THE STRATEGIC COLLABORATIVE FUND PHASE II
2022 CALL FOR CONCEPT NOTES

Theme

Improving water resources management and climate resilience by integrating socio-ecological systems thinking

About the Strategic Collaborative Fund

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. 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. To this end, the **Guidance Note on Integrating Gender and Human Rights-Based Approaches** in SCF2 supports the inclusion of gender equality and human rights into the SCF2 programme. We strongly encourage the potential partner organisations to use the note as a guide for developing the concept notes.

Learn more about the SCF2 programme and details for concept note submissions **here**.

Specific Focus and Priority

In the field of water management, the current interconnected challenges are inherently unpredictable and difficult to control. To address these challenges, a paradigm shift in water management is required globally where we need to move away from the command and control (or technocratic) approaches and human centric towards adaptive and inclusive socio-ecological systems (SES) thinking and Nature-based solutions (NbS).

We are looking for proposals that demonstrate practical action to address and identify opportunities for improving water resource management and climate resilience by integrating socio-ecological systems thinking. We prioritise events demonstrating innovative methods and/or frameworks for analysing socio-ecological systems thinking at various levels to ensure sustainable and equitable use of water resources, ecosystem management, and inclusive decision-making with consideration to Indigenous ecological knowledge, gender equality, and human-rights based approaches.

Rationale

Humans are significantly altering the global water system within earth systems without adequate knowledge of the consequences. The science-based command and control approach to water management that appeared to work in the past is now recognised as ineffective in dealing with the Anthropocene's complex and intertwined challenges, such as resource constraints, financial instability, social and gender inequalities within and between countries, and environmental degradation.

There is rising evidence that conventional approaches are failing to handle contemporary water management concerns, which has sparked a debate over a newly emerging water paradigm. (Gain et al., 2020; Schoeman et al., 2014).

In this era, understanding the dynamic interactions between humans and water is crucial to support human well-being and sustainable development. Traditional disciplinary approaches, according to UN (2017), cannot meet the interconnection (synergies and trade-offs) of water (SDG 6) and non-water (other SDGs) related targets. Thus, inter- and trans-disciplinary approaches are necessary to address complex interconnections and to identify effective solutions to achieve sustainability.

Socio-ecological systems (SES) approaches explicitly recognise the connections and feedbacks between human and natural systems. The resilience of such a system depends on a wide range of factors stemming from linkages between human societies and ecosystems. These factors include changes in the social, political, and environmental situations. These factors cause stress and disturbance, which a community may overcome if it is truly resilient. Socio-ecological resilience embodies the capacity of linked SES to absorb recurrent disturbance to retain essential structures, processes, and relationships.

Who is most affected?

South and Southeast Asia is exposed to a range of water-mediated climate hazards and vulnerabilities including heavy rainfall events, cyclones, floods, and droughts. The climate hazards affect relations between states through humanitarian crisis, migration, greater dependency on imports and even conflict along with agricultural yields, biodiversity, and availability of clean water. Six of the world's ten most climate change affected countries from 2000 to 2019 are in South and Southeast Asia including Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan (Global Climate Risk Index, 2021).

Moreover, climate change is already and will increasingly affect populations in terms of quality of life, safety as well as health, and increasing gender inequalities and exacerbating social inequity. Poor, slum, and marginalized groups, including women, elderly, and Indigenous people are the most vulnerable groups to climate change impacts, water insecurity and degradation of ecosystem services, and these groups have the least adaptive capacity to water-mediated

disasters. Power structures, limited access to resources, and discrimination based on race, poverty and gender further enhances the vulnerability of these populations.

The rights of these people to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment are further violated by mismanagement and unsustainable use of water resources. These groups have lower access to clean water resources and their exclusion from management and participatory processes undermine their ability to protect and preserve water resources and ecosystems. Even when they participate in the decision-making process, they often lack power and legitimacy. The overemphasis on formal organizations prevents their inclusive engagement, and the likelihood of formal organizations of marginalised communities is impeded by limited access to resources and oppressive power structures. When deploying water resource management actions at the local level, Indigenous knowledge of these people is not considered, resulting in failure and often mismatches to the demands of these populations.

How to address the gaps?

In the field of water management, the current interconnected challenges are inherently unpredictable and difficult to control. To address these challenges a paradigm shift in water management is required globally where we need to move away from the command and control (or technocratic) approaches and human-centric towards an adaptive and inclusive socio-ecological systems (SES) thinking Nature-based solutions (NbS). Socio-economic benefits created by these solutions make them cost-effective solutions to address multiple societal challenges while generating economic opportunities and employment. This will help to address multiple water-related issues, including water pollution, climate change, transboundary water resources management as described in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG1 (Target 1.5), SDG5 (Target 5.5, 5C), SGD6 (Target 6.2, 6.6, 6B), SDG 10 (Target 10.2, 10.3), and SDG13 (Target 13.1), respectively.

These approaches, when implemented considering the core SES attributes of causality (or interdependence), feedback, non-linearity, heterogeneity, and cross-scale dynamics, can lead to the development of an interdisciplinary water paradigm. These five main attributes of SES are explained below:

- **Causality** assumes changes in one process or state is the reason for changes in another process or state.
- **Feedback** provides a deeper view in which interactive relationships create a loop where outcome links back to the origin of trigger of interactions
- **Heterogeneity** reflects variability in SES in space and/or time
- **Non-linearity** is a situation where the result of interactions among processes and states are not proportional over time
- **Cross-scale dynamics** highlights the feedbacks and interactions across time and space.

This paradigm aims to make decisions for generating a broader spread of benefits for people and ecosystems through wider integration of issues, sectors, and disciplines including access to

information, transparency, and accountability. Local communities, especially vulnerable and marginalized groups, youth and women groups, various levels of stakeholders can collaborate to develop such water governance paradigms.

Also, improved water resources management and climate resilience is directly relevant to address gaps in gender equality and human rights-based approaches that are impacted by water scarcity, poor sanitation, and water-mediated climate disasters, among others.

The Regional Strategic Collaboration

We invite submission of proposals for regional events that will address and identify possibilities for improving water resources management and climate resilience by integrating socio-ecological systems thinking. We particularly look for proposals that discuss the following:

- The proposals are expected to show novel methods, case success stories and failures,
- Identify key challenges and barriers, engage broad spectrum of stakeholders and local communities, Indigenous people, youth, and women groups in implementing socio-ecological systems-based approaches for sustainable management of water resources, control of water pollution, reducing risks of water-related disasters, and building ecosystem resilience.
- The event should also identify practical approaches for implementation across scales, explore potential collaboration and partnership among different sectors and stakeholders while providing policy recommendations for scaling up.

The proposal could be linked with an ongoing project and/or initiative that needs to be scaled up. The outcomes of the proposed regional event must support the objectives of one or more existing international conventions and agreements and should feed into larger policy processes and framework at country and regional scales, such as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), The Ramsar Convention, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the Land Degradation Neutrality target (UNCCD), IPBES, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) Centre for Biodiversity, ASEAN–-China Strategy on Environment Cooperation, Mekong River Commission, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. Reference can also be made to relevant human-rights conventions, including the Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

It is expected that the outcome(s) of the event will be an input to preparations for at least one of the following international policy processes World Water Week 2022 (Seeing the unseen: The value of water), UN Climate Change Conference (COP27), COP (Conference of the Parties) 15 of Convention on Biological Diversity to decide Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

Theme-Specific Criteria

- Direct contribution to the SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 10, SDG 13, and international agreements such as UNFCCC, UNCBD etc.
- Mainstreaming gender equality and human rights goals throughout event design, implementation, and evaluation
- Programme should highlight lessons learnt and practices for improving water resources management and achieving climate resilience through SES thinking considering Indigenous and local knowledge, gender equality, social equity, and human rights.
- Ensuring multi-level and diverse stakeholder engagement and meaningful participation of marginalized groups in decision making processes.
- Identification of target policies and large-scale platforms to be influenced along with key policy recommendations to be disseminated at
- Clear and effective communication plan or strategies to raise awareness among the target groups on the importance of SES thinking for water resource management and achieving climate resilience.

Expected Results and Outcomes

Theory of change			
Outputs	Output 1	Output 2	Output 3
	A regional scale policy event along with a series of national events with multiple. gender-balanced and diverse stakeholders	• A report outlining key messages of the event and next steps for policy influence. • A compendium of case studies depicting inclusive and adaptive SES thinking for water resource management and climate resilience • Strategic plan for stakeholders to transform/improve water management approaches in terms of equity, sustainability, and inclusivity	Communications and/or policy products about the events, in various formats to target diverse groups of stakeholders (e.g., local and sign language translation, infographics, podcasts, briefs, blogs, declarations)
Potential Target Participants/	Policy makers	Policy makers	Policy makers NGOs

Stakeholders/ Users	River Basin Organizations	Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)	Academia
	Government line agencies	Academia	Wetland and River management committees
	Indigenous peoples		
	Youth and Women groups		
	Marginalized communities		
	Farmer groups		
	Self-help groups (Fish operatives etc.)		
	Wetland and River management committees		
Outcomes	Build regional network and informed planning and decision-making process to develop climate resilient water resources	• Capacity enhancement • Improved access to information	Improve scientific knowledge of key stakeholders on importance of SES thinking, also taking into consideration gender equality, social equity, and human rights
Relevant Policy Frameworks	Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 1, SDG 5, SDG 6, SDG 10, SDG 13) Aichi Targets United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ASEAN-China Strategy on Environment Cooperation MRC/ Lancang-Mekong Forum		
Impacts/ Goals	• Creating an information base to feed into water management framework ad policies of different sectors at national and regional level • Improving collaboration and corporation among diverse stakeholders' group and inclusive decision-making processes • Mitigation and adaptation of climate impacts on water resources		

| | • Strengthened regional fibre to achieve international commitments such as SDGs |