



**The Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) PLUS:
Partnerships for a Long-term Climate-Resilient Mekong through Just and Sustainable Transitions**

RAPID RESPONSE RESEARCH

Call for "Expressions of Interest"

I. CALL SUMMARY:

SUMERNET is calling for the Expressions of Interest (Eols) for its rapid-response research grants. SUMERNET will offer 12 grants in total during its fifth phase programme "SUMERNET PLUS" (2025-2027). Funding support will not exceed **480,000 SEK (~USD 52,000) per project** to be completed **within 6-12 months**.

Launch of the call: 17 March 2026

Deadline for submission of Eol: 05 April 2026, 23:59 (Bangkok/Indochina time)

Submissions of Eol will ONLY BE ACCEPTED through the online submission platform:

[APPLICATION LINK](#)

All partners and potential applicants are invited to join

**SUMERNET PLUS: Rapid Response
GRANT INFORMATION SESSION**

Time: 15:00 – 16:30 (Bangkok/Indochina Time)

Date: Thursday, 19 March 2026

Meeting Link (Via Zoom)

<https://sei-org.zoom.us/j/64285800934?pwd=74vxFjb4c1LwlY9qkoOOUjjF2OmCVF.1>

Meeting ID: 642 8580 0934

Passcode: 747607

BACKGROUND:

Over the past three decades, the Mekong Region has evolved from one of the least developed regions into a dynamic hub of diversified industries and economic growth. This transformation, driven by economic development based on its rich ecosystems, including rivers, wetlands, forests and farmlands, lifted millions out of poverty and improved livelihoods. While the region's economic growth has relied on harnessing its natural resources for goods and services, this has also resulted in environmental degradation and social inequities. There is a need to balance

resource-based development with long-term environmental resilience. Some of the continuing challenges faced by the region include conserving ecosystem health and biodiversity, addressing the interconnected demands for water, energy, and food, strengthening transboundary cooperation, and adapting to the ecological impacts of extreme weather variability driven by a changing climate.

Since its inception in 2005, the Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET), with long-term support from the Swedish Government through the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) and its constituents of citizens from the Mekong Region, have contributed to bringing these challenges into the regional discourse on sustainable development and through evidence-based research seeking out solutions that would support the policy formulation arena. Over the last 20 years, SUMERNET has continued to build its network and strengthen regional ownership. It has connected stakeholders and promoted South-South cooperation. Through high-quality research, SUMERNET has shifted researchers' mindsets toward seeking concrete change and bridging the gap between research, policy, and evidence-based action.

The new phase of SUMERNET, called "SUMERNET PLUS" Programme carries **overall mission of improving the policies and practices in the Mekong Region that support a just, inclusive and sustainable transition towards enhanced climate resilience in relevant key sectors across different levels (at sub-national, national, and regional levels) through inclusive and solution-oriented knowledge co-production, capacity development, proposal of innovations and policy engagement, while taking into account gender equality, disability and social inclusion and human rights based approach in the Mekong Region.**

This transition will be achieved through **three interlinked objectives that focus on:**

1. **Enhancing capacities and inclusive collaboration of knowledge producers, policy influencers, and young professionals 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;
2. **Improving 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; and
3. **Adopting 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.

SUMERNET PLUS will support a range of grants, dialogue and events, and research and policy outputs to deliver on the programme goals.

More information about the programme can be found here ([link to the popular summary](#)).

II. ABOUT THIS CALL

The Applications should emphasise concise research that presents a logical summary of the design, methodology, and outputs, based on the research question and context proposed. We welcome applications with involvement of researchers, policymakers and planners, practitioners, private sector, and marginalized women and men are particularly encouraged, as are those led or co-led by women and/or members of indigenous communities in the Mekong region.

SUMERNET under this call will support three types of rapid response grants as per below:

1. Capacity Development Grants (Capacity Grants)

These Grants will strengthen the capacities, skills, networks, and collaborative systems of knowledge producers, policy influencers, and young professionals to advance credible, solution-oriented climate resilience action. The grants should aim to support research capacity development, long-term leadership, inclusive collaboration, and the sustainability of knowledge ecosystems in the Mekong Region.

Priority beneficiaries must include some of these groups:

- Early-career researchers and young professionals
- Women researchers, leaders and grassroots organizers
- Community researchers and practitioners
- Government officials and planners
- Journalists and communicators
- Civil society and Indigenous leaders

Priority Capacity Areas

Proposals may address capacities related to the following:

- Academic writing, research, quantitative and qualitative analysis
- Participatory, feminist, and community-based research methods
- Climate risk and vulnerability assessment
- Policy analysis, advocacy, and engagement
- Knowledge translation, storytelling, research communications
- Digital tools and data visualization
- Proposal writing and fundraising
- Integrating Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) and human rights based approach into research
- Other topics identified by members.

Learning and Collaboration Approaches

Supported approaches may include mentorship and fellowship programmes, communities of practice and peer learning; co-learning and innovation labs; training-of-trainers models, series of training workshops, among others.

Expected Outcomes

Proposals must demonstrate long-term capacity outcomes beyond short-term training activities. This call encourages proposals that may identify outcomes linked to increased research publication, improved technical, leadership, and engagement skills; Increased participation of women and youth in research and policy spaces; Integration of new capacities into partner institutions; Strengthened multi-stakeholder networks; Sustainable learning mechanisms and alumni networks, additional funding secured for future research and activities among others.

2. Strengthening Research, Policy and Practice for Climate Resilience Impact Grants (Impact Grants)

Impact Grants support initiatives that leverage existing research, partnerships, and field experience to advance knowledge, policy development, implementation, and institutional practice for equitable climate resilience. The grants are designed to accelerate the uptake and execution of policy solutions, institutional reforms, and governance improvements at local, national, and regional levels, grounded in evidence-based decision-making.

Priority Areas

In keeping with programmatic priority areas, Proposals may focus on the broad thematic areas of climate change adaptation and mitigation, water-energy-food nexus, agriculture and food systems, forests and environmental degradation, and women, youth, and climate action.

Target users of the grant results include the following groups:

- Regional level: Mekong River Commission, Mekong Institute, and ADB Greater Mekong Subregion, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, and relevant working groups of ASEAN.
- National level: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Industry and Commerce, Office of the National Water Resources
- Sub-national level: local governments and civil society organizations
- Other relevant agencies to be identified.

Expected Activities: Supported activities may include some of the following

- Research to address policy questions or practical problems
- Demonstration of interventions/solutions on ground

- Development of policy briefs, guidelines, and technical tools
- Policy dialogues and stakeholder consultations
- Technical support to regional, national and subnational planning processes
- Institutional capacity strengthening for policy uptake

Expected Outcomes: Proposals should demonstrate clear pathways to the following

- New knowledge and solutions jointly produced with the boundary partners
- Improved capacity of the institutions for policy uptake
- Improved policies, regulations, or implementation mechanisms
- Strengthened coordination among government agencies
- Increased allocation of public resources for resilience
- Adoption of inclusive and evidence-based practices
- Enhanced participation of women, youth/young professionals, people with disability and other marginalised groups in decision-making

Priority will be given to proposals with strong institutional partners and measurable policy or practice outcomes.

3. **Piloting and Scaling Climate-Resilient Solutions with the Private Sector (Innovation Grants)**

These Grants will support the piloting, testing, and scaling of climate-resilient solutions in collaboration with private sector actors, grounded in evidence from solution-oriented knowledge co-production. The grants aim to catalyse inclusive, environmentally responsible, and financially viable innovations that benefit vulnerable communities in the Mekong Region with support from the private sector and other stakeholders in adopting just, equitable and sustainable practices.

The grantees are expected to engage with the following groups as boundary partners or strategic partners.

- Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs)
- Market and value chain intermediaries
- Industry associations and business networks
- Financial sector actors

Priority Innovation Themes

Proposals may focus on:

- Climate-resilient agricultural and aquaculture value chains
- Nature-based solutions, and ecosystem restoration
- Water-energy efficient, water-energy saving and climate-smart technologies
- Community-based early warning systems
- Any other relevant innovations

Eligible Innovation Types

Supported innovations may include:

- New or adapted products and services
- Business and delivery models
- Public–private partnership approaches
- Market access and value-chain solutions

Expected Outcomes

- All applicants are encouraged to outline Scaling Pathways and to include policy and regulatory enablers, partnership development pathways, and long-term sustainability and exit strategies.
- All proposals must ensure Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) where applicable; Fair benefit-sharing mechanisms and Local ownership and participation. Priority will be given to innovations demonstrating strong social inclusion, environmental integrity, and realistic scaling potential.

Cross-Cutting Requirements (All Grant Types)

All proposals, regardless of grant type, must demonstrate clear **relevance** with Mekong climate resilience priorities; advance **Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion**, include robust gender and social inclusion analysis, participation targets, and leadership roles for women and Indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs); promote **Knowledge Sharing and Learning** and commit to open-access knowledge products, learning briefs, and regional dissemination activities; strengthen **Partnerships** by demonstrating meaningful collaboration among research institutions, communities, policymakers, civil society, and private sector actors; and integrate **Monitoring, Learning, and Adaptation**, including adaptive management approaches, learning questions, and reflection mechanisms.

III. SELECTION CRITERIA:

Successful applications will have to fulfil the following particulars:

- **Eligible Applicant:**
 - Following the donor’s policy, only the organizations (e.g. research institutes, universities, think tanks, non-profit organizations) from Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam can apply. Lead organization and other members of the project consortium must be independent and must not be a public or government entity registered under Cambodian law, including ministries, state agencies, or other government-affiliated institutions.
 - Project lead must be a formal member of SUMERNET network. [To become SUMERNET network member, [please register here](#)].

- Lead Applicant (LA) needs to demonstrate that they have the skills, knowledge, and support necessary to direct the proposed research and to be actively engaged in carrying it through to completion. The LA will need to provide appropriate evidence of expertise and experience that match the nature and context of the rapid response project.
 - Recipients of previous SUMERNET and Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tank Network (MTT) grants are strongly encouraged to apply.
 - Former SEI staff who have completed employment with SEI (as the host of SUMERNET Secretariat) at least 12 months before the launch date of the call are eligible to be part of the team applying for the grants.
- **Requirements for rapid response grant EOI:**
 - *Directly contribute to at least two programme objectives, including*
 - a. Programme Objective 1: Enhancing capacities and inclusive collaboration of knowledge producers, policy influencers, and young professionals to deliver solution-oriented knowledge co-production, policy engagement, and communications (as a must) and
 - b. Programme Objective 2: Improving policy development and implementation by policymakers and practitioners to deliver equitable climate resilience solutions and/or
 - c. Programme Objective 3: Adopting just, equitable and sustainable practices by the private sector and other stakeholders.
 - *Focus on at least one country of 4 Mekong countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, Vietnam but with the regional significance*
 - *Provide a letter of support or request from target user(s) of future research findings/results to certify that there is a real need for this research; while not compulsory, it will certainly be an advantage.*
 - *Provide a research approach that includes gender equality, disability, and social inclusion, human rights, conflict sensitivity, governance and poverty reduction as key targets.*
 - *Engaging with a diverse group of team members in the project that represents diverse genders, ages, ethnicities, and are at various stages in their research careers is an advantage, especially if the project has a woman lead.*
 - *Lead Organisation and Team Leader have extensive experience and proven capacity to manage the grant that engages with interdisciplinary experts in the mentioned sector for the Mekong Region.*

2. Required Qualifications of the Team:

- a. Demonstrated experience in proposed research and policy analysis
- b. Demonstrated experience in conducting similar studies in the Mekong Region
- c. Strong understanding of Mekong region development challenges
- d. Proven track record in stakeholder engagement
- e. Experience with climate resilience, sustainability, water management resources, community & policy engagement, and other areas related to [SUMERNET PLUS](#)
- f. Experience in integrating gender equality, disability and social inclusion and human rights based approach into climate and environmental research and studies.

- g. Financial management capacity for international grants with reporting standards

3. Desired Qualifications:

- a. Previous collaboration with SUMERNET or relevant networks
- b. Inclusion of young professionals (under 35 years)
- c. Gender-balanced research team members
- d. Experience with participatory research methods
- e. Past research experience with similar stakeholder engagement in the Mekong region
- f. Team with several members includes the talent individuals from diverse genders, Indigenous groups, people with diverse ethnicities, and persons with disabilities are encouraged to apply.

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- **Technical Quality (40%)**
 - Fulfill all requirements of rapid response grant EOI as described above. (20%)
 - Methodological rigour and appropriateness (e.g. including also integration of gender equality, disability and social inclusion, human right based approach into the design). (10%)
 - Feasibility of proposed approach considering capacity and available time and resources. (10%)
- **Team Expertise (25%)**
 - Relevant experience and qualifications
 - Team composition and complementary skills
 - Track record in similar research in the Mekong Region

Existing network and connections with the targeted stakeholders.

- **Impact Potential (20%)**
 - Expected contribution to SUMERNET PLUS objectives
 - Policy relevance and uptake potential
 - Stakeholder engagement strategy
 - Sustainability of outcomes
- **Financial Management Capacity, Budget and Timeline (15%)**
 - Demonstrated organizational financial management capacity for international grants' compliance and reporting
 - Cost-effectiveness
 - Realistic timeline
 - Clear budget justification
 - Value for money

Note: To support the granting decision, SUMERNET reserves the right to assess the track record of the applicants' delivery and compliance with past grants, projects, and contracts (if any) with SUMERNET and SEI in which the applicants have been involved as key actors.

IV. EXPECTED OUTPUTS

- One English manuscript for submission to an international/regional/national journal listed in SCOPUS or Web of Science and with an Impact Factor.
- At least one dissemination product (e.g. blog/video/op-ed/podcast) to share findings with marginalized and/or vulnerable communities.
- At least one capacity development/knowledge dissemination/policy engagement event.
- One Policy brief to be developed in consultation with the SUMERNET Secretariat for the dissemination of findings and recommendations, which will be directly used to inform ongoing planning or decision-making processes as earlier identified (this product is optional, depending on project context).

All activities and outputs must be completed within 6-12 months.

V. TENTATIVE DATES: (Bangkok/Indochina time)

Launch of the call	17 March 2026
Information Session	19 March 2026
Eol submission deadline	05 April 2026
Eol Review and feedback	10 April 2026
EOI Revision and finalization	27 April 2026
SUMERNET SC endorsement	30 April 2026
Announcement of results	1 May 2026
Contracting and onboarding	31 May 2026
Project start date	1 June 2026
Project completion	6-12 months from the start date (30 November 2026/ 31 May 2027)

VI. HOW TO APPLY

The Expression of Interest (Eol) and annex templates (available at this link) must be completed to ensure eligibility. The form refers to the SUMERNET website, which includes information on the programme's goals, objectives, priority themes, operating approach, boundary partners, and capacity development. Applicants must refer to the guidance information on the SUMERNET website to complete and submit the Eol.

All applications must submit an **Expression of Interest** and supporting documents **using the SUMERNET online submission** platform at LINK

Email submissions will NOT be accepted.

Documents to be prepared for online submission:

Required:

- Completed Expression of Interest form
- CV of Project Leader
- CV of all project team members (all key members)
- Annexes of activities, outputs
- Completed Technical Proposal ([DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE](#))
- Financial Proposal ([DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE](#))¹
- Organization assessment form ([DOWNLOAD TEMPLATE](#))
- Lead organization's registration certificate

Optional:

- Letter of support from target users of this research findings or boundary partners, while not compulsory, will certainly be an advantage.
- Most recent (2 years) audit report
- Reference supporting administrative fee/overhead rate (e.g., organizational policy, previous project agreements, standard practice)
- Reference supporting team members' personnel rates (e.g., organizational policy, previous project agreements, standard practice)
- Previous relevant work

VII. IMPORTANT NOTES:

- Email submissions will NOT be accepted
- Incomplete applications will NOT be reviewed
- Late submissions will NOT be considered
- The lead organisation can apply for ONE or more rapid response grants. However, only one grant can be awarded to the same lead organization.
- Lead organization will enter into sub-grant agreement with SEI as the host of SUMERNET Secretariat.
- An individual expert can be a project lead for only one rapid response grant.
- SUMERNET reserves the right not to grant the shortlisted teams that cannot fulfil the expectations during the proposal's refinement and due diligence processes.

VIII. CONTACT INFORMATION

For further inquiries, please contact:

<p>Sushmita Mandal Senior Research Fellow</p>
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¹ This grant can cover the overhead cost of the applicant's organizations (if any). The normal overhead rate of the organizations should be applied. However, total overhead cost applied to the project cannot be higher than 20% of total grant received in any case.

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