

SEI in Myanmar



Project Brief
September 2019

Background

Myanmar is the second largest country by area in Southeast Asia, with a population of over 53 million. Although the country is rich in biodiversity and natural resources, development challenges remain, with almost 32 percent of the population living below the poverty line. Most of the country's population live in rural areas and rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. The majority of farms are small, subsistence-level holdings, with productivity dependent on seasonal rainfall patterns. Climate change therefore poses significant risks for Myanmar's local communities, which are dependent for their livelihoods on water and natural resources.

Areas of Work

Since 2013, the SEI has engaged with Myanmar partners and stakeholders to strengthen Myanmar's transition towards sustainable development through collaborative research, policy engagement, capacity building and joint action related to environment and development issues. SEI focuses on gender equality, social equity, environmental rights and poverty reduction. Along with these issues, SEI also aims to foster dialogue around challenges and solutions related to water management, climate-resilience development, ecosystem services, hydropower, and rural livelihoods and well-being.

Projects

1. **SERVIR Mekong:** Supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA), this project uses geospatial data made publicly available by NASA to help address development challenges related to a changing climate, especially in the context of disaster risk reduction, food security, and landscape management to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. SEI's work supports the Directorate of Water Resources and improvement of River Systems (DWIR) to develop a large-scale seasonal river morphological monitoring system to identify areas affected by erosion.
2. **SUMERNET:** SEI acts as the Secretariat to host the Sustainable Mekong Research Network that comprises research and knowledge producers in the Mekong Region. SUMERNET supports research and policy engagement on critical sustainability issues. SUMERNET's research agenda in Myanmar focuses on assessing the impacts of economic development in rural livelihoods and well-being, and on adaptation pathways for climate-resilient development.
3. **Chindwin Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (CBES):** The CBES project aims to assess the potential impacts of development and climate change on livelihoods and biodiversity within three key biodiversity hotspots in the Chindwin River Basin. SEI engaged with local partners in Myanmar such as the Myanmar Environment Institute, the Sagaing Regional Government, other

Photo (above): Chindwin Fisherman
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Myanmar, riverbank erosion © RAJESH DANIEL / SEI

relevant government agencies, academics, researchers and the media to empower civil society and government agencies to mainstream biodiversity and ecosystem services into development plans for the Chindwin River Basin. CBES additionally supports policy-makers for comprehensive basin development planning to provide strong environmental and social safeguards for people and the environment.

- 4. Gender and Hydropower in Myanmar:** SEI partnered with the World Bank International Finance Group for the “Powered by Women” initiative, which worked to improve hydropower company operations in Myanmar through gender-smart initiatives and recommendations. The initiative generated knowledge on the current roles and opportunities for women in the hydropower sector in Myanmar.
- 5. Chindwin Futures:** Initiated in 2013, Chindwin Futures supported water management through evidence-based participatory planning processes in the Ayeyarwady region. In 2019, SEI supported the establishment of the Chindwin River Basin Organisation to improve policies and the management of water resources and planning for development of the Chindwin Basin. SEI work in the Chindwin Basin aims to build public awareness and education about river conditions and river basin management.
- 6. Water, Energy and Food Nexus:** Since 2015, this SEI Initiative has built on SEI’s long experience in environmental governance through investigating the cross-sectoral linkages and synergies between water, energy, and food. The initiative supports those who govern and manage these systems in a collaborative effort to meet human aspirations under sustainable principles.
- 7. Gender equality in fisheries and coastal resource management:** SEI collaborated with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Southeast Asian Fisheries Development Centre (SEAFDEC) to explore drivers of gender inequality and constraints in the context of fisheries and coastal activities. The project examined national policy conditions in 12 countries, including Myanmar, to improve gender equality in environment and natural resource management.