

Strengthening Regional Collaboration for Sustainable Development

The SCF2 Journey (2018-2023)





In 2018 SEI Asia, in collaboration with the Swedish government (Sida), initiated the Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2 (SCF2) programme to enhance the ongoing efforts toward the 2030 Agenda in Asia. It focused on fostering regional cooperation, policy dialogue, and sustainable development while upholding rights-based approach and gender equality.

Setting the Stage

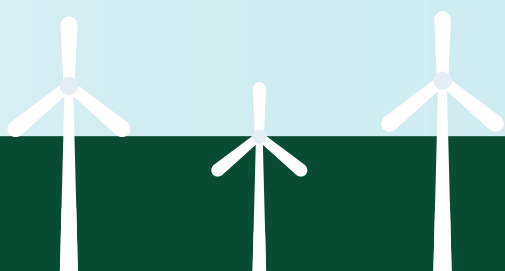
The programme's rationale was simple yet profound: sustainable development required strategic and inclusive partnerships. SCF2 was founded on the idea that collaboration was the key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability were at the forefront of this initiative.

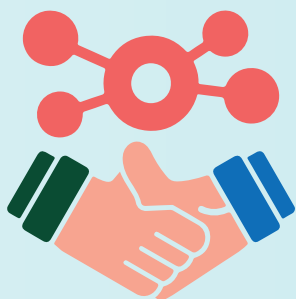
Component 1: Inter-regional Cooperation between ASEAN China as well as Asia and Europe

To facilitate cooperation between ASEAN, China, and Europe, SCF2 supported the China-ASEAN Environment Cooperation Forum (CAECF) and the Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENV Forum) annually. These platforms facilitated discussions and knowledge exchange among key experts and stakeholders, contributing to a better understanding among these regions and fostering partnerships.



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Component 2: Regional Cooperation in Asia

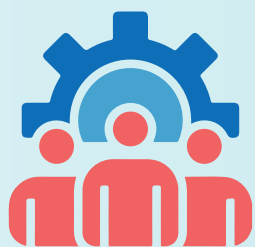
SCF2 recognized the need for regional collaboration to address critical transboundary environmental issues and challenges. It supported development partners based in Southeast Asia and South Asia in organizing policy dialogues focusing on issues like climate change, pollution, water governance, energy flows, natural resource efficiency, food systems and agricultural development which are well aligned with the 2030 sustainable development agenda.

Component 3: Learning and Capacity Development

SCF2 understood the power of knowledge and its role in driving change. As a result, the programme developed two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) focused on gender equality and rights-based approaches. These courses aimed to enhance institutional capacity and promote gender, human rights, and poverty-centric policies in environmental and climate change matters and the SDGs. Furthermore, SCF provided guidance and interactive dialogues on how to integrate gender and rights-based approaches into partners' event planning and implementation, further advancing progress toward the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.



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Component 4: Programme Management

Effective programme management was essential for success. SCF2 applied its Theory of Change, MEL tools and communication support in assisting partners for identifying target policies and tracking the application of new knowledge in policy formulation.



The SCF2 Success Story Unveiled

Over the years, SCF2 catalyzed positive changes in the region. It promoted collaboration, supported policy development process, and equipped institutions with the tools and knowledge needed to tackle complex environmental issues. The programme was not just about forming partnerships; it was about creating a future where sustainability, equality, and cooperation thrived.

SCF2's success was evidenced by tangible achievements. Regional policies adapted to align with the SDGs, and innovative solutions addressed key transboundary issues. Gender equality and rights-based approach became integral to environmental and climate change policies. The Sustainable Development Goals were no longer distant aspirations but practical goals.

The programme's journey demonstrated that when we join forces toward a shared objective, remarkable progress is achievable. It was a story of hope, collaboration, and transformation, reaffirming the significance of regional cooperation in realizing a sustainable and prosperous future for Asia region.

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SEI Asia launched the Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2 (SCF2) in 2018, leveraging on its existing partnerships with critical organizations from civil society, government, academia and the private sector.

The goal is to support evidence-based science further, to bridge the path for informed policy decision-making, gender equality, and a rights-based approach.

SEI Asia's implementation revolved around providing financial and technical capacity support to regional institutions. This encompassed bridging the gap between research and policy in regional development forums, working closely with regional partners to focus on SDG achievement, fostering dialogues between the private sector, governments, CSOs and the public, and developing free online courses with follow-up coaching. This approach empowered partners to incorporate gender and rights-based approaches into their environment and development policies and practices.



2019

The full launch of the programme in 2019 marked the beginning of a journey towards greater inclusiveness, collaboration, and impact for environmental sustainability through inter-regional and regional collaborative efforts.

Strengthening inter-regional cooperation

Improving cooperation between ASEAN, China, and Europe is key in policy development, trade expansion and greater multilateral understanding.

SCF was part of steering committee in the planning of the China-ASEAN Environment Cooperation Forum (CAECF) and the Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENV Forum) which are platforms between ASEAN, China and Europe to strengthen exchanges of experiences and best practices, dialogue and pragmatic cooperation and address regional sustainability. The CAECF is a high-level environmental policy dialogue with key officials, which focuses on inter-regional green growth, Green Value Chain Partnership and south-south environmental cooperation for sustainable development. To date, CAECF and the related series of activities have been successfully held in China for nine consecutive years.

The ENVforum Annual Conference organized by Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF), is actively engaged in the global discussion surrounding Sustainable Consumption and Production and SDGs. Going beyond its traditional format, the ENVforum launched a program to contribute to the bottom-up process that supports the implementation and monitoring of SDGs by providing Asian and European countries with key insights into sustainable production planning. by announcing partnerships with six diverse grantees for hosting critical environmental events in Asia.



Promoting regional dialogue

SCF supports ASEAN countries in enhancing regional collaboration and partnership on policy development and key trans-boundary environmental and sustainability issues, including climate change, water governance, energy flows, natural resource use, pollution, food systems and agriculture. The programme provided support for initiating, organizing, and hosting strategic regional events that highlight key issues related to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.



In 2019, SCF supported the following thematic environmental events:



Climate Change Adaptation

Event title: Challenges and Opportunities on Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices and Rights-Based Sustainable Development: A Southeast Asian Forum

Partner:



Water

Event title: Regional Consultation to Promote Actions to Improve Asian Deltas Resilience

Partner:



Energy

Event title: 9th Southeast Asian Human Rights and Business Conference

Partner:



Agriculture

Event title: Building Effective and Harmonized Regional Policy on Sustainable Agriculture

Partner:



Disaster Risk Reduction

Event title: Grassroots Community Resilience at the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum 7 (APUF-7)

Partner:



Gender

Event title: Silver Linings – Transforming gender through climate dialogue

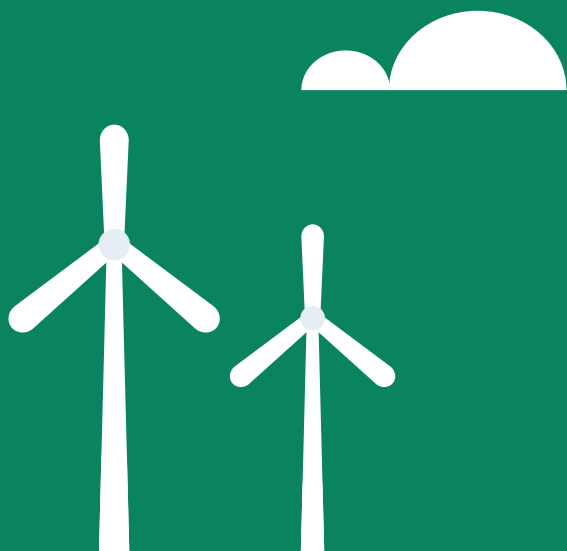
Partner:



Enhancing private sector collaboration

In partnership with Global Initiatives, SCF supported the establishment of sustainability partnerships in the private sector through the Responsible Business Forum (RBF) and the Roundtable for Environment and Social Inclusion, convened as a key side event to the RBF series in Asia.

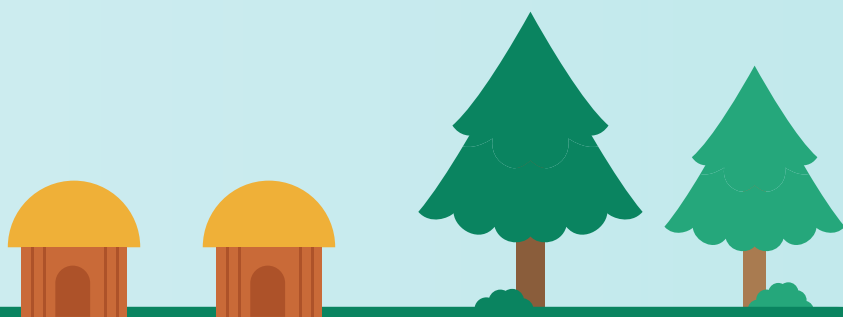
SEI recognizes the critical role and capacity of the private sector as a critical change agent of environmental and sustainable development. It is important to understand the needs from its perspectives and concerns to be well integrated into programme's initiatives on environmental and sustainable development and policy engagement. The partnership aims to enhance regional collaboration among the private sector, public sector, and civil society stakeholders in Asia in environmental, climate change, and natural resources management.



Success stories

Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Asia reaffirm their rights [by Albert Salamanca]

The lands and livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples in Southeast Asia face mounting threats from climate change and development projects. In order to tackle these problems and address sustainable development, governments and other stakeholders need to listen to their voices. Southeast Asia's 150 million Indigenous People face increasing challenges due to rapid development, climate change, displacement and lack of recognition of their traditions and practices, which are often criminalized. Recognizing these challenges, representatives of Indigenous Peoples communities from Cambodia, Myanmar, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam, came together for the regional forum Challenges and Opportunities on Indigenous Knowledge System and Practices and Rights-Based Sustainable Development in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on 8–9 October 2019. The forum, organized with SEI partner the Samdhana Institute, and supported through the Strategic Collaborative Fund, discussed the challenges and opportunities of Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSP) in the context of global initiatives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples.



Success stories

Indigenous Peoples and climate change

While the challenges that climate change presents are enormous, Indigenous Peoples have Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Practices (IKSPs) that have sustained them for generations. The ability to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to climate change impacts can be informed by this knowledge and these practices. In remote communities with limited or non-existent government services, Indigenous Peoples rely on their IKSP for subsistence. In light of IKSPs' documented utility and legitimacy for Indigenous communities, there may be important opportunities to integrate them into climate change adaptation.

Indigenous Peoples and food sovereignty

Climate change, the deepening penetration of commercial agriculture and cash cropping, growing threats from hydropower development and extractive industries, and modern consumption practices have also threatened food sovereignty. In some areas, conservation measures and protected areas exclude Indigenous peoples, leading to the loss of food sources and a change in their ability to produce and consume food according to their culture.

Toward greater rights-based sustainable development

Participants of the Yogyakarta forum have released a statement of solidarity in response to the current challenges facing Indigenous Peoples, renewing the commitment to defending their rights and ensure their voices are heard. It is imperative that governments and other stakeholders listen to these recommendations to help secure a thriving future for Indigenous peoples, their livelihoods and culture, and help contribute to the most pressing environmental challenges.



Success stories

Supporting women environmental defenders in the time of COVID-19 [by Sara Vigil and Babette Resurrección]

Inequalities render people's vulnerability toward disasters and pandemics; if these inequalities are the symptom, exploitation (of nature and labour)

The conversion of land, and labour and money into commodities – poses lethal threats to nature and human beings. This leads to grievances, resistance, and demands for social protection from the increasing marketization of life and nature.

Protecting the defenders

SEI Asia, through the Strategic Collaborative Fund, supported a project called Silver Linings: Transforming Gender Relations through Climate Adaptation Networks. It gathered indigenous women from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar to share their experiences and to build common purpose.

The workshop, co-organized with Cuso International and the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact, highlighted the need to empower and strengthen the capacity of indigenous women to negotiate and to amplify their voices. It also underscored the need to document and disseminate practices to strengthen leadership and promote South-South and global dialogue and exchange.

Moving forward: human and environmental rights are inseparable

It is in the exploitative nature of our socio-economic system that we can find the root causes of both environmental collapse and of gender and social inequalities – now more than ever, we need environmentalists who works through for the poor and marginalized. Our commitment to keep supporting women environmental defenders in developing countries has been renewed through SCF. Our capacity to do transformative and relevant research now in the crisis period will largely depend on our abilities and efforts to support an environmentalism of the poor based on the premise that the fight for human and environmental rights are inseparable from one another.

2020

Amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, SCF2 exhibited remarkable resilience and continued programme implementation, even under the constraints of the "new normal."

Despite the hurdles presented by the pandemic, SCF successfully conducted eight inter-regional and regional events, marking a steadfast dedication to its objectives. The transition to online platforms was undoubtedly a learning curve, but it still brought together diverse stakeholders to discuss and address key environmental and development challenges.

In addition to the events, SCF launched two pioneering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) centered on human rights and gender equality. These courses are instrumental in promoting capacity building, knowledge dissemination, and driving the integration of human rights and gender equality perspectives into environmental and development policies.

Strengthening inter-regional cooperation

The Asia-Europe Environment Forum, organized by Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), focused on Sustainable Consumption and Production, and brought diverse perspectives of antimicrobial resistance, sustainable garments, single-use plastics and inclusive food value chains.

SEI led the discussion on inclusive food value chains and highlighted the need to shift from the dominant food systems model that relies heavily on chemical input, monoculture, and large industrial systems. Policies that help secure tenure for small-scale farmers and indigenous peoples; and multi stakeholders and multi-rights holder platform are crucial for the shift to a more sustainable and equitable food value chain.



Promoting regional dialogue

In 2020, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, SCF delivered regional strategic policy events by maximizing virtual platforms to extend its outreach to transboundary partners in Asia and beyond.



In 2020, SCF supported the following thematic environmental events:



Agriculture

Event title: Sustaining Family Farming in Asia Through Inclusive, Farmer-Driven Approaches

Partner:



Climate finance

Event title: The Climate Finance Track at the AVPN 2020 Virtual Conference

Partner:



Water

Event title: Women, Water, Climate: Tackling the Challenges

Partner:



Urban

Event title: IPEN-SEA Virtual Conference 2020: Citizen Science in Southeast and East Asia

Partner:



Climate change adaptation

Event title: Platforms for the inclusion of non-normative genders and sexualities (NNGS) in CCA policy and action

Partner:



Disaster risk reduction

Event title: Silver Linings – Transforming gender through climate dialogue

Partner:



Gender

Event title: Silver Linings – Transforming gender through climate dialogue

Partner:



Success stories

Scaling up sustainable finance for the most vulnerable in a post-pandemic Asia [by Yossef Zahar]

Amid the ongoing struggle against the COVID-19 pandemic in the Asia-Pacific region, there is a growing consensus on the necessity of green stimulus packages that balance economic and environmental sustainability. However, the ability of governments to provide such packages varies significantly.

Richer ASEAN countries are implementing comprehensive stimulus packages aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while poorer nations primarily focus on immediate health concerns and economic recovery.

In a time when health and food security take precedence over climate considerations, pursuing sustainable and green investments presents a challenge for governments. To achieve inclusive and sustainable green impacts from stimulus spending, it is crucial to supplement state resources and donor support with private sector funds.

Advancing Sustainable Finance

Progress has been made in adopting green standards, incentivizing the green loan market, issuing green bonds, and promoting Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) investments. Development and public sector financial institutions are willing to fund climate action. In 2019, green bonds and loans reached \$64 billion, a 29% year-on-year increase, equivalent to one-quarter of global issuance. However, there remains a need for a more substantial scale of green investments to support poor and marginalized communities, who often lack financial knowledge and are most vulnerable to climate impacts. Barriers to accessing capital market funds persist, stemming from differences in founding principles, institutional restrictions, and financial terminology understood primarily by bankers and institutional investors.

Coordinating Approaches to Finance

Regulators and policymakers must harness private green capital to develop stimulus packages that extend beyond immediate relief and support vulnerable communities' resilience and sustainable growth in the medium and long term. Successful in-country schemes, like Indonesia's government-backed project guarantees, can be expanded to support emerging financial models.

Formulating viable financial models is necessary to attract mainstream funds. This requires a broader stakeholder approach and creative integration of instruments.

International financial institutions can play a critical role and should be encouraged to allocate resources for long-term stakeholder engagements. Local initiatives can complement regional schemes, such as the Asian Development Bank's ASEAN Catalytic Green Finance Facility, which reduces financing costs through diversification and liquidity benefits for investors.

Redefining Mandates

Philanthropic organizations and family donors, traditionally supporting governments, are increasingly engaging in sustainable finance through private sector funds. The removal of unnecessary restrictions, such as geographical mandates, is vital to foster regional schemes. Transparency is required to facilitate new investment ideas and return mechanisms, including environmental and social benefits in fiduciary duties.

Partnering for Impact

Incorporating inclusive sustainable finance into stimulus packages necessitates a focus on desired and actual impacts, with an emphasis on gender equality and social equity. Multi-stakeholder working groups should be established for pilot projects with promising results, leading to commercial viability and scalability.

SEI's sustainable finance initiatives in Asia aim to facilitate these dialogues, incentivize financial players' participation, and develop evidence-based solutions and impact assessment frameworks, all with a deep understanding of communities and the goal of simplifying complex institutional languages. As part of the Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2 (SCF2) programme, SEI Asia partnered with the Asian Ventures Philanthropy 2020 virtual conference to explore financial instruments to help facilitate the transition towards a global low-carbon economy.

By breaking free of existing silos and promoting collaboration and understanding among stakeholders, innovative and effective financial models can be developed to support vulnerable communities for an inclusive, resilient, and sustainable future.

It is clear that stakeholders need to redefine mandates and seek new ways for organizations to work together. Unnecessary restrictions, such as geographical mandates, should be lifted, paving the way to regional schemes. In addition, openness is required to facilitate new investment ideas and return mechanisms, and it would also help change fiduciary duties to include environmental and social benefits.

SEI Asia and Raoul Wallenberg Institute launch online course on rights-based approaches to environmental sustainability **[by Charmaine Caparas]**

SEI Asia's first massive open online course (MOOC), Rights-Based Approaches to Environmental Sustainability, was developed in partnership with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (RWI). The MOOC is a deep dive into how practitioners can plan, implement and deliver environmental sustainability initiatives with a human rights based approach at the core.

The initiative, under SEI's Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2 (SCF2), is supported by the Swedish government via Sida, which champions regional cooperation and policy dialogue for sustainable development and environmental sustainability, through capacity building and knowledge sharing.

SCF2 gives grants annually to partner organizations to implement regional environmental events on themes including climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, water resource management and gender equality. Following the launch of the MOOC, grantees will be encouraged to take the course as an important first step to integrating rights-based approaches into the events.

"The integration of a rights-based approach is critical to fostering inclusive and transparent, regional and inter-regional collaboration, for transboundary environmental policy development," says Niall O'Connor, SEI Asia Centre Director. "The launch of this human rights online course will encourage more environmental practitioners to integrate a rights-based approach into their operations."

The seven-part course explains where human rights come from and what they are meant to do; what international human rights law covers and how it operates; how human rights are relevant to issues of environment and sustainability; and how you can start using rights based approaches in activities and projects.

Apart from the grantees, O'Connor says professionals and decision makers specializing in environmental protection, climate change and sustainability would also benefit from the course. Environmental specialists with limited past experience and knowledge in human rights are also encouraged to enroll.

The online course aims to help bridge the gap between experts in the fields of environment, human rights and development, to pursue synergies and to improve the integration of human rights tools and considerations into environmental and development actions and policymaking.

"What I like about this course is how it makes human rights accessible for professionals in the various environmental areas. It's arguably one of the best on offer," said Jason Squire, Director of RWI's Regional Asia Office.

2021

SCF's response to the persistent pandemic in 2021 was marked by the introduction of hybrid events, a dynamic blend of in-person and online interaction. This innovative approach allowed for continuing vital discussions and collaborations while prioritizing safety.

Furthermore, in a bid to strengthen its impact at the grassroots level, SCF forged robust partnerships with local organizations deeply rooted in their communities. These grassroots partnerships enhanced the programme's reach and ensured that its initiatives had a tangible, positive influence on local communities.

Strengthening inter-regional cooperation

The Asia-Europe Environment Forum (ENVforum) in 2021 highlighted four thematic streams related to circular food systems.



Agriculture



Small medium enterprises and food circularity



Food policy and security during the pandemic

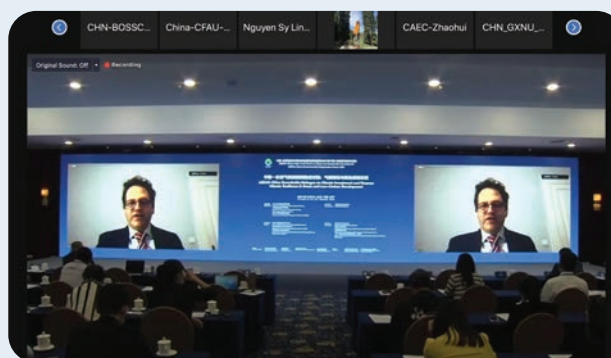


International food trade

The session led by SEI recognized the need to unpack the current food system inequalities and promote policy transition to a sustainable, inclusive and circular food system.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN-China Environmental Cooperation Forum organized by FECO, gathered policy makers to explore actions to enhance mutual cooperation and develop the ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Enhancing Green and Sustainable Development Cooperation.

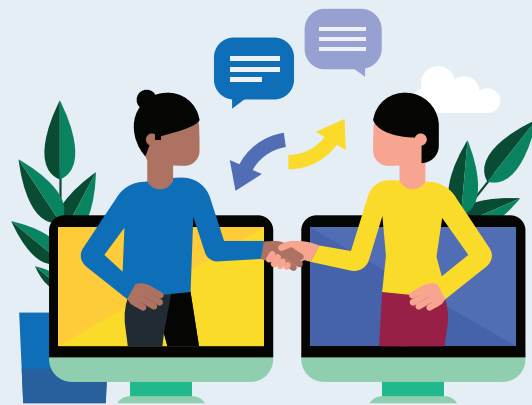
SEI also supported the review of the current China-ASEAN Strategy and Plan of Action (2021- 2025), which was adopted in November 2020 by the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN and China.



Promoting regional dialogue

Recognizing the need to adapt to the evolving landscape, SCF introduced innovative hybrid regional policy events, combining online and in-person components.

The hybrid approach allowed for meaningful engagement while ensuring safety, marking a significant milestone in the program's resilience.



In 2021, SCF supported the following thematic environmental events:



Freshwater ecosystems

Event title: Towards Mainstreaming Ecosystems Services in National Policies for Sustainable Management of Freshwater Ecosystems in South and Southeast Asia

Partner:



Agrobiodiversity

Event title: Mainstreaming Agrobiodiversity for Sustainable Food Systems in ASEAN.

Partner:



Air pollution

Event title: Sustainable and Inclusive Solutions for Air Quality and Climate Change: A Virtual Regional Learning Event for South-east Asia

Partner:



Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management

Event title: Towards a Climate Resilience Society for All: Harnessing the Transformative Power of Inclusive Social Media and Digital Platforms for Climate Adaptation and Resilience Building in Southeast Asia

Partner:



Gender and migration

Event title: Engendering Climate-Induced Migration Perspectives from Asia

Partner:



Success stories

Agrobiodiversity conservation in Southeast Asia depends on enhancing local community stewardship [by Dimas Fauzi and Pimolporn Jintarith]

Agrobiodiversity is the wealth of herbs, plants and animals that are conserved and used by local communities in Southeast Asia as part of agricultural production. Many empirical studies have suggested strong links between enhanced land tenure and land security to promote successful agrobiodiversity conservation. Local dependency on ecosystem services for livelihood needs also shapes environmental attitudes and influences conservation outcomes.

In Southeast Asia, community-based forest management programs emphasize ensuring economic development through agriculture and timber production while promoting forest conservation. However, community-based forest management is not always intended for these production purposes as it can also be allocated purely for conservation to prevent land use changes. Despite the empirical findings, there is still much to be done in terms of action on the ground to promote successful local stewardship and agrobiodiversity conservation in the long term.

Will community stewardship persist over time?

Looking into the intersection between agriculture and biodiversity conservation, the question of long-term community stewardship is based on two central tenets: the land's productive capacities and tenurial security.

“Indigenous and local community management of biodiversity reflects [the] wisdom and good practices impacting on food security, livelihood, and conservation... And if this [land tenure] is secured, then it would automatically help protect and enhance indigenous knowledge systems and practices,” said Femy Pinto, Executive Director of the Non-Timber Forest Product – Exchange Programme Asia.

In many cases, community stewardship is dependent on the ecosystem services that the land provides, both tangible or intangible. These services manifest in various forms, such as agricultural production, water resources, cultural values and recreational functions. Specifically, the land's productive capacities will likely remain the same over time, if not decrease, due to weather anomalies and the loss of soil productivity. As a result, they may not be able to meet the needs of a growing population.

While farmers who manage private agricultural lands have the flexibility to improve their land productivity or shift to other crops, those managing public or common lands do not possess such an option. In the case of community forestry in Indonesia, land ownership is not always the norm and land use designation is strict. Communities managing the forests are given a management license for a certain period with the possibility of extension, albeit with substantial government control and discretion. In the process leading up to the license extension, registered members may seek to retain and pass on their land management rights to the next generation.

In the absence of long-term land use planning, and more importantly land security, local community stewardship is often undermined, resulting in the loss of agrobiodiversity.

Inclusive land legacy planning

One of the gaps in the existing research and policy framework in Southeast Asia is on the land legacy scenario for community-managed private and public lands. The land legacy scenario plays a vital role in creating a land-use “lock-in” effect, in which the lands are designated for agrobiodiversity conservation and become difficult to reverse. There needs to be a range of different approaches in implementing land legacy scenarios between private and public (or common) lands given the different ownership status.

For private lands, landowners maintain full discretion to determine the type of land use. They have the right to keep agrobiodiversity land use as is or change it, especially when they inherit the land. One possible scenario is to designate a parcel of their private lands for biodiversity conservation. Payment for ecosystem services can serve as a potential incentive for the landowners, which can encourage them to implement sustainable agricultural practices.

Although the public land process can be more straightforward since the land use status is predetermined, communities need to be involved from the inception and planning stages. Ensuring inclusive community planning for public lands can strengthen the tenure security for the communities and ensure they maintain local stewardship. However, this proposal comes with two caveats. First, land legacy in Southeast Asia is often tied to traditional and customary rules. In conducting land legacy scenario planning, it is essential for the stakeholders to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and instead consider each individual local context and needs. This also stresses the importance of a gender-responsive approach in land use planning, as it could alter the tendency to cater to men’s needs as a representation of the community.

As Cynthia McDougall, Senior Research Fellow at SEI Asia, pointed out, “An important pathway to have in our mind is to think about generating meaningful choices for women. This means equitably and explicitly assessing needs and priorities of women, especially women who have been underserved or under-recognized in these systems, including indigenous women [and] economically poor women.”

In order to create a “lock-in” effect, the government needs to provide institutional and policy backing. This is especially true for private lands, which may require additional policy measures to ensure tenure security if their lands are allocated for biodiversity conservation. For community-managed public lands, the legacy scenario should ponder the fulfilment of ecosystem services that the communities depend on as this can result in successful local conservation efforts.

While securing the tenure rights of the communities is vital, policymakers and researchers should think ahead to ensure long-term community stewardship through inclusive land legacy planning.

Southeast Asia Is Gearing Towards Sustainable and Inclusive Solutions for Air Quality And Climate Change [by Clean Air Asia]

Based on official government data on air particulates compiled by Clean Air Asia up to 2017, no city in Southeast Asia was able to achieve annual WHO air quality guideline values. The unfortunate reality is that women, children, poor, and other disadvantaged groups are more vulnerable, therefore the most harmed by polluted air and a warming climate. They are also often least able to recover from those impacts. Clean Air Asia recognises the need to amplify these voices, and understands their participation is vital to achieve a cleaner air for all.

In the wake of COP26, it is vital to underline that improving air quality will help to curb climate change and improve public health outcomes, saving lives and the planet. This interactive learning event is designed to highlight the need to urgently scale-up local actions to realize the co-benefits of addressing air pollution and climate change.



SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
A PREPARATORY EVENT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS
 16 NOVEMBER 2021

URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED TO ADDRESS AIR POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

AIR QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IMPACTS THE ECONOMY

WHAT DO WE WANT TO achieve?

SUSTAINABLE & INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AQCC!

- KNOWLEDGE SHARING
 - PROVIDE SCIENCE-BASED INFORMATION TO POLICYMAKERS AND CASCADE CLEAR ACTION STEPS TO COMMUNITIES
 - CAPACITY-DEVELOPMENT IS VERY IMPORTANT
- CLARITY & TRANSPARENCY
 - SIMPLIFY THE MESSAGE!
 - THERE MUST BE CLEAR AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
 - THERE SHOULD BE CLEAR TARGETS, ROADMAPS & POLICIES
- EMPOWERMENT
 - EMPHASIZE INCLUSIVE APPROACH ON...
 - DATA COLLECTION
 - DECISION-MAKING
 - PARTNERSHIPS
 - EMPOWER PEOPLE IN THE MARGINS WITH INFORMATION, CAPACITY-BUILDING AND SPACES FOR MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION.

HOW DO WE MOBILIZE action?

- ESTABLISH THE KNOWLEDGE BASE
- IDENTIFY ACTIONS
- MOBILIZE RESOURCES
- BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE SCIENCE KNOWLEDGE/SOLUTIONS
- TRANSFORM COMMITMENT ON THE GROUND

WE SHOULD ENSURE THAT NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND!

SUPPORTED BY: SEI Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden Sverige, IQAir, CLEAN AIR ASIA, IGES, AIT Asian Institute of Technology

SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
WELCOME AND OPENING PLENARY
 23 NOVEMBER 2021

OUR ULTIMATE GOALS:

- ACCELERATE CLIMATE CHANGE & CLEAN AIR ACTION
- DELIVER PUBLIC HEALTH
- EQUITABLE & FAIR SOLUTIONS

IN SOUTHEAST ASIA, ABOUT HALF A MILLION DEATHS ARE ATTRIBUTED TO AIR POLLUTION.

- WHERE WE ARE NOW
 - 3% DEATHS ARE OF NEWBORNS
 - WE NEED TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN!
 - BLACK CARBON AFFECTS SOUTHEAST ASIA GREATLY
- COLLABORATION AMONG SECTORS IS KEY!
 - SCIENCE AND POLICYMAKING SHOULD BE BRIDGED
 - EMPOWER MARGINALIZED SECTORS

THERE IS NOTHING MORE ESSENTIAL FOR LIFE THAN AIR.

AIR POLLUTION IMPACTS WOMEN, CHILDREN & MARGINALIZED GROUPS DISPROPORTIONATELY!

WHO AIR QUALITY?

- COUNTRIES CAN SET STANDARDS AND GOALS FOR AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT BASED ON THE WHO GUIDELINES
- WE NEED TO FOCUS MORE ON PROTECTIVE GUIDELINES TO ADDRESS AIR POLLUTION-RELATED DISEASES.
- EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE BASE
- MONITORING & REPORTING
- GLOBAL LEADERSHIP COORDINATION
- INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN AIR POLLUTION & CLIMATE CHANGE
- HEALTH IMPACTS ARE HIGHLY CORRELATIONAL WITH SOCIAL STATUS
- THE IMPACT TO THE INFORMAL SECTOR IS HIGH
- INFORMAL SECTORS REMAIN INVISIBLE IN BOTH POLICY AND RESEARCH AGENDA

SUPPORTED BY: SEI Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden Sverige, IQAir, CLEAN AIR ASIA, IGES, AIT Asian Institute of Technology

SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
TRANSLATING INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS INTO INCLUSIVE ACTIONS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A CHANGEMAKERS DIALOGUE
 23 NOVEMBER 2021

KEY REPORTS

- 91% EXPOSED TO AIR POLLUTION
- 25 MOST EFFECTIVE MEASURES
- NEED FURTHER ACTION
- TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORT

25 MEASURES

- ADDRESS EMISSIONS OF PM & PM PRECURSORS
- CLEAN COOKING
- TRAFFIC
 - CROP RESIDUE OR VEHICLE INSPECTION
 - INDUSTRY
 - ROAD DUST
 - SOLID WASTE
- IMPLEMENTATION OF HEALTHY AND SECURE CLIMATE CHANGE GOALS

25 CLEAN AIR SOLUTIONS IMPROVE MILLIONS IN ASIA

WE HAVE TO WORK TOGETHER

SHARING KNOWLEDGE & TECHNOLOGY ACROSS CITIES

CO-INNOVATION & CO-BENEFITS BY COMBINING HARDWARE WITH SOFTWARE

- ENHANCE SCALABILITY
- PROMOTES SUSTAINABILITY
- ACCELERATE REPLICABILITY

ROLES OF SOCIETY GROUP

- GOVERNMENT: PLAN & IMPLEMENT
- ACADEMIA: GENERATE DATA
- PRIVATE SECTOR: REDUCE EMISSION
- CITIZEN: ADVOCATE FOR & DRIVE POLICY CHANGES

INVOLVE ALL SOCIAL GROUPS FROM THE START

GENDER INEQUALITY

THIS CAN CREATE INEQUALITY OF ACCESSIBILITY, OPPORTUNITY, AND EXPOSURE TO AIR POLLUTION

ENGAGE YOUTH

- THEY CAN EASILY BUILD TRUST
- DISSEMINATE INFORMATION
- RECOGNIZE YOUTH'S STRENGTHS
- CONNECTED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT SOCIAL ISSUES
- OPEN-MINDED
- NATURAL COLLABORATORS

SUPPORTED BY: SEI Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden Sverige, IQAir, CLEAN AIR ASIA, IGES, AIT Asian Institute of Technology

SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
BUILDING POLITICAL SUPPORT WITH STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS: FROM GOOD POLICY TO GOOD POLITICS
 24 NOVEMBER 2021

CHALLENGES

- GAPS IN DATA
- DIFFERENT LEVELS IN PERCEPTION OF AIR QUALITY
- LACK OF SPACES FOR TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

POLITICAL LEADERS' VIEWS & MOTIVATION

AIR POLLUTION IS A PERSONAL PROBLEM THAT AFFECT REAL PEOPLE

COMMUNICATION TWO-WAY STREET

BEST PRACTICES

- COMMUNICATION CREATES LISTENING
- ENCOURAGE CURIOSITY
- CREATE CONVERSATION
- LINK PEOPLE'S STORIES TO THE RIGHT EARS
- LOVE COMMUNITIES USE TOOLS & POWER TO MAKE CHANGES
- THE AWARENESS LEVEL DOES NOT MATCH THE IMPACT LEVEL
- WE NEED TIME, MONEY, AND COMMITMENT!!!
- AIR POLLUTION IS A MAJOR KILLER!
- FAILURES TO ACT CAN LEAD TO LEGAL CONSEQUENCE AND LOSS OF REPUTATION

EVALUATE & MONITOR

- KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
- EXTENSIVE CLEAR GOALS
- QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE

ENGAGEMENT WITH POLICYMAKERS

- ENSURES THE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF INTEGRATED AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS
- DEVELOP INFORMATION MATERIALS THAT INSPIRE PEOPLE-CENTERED DATA TO INFORM POLICIES AND GATHER SUPPORT FROM STAKEHOLDERS

DO NOT TIP: BE MINDFUL OF THE LANGUAGE YOU USE

SEE CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY - FASTER CHANGE - A BURDEN

THAT'S THE HOPE FOR CHANGE

SUPPORTED BY: SEI Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden Sverige, IQAir, CLEAN AIR ASIA, IGES, AIT Asian Institute of Technology

SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
EMPOWERING CITIES TO IMPLEMENT INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS: EXPERIENCES AND INTERSECTIONAL STRATEGIES
 25 NOVEMBER 2021

CO-BENEFITS SHOULD BEGIN IN COLLABORATION!

SUCCESS FACTORS

- DATA INCLUSIVENESS
- COLLABORATION
- PUBLIC SUPPORT
- GOVERNMENT COOPERATION
- AIR QUALITY CHAMPIONS

CO-INNOVATION PROVIDES TAILORED SOLUTIONS AND DATA FOR CO-BENEFITS. INVOLVE THE BENEFICIARIES!

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL INTEGRATION

JOINT GOALS

- ALIGNED POLICIES/PLANS
- ACCESS TO FINANCE
- CAPACITY TO IMPLEMENT
- SHARING INFORMATION
- STANDARDS FOR MONITORING

THIS NEEDS TO BE DELIBERATE!

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

- WE NEED COMMITMENT FROM THE GOVERNMENT & STAKEHOLDERS
- INCLUSION HAS TO BE ORGANIC. WE NEED DIVERSE VOICES!

COMMUNICATION IS KEY!

TAKE BOLD AND INNOVATIVE STEPS

GOOD PRACTICES ON COMMUNICATION

- WORK WITH THE YOUTH
- DEVELOP MESSAGE WITH THE BENEFICIARIES IN MIND
- INVOLVE DIVERSE STAKEHOLDERS
- SHOW THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY ACTIONS

CO-INNOVATION PUTS PEOPLE AT THE CENTER OF THE PROCESS.

CRITICAL BARRIERS

- FINANCING
- POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ALIGNMENT
- ACCESS TO INFORMATION
- ACCESS TO CAPACITY AND SKILLS

IN HANDS, REDUCING THE USE OF BEEHIVE STOVES GREATLY IMPACTED THE AIR QUALITY POSITIVELY.

MORE THAN 10,000 NO LONGER EXPOSED TO BECOME POLLUTION.

SUPPORTED BY: SEI Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden Sverige, IQAir, CLEAN AIR ASIA, IGES, AIT Asian Institute of Technology

SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS FOR AIR QUALITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE
MOBILIZING INNOVATIVE FINANCE FOR INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES IN A POST-PANDEMIC WORLD
 25 NOVEMBER 2021

FINANCING AQM OBJECTIVES

- MOBILIZE RESOURCES FOR CAP
- FINANCIAL EMISSION REDUCTION MEASURES - NOT ONLY SERVICES
- FINANCIAL MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT AQM

PUBLIC FINANCE

- INTERNATIONAL
- CLIMATE FUND
- MULTI, BILATERAL
- NATIONAL, REGIONAL, LOCAL FINANCE

WHAT DO YOU HAVE AVAILABLE LOCALLY?

PRO TIP!

- WORK WITH UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH FACILITIES
- ENSURE FINANCING FOR AIR QUALITY & CLIMATE CHANGE
- TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND NECESSARY VERIFIABLE FINANCIAL & UTILISING RESOURCES

CHALLENGES

- LACK OF LOCAL EXPERT NO FUNDS TO IMPLEMENT
- NO DIRECT ACCESS TO INTERNATIONAL FUNDS
- ESTABLISH GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR GOVERNMENT
- LACK OF ADEQUATE DATA TO SHOW AIR QUALITY IMPACT

PHASES OF PROJECT PREP

- ESTABLISH STRONG LINK BETWEEN PROJECT IDENTIFICATION & DEVELOPMENT
- MAINTAIN DIALOGUE AND ENGAGEMENT
- ANTICIPATE COMPLEXITIES OF LEGAL & REGULATORY ISSUES
- IDENTIFY CHAMPIONS TO FACILITATE DECISION-MAKING AT LATER STAGES

SUPPORTED BY: SEI Stockholm Environment Institute, Sweden Sverige, IQAir, CLEAN AIR ASIA, IGES, AIT Asian Institute of Technology

2022

SCF has taken a significant step by reinstating "regular programming" and reintroducing in-person events. This marks a milestone for the programme, enabling more immersive and direct interactions with its valued partners.

The in-person environment reiterates SCF's ethos of mutual learning, knowledge exchange, and collaborative strengthening that transcends the limitations of virtual interactions.

Strengthening inter-regional cooperation

Recognizing that achieving a Net-Zero, circular economy is a shared endeavor, SCF supported the ENVforum in 2022 as it focused on decarbonizing food supply chains and the collective action needed to make it a reality.

Meanwhile, SEI Asia through SCF is a longstanding partner in the ASEAN-China Environmental Cooperation Forum organized by FECO. In 2022, SEI presented ongoing climate change policy and actions within the region.



Private sector engagement through the partnership with Seed and AVPN

Promoting regional dialogue

SCF started reintroducing in-person events in 2022 as the region recovers post-COVID 19 pandemic. This step marks a significant milestone for the program, allowing for more direct and immersive interactions with partners.

The return to live events is a cause for celebration as it brings together diverse stakeholders, fostering valuable face-to-face engagement. This dynamic environment provides a unique platform for learning from partners, exchanging knowledge, and strengthening collaboration in ways that transcend the limitations of virtual interactions.



In 2022, SCF supported the following thematic environmental events:



Disaster Risk Reduction

Event title: Making Sense of and Responding to Loss and Damage in Southeast Asia

Partner:



Ecosystems

Event title: Waste Hero Alliance: Waste Workers & Youth Together for Inclusive Circular Cities

Partner:



Agri-food systems

Event title: Building a Sustainable and Inclusive Agriculture System - Together towards a Zero Exclusion, Zero Carbon, Zero Poverty Southeast Asia

Partner:



Partnerships for Climate-Resilience Pathways in Asia

Event title: Pathways to Climate Resilience: Forward Family Farmers for a Healthy People and Planet

Partner:





Water

Event title: Democratizing and re-Indigenizing Water Resources Management and Climate Resilience in the Lower Mekong River Basin

Partner:



Success stories

Waste Hero Alliance: bringing dignity to informal workers while achieving zero waste [by Chloe Pottinger-Glass]

In recent months, a partnership called the the Waste Hero Alliance involving youth activists, NGOs, social businesses and informal waste workers across Asia has been promoting a shared vision of an inclusive future that also generates zero waste.

Their recently launched report **Youth Visions for the inclusion and empowerment of informal workers in Asian circular cities** captures the findings of a series of workshops which aimed to explore the challenges faced by informal workers and policy responses.

Empowered and dignified workers are key to an inclusive

Despite growing momentum toward circular transitions, a focus on social equity and inclusivity is often lacking. For instance, solutions that involve modernization of waste management practices may not integrate informal waste workers, who are able to maximize recycling outcomes with minimal infrastructure in resource-scarce contexts.

“I feel very nervous about my work because if I get hurt, I lose money and no basic health insurance from the government because my work is not recognized.” – Informal waste worker, Bangladesh

The Waste Hero Alliance believes including waste workers today, empowers them as dignified workers tomorrow. This starts with visibility and recognition of all waste workers as essential service providers. It also means ensuring access to education, upskilling and training opportunities, and access to affordable and quality health services and social security.

The power of youth

In the fight for climate and social justice, it is often young people who have risen to the challenge by speaking up in solidarity and on behalf of future generations.

The Waste Hero Alliance has provided the opportunity for youth to engage with waste workers in an empathetic way and to develop their skills and knowledge in policy influencing.

Through a series of “Policy Bootcamps”, young people were able to develop policy canvasses which responded to the challenges raised by informal waste workers. These ideas were then pitched at the 77th United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) High Level Side Event for Social Business and Youth on the 23 September 2022 which provided a real opportunity to influence policy on a global scale.

Beyond the policy pitches, youth ambassadors are committed to supporting inclusive circular transitions through advocacy, dialogue, educational activities and fundraising.



“This event has transformed my pessimistic views of the world that is ‘beyond repair’ to a mindset that nothing is ever too late, with the collective power of the youth and the people.” – Lanlana (Fay) Sukparangsee, Youth Waste Hero Ambassador, Thailand

Building platforms for collaboration can ensure policies for circular transitions are just

The Waste Hero Alliance has also provided an opportunity for regional network building between NGOs and social businesses to incubate new ideas. With key policy frameworks such as the 2021 Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community and the 2019 Bangkok 3R (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) Declaration Towards Prevention of Plastic Waste Pollution through 3R and Circular Economy already in place, building partnerships to advocate for the rights of informal workers and the rights of future generations can ensure that circular transitions are just.



Success stories

Lost and damaged, but still fighting: intangible climate impacts on small island communities [by Minh Tran]

“Loss and damage” is not only economic. Along with the loss of local cultures and values, the anxiety that comes with every storm, and the trauma of having lost a roof over their heads after each disaster can lead to extreme mental distress. The communities of Tubigon and the surrounding islands in Bohol, the Philippines discuss how they cope with many intangible climate change impacts.

“Laban lang! Laban lang! That is just what we are supposed to do,” J recalled as we talked about mental health and psychosocial support needs after Typhoon Odette hit her island in the Philippines in December 2021. Laban lang means “keep fighting” in Bisaya, the local language of the island.

Having lost much of their belongings to the disaster, mental wellbeing is both a luxury and a taboo for J and her community. As devastated as they felt after Odette, the emotional damage of the typhoon must be set aside to focus on material recovery efforts.

Yet, the irony of laban lang was not lost on young islanders like J. What are the costs and what are the implications on people’s wellbeing of their fight? “Forward ever, backward never,” her friend recited Tubigon municipality’s motto although with a sense of sarcasm.

The motto reflects a mentality of resilience that has been developed over the years as the islands are often hit by hazards. In the past decade, the Municipality of Tubigon has suffered four major disasters.

In 2013, a 7.2 magnitude earthquake hit the island of Bohol that killed 195 people, destroyed 14 500 structures, displaced 340 000 residents and resulted in the land sinking by as much as 75 cm on smaller nearby islands, including Pangapasan and Batasan. Ever since, these islands flood every month from May to August during high tide. During November to January, the floods come at night, making it even harder for people to cope. In 2016, a dry spell depleted the island’s water resource. To top it off, in December 2021, in the midst of a global pandemic, Typhoon Odette hit these islands, affecting 40 000 people and damaging 3500 houses in Tubigon.



Living with hazards

To protect the islands from storm winds and waves, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources supported residents of Pangapasan and Batasan to plant mangroves in the early 2000s. With tidal flooding becoming more frequent and intense, houses themselves are elevated on coral stone or concrete stilts. Across the islands, residents built elevated classrooms, roads and expanded potted plants and vegetable gardens.

From one hazard to the next, the island communities have been mobilizing and exhausting their resources to cope and adapt. Islanders are finding it ever tougher to practice their livelihoods. While seashell gleaning in shallow rockpools and intertidal zones used to be a source of income for women of the islands, land subsidence and sea level rise make this harder to do. To adapt, they taught themselves diving to continue picking seashells underwater to provide food and income for their families. In addition, the municipal government has been supporting recovery and adaptation efforts, such as by providing construction materials, building a seawall, or exploring relocation strategies.

The limits of adaptation

At the global level, loss and damage refers to negative impacts of climate change that cannot be or have not been avoided through adaptation or mitigation. Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), loss and damage negotiations have driven a focus on liability and compensation. However, loss and damage finance is also a matter of solidarity, restitution and climate justice.

Despite calls from governments and local communities, an overall financing mechanism to avert, minimize and address loss and damage is yet to become a reality. This is because of the lack of an operational definition of loss and damage, political disagreement over liability and existing international finance bureaucracies. On the ground, losses and damages are already happening, as forcefully seen in island communities like Tubigon.

Indeed, while the Philippines sees hazards like flooding and typhoons on an annual basis, climate change has increased their intensity. When Typhoon Odette made land-fall, it escalated from Category 2 to 5 overnight. The early warning system was not activated as quickly, and island residents were left to cope by themselves without preparation.

Looking beyond economic values

“Everything was lost, from my birth certificate to my laptop,” J said. After the typhoon, when houses turned to rubble, her family moved into her grandparents’ house. Her father, a fisherman, lost his boat to the typhoon. He had no choice but to try his hand at carpentry as he tried to build a new boat using the engine that was salvaged.

Eight months after the typhoon, her community is focused first on restoring livelihoods, the house second. It was not only a building, however, that J’s family lost to the typhoon. Storm surge and violent winds had washed away a home filled with memories, along with the security of having a roof over their heads.

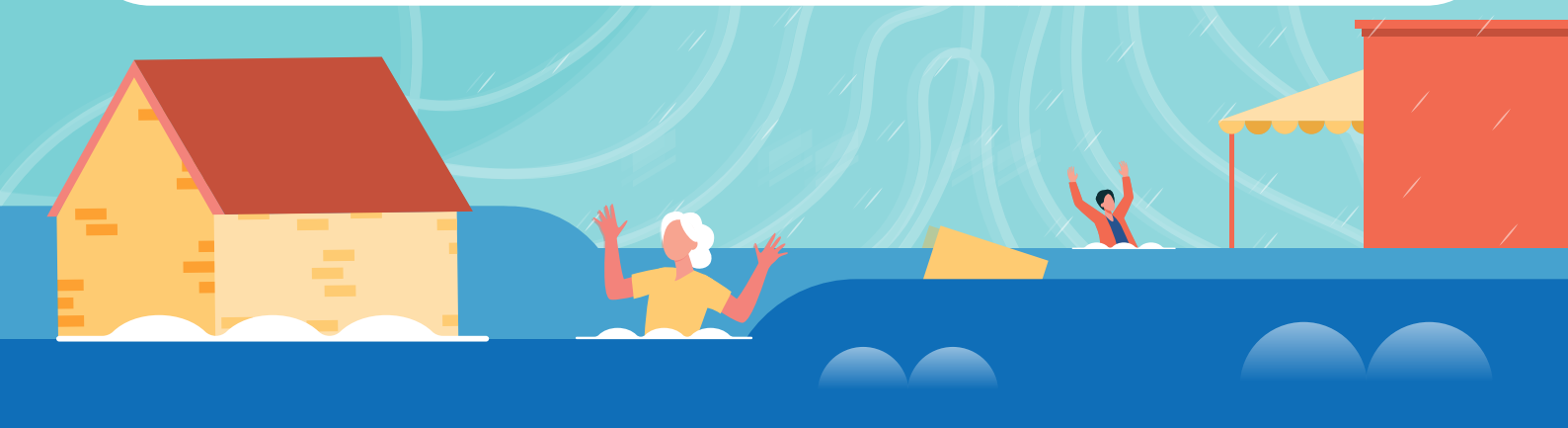
It was not just the lack of financial resources that make reconstruction difficult. It took J a while to mentally come to terms with what is left after the typhoon. “I did not even dare to look at the place, to visit where our house was once.” She recounted going through her belongings days later, only to find her personal items with much sentimental value damaged or destroyed by the disaster.

Loss and damage have been on the agenda of UNFCCC negotiations since as early as 1991. What is often overlooked in the debate are non-economic ones.

Others were more concerned with the loss of culture and heritage. The typhoon already destroyed Batasan’s oldest school. With relocation, a recommended adaptation measure, the islanders fear further losing their way of living, livelihood and identity as fisherfolk.

The impacts of climate change and disasters cannot always be easily converted into dollar amounts. The anxiety that comes with every strong wind, the trauma of having lost a home, the stress of making ends meet, or the loss of cultures and values are some of the non-tangible losses that J and Tubigon island communities are experiencing.

While negotiators continue their dialogues at international conferences, who is accounting for losses and damages that are already taking place? While disaster response tends to focus on immediate, tangible needs, how can non-economic impacts be taken into consideration? For the islanders, these are real questions for which they seek answers.





2023

2023 marks the culmination of a remarkable and impactful journey of SCF. In its final year, SCF continues to foster collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building in Asia. Its legacy, shaped by the dedicated efforts of partners and participants, stands as a testament to the power of collective action in achieving a more inclusive and sustainable future.

Strengthening inter-regional cooperation

Under the theme "Pursuing a Synergistic Approach to Climate and Environmental Governance: Advancing the Harmony between Humanity and Nature," the ASEAN-China Environmental Cooperation Forum for 2023 has a clear objective: to foster collaboration and provide a platform for the exchange of knowledge and experiences among ASEAN Member States and China. The overarching goal is to strengthen environmental conservation efforts and address the challenges posed by climate change.

SEI Asia has been a longstanding partner of the Foreign Economic Cooperation Office (FECO) under the Ministry of Ecology and Environment in China, supporting these initiatives through the Strategic Collaborative Fund.



Promoting regional dialogue

On its last year, SCF selected five partners in South and Southeast region to host regional policy dialogues, working towards building climate resiliency through inclusive approaches.



In 2023, SCF supported the following thematic environmental events:



Climate finance

Event title: Mind the Gap! Unlocking Inclusive Finance for Food System Transformation through Multi-Stakeholder Action

Partner:



Biodiversity

Event title: Integrating Equity and Reframing Urban Nature-based Solutions in Growing, South Asian Cities

Partner:



Partnerships

Event title: Strengthening Regional Knowledge-Policy-Practice Networks for Inclusive and Equitable Climate Resilience Actions in the Mekong Region

Partner:



Circular economy

Event title: Bringing people and policy together for coherent actions towards achieving Inclusive Circular Economy Transition in South Asia and South-East Asia

Partner:



Climate and gender

Event title: Securing Land Rights of Women and Indigenous Peoples in the Face of Climate Change in South Asia

Partner:



Success stories

Getting climate finance right for smallholder farmers: lessons from the Philippines, Vietnam and India [by Charmaine Caparas and Kuntum Melati]

Climate change threatens the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Asia, who rely on traditional practices and face challenges in accessing finance. Equity financing, which involves shared risks and rewards, is emerging as an alternative mode of financing that can empower smallholder farmers, enhance their resilience, and promote sustainable and inclusive agriculture.

As climate change gathers intensity, it threatens food security and, particularly, the livelihoods of smallholder farmers who cultivate small plots of land using traditional practices that depend on soil fertility and predictable rainfall for a good harvest.

In times of cash squeeze, many generations of smallholder farmers in Asia have relied on short-term loans, often from informal sources, to tide them over a difficult harvest or make small farm investments. While these loans offer immediate capital for essentials like seeds, livestock, and tools, farmers risk falling into a debt trap, especially when their crops fail and cannot meet the mounting high-interest payments and inflexible repayment schedules.

Climate finance aims to support developing countries' transition to low-carbon, resilient economies. However, smallholder farmers often need help to access these funds, which often offer difficulties for farmers to access with their opaque application processes and perceived investment risks associated with smallholder agriculture. These difficulties are multiplied several times in complexity for women farmers.

Smallholder farmers in Asia need alternative modes of financing. One such approach being considered by many civil society groups is equity financing. This involves raising capital in exchange for ownership of a venture. By offering equity, investors become partners in the farmers' success, sharing risks and rewards.



Equity finance can change smallholder farming livelihoods for the better

Equity financing fosters shared responsibility, knowledge transfer, and flexibility while promoting sustainable practices.



Shared risk and long-term commitment:

Equity financing aligns the interests of investors and farmers, fostering a sense of shared responsibility. By sharing the risk, investors are motivated to support farmers adopting more climate-resilient agricultural practices. In the Philippines, the Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) implemented Resilience and Inclusion through Investment for Sustainable Agrikultura, where they provided investment to strengthen inclusive cacao markets. They supported smallholder farmers, particularly women farmers, through a market systems approach with cooperatives or small-medium enterprises (SMEs) connected with selected business service providers and financial intermediaries. Additionally, through the MEDA Risk Capital Fund, new investment capital was made available through selected financial institutions in the Philippines to promote the inclusion of women farmers, support the conservation of the environment and provide overall support to the cacao sector.



Capacity building and knowledge transfer:

Equity financing extends beyond mere capital injection. Investors can provide technical expertise, mentorship, and network access, empowering farmers with the knowledge and skills to effectively navigate challenges and adapt to the changing climate. The IDH Sustainable Trade Initiative in Vietnam supports farmers and farmers' groups to strengthen their capacity in the pepper supply chain. The initiative encompasses various aspects to enhance farmers' capacity, including improved service delivery innovations, implementing technologies to boost productivity, income diversification, and increased climate resilience. These activities also serve as a platform for members to share lessons learned and experiences. This program has contributed to scaling up Vietnamese pepper production and trade and increasing smallholder farmers' incomes.





Diversification and adaptability:

Climate finance players need to understand various risks faced by smallholder farmers and adopt different portfolios to reduce farmers' vulnerability against fluctuating market conditions. Moreover, equity investment offers farmers greater financial flexibility during periods of low yield or unforeseen circumstances. Private and public partnerships can offer appropriate financial products and services to support farmers in adopting practices to face climate risks, improving their livelihoods, and reducing environmental impacts. For example, to protect farmers against risk and uncertainties, private-public partnerships could offer crop insurance and build supportive financial ecosystems for farmers. Corteva Agriscience crop insurance allows farmers to repurchase discounts if storms damage crops.



Incentives for building climate resilience:

With equity financing, investors are vested in promoting farming practices that can help build climate resilience. They can encourage the adoption of climate-smart techniques, resource conservation, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, contributing to broader environmental objectives. The Small Tea Grower Sustainability Program in India exemplifies how equity financing can cultivate practices to build long-term climate resilience. Through this initiative, an investment fund provided equity financing to smallholder tea farmers, helping them transition to organic and climate-smart tea production. The equity investment provides the capital for infrastructure improvements and training and incentivizes farmers to adopt practices that can build climate adaptation. The project promotes soil conservation, biodiversity preservation and water resource management, resulting in improved tea quality, higher market prices and reduced environmental impacts.



■ Some challenges for equity financing

While equity financing holds promising opportunities, it has several challenges that need to be addressed especially by governments in the region:



Ensuring fair distribution: Guaranteeing equitable access to equity financing for all smallholder farmers, regardless of their size, location or social background, is crucial to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities.



Governance and transparency: Establishing appropriate governance mechanisms and transparent reporting systems is essential to build trust between farmers and investors, ensuring fair treatment and accountability.



Regulatory frameworks: Developing supportive regulatory frameworks that encourage equity financing in agriculture is necessary. Governments should create an enabling environment that attracts investors while safeguarding the interests of farmers.

■ What we should do next

Equity financing has the potential to empower smallholder farmers by revolutionizing the agricultural sector through shared risk, knowledge transfer, flexibility and sustainable practices. However, addressing challenges and promoting innovative financial products and responsible investment will be crucial to unlocking its full potential and creating a resilient and inclusive agrifood system. Access to affordable financing instruments will enable farmers to adopt new technologies, resources and practices, contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals, inclusive economic growth, food security and resilience to climate change.

The authors' reflections were inspired by the event Mind the Gap! Unlocking Inclusive Digital Solutions for Climate Finance, an investor roundtable to discuss a proposed multistakeholder public-private partnership model aimed at advancing digital financial and climate inclusion among agriculture MSMEs, including smallholder farmers. Some case study examples mentioned in the article were from the ASEAN Academy on Responsible Investing, which Kuntum took part in. Grow Asia, a 2023 grantee of the Strategic Collaborative Programme, organized these initiatives.

Success stories

How nature-based solutions can build urban resilience: four lessons from SEI's work in South Asian cities [by Ridhi Saluja and Ronika Postaria]

Over the past decade, nature-based solutions (NbS) have emerged as interventions with nature at their core and adapted to the local context, bolstering resilience and promoting sustainability in the face of worsening climate risks and rapid development.

Nature-based solutions (NbS) have demonstrated the potential to effectively tackle a range of critical health and environmental issues, from ecosystem degradation to loss of biodiversity across multiple scales. However, so far NbS has focused predominantly on rural areas. Urban nature-based solutions (NbS) have the potential to effectively tackle pressing societal issues, including climate change mitigation and enhancing a city's resilience to climate-related risks. By incorporating green spaces, these solutions can contribute to the improvement of both the quality of life for urban residents and the conservation of biodiversity.

Here we provide four lessons based on SEI's collaboration at the ground level to show how NbS can be made to work to address environmental challenges in cities.

Community engagement

The success of NbS relies heavily on community involvement and leadership as evident from the Bangladesh case study, local participation in Hatirjheel's restoration created a flourishing community space by prioritizing nature-based solutions and minimizing artificial elements. Multiple issues including water pollution, encroachment and rampant urban growth were addressed through the project while also providing compensation and housing options to affected families.



Holistic approaches

Holistic approaches have been proven to maximize the benefits of NbS projects by taking a socio-ecological systems approach, as well as economic and cultural factors, and adapting to the complexities of urban environments. The ‘Urban Greening and Biodiversity Enhancement’ project in Gorakhpur, India, shows how combining technical expertise, local wisdom, and multiple perspectives has ensured inclusiveness and equitable decision-making. In this case, urban residents initially proposed a boundary wall at the project site to counter urban flooding, while informal settlers on the outskirts were excluded from these community discussions due to social and cultural reasons. These informal settlements would have been the ones adversely affected if the proposed solution had been implemented. But this adverse impact was averted by the designers, who proactively mapped and analyzed the solution’s effects on all stakeholder groups and reconsidered the boundary wall solution.

Collaborative partnerships

Urban challenges are complex and require a diverse set of skills and knowledge that no single entity can possess. Cross-sectoral and cross-disciplinary collaborations are credited with generating cooperation that surpasses individual capacities and supports NbS initiatives. The ‘Darwin project’ from Sri Lanka is an example of a successful partnership between the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), government departments, and local communities to restore marshes, enhance biodiversity, and improve livelihoods. This partnership facilitated the exchange of ideas and concerns, ensured efficient resource allocation, and contributed to the long-term sustainability of the project.

Gender equality and social inclusion

Gender-sensitive and socially inclusive urban development is critical because different genders and social groups have diverse needs and desires that must be realized and designed within proposed nature-based solutions. So far, gender and social inclusion have been overlooked in setting NbS goals as attention has been directed toward implementing structural solutions. NbS objectives should provide equal opportunity for all demographics and account for the disproportionate effect that changes may have on some communities and genders. Community discussions in India, for instance, have emphasized the need to include diverse groups such as ASHA workers and teachers in ward committees and Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) to protect women’s and other genders’ interests, close governance gaps, and guarantee the success of NbS.

Optimizing NbS project design and implementation

Building on the priorities highlighted above through country projects, we find some key enablers that could support the development of a robust framework for implementing nature-based solutions with a vision of creating resilient, just, and sustainable urban cities in South Asia.

A local and context-specific problem statement, co-created and co-developed with all relevant stakeholders, must be identified during the design phase of NbS projects in order to maximize outcomes in later phases. Baseline analysis is critical to support and map the effectiveness of the projects and show quantitative indicators to the beneficiaries and other stakeholders. If short-, medium-, and long-term indicators are established, adaptive management can be used to revise the project to suit the desired outcomes.

Cities in South Asia have unique yet similar circumstances and challenges that undermine community involvement and engagement. Identifying clear methods and approaches for stakeholders' engagement through all project stages is crucial. This may involve strategies for connecting with mobile populations in urban areas, utilizing local knowledge for sustainable solutions, and making communication more straightforward to encourage inclusive participation.

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are critical to address climate-related challenges as they can tackle challenges that go beyond climate adaptation and mitigation objectives. By adopting a multifaceted approach that defines targets related to biodiversity conservation, health and well-being, food security, and social cohesion, NbS outcomes can be maximized. Acknowledging the potential of NbS to address various urban challenges can enhance its effectiveness in promoting overall urban well-being.

Finding ways to institutionalize NbS principles into urban planning policies and frameworks is crucial for ensuring that the benefits of NbS are sustained long after individual projects are completed. Community members, government officials, and other interested parties should all have a say in the design process to promote long-term ownership and stewardship of the project's outcomes.

This piece is based on SEI's collaboration with Transitions Research under SEI's Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2. A series of national-level workshops were hosted in India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh with the goal of rethinking and reframing NbS implementation in the context of South Asia Cities, culminating in a "policy lab" in Sri Lanka bringing together like-minded researchers, planners, CSOs (Civil Society Organizations) and policymakers.

Supporting the 2030 Agenda

Reduced Climate Risk



Convened regional platforms and serves opportunities to influence environmental policy and climate action to be more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive.



Fostered multi-stakeholder partnership and develop regional strategies to promote rights of marginalised groups, gender empowerment, and poverty reduction.



Strengthen regional collaboration to improve community's resilience and mitigate the impact of climate change



Amplified the voice of marginalised groups ranging from NNGS, informal waste workers, family farmers, environmental defenders, youth, landless farmers, and others in shaping climate action



Built networks among NGOs, local communities, government agencies, SMEs, academia, youth, and other key stakeholders to ensure a more equitable climate policies

Reduced Climate Sustainable resources



Developed low carbon economy through promotion of circular economy approach, green jobs, and resource efficiency



Accelerated the pathway to build a resilient economy through leveraging public-private sector engagement



Raised capacities of targeted stakeholder and vulnerable groups to preserve the ecosystem and sustainable use of natural resources especially related to water and land management



Contributed to the discussion on sustainable consumption and production through regional policy dialogues, international conferences, and other relevant avenues



Shared knowledge and experiences and initiatives that can help to maintain to preserve the environment

Supporting the 2030 Agenda

Improved health and well-being



Promoted gender equality and helped making cities and communities become more inclusive and healthy by addressing environmental issues such as air pollution, waste, sanitation and water contamination.



Showcased collective actions to mitigate climate change by creating green spaces, promote responsible investment, and preserving agrobiodiversity.



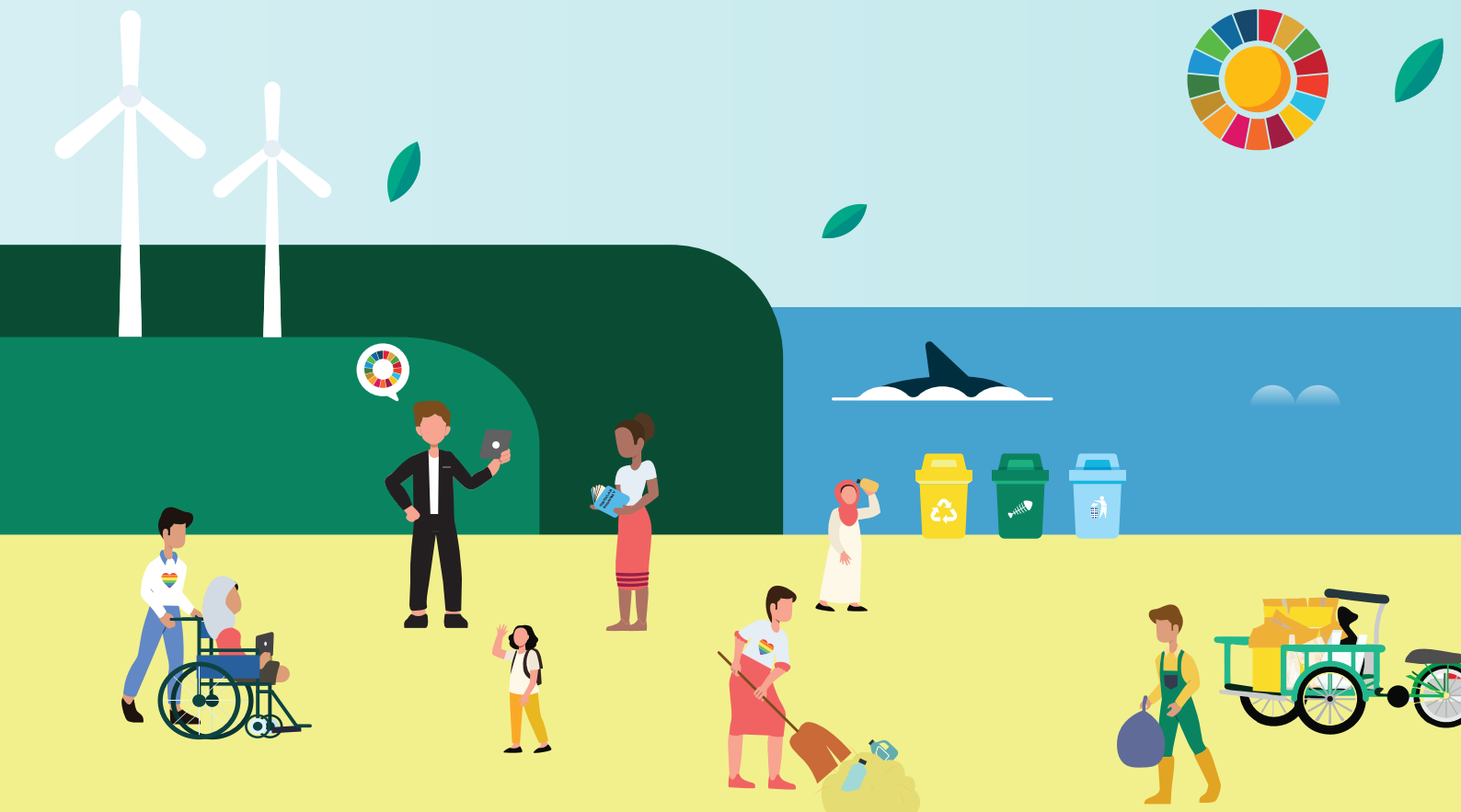
Engaged citizen science in mapping and analyzing environmental issues such as waste problem and develop appropriate actions and solutions



Created co-learning process between local communities, policy makers, practitioners, academicians, and other key actors in the effort to transition to green economy



Integrated gender analysis and intersectionality to better understand different levels of risk exposure to climate change that affect health and well-being



Our partners

SCF Partner 2019



An Asian Center for Social and Environmental Renewal

SCF Partner 2020



SCF Partner 2021



SCF Partner 2022



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