



Terms of Reference (TOR)

Thematic Advisor on Human Rights Based Approach

SUMERNET PLUS Programme

A. BACKGROUND:

In this phase **SUMERNET PLUS** (July 2025 to December 2029), the Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) will strive to improve policies and practices through scientifically robust, policy-relevant research and diverse and innovative means of outreach to support a just and sustainable transition for enhanced climate resilience, while taking into account gender equality, disability and social inclusion and human rights based approach in the Mekong Region.

This will be realized through the following **programme objectives**:

- **Enhanced capacities and inclusive collaborations of Mekong's knowledge producers, policy influencers, and young professionals** are needed to deliver credible research, solution-oriented knowledge co-production, policy engagement, and communications that respond to the differentiated needs of local communities, women and other marginalised groups, and local leaders in addressing climate resilience challenges.
- **Improved policy development and implementation by policymakers and practitioners** that are inclusive, gender-responsive and grounded in human rights-based approach to deliver equitable climate resilience solutions in the Mekong Region.
- **Adoption of just, equitable and sustainable practices by the private sector and other stakeholders**, based on inclusive evidence from solution-oriented knowledge co-production, will contribute to climate resilience in the Mekong Region.

Programme themes:

- **Exploring nexus interactions and trade-offs in the Mekong Region.** This theme focuses on existing dependencies, synergies, and trade-offs among key sectors (e.g., water, energy, agriculture, and forests) with the overall purpose of designing innovative solutions that address the existential threats of climate and unsustainable development using a transdisciplinary and inclusive approach.
- **Building socio-ecological resilience across scales.** Through practical and innovative partnerships (including public-private partnerships), this thematic area will maintain and enhance the resilience of socio-ecological systems to development and climate change.
- **Just sustainable transitions.** This thematic area will support the development of innovative, scalable solutions and evidence in key sectors (e.g., water, energy, agriculture, and forests) on a just sustainable transition for climate resilience. It will focus on defining the problem and solutions along with marginalized and vulnerable communities, women, youth, and local and Indigenous peoples.

Priority areas of work:

- Climate change adaptation and mitigation
- Water-energy-food nexus
- Agriculture and food systems
- Forests and environmental degradation

- Women, youth, and climate action

SUMERNET PLUS will continue linking evidence-based research with policymakers, local communities, and vulnerable and marginalised groups across the region so that policy choices made will ensure socially inclusive, equitable, and sustainable development in the Mekong Region.

The SUMERNET PLUS Thematic Advisors provide credible and reliable support for SUMERNET PLUS programme. The SUMERNET PLUS Thematic Advisors are respected experts who provide strategic advice on the capacity building and development of research for policy and practice, communications, policy engagement and network development. They are drawn from some of the best minds, skills and competencies found in the Mekong Region.

The SUMERNET PLUS Thematic Advisors provide support for research partners in the following topics: Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI), Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA), Conflict Sensitivity-Ethics, Research for policy, Policy communications and Engagement on Climate Resilience. Importantly the thematic advisors will work together to provide an integrated resource to improve knowledge and build capacity for the SUMERNET projects and network members.

Human Rights based Approach (HRBA) Advisor

SUMERNET PLUS is committed to embed and mainstream a human rights-based approach in all its relevant research and policy engagement activities to address climate resilience issues of socially marginalized groups in the Mekong Region.

Specifically, the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) Advisor will guide SUMERNET in addressing climate resilience. This will cover consideration of the concepts and analysis on human rights, assessment on environmental rights to resources and access to resources, mainstreaming HRBA into research in climate resilience through just and sustainable transitions.

B. GENERAL TASKS:

- Review the applications for SUMERNET grants with a HRBA lens and note gaps in proposals with a view of how to address these gaps.
- Plan and ensure HRBA are incorporated as cross-cutting themes into the research and policy engagement efforts of the Network.
- Work with Component Coordinators and network partners to ensure that human rights are issues central to the problem sets designed for each Component.
- In collaboration with Component Coordinators and network partners design specific research activities related to the subject matter and ensure human rights perspectives are tied to these activities.
- Design and organize training activities and mentoring support to improve and update the knowledge of researchers to address the subject matter.
- Review and provide inputs into the methodology and work plans of research projects undertaken within the Network from a HRBA perspective.
- Review and provide inputs into research and policy products from a HRBA lens.
- Advise HRBA at the programme level (SUMERNET PLUS) or entry points that research findings and policy recommendations can be used to contribute to relevant national and regional strategies, policies, planning, institutes effectively in practice.

C. SPECIFIC TASKS:

- Review grant applications from an HRBA perspective.
- Provide HRBA capacity building to all relevant grantees, SSC and SUMERNET Secretariat
- Review and update existing guidelines for integration of HRBA into research projects under SUMERNET, including how to apply HRBA lens in engagement with private sector
- Provide mentoring support to the research project teams on the integration of HRBA into research during the implementation (as time permitting)
- Review and comment on project documents and outputs prepared by research projects on issues related to HRBA (as time permitting)
- Support communications related to the integration of HRBA into research under SUMERNET PLUS

D. PRIVILEGES:

- Formal recognition for their contribution to SUMERNET PLUS, this being acknowledged through meetings, the SUMERNET website, and relevant publications.
- Co-authorship or acknowledgement (depending on the level of contributions, if the contribution of Thematic Advisors is significant) in the writing of sub-national and integrated regional assessment, and associated peer-reviewed articles of grantees.
- Reimbursement for any direct costs (e.g. travel and accommodation) incurred when participating in SUMERNET activities when applicable.
- Professional fee for associated services.

Note that this is not a full-time position with monthly salary and benefits.

E. DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE

| No. | Deliverables | Description | Timeline |
|------------|--|--|---|
| 1. | Develop an HRBA annual workplan based on the programme workplan 2026-2029 | The advisor to deliver HRBA annual workplan based on SUMERNET PLUS programme workplan 2026-2029 | March 2026 December 2026 December 2027 December 2028 |
| 2. | Comments and recommendations on the applications submitted to the SUMERNET competitive calls | The advisor to review the applications for SUMERNET grants with a HRBA lens and provide the recommendations on how to improve them. | May 2026-December 2028 |
| 3. | Guidelines for integrating HRBA into research under SUMERNET reviewed and updated. | The guidelines for the incorporation of HRBA into all research granted projects within SUMERNET are updated. | February -June 2026 |
| 4. | Training sessions organized | Support the implementation of the training session for all relevant grantees, SSC and SUMERNET Secretariat on the topics related to HRBA | July 2026-December 2028 |
| 5. | SUMERNET annual regional network meetings, Learning Forum and other key events | Advisor will contribute to the design of the programme's key activities, develop and deliver materials for the relevant sessions. | August – November 2027 August – November 2028 |

| No. | Deliverables | Description | Timeline |
|-----|--|--|---|
| | delivered with a strong focus on HRBA | | January – May 2029 |
| 6. | Comments on the progress made by the grantees each year | Advisor to provide the comments/suggestions to the grantees when reporting their progress work during SUMERNET key activities | Jun 2026 – May 2029 |
| 7. | Additional comments provided to individual research teams requesting for follow-up meeting/discussion | Advisor will have follow-up meetings with some research projects that need further advices on the issues related to HRBA for their project. The meetings can be held online | Jun 2026 – May 2029 |
| 8. | Inputs to communications products | Advisor will contribute to the communications related to HRBA upon request | Jun 2026 – May 2029 |
| 9. | Advice on specific issues upon request by the grantees, Secretariat or SSC members | Upon request, advisor to discuss with grantees, Secretariat and SSC and provide advice on relevant issues in project implementation | February 2026- May 2029 |
| 10. | Reflection report (for annual and final). Part of the reports could be published on SUMERNET's website | Adviser to reflect on overall support and contributions provided during SUMERNET PLUS and how these supports contribute to overall SUMERNET PLUS outcome achievement. The report should also mention lessons learnt experienced by the Adviser during the period of working with the programme | December 2026 December 2027 December 2028 May 2029 |
| 11. | Reflection report (for annual and final). Part of the reports could be published on SUMERNET's website | Adviser to reflect on overall support and contributions provided during SUMERNET PLUS and how these supports contribute to overall SUMERNET PLUS outcome achievement. The report should also mention lessons learnt experienced by the Adviser during the period of working with the programme | December 2026 December 2027 December 2028 May 2029 |

F. ESTIMATED TIME INPUTS:

The Thematic Advisor will contribute to SUMERNET PLUS programme activities on a part-time basis for a period of 39 months. The level of effort for this advisory depends on actual activities conducted and outputs to be delivered. Estimated time inputs for this contracted period will not exceed 50 working days in total. Following include indicative working days during service period. This could be adjusted based on the need of the programme.

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| Indicative time allocation (working days) |
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|---------------------|-----------|
| February - Dec 2026 | 16 |
| Jan – December 2027 | 12 |
| Jan – December 2028 | 12 |
| Jan – May 2029 | 10 |
| Total | 50 |

Additional notes:

- **Payments will be billed made based on actual outputs delivered and actual working days per year**, not exceeding the maximum annual allocation.
- **Continuation each year is subject to annual programme workplan & annual performance assessment** conducted by the SUMERNET Secretariat.
- **The indicative time allocation** is subject to agreement during the contracting process and annual performance assessment.

G. PERIOD:

This role is expected to perform tasks within the period of the SUMERNET PLUS Programme, currently from **1 February 2026 to 31 May 2029**.