



SUMERNET 4 AII

Research for Policy and Practice
& Policy Engagement Strategy



SUMERNET 4 All (S4A): Research for Policy and Practice and Policy Engagement Strategy

The Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) is a long-term programme and regional research network to inform and influence policy development over the long-term on sustainable development in the Mekong Region. The goal of SUMERNET is to achieve sustainable development in the Mekong Region by strengthening knowledge-based policy processes.

The SUMERNET network is guided by SUMERNET Network Members (SNMs), who collectively deliberate on strategic issues that have implications for the whole network. The SNMs delegate their authority in taking strategic decisions to SUMERNET Steering Committee (SSC). The SUMERNET Secretariat hosted at Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) provides the day-to-day management, coordination and technical support to the network under the direction of the SSC.

“SUMERNET 4 All” (S4A) is fourth phase (2018-2023) of SUMERNET programme. S4A is funded by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) and has a mission to *improve policy and practices in reducing water insecurities for all, in particular for the poor, marginalized and socially vulnerable groups of women and men in the Mekong Region*. This will be done by conducting collaborative research, engaging with the policy process, and promoting scientifically sound research and innovation while considering gender and social equity, human rights, environmental integrity and poverty reduction.

This document serves as the strategy, informing how SUMERNET will carry out its research for policy and practice and engage with the policy and wide group of stakeholders to fulfil the mission set under SUMERNET 4 All.

1 S4A Expected Outcomes and Boundary Partners

S4A's overall expected outcome is “by 2023, the policies, strategies, plans, programmes and practices at national and sub-national levels is taking on findings of SUMERNET's joint action and research which consider human rights, conflict sensitivity, gender inclusivity and poverty reduction”.

S4A's overall outcome will be made possible by producing two interlinked bridging outcomes which are:

- improved capacities of researchers' and boundary partners' to influence policies and practices; and,
- Policy recommendations based on evidence-based science in consideration of human rights, conflict sensitivity, gender inclusivity and poverty reduction promoted through appropriate policy engagement strategies influencing policy-makers and decision makers.

These outcomes are the interaction of results of the specific outputs produced in response to the main outcome challenges¹, that S4A will influence three key groups of boundary partners². To achieve these outcome challenges, 'SUMERNET 4' All will:

- enhance the knowledge, attitude, and skills of **KNOWLEDGE PRODUCERS** so that they can deliver credible, gender inclusive, human rights-based, conflict sensitive, and poverty focused research, on key sustainability challenges throughout the Mekong Region. Knowledge producers' capacity and confidence will be built so that they improve their research practice and contribute to the discourse on water insecurities in the region (**Outcome challenge 1**);-
- support **POLICYMAKERS** and **PRACTITIONERS** at subnational, national and regional levels in order to develop policies, strategies, plans and programs to address water insecurities and poverty in the Mekong Region, based on sound evidence and science, and informed by the principles of human rights, conflict sensitivity and gender inclusivity (**Outcome challenge 2**); and,
- improve the understanding of **POLICY INFLUENCERS** (e.g., media, CSOs, think tanks etc.) on water insecurities in the region, by providing them with credible and independent knowledge so that they become better advocates for SUMERNET research findings in influencing critical policy and practice domains on water management in consideration of human rights, conflict sensitivity, gender inclusivity and poverty reduction (**Outcome challenge 3**).

¹ Outcome challenge is a statement that describes the desired changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, actions (professional practices) of the boundary partner.

² Boundary partners are the individuals, groups, or organizations with whom SUMERNET interacts directly, and with whom SUMERNET, can anticipate opportunities for influence and measurable changes. The boundary partners of S4A include the knowledge producers, policy makers and practitioners and policy-influencers

2 S4A Programme Components

Delivery of the S4A mission is done through various activities under four interlinking components; multi-stakeholder engagement (component 1), research for policy and practice (component 2), communications (component 3) and programme management and coordination (component 4).

Importantly, the four components work hand in hand. The role of each component is clear; the **Programme management and coordination component** supports and delivers on logistics and functional running of S4A creating an enabling environment for all of S4A. The **communications** component acts as a catalysis with multiple modes and mediums to inform, enhance and increase the capacity of knowledge producers, policy influencers and policy makers on water insecurity issues. The **multi-stakeholder engagement component (or policy engagement component)** and **research for policy and practice** component, work closely together to deliver enhanced knowledge and policy impact. The components and their roles are summarised in **Figure 1**.

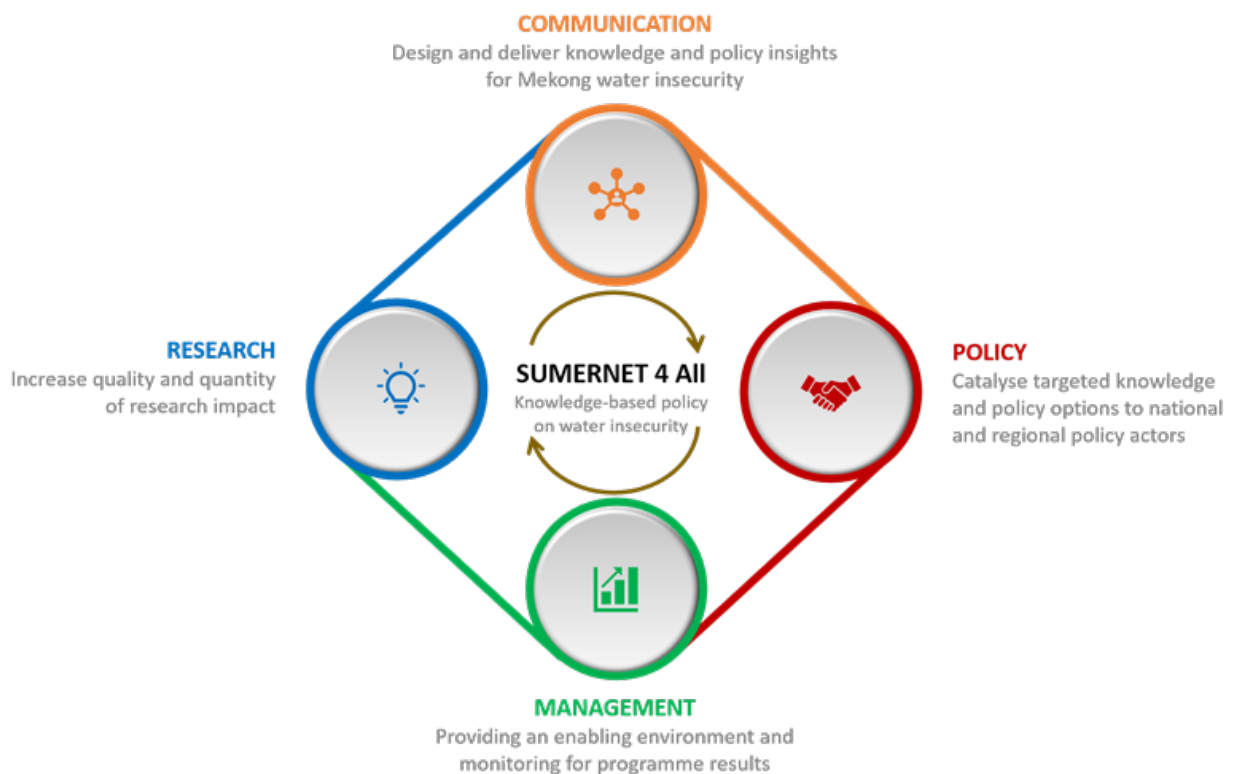


Figure 1: Summary of role for three S4A components; Research for policy and practice, communication and multi-stakeholder engagement (or policy engagement).

3 S4A Research for Policy and Practice

While all programme components contribute to the achievement of Outcome Challenge 1 for KNOWLEDGE PRODUCERS, the **Research for Policy and Practice Component** plays the most important role on this. This component conducts scientific research that helps improve understanding of water systems; evaluates the impacts of existing water related strategies and policies; explores emerging and alternative policies and practices, and assesses the needs and interests of potential users of research, for instance, from analysing or enabling pilot and demonstration projects.

3.1 Focus

The research for policy and practice component has three clear foci.

First is to address water insecurities in the region, by focusing its effort on three specific themes; (1) water access, rights & allocations in times of scarcity, (2) governance and management of flood disaster risks, and (3) transboundary interactions with water systems. The priorities within these themes are bottom up driven, ie. identified, designed and delivered by nationals across the Mekong to ensure that they are issues of local significance and have direct application to changing policy and practice.

Second, is the mainstreaming of gender and social equality, including taking conflict sensitivity, human-rights-based approaches and poverty reduction into account across all its activities, through:

- presence of dedicated research questions related to gender and social equality in all proposals;
- presence of a gender specialist in each research team;
- gender capacities assessment of each awarded grantee;
- formulation of a gender analysis mentoring plan for each team, in a participatory and mutually learning way, with the gender advisor, members of the SSC and Secretariat. This plan will consider research questions formulation, gender-informed methodologies, and gender-sensitive research findings, that inform gender-responsive policy recommendations;
- research teams will be required to draft and create “gender action plans” that build on their research findings and serve as basis for possible gender mainstreaming in their respective organisations;
- all research projects to undertake ethics training and an ethics review, to ensure delivery of highest possible standard of research.

Third, to have vulnerable groups (gender minorities, persons with disability, elderly, ethnic groups, the poor, migrants and farmers or fishers) integrated in the research to ensure inclusive support to all beneficiaries of within research.

3.2 Activities

The following is a list of the activities to be undertaken under the Research for policy and practice component.

- a) **Grants for collaborative research** for policy and practice to support research activities in several countries in the same project.
- b) **Grants for rapid response/emerging research** to support the rapid research that can directly inform the policy or practice in the region.
- c) Grant for **Groundwater Integrated Regional Assessment (GIRA)** in the Mekong Region to support the regional assessment that can better inform discussions with national governments on transboundary challenges and potential solutions at the regional level on groundwater management.
- d) **Capacity building workshops** and partner meetings;
 - o Training workshops on full proposal development for research and integrated regional assessment partners & participatory workshop on S4A performance assessment framework (PAF). Topics for the trainings include how to write good research proposals, results-based frameworks, policy engagement, gender and social equality, human rights-based approaches, conflict sensitivity).
 - o Project implementation support through the secretariat, by providing bi-annual project meetings and providing a platform for engagement and sharing of knowledge.
 - o Annual Meetings: a regional annual event to bring together researchers and boundary partners involved in all research projects and integrated regional assessments, to share lessons learnt from their projects.
 - o Visit to research project teams and national partners supporting integrated regional assessment activities for mentoring support, MEL and joint project meetings with women's/gender organizations and vulnerable groups. Mentoring support is on subjects related to gender and social equality, human right-based approach, conflict sensitivity, policy engagement.
 - o SUMERNET Learning Forum: the final event of S4A to bring researchers and boundary partners of the research and GIRA projects together, to participate and reflect upon what they have learned over the programme period and what should be planned for the future
- e) **Mentoring support** to research for policy and practice teams, with the focus on their research topics. This is supported through the secretariat providing bi-annual mentoring meetings, and providing a platform for engagement and sharing of knowledge.

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- f) **Technical support** for:
- o integrated regional assessments and decision-support tools for scientific assessments, modelling and analysis.
 - o capacity building and mentoring related to human rights-based approach and conflict sensitivity.
 - o capacity building on research methodology, academic writing and conduct the synthesis of research project findings.
 - o development of Critical Gender Analysis Tool (CGAT), preparation of gender mentoring plan per research team, based on a gender capacities assessment, capacity building and mentoring support related to gender and social equality, drafting of “gender action plans”.
 - o Design, delivery and implementation of ethics process for S4A projects to ensure the highest standards in research design and delivery.
- g) SUMERNET Secretariat support in delivering the S4A programme with the focus on research for policy and practice.

3.3 Indicators

S4A has set up more than twenty indicators to measure its success in achieving the expected outcomes over the programme period. The Research for Policy and Practice Component will directly contribute to following indicators.

1. Number of manuscripts/book chapters authored by multiple nationalities are accepted for review by peer-reviewed publications and number of theses/ dissertations produced as the results of research projects
2. Number of reports and other knowledge products produced related to gender and social equality dimension
3. Number of multi-country research projects
4. Proportion of young researchers involved in SUMERNET projects
5. Proportion of female researchers in managerial positions of projects as the project leader or co-leader.
6. Proportion of research projects and joint actions which identify vulnerable groups (e.g. gender minorities, persons with disability, elderly, ethnic groups, the poor, migrants and farmers or fishers) as target beneficiaries
7. Proportion of research projects and joint actions which engage with women/ gender organizations as the researchers or boundary partners or target beneficiaries
8. Proportion of research projects which address environmental rights in their key research questions
9. Number of people attended the trainings related to gender mainstreaming
10. Number of people attended the trainings related to human rights-based approach
11. Number of people attended the trainings related to conflict sensitivity

4 S4A Policy Engagement Strategy

The Multi-stakeholder Engagement (or Policy Engagement) Component plays a critical role in contributing to the achievement of the Outcome Challenge 2: POLICY MAKERS and PRACTITIONERS and Outcome Challenge 3: POLICY INFLUENCERS. This component identifies research questions, structures the problem statements, captures emerging issues, and sets priorities for research. The activities here are highly participatory and include the widest range of stakeholder perspectives possible. Under this component, different stakeholder groups (including those concerned with gender equality and human rights) are identified and engaged.

Multi-stakeholder engagement in S4A builds on the capacity of the SUMERNET network, its partners and the research conducted over the past 15-year period. Specifically, it capitalises on the trust, relationships and experiences gained with boundary partners across the region, which are an integral element of SUMERNET. The current programme focuses on issues of water insecurity throughout the region, particularly those of transboundary nature. Policy engagement is complemented by applied research projects and policy research on issues yet to be determined.

4.1 Focus

The main focus of the S4A multi-stakeholder engagement process is to:

- facilitate policy and research engagement processes in the region
- design solutions to water insecurity, based on research that can be scaled-up to fit national and regional policy goals
- provide targeted knowledge to help inform and produce policy options for national and regional policy actors.

The policy engagement approach of SUMERNET is pragmatic and seeks to find effective ways to address water insecurity issues at scale. The focus on water insecurity is defined “as not having the rights or access to sufficient water of adequate quality or being made increasingly vulnerable to unacceptable levels of water-related risks”. The focus stems from an understanding that sufficient quantity and suitable quality of water in the Mekong Region is a key factor in the sustainability of production, livelihoods, wellbeing and the environment in the region. It also takes into account that current economic and social development implies very significant environmental and social changes, that will greatly affect efforts to reduce water insecurities, both, positively and negatively. In addition, the research and engagement specifically targets SDG Goal 6, which aims to ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

The issues the policy engagement component seeks to address, stem from previous and current research, where there is a high chance that solutions-oriented research outcomes are valid and scalable and can, therefore, alleviate the challenges of water insecurity for a large number of communities and people. It builds on existing research, within and outside SUMERNET, links to water insecurity (broadly defined), and seeks to establish models of engagement, which can be replicated and adapted across the region. The issues covered will be related to water insecurity, as defined in S4A, and can be further defined within the SUMERNET network to be context specific.

They align with national government priorities or documented emerging water insecurity challenges (evidence based). They may range from water-related disasters, issues of climate change and adaptation, irrigation, power generation, as well as household and industrial use and pollution. Multi-stakeholder Engagement Component will engage with policy developers and implementers at sub-national, national and regional levels, as well as ‘policy influencers’, such as media, the private sector, CSOs and other regional initiatives.

4.2 Activities

S4A Multi-stakeholder Engagement Component (Component 1) guides the design of research projects to ensure relevancy to policy and practice. It is highly integrated with the Research for Policy and Practice Component (Component 2) and includes collaborative work with networks of local, national and regional researchers and boundary partners – policy advisors, planners, practitioners and gender resource persons, organizations with strategic influence in the public policy process, and continues through from design to exploration in pilot projects, to full implementation.

All activities conducted under S4A, including the multi-stakeholder engagement activities are, by design, bottom-up, co-designed, regionally relevant, and inclusive, according to SUMERNET’s core principles. Multi-stakeholder engagement considers social equity and gender-relevant issues in representation, potential impacts, participation, and in assessing various dimensions of governance. Further, multi-stakeholder engagement links research and academia to institutions with decision-making authority in each of the Mekong countries, as well as regionally.

Engagement occurs with SDG achievements in mind and towards increased regional integration and collaboration for sustainable development across the region. S4A supports opportunities to build the capacity of national and regional research actors to be able to participate in international and research dialogues e.g. SUMERNET policy forum, small grants, various capacity building activities.

Below we provide more details regarding various activities conducted to achieve meaningful engagement with multi-stakeholders:

- a) Grants for the application of scientific results or innovations (joint actions). Successful grants need to be applied jointly by researchers and their boundary partners. They need take gender and social equality, human rights-based approach, conflict sensitivity, and poverty reduction into account.
- b) Small grants for hosting small events, participating in large events as individual or in panels, supporting proposal development, engaging in policy dialogues, exchange visits with other projects or teams, monitoring the impacts from past research projects.
- c) Multi-stakeholder dialogue, engagement and capacity building:
 - o Training workshops for joint actions. Topics for training are related to how to write good project designs, results-based frameworks, policy engagements, gender and social equality, human rights-based approaches and conflict sensitivity
 - o Meetings and dialogues with partners, boundary partners and key events organized by others.
 - o Meetings with women's/gender organizations to mainstream water issues, rights and management
 - o Meetings with the communities or other conflict-affected groups to understand the issues and their needs wherever possible.
 - o Annual policy forum (part of SUMERNET Annual Meeting).
 - o Visits to the joint action teams for mentoring support on various topics including MEL
 - o SUMERNET Learning Forum: This component will be jointly organized as the final event of S4A to bring researchers and boundary partners of the joint action projects together, to participate and reflect what they have learned over the programme period and what should be planned for the future.
- d) Mentoring support for application of scientifically proven results or innovations (joint actions) with the focus on their project topics.
- e) Technical support for capacity building and mentoring related to policy engagement, gender and social equality, human rights-based approach, conflict sensitivity, research ethics, research methodology, academic writing and conducting the synthesis of SUMERNET project findings from joint action projects.
- f) SUMERNET Secretariat support in delivering the S4A programme with the focus on multi-stakeholder engagement.

4.3 Indicators

S4A's Multi-stakeholder Engagement will directly contribute to the achievement of following performance indicators

1. Number of policy documents (policies, strategies, plans, programmes and practices) that include findings from SUMERNET's joint action and research
2. Number of projects which communicated policy recommendations with relevant policymakers and decision makers
3. Number of national and sub-national policy recommendations on water management specifically targeting women/gender organization, marginalised and vulnerable groups involving in particular gender minorities, persons with disability, elderly, ethnic groups, the poor, migrants and farmers or fishers
4. Proportion of policy recommendations accepted for consideration by relevant policymakers and decision makers
5. Proportion of boundary partners policy influencers that stated improved understanding on water insecurities issues
6. Number of quotes or mentions about SUMERNET 4 All or its activities on water management in the public sphere (offline and online)
7. Number of events where S4A work is presented
8. Number of public engagement activities (interviews, media coverage, key events etc.) performed by researchers and boundary partners
9. Number of national and sub-national meetings on water management issues participated by women and men including marginalised and vulnerable groups e.g. gender minorities, persons with disability, elderly, ethnic groups, the poor, migrants and farmers or fishers
10. Number of regional meetings on water management issues participated by women and men including marginalised and vulnerable groups e.g. gender minorities, persons with disability, elderly, ethnic groups, the poor, migrants and farmers or fishers
11. Proportion of female participants in SUMERNET organised events
12. Proportion of female resource persons in SUMERNET organised events
13. Number of joint actions on innovative and equitable policy and practice in water management

5 Roles of SNM, SSC and SS in S4A Research and Policy Engagement

The SNM can engage in S4A research and policy engagement activities directly, either by applying as part of granted projects offered by SUMERNET or participate in other activities that are open widely for the network members and public to participate e.g. policy forum, annual network meetings, sharing the stories on SUMERNET website.

The SSC members use their expertise and connections within the countries that they are representing, as well as region wide, in advising the research direction and policy processes that S4A grantees and SS should pursue. In addition, the SSC members can represent the network in relevant research and policy dialogues time to time.

For S4A research and policy engagement, the SS provides the day-to-day management, coordination and technical support to the network under the direction of the SSC e.g. designing the competitive calls, selection and support for implementation of granted projects, review of project products, organization of events including meetings and trainings, facilitating mentoring support, engagement with policy process.

More information about the roles of SNM, SSC and SS can be found in the SUMERNET Governance Structure.

6 Opportunities to cooperate with S4A Research and Policy Engagement

SUMERNET seeks to collaborate with other regional actors on regional integration and in addressing water governance issues across the Mekong Region, to positively enhance S4A's impacts on research and policy engagement. To this end, S4A actively engages with institutions that follow similar approaches, albeit not with the same focus as S4A.

Key entities and areas for cooperation include:

- Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS): to exchange knowledge and sharing on the issues related to transboundary water challenges via various events e.g. SUMERNET's policy forum, MRC's stakeholder consultations and sharing S4A research findings for better informing MRC project work e.g. projects related to groundwater management in the Mekong countries.
- The Strengthening Human Rights and Peace Research and Education in ASEAN/SEA Programme or SHAPE SEA: to cooperate on various activities related to capacity building, trainings, research, sharing and exchanging knowledge and expertise in the areas of environment and human rights-based approach.
- ASEAN Secretariat: knowledge exchange on policy initiatives by ASEAN as well as recommendations and policy decisions developed by S4A.
- Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC): inform LMC on needs, risks, vulnerabilities, and outcomes of S4A activities
- China-ASEAN Environmental Cooperation (CAEC): report to CAEC on research outcomes and recommendations on transboundary research for consideration
- Earth Journalism Network (EJN): to build the partnership between the research and media for public awareness raising on the issues related to water insecurity in the Mekong region through joint public seminars.

Apart from above institutes, SUMERNET is keen to expand its cooperation and partnership with other institutes with common interest in reducing the water insecurity for all in the Mekong region.



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