments of specific sustainability issues; synthesis of knowledge; policy analysis to examine and inform decision-making, policy and planning processes; and client-driven advice and knowledge services; through to implementation support for development interventions.

Since our beginnings in 1989 we have steadily strengthened the foundations of our research. These include:

- **Our ethos:** Our research is grounded in a deep commitment to sustainable development, and has human wellbeing at its centre.
- **Research quality:** Our research is rigorous and credible. We strive for objectivity, but acknowledge that science is often normative and seldom free from values or interests, and that these should be transparently appraised.
- **Relevance:** We analyse and provide solutions to some of the world’s most pressing sustainable development challenges.
- **Integrity:** We are not driven by political ideology or business interests. As an independent research institute, we make full information on our finances and funding open to all. Our research is impartial and transparent, and we provide knowledge that is freely accessible in response to our partners’ needs.
- **Innovation:** Our pursuit of novel and integrated methods on emerging research topics – both in-house and with partner organizations around the world – keeps us at the cutting edge of science for sustainable development.
- **Interdisciplinary approach:** SEI’s research spans and combines disciplinary approaches across social and natural sciences, such as biology, atmospheric chemistry, geography, resource theory, computer modelling, economics, decision analysis, sociology, political science, and philosophy. Our projects often apply distinctly interdisciplinary methods such as scenario analysis, systems theory and participatory research.

Figure 2: An illustration of SEI’s work along a science policy continuum.



- **Evidence:** We take an empirical perspective, and are also flexible, gearing various methods and approaches as appropriate for different research questions. Abstractions or “grand ideas” are never more important than empirical observation and experience.
- **Partnership:** It is fundamental and necessary to our approach that we work alongside other organizations to achieve results. We believe in pooling expertise, and realize that we are more effective when working in partnership.

Over the strategy period we will build on these foundations to further enhance our scientific profile and global reputation (see the goals, page 28).

### How we organize our research

We are a project-based organization, and our work is carried out collaboratively across centres, each of which has its own particular expertise and profile (see pages 16 and 17). Our research portfolio is built by SEI staff, in association with our partners around the world, who innovate and develop new ideas and projects in line with our mission and vision.

Over the next five years our research activities will be organized around three overlapping structures: themes, projects, and the new SEI Initiatives. These are described below.

### Themes

SEI’s four integrated research themes represent different perspectives on sustainable development and serve as cross-centre platforms for synthesis, learning, exchange, and



*Our research is the foundation of what we do, providing the credibility we need to work effectively with decision-makers and build capacity in society.*

leadership. The themes generate and develop new research ideas and identify challenges that our work should address, while the theme leadership functions as an institute-wide collective that, together with the Research Director and Policy Director, guides the development of research and enhances its quality and relevance. The four themes are described below.

**Managing Environmental Systems:** This theme is concerned with the interaction between natural resources and human development, and how to make viable and sustainable choices in environmental systems as they link to social systems. Today there is increasing pressure on air, water, land and ecosystems to produce food, fodder, fibre and energy. Managing these resources requires integrated analysis that cuts across topics and sectors. Sustainability in environmental systems depends on how resources have been and will be exploited, how benefits are distributed, and on how impacts are dealt with: SEI takes an integrated view of resource use, and our range of approaches, tools and methodologies provides new knowledge on stocks and flows of resources, and synergies and trade-offs in their use.



UN Photo/Mark Garten

**Reducing Climate Risk:** Climate change is a critical issue of our time. In some places it already affects livelihoods and food security, and puts at risk years of development progress. Evidence shows that unless we sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the very near future, the impacts of climate change will exceed the ability of many societies and natural systems to cope with them. Focal areas include: pathways to high-efficiency; low-carbon energy systems; the role of carbon markets and bio-resources; vulnerability analysis and adaptation planning; and the integration of adaptation and disaster risk reduction into development plans. SEI views mitigation and adaptation in concert, from urban development to forest management, as well as in the politics and ethics of finance and responsibility for climate action.

**Transforming Governance** is concerned with political and social change and the building of institutions at all levels in order to empower stakeholders and build their capacity, improve policy, build resilience, and transform society for sustainability. Focal areas include: stakeholder engagement and dialogue; behavioural perspectives on decision-making; institutions and actors in social change; politics and policy analysis; and social, collaborative and group learning that help foster more functional, transparent and representative systems of governance.

**Rethinking Development** examines the unfolding of a future of growing uncertainty, in which environmental factors have begun to bring about serious social, economic and geopolitical changes. As the world is growing more and more complex, it is in-



*Through the SEI initiatives we can add substantial value and make a real impact by responding to critical challenges in sustainable development.*

creasingly necessary to challenge conventional wisdom. SEI brings together different approaches and methodologies in order to uncover new patterns and unexpected relationships. Focal areas include production, consumption and trade patterns; new dimensions in linking security and sustainability; explorative scenario analysis; integrated assessments of policy impacts; and new approaches to understanding the socio-economics of a finite world.

**Projects**

are the basic level of operations through which our scientific expertise attracts external research funding and partnerships. Our ambition is to further draw together clusters

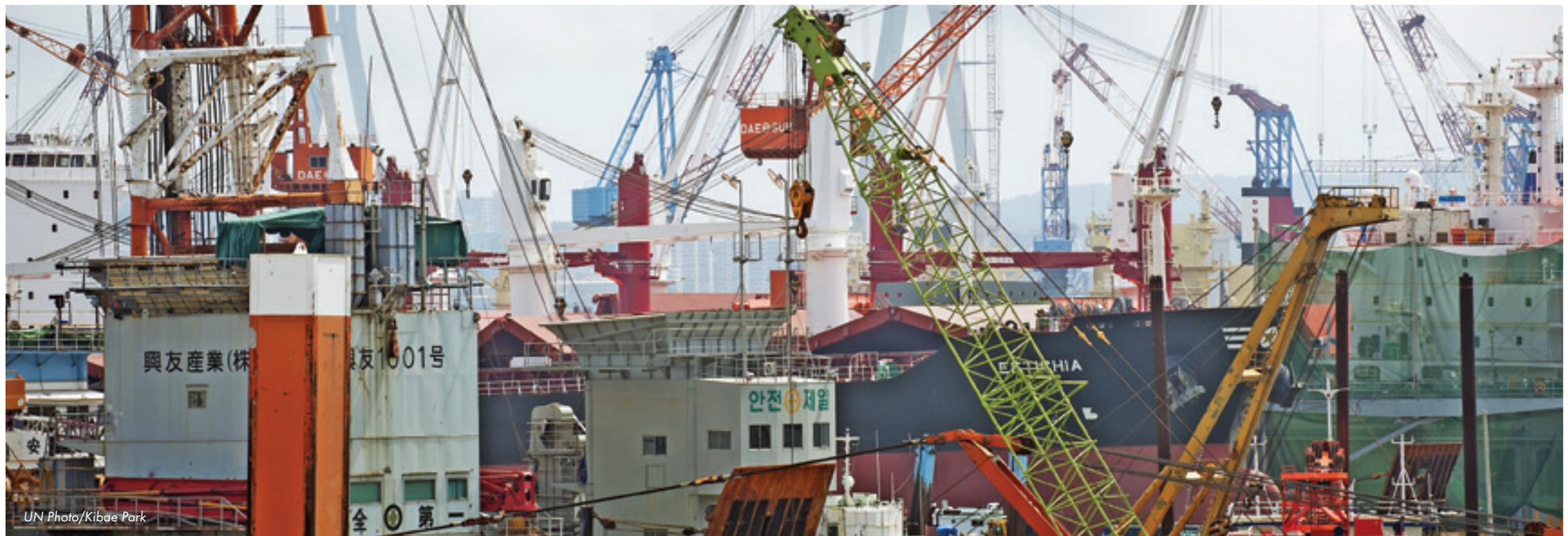
of projects that use similar tools or address similar issues (e.g. regional, policy-related or methodological) in order to build our international profile as a knowledge provider in key areas.

**SEI Initiatives**

From 2015, SEI will invest significant institutional resources into research on specific issues of sustainable development that we are particularly well placed to address, and in which we have a particular niche and expertise. The SEI Initiatives – eight of which have been identified by our themes and are in the pipeline as of January 2015 – will function as hubs for research supported by both core and project funding (see overleaf).



*We provide analysis of and solutions to some of the world's most pressing sustainable development challenges. We also strive to make our knowledge accessible to all.*



UN Photo/Kibae Park

# SEI INITIATIVES

From 2015, SEI will invest in research on key issues around sustainable development that we are particularly well placed to address. The SEI Initiatives will function as hubs for research supported by both core and project funding. Eight initiatives are in the pipeline as of January 2015.

## ***Behaviour and Choice***

This initiative will examine how to bring about changes in behaviour, choice and decision-making at the household level. By doing so it will support the design and implementation of more effective development programmes and governance interventions.

## ***Fossil Fuels and Climate Mitigation***

This initiative aims to understand the factors that support movement towards and away from fossil fuel development through high quality and timely research. It will do this to influence policies, plans and investment decisions in a manner that makes the pace and location of further fossil fuel development and trade more consistent with long-term sustainability objectives.

## ***Low Emission***

### ***Development Pathways***

This initiative will study the effects of integrated mitigation of short-lived climate pollutants as well as other air pollution and greenhouse gases, and the realization of multiple benefits. It will support practitioners to more effectively integrate the many dimensions of air pollution and climate change into their plans and strategies, in both the near and long term.

## ***Climate Finance***

This initiative aims to untangle key controversial issues that have emerged as impediments to the mobilization, delivery and scaling up of climate finance. It will do this to contribute to better governance and more effective and efficient use of climate finance.

## ***Producer to Consumer Sustainability***

This initiative aims to understand the sustainability implications of the evolving trade, production and consumption patterns of major traded commodities in an increasingly resource-scarce and globalized world. By doing so it will support more informed decision-making along supply chains to deliver positive economic, social and environmental outcomes.

## ***Transforming Development and Disaster Risk Reduction***

This initiative will connect disaster risk reduction (DRR) with inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. Research into socio-economic changes and environmental risks in specific contexts will generate knowledge that can both enable communities to cope with hazardous situations and support policy and practice to pursue development that takes account of new and emerging risks.

## ***The Water, Energy and Food Nexus***

This initiative will apply a nexus toolkit to address interconnected water, energy and food development challenges at different levels. It will do this to enable those who govern and manage these systems to work together to ensure basic access, efficiency and sustainability.

## ***Sustainable Sanitation***

This initiative will seek to inject new momentum into the search for sustainable ways to boost sanitation provision in low- and middle-income countries through new research, knowledge exchange, capacity building and advisory services. It will focus on “productive” solutions that offer multiple benefits in terms of food security, environmental sustainability, livelihoods and health.

## Goals for 2015–2019 – Scientific Research

### **1. We will increase the quality and impact of our scientific publications.**

This involves not only an increased focus on peer-reviewed journals and reports, as opposed to grey literature, but also a greater emphasis on publishing in interdisciplinary and widely read academic journals when appropriate, as opposed to narrow, specialist publications. We will also assess and broaden our policy on open access research.

### **2. We will become a global knowledge leader through the SEI Initiatives.**

In 2015–2019 we will invest core and other resources into the new SEI Initiatives. Through these we aim to become a global leader in research niches where, by combining our unique competences, we can add substantial value and make a substantial impact. The SEI Initiatives aggregate particular areas of research and policy and respond to critical challenges in sustainable development that we are especially well positioned to address.

### **3. We will develop and deepen partnership agreements with universities and research centres around the world.**

SEI has internationally recognized scientists in-house, and our conviction is that our overall scientific capacity can be further strengthened by partnerships with universities, whereby we can promote research cooperation, exchanges and academic careers for our staff.



Photo: Sean Hobbs



UN Photo/UNFCCC/Jan Golinski

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

*Overarching objective: To provide effective decision support and engage in key policy arenas*

At the core of our approach is the principle that scientific knowledge can and should be integral to decision-making, and that exchange of information shifts attitudes, provides evidence and induces change. Producing high quality research is only part of the task – we ensure that our knowledge counts through effective engagement with decision-makers and policy-makers.

We have a long track record of working with decision-makers and enabling people to make change at all scales. Not only do we support and influence intergovernmental negotiations and processes, as well as national or local policies on different aspects of sustainable development, we also inform investment and management decisions, support civil society, and work towards behavioural change on the part of individuals and organi-

zations. We have often set the agenda and raised the profile of environment and sustainability issues that are outside the mainstream.

In the past we have tended to work with policy and decision-makers already active in the sustainable development debate. But current challenges demand that we engage more effectively with those working in business, finance and planning, as well as other sectors where sustainability is not necessarily the main concern but in which it is critical to further integrate environment and development issues. We recognize that the landscape of sustainable development is shifting and, for example, that the private sector increasingly influences and promotes change. Therefore we will increase our engagement with “hard-to-reach” stakeholders, including those in the private sector, reflecting the huge influence they have. The links and interactions between public policy and decision-making and private sector action are of special interest.

We also strongly believe that long-term engagement – building enduring relationships

with policy- and decision-makers, partners and processes – is often the most effective approach to influencing change. On the one hand it allows our partners to develop a deeper understanding of particular issues and on the other it helps us to understand the constraints and issues that decision-makers face.

SEI has built a reputation as a credible, independent and reliable knowledge partner in both the developed and developing worlds; one that has a deep appreciation of the range of world views and development priorities that different countries and communities hold. But our engagement with deci-

sion-makers and agents of change must be improved still further. In order to do so, we have identified several key areas where we can perform better to heighten the impact of our engagement.



*We recognize that the landscape of sustainable development is shifting, and we will increase our engagement with “hard-to-reach” stakeholders*



UN Photo/Tobin Jones

## **Goals for 2015–2019 – Policy Engagement**

**1. We will assess and further develop SEI's approaches to policy engagement and influence.**

Developing a more sophisticated and structured understanding of decision-making processes throughout the organization will enable us to work more effectively with new and existing partners.

**2. We will increase the capacity of SEI staff to work at the interface between science and decision-making.**

To achieve this, it is vital that we carefully consider policy engagement in project planning and design. Internal learning and training will boost staff's engagement skills and their understanding of policy-maker concerns.

**3. We will further invest in engagement with decision-makers and policy-makers who influence sustainability, including those in finance, planning, and the private sector.**

Too often in the past, policy engagement in the sustainable development field has been limited to the environment and development-cooperation communities. This has not proved sufficient: to make a real difference at this moment there is a need to push beyond these groups and connect with "mainstream" decision-makers, for example in the financial and economic policy arenas.

**4. We will support the long-term and continual engagement of SEI in strategically important policy- and decision-making processes.**

This goal involves a greater focus on strategically important policy processes at intergovernmental, regional, national and local scales, and ensuring effective and enduring engagement with these processes.



Photo: Sean Hobbs

## CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

*Overarching objective: To strengthen the capacity of individuals and organizations to make decisions and institutional arrangements that promote sustainable development*

The founding principle of our approach to capacity development is that it is most effective when initiated by our partners and stakeholders in research, policy and practice, and best conducted through joint learning as we implement projects.

Our approach has evolved from an early focus on individuals, organizations and technical training, through support for integrated planning and decision-making processes between organizations, towards a broader focus on learning, empowerment, and development of social capital, culture, and values. We have also strengthened our conceptual work on collaboration and learning, and publish an increasing amount of scientific literature in the field.



*For us, capacity development is a process that is initiated from within groups that we engage with. We also focus on the equality and gender aspects of capacity development.*

We build capacity in a range of ways: project and programme collaboration; training (e.g. workshops on our tools; see Tools, Platforms and ICT, page 44; write-shops and seminars; hosting of PhD and MSc students and interns; and other methods of engagement. Equality and gender are also central aspects of our approach, as is working in developing countries.

We view capacity development as a process with three interdependent areas of action:

**1. The individual level**, where people acquire abilities and competences to function in their institutional setting. We work at this level by encouraging staff secondments and hosting guest researchers and interns, and engaging in graduate supervision. Moreover, through our project partnerships we work with consultants and researchers all over the world. We also organize and contribute to professional training programmes.

**2. The organizational level**, which is about an organization's capacity to manage its mandate. At this level we focus on developing and sharing skills, knowledge, and experience among stakeholders, and on how they can make use of these within their organizational context. This includes technical capacity for planning and analysis, stakeholder engagement, social and environmental assessments, and knowledge dissemination.

**3. The institutional level**, which consists of the incentives, procedures and governance that shape the behaviour of organizations and individuals. Institutions comprise both formal arrangements (e.g. written policies, guidelines and laws) and informal arrange-

ments (e.g. norms, culture and cognition) that set the boundaries for and shape human relations. Here, SEI works to build institutional arrangements, procedures for institutional coordination, engagement with stakeholders and in policy processes, and impact assessments.

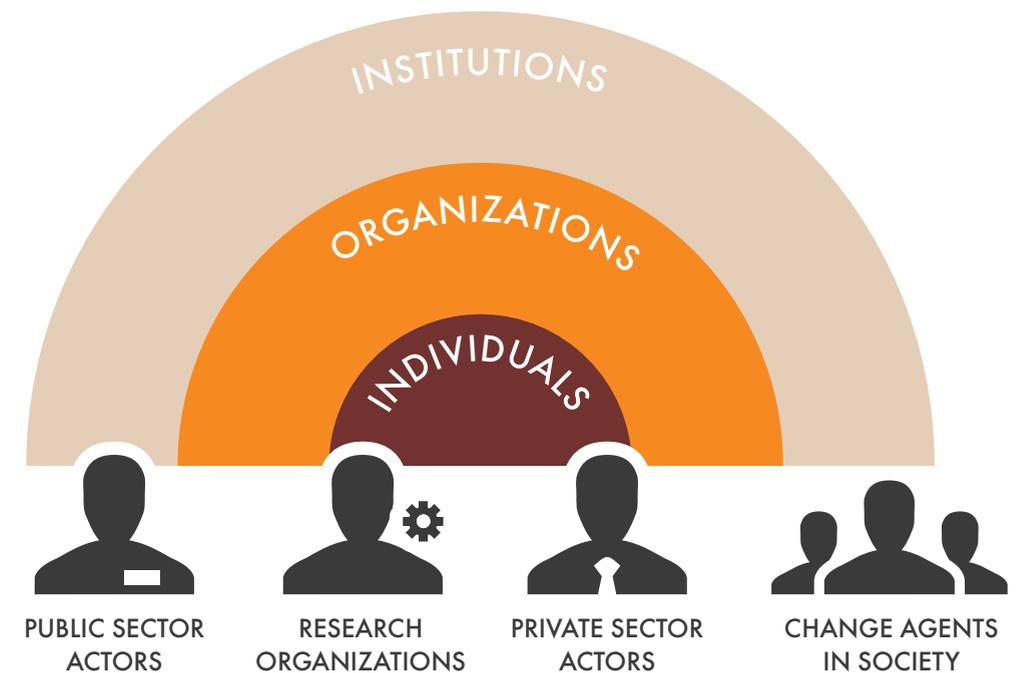
We prioritize four types of partners in capacity development:

- Public sector actors, e.g. government agencies, local and regional planning bureaus, international negotiators in the foreign services

- research organizations, e.g. universities, consultants, and NGOs, which feed knowledge, experience and perspectives into decision-making processes.
- private sector actors, including both SMEs and entities within larger corporations
- other change agents in society, including individuals and civil society groups.

Many of our existing partnerships are maintained and developed through institutionalized networks (e.g. SIANI, SUMERNET, IRF2015) and online communities (e.g. COMMEND, weADAPT).

Figure 3: SEI develops capacity by working with four sets of partners at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels.



## **Goals for 2015–2019 – Capacity Development**

### ***1. We will further include capacity development activities in our research projects, initiatives and expert areas.***

Broadening access to the knowledge and information we produce will require that we invest project resources and involve our partners in the design, implementation and scientific reporting of our work, and that we improve the accessibility of our analytical tools and the information they generate (see Tools, Platforms, and ICT, page 44). We will develop capacity building activities at the request of partners, building on knowledge generated from our research, to empower marginalized and other stakeholder groups to participate in judicial, administrative, and decision-making processes.

### ***2. We will systematize our capacity-development infrastructure, toolkits and methods.***

This requires investment to establish a comprehensive infrastructure for capacity development that spans and supports centres and is linked to our knowledge management system. This will enable us to more effectively use our knowledge and research, both internally and in training programmes and seminars with our partners..





PART 3

# ENABLING OUR DELIVERY

Delivering results depends on enabling factors: how we communicate, monitor, and learn from our work, how we deploy our tools, and how we manage our finances and human resources. Our goals build on SEI's stronger financial, managerial and organizational position, and drive us toward improvements in recruitment, infrastructure, skills and knowledge, and in honing our policy impact.



## COMMUNICATIONS

*Overarching objective: To produce and share knowledge more effectively, in partnership with decision makers*

We believe that scientific insights can guide us through change and should inform decision-making and public policy. Communication is the interface between science and policy, and so must be embedded in our research and enable our engagement with decision makers. Our approach to communications is focused on the needs of our



*To grasp the opportunities presented by rapid change in communications, our goals for communication will focus on embedding it in our research*

partners and is based on credibility, building relationships, and engaging in dialogue.

In communicating our research we aim to reveal the interdependence of development and environment issues; describe the complex relationships between people, nature and social systems; and strive for a complete picture rather than looking at aspects of a problem in isolation.

From “big data” to micro-blogs, much of the world is in the midst of a communications revolution. More information than ever is gathered and crunched, more is available, and it is accumulated and shared at increasing speed. While new forms of collaboration are made possible, information overload is a common risk, and while new communication formats are created, established models disintegrate and the simplest tools allow people to curate and broadcast their own versions of the news.

At a time when we are exposed to so much babble, listening and discernment are at a premium. Successful communication is not just



*Successful communication is not just about being heard: It will require an authentic and credible voice and will increasingly take place in conversation.*

about being heard: it will require an authentic and credible voice and will increasingly take place in conversation. The effective communicator will create spaces for dialogue in which authors and audiences interact.

The three defining characteristics of modern communication – volume, availability and speed – mean that it is even more important to invest in communication basics, which are: knowing your audiences and developing relationships, building narratives, and tailoring communications products and timing their delivery.

In order to grasp the opportunities presented by rapid change in communications, our goals focus on embedding it in our research, from concept to execution. Our approach will be more selective and targeted, with a clear focus on desired outcomes and impacts. Communications should also enable our policy engagement, and be built on a sharpened understanding of decision-making contexts.



UN Photo/Sebastiao Barbosa

## Goals for 2015–2019 – Communications

### **1. We will enable all SEI staff to be better communicators, and mobilize the authentic and diverse voices within SEI.**

All of our researchers have important work and fascinating stories to relate. Investment in training and new tools will help staff to develop into competent and compelling communicators so they can engage more effectively with key audiences.

### **2. We will invest in more structured and proactive planning for communications and policy engagement.**

This will require that we reshape the communications team and ensure that communications is an integral part of project design, rather than a bolt-on option: researchers and communicators should co-design projects so we better identify target audiences and so that communications is embedded in projects from the proposal stage.

### **3. We will develop more targeted content and formats that better meet the needs of users.**

Effective communication engages audiences and establishes dialogue. The result is a shared, evidence-based narrative that increases uptake and impact. Communicating science requires the application of the latest research on communication methods, and it also means learning what works, through continuous evaluation (e.g. through media monitoring and website analytics) and adjustment of messages and channels.

### **4. We will deploy our peer-reviewed output more effectively in order to further develop the credibility of our communications.**

Peer-reviewed articles form the majority of our published output. We will take greater advantage of the quality and credibility of this material, and repurpose it to offer more effective decision support.





Photo: Laurie VanVleet

## TOOLS, PLATFORMS, AND ICT

Overarching objective: To advance the technical development, accessibility and application of our tools, platforms, and ICT environment

One reason why SEI stands out in its field is because of its suite of innovative analytical tools. These provide support and knowledge across a range of areas such as energy and water planning, sustainable consumption and production, climate adaptation, trade, agriculture, and scenario development. While many of these tools are developed and applied within specific projects, several of them have been taken up by external users, in some cases very widely at the global scale.

Our tools fall into three broad categories that together enable our research, policy engagement, and capacity development.

- **Analytical tools and methods:** These tools are used primarily by scientists who implement research. These include quanti-

tative tools such as DO3SE and IOTA, and also qualitative and semi-qualitative methodologies within the social sciences.

- **Signature tools:** This group of tools is analytical, but also explicitly user-oriented and applied to tackle complex questions of resource governance and management at various scales. The tools also point towards potential solutions that can be adapted to local solutions and scaled up. Our signature tools include quantitative tools, such as the Long-range Energy Alternatives Planning (LEAP) system, the Resources and Energy Analysis Programme (REAP) and the Water Evaluation and Planning (WEAP) system, as well as semi-qualitative ones, such as exploratory scenario methods. User communities, such as water and energy managers at the municipal level, apply these tools to co-produce research or analysis.
- **Web-based decision support, communication, and visualization tools.** These include TAGMI, REAP, weADAPT and NetPositive.

Because the use of one resource very often impacts on another, we have begun to link and combine our tools for water and energy planning (WEAP and LEAP) to address the water, energy and food nexus. It is our ambition to link up other SEI tools into this process, for example DO3SE, which measures the impact of air pollution on crops.

Our tools have enabled us to engage more effectively in critical policy processes, particularly in areas such as energy, consumption and water. But today the world of technology is rapidly evolving and this strategy acknowledges the need for renewed institutional investment to develop these resources.

In order to keep these tools responsive to today's policy and management challenges, there is a need to continuously improve their functionality, and so we will broaden access to the information they produce. Currently, the analytical tools are most accessible to technically trained experts, but there is both an opportunity and a need to use the web and associated technologies to make these modelling tools more accessible to non-technical users. This effort could involve investing resources to access data sets required to run the tools, to construct scenarios that could be run through the models, and to share the results of these model runs in visually compelling and accessible graphics. In addition, there is the potential to use web-based resources for knowledge sharing and capacity-building to help the growing user communities connect and communicate. This will mean moving away from the current desktop software model towards multi-platform, cloud-based computing and data sharing.



*Our signature tools are applied in resource governance and management at various scales, and help to tackle complex problems and point towards solutions*

The current revolution in “big data” and ICT also offers opportunities to advance our research and advisory capacity through data capture, analysis, visualization and sharing. Modern sensor technology and smartphones can provide new data sets in both the physical and social domains. With the rapid development of how objects in our daily life can communicate through the Internet, vast amounts of data can be available for sustainability research, and for social learning. Creative visualization tools can also provide new and engaging ways of communicating research for policy impact and capacity development.

We will also develop our use of tools and ICT to support internal processes within our organization. In terms of our internal processes, it is a priority for us to improve our business tools to make our planning and project processes more efficient and to integrate our internal knowledge management systems, moving the institute towards a digital business model in which systems are seamlessly integrated.

## **Goals for 2015–2019 – Tools, Platforms, and ICT**

### **1. We will advance our efforts to develop and integrate our analytical tools.**

Further integrating our tools will better support decision-making around complex problems. This would entail, for example, linking up water, energy and land-use models to address resource management and development challenges at different scales.

### **2. We will make SEI's tools more accessible to policy-makers and stakeholders.**

This will be achieved by taking advantage of web-based resources and big data, and by making our tools more interactive and using visual design to improve ease of use.

### **3. We will continue to invest in ICT for internal knowledge management.**

This involves developing and integrating our organizational software. For example, we will explore cloud-based solutions as well as linking our project planning and monitoring system (PMEC – see page 56) with tools for staff collaboration, financial management, communications, human resources, and archiving.



# SEI TOOLS & PLATFORMS

## LEAP: Supporting innovation in energy planning and climate mitigation

During 25 years of development LEAP has established itself as a key tool for energy planners and climate change mitigation professionals working for government agencies, utilities, universities, consultancies and NGOs. The online LEAP user community (COMMEND) now has almost 24,000 members who regard LEAP as one of the most useful and approachable tools for responding to the world's major energy, development and environmental challenges. LEAP encourages its users to take a holistic, scenario-based perspective in response to these challenges; one that focuses as much on demand-side issues as on the issue of supply-side technology, which is the focus of most energy modelling tools.

[energycommunity.org](http://energycommunity.org)

## REAP: Unravelling the implications of consumption across scales and jurisdictions

REAP creates consumption-based accounts of environmental impacts by analysing supply chains, capturing environmental impacts and re-allocating impacts from producers to end consumers. The REAP framework can be used to explore the impacts of any consumer group, from the country level through to local municipalities or individuals. Baseline data provide a starting point from which to understand current consumption impacts, and REAP also has a scenario function that allows users to explore the possible impacts of changes in policy or behaviour.

## WEAP: Managing water for social development and environmental protection

Water management can be a contentious enterprise as many users depend on water resources and aquatic ecosystems are highly visible and valued. In situations of scarcity, conflict can even occur. For more than 20 years SEI has been developing WEAP (Water Evaluation and Planning System), which has emerged as one of the global standards to assist in the improvement of system performance. With more than 13,000 members on the user forum, the WEAP tool is used widely around the world to allow for integrated analysis of basin hydrology, surface water and groundwater allocation, water quality, and environmental flows within a scenario based analysis framework at scales ranging from single water utilities up to large river basins. [weap21.org](http://weap21.org)

## weADAPT: Brokering knowledge and developing capacity on climate adaptation

weADAPT is a collaborative web-based platform where practitioners, researchers and decision-makers share knowledge on adaptation planning. The platform includes guides for interpreting and analysing climate information, methods for assessing social and climate vulnerability, and a range of tools to support adaptation decision-making. WeADAPT has links to over 2000 global projects, articles and case studies in the Google Earth Adaptation Layer and Knowledge Base, and has grown rapidly in the past three years, with more than 2500 members and 700 organizations now registered and users in more than 190 countries. Many of the members have begun to co-create knowledge from historically "hard-to-reach" areas with low or no bandwidth through intermediaries both connected to the platform and knowledgeable about the work of partners on the ground.

[weadapt.org](http://weadapt.org)



## ORGANIZATION AND FINANCE

Overarching objective: To be a diverse, attractive, and financially robust organization where skilled researchers and professionals can thrive

### Overview of the management structure

The SEI Board has an international membership that represents academia, international organizations, government agencies and the private sector. The Board approves the budget of the Foundation, and appoints the Executive Director and the Finance Director. The Board also provides strategic advice to SEI's leadership on a range of substantive, organizational and administrative issues, and meets four times per year.

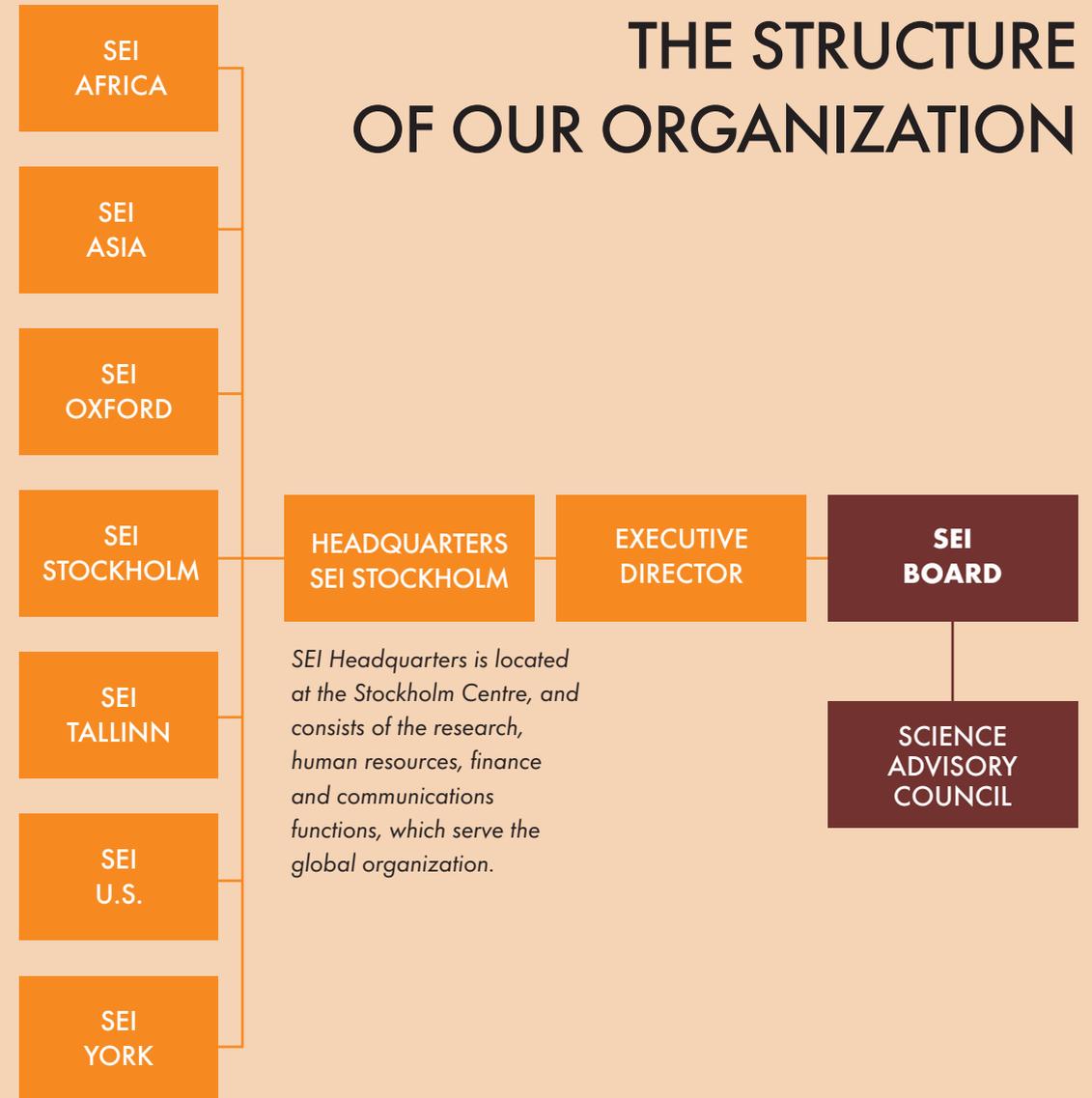
The Science Advisory Council (SAC) was established in 2013 and represents a broad set of scientific disciplines that correspond to SEI's research agenda. It provides strategic advice to the research leadership on all as-

pects related to the institute's research and policy work. The SAC reports directly to the Board, and may also present recommendations to it.

The operational management structure of SEI consists of:

- The SEI Executive Team, which is the principal day-to-day operational decision making body of the organization.
- The SEI Management Team is a broader advisory and strategic decision-making body, which consists of all the centre directors, department directors, and the staff representatives. It decides on SEI-wide policies and strategies.
- The Theme Leadership steers the institute's research under the guidance of the Research Director, and is the SEI-wide research, learning, and development structure.

# THE STRUCTURE OF OUR ORGANIZATION





*Financial stability is critical for long-term planning, and this enhanced commitment provides a firm basis for achieving our aims over the strategy period.*

#### **Changes in 2010–2014**

During the 2010–2014 strategy period we made substantial changes and investments to strengthen our management and governance. We also introduced institutional planning tools and processes that have sharpened our focus on results, efficiency and accountability in projects. These reforms were partly initiated based on recommendations provided through four independent evaluations in 2010, and later enabled through increased core support provided by the Swedish Government.

In 2013 the relocation of our headquarters and the Stockholm Centre further strengthened our profile and brought us closer to partners. The SEI Africa Centre also relocated in 2013 from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, to Nairobi, Kenya, and is now steadily growing and establishing itself as a regional centre in East Africa (see page 16).

#### **Human Resources**

Our people are our core asset, and our diversity is also a source of strength: people from more than 30 different countries work at the institute. SEI staff have a deep understanding of environment and development issues, strong networks, the capacity to work in partnership with different groups at different scales, and an awareness of the realities of policy and decision-making contexts. We are recognized as one of the top research institutes in the world, which reflects the calibre of our people and their ability to deliver high quality, relevant results and gain and build trust with our partners and funders. Our global staff survey shows that employees are highly engaged and proud to work here.

But we must build further on these qualities. We will improve networking and collaboration among our family of centres, in particular by ensuring that all new staff are fully integrated into the whole organization. And while we continue to grow and professionalize, we must maintain our flexibility and dynamism, which is a hallmark of SEI and which allows new and innovative research to grow and prosper. Enhancing the leadership culture in the organization, in both research and project management, will help us to do this.

#### **Financial sustainability and resources**

A large proportion of SEI's financial resources are mobilized through the centres and individual researchers. This is a considerable advantage for the organization since it un-

derpins robust and stable finances. At the same time, strong core support proves financial stability that is critical for SEI's long-term planning. In recent years we have extended our collaboration with, and received increased funding from, both the Swedish Ministry for the Environment (through the Swedish Research Council, Formas) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). This enhanced commitment provides SEI with a firm basis to move forward and achieve our aims over this strategy period.

In 2015–2019, our partner-based funding model will continue to evolve. Through the new SEI Initiatives (see page 26), we will co-invest resources in innovative work together with partners and clients. In parallel, we continue to determinedly pursue funding opportunities offered through public sources such as research councils. We will also continue to work actively with multiple partners in an advisory role on sustainable development decision making at the global, regional, national, and local levels.



*Our multidisciplinary and international research environment offers great potential for employees to expand and deepen their expertise.*

## Goals for 2015–2019 – Organization and Finance

### **1. We will continue to grow and invest in capacity at all centres to ensure that we deliver on our objectives.**

Our centres underpin our mode of operation (see page 16), and in order to thrive they require on-going investment and, where necessary, strategic recruitment.

### **2. We will provide more opportunities for all of our staff to develop their expertise, and ensure that our diversity remains a strength.**

Our multidisciplinary and international research environment offers great potential for employees to expand and deepen their expertise. We will capitalize further on opportunities presented by internal learning and capacity building, cross-centre exchange, interdisciplinary research projects, and training.

### **3. We will further strengthen our capacity and systems for project management, quality assurance, and risk management.**

The ability to manage risks in a complex, changing environment is a growing priority. Efficient and effective project management systems are key to monitoring and mitigating potential risk.

### **4. We will ensure that operational plans for financial control, ICT, and human resources support the overall achievement of the strategy objectives.**

Our aim is to achieve this in a resource efficient and cost-effective manner.

### **5. We will maintain a diverse project and funding portfolio**

Diverse funding is key to our financial resilience, and we will work to deepen and expand partnerships with a broad range of actors within the public and private sectors and civil society.



## MONITORING AND LEARNING

Overarching objective: To be a learning organization that continuously takes stock of past experience

One of the great challenges for an organization working at the intersection of science, policy, and practice is how to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of its work and learn from past experience.

In 2010, we set out to develop a systematic and formalized approach to monitor and evaluate projects. The result was the custom-designed web-based Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Communication



*Monitoring and evaluation are critical to our ambitions, and we will invest more in how we evaluate and monitor our own work, and keep learning to do it better.*

(PMEC) system, which has become integral to our project and organizational management. It has now been embedded in a range of processes around proposal development, planning of projects, and monitoring and evaluation. All of our projects must now be tracked in PMEC.

PMEC is based on a theory-of-change approach called outcome mapping. It has been adapted to our mode of working, and to allow integration with our systems for communication and budget management. PMEC encourages staff to think beyond a project's activities and outputs, and first ask what change they want to contribute to and which people and organizations could be directly influenced, informed, or empowered to bring about such change. This helps project teams to focus on outcomes and be realistic about the influence they can have in the complex realm of policy- and decision making. It promotes adaptive management of project activities and outputs by monitoring progress towards the desired outcomes, and it provides a systematic way to share lessons learned across the organization.

### Our boundary partners are

the individuals, groups, or organizations that we directly interact with and seek to influence through our projects. Depending on the project, they might represent public policy, academia, NGOs, civic groups, or industry and the private sector, from the local to global scales. For each project we use our PMEC system to plan, monitor and evaluate the type of change the project aims for.

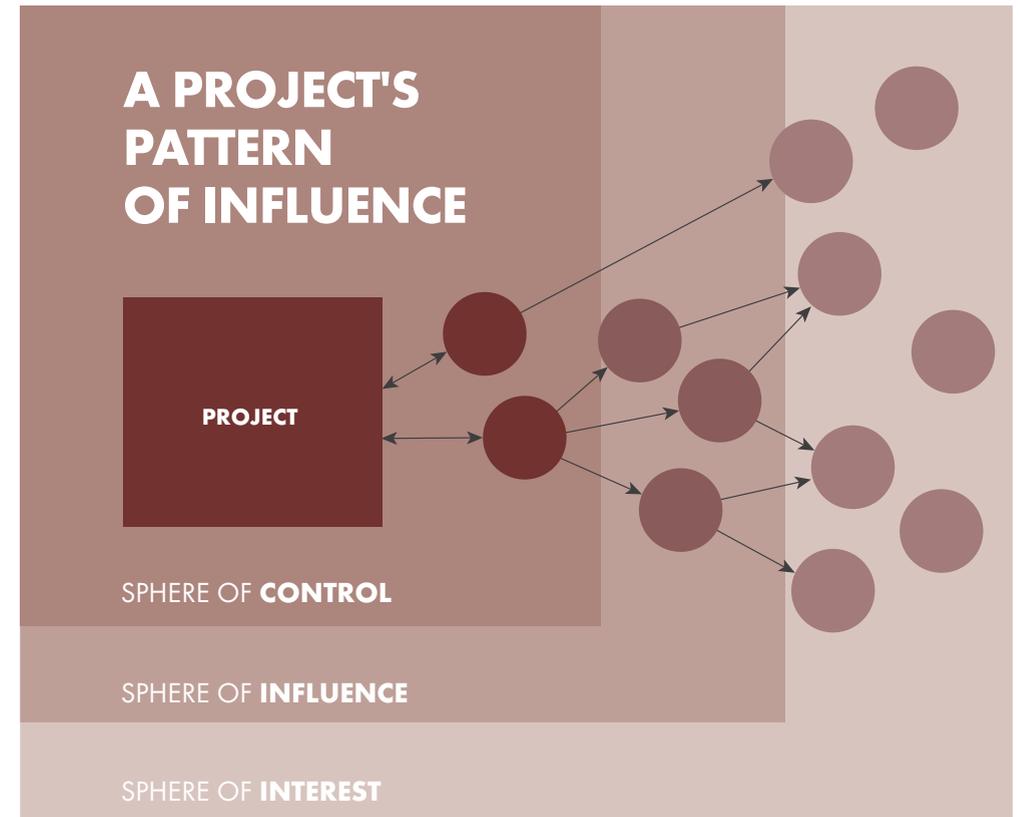


Fig 4: A project's influence: our monitoring and evaluation system allows us to map the outcomes and influence of our work.

● PROJECT PARTNERS ● BOUNDARY PARTNERS ● OTHER STAKEHOLDERS

PMEC is designed not only to track and evaluate individual projects, but also to feed into higher-level reporting, monitoring and evaluation. In this way we can monitor results across our seven performance areas using the information gathered in PMEC.

We have already embedded monitoring and evaluation at the project level. The next step is to ensure that lessons from project implementation and management feed into in-

stitutional learning. We work in a context of high complexity, with a wide range of partnerships, collaborations, and links between issues and actors that change over time. This demands an ability to absorb complexity and a willingness to adapt to changing contexts. And by investing in becoming a learning organization, and further improving our monitoring and evaluation processes, we can better assess our policy impact and identify best practices for achieving it.

### **Goals for 2015–2019 – Monitoring and Learning**

**1. We will further embed the PMEC system within our workflows.**

Our monitoring and evaluation system will be fully integrated into staff workflows so we can more effectively plan, monitor and evaluate projects.

**2. We will monitor, evaluate and learn from our key outcomes.**

PMEC will enable us to capture scientific advances, policy changes and examples of successful capacity development achieved by our projects or initiatives, and to learn from these.

**3. We will develop and put in place feedback processes between project activity and higher management.**

This will allow the right level of detail to be communicated to higher management and the SEI Board, and to ensure that lessons learned on project implementation are shared across the institute.



**Cover photo by:  
Peter Erickson, SEI U.S. (Seattle).**

In 2013, Mongolia started its first commercial wind power plant, the Salkhit Wind Farm. In the same year SEI worked with the Mongolian Government to assess long-range energy supply options for the country. This photo was taken at an unplanned gathering of workers and their families at the plant.

*SEI is an independent, international research institute. It has been engaged in environment and development issues at local, national, regional and global policy levels for more than a quarter of a century. SEI supports decision making for sustainable development by bridging science and policy.*

