**Terms of Reference (TOR)**

**Thematic Advisor on Conflict Sensitivity-Ethics**

**SUMERNET PLUS Programme**

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## 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.

**SUMERNET PLUS Thematic Advisors** provide credible and reliable support for SUMERNET PLUS and its partners in conducting collaborative research and policy engagement. The SUMERNET PLUS Thematic Advisors are respected experts who provide strategic advice on capacity building and the 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.

SUMERNET PLUS Thematic Advisors also support the 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 SUMERNET granted projects and network members.

**Conflict Sensitivity-Ethics Advisor**

**SUMERNET views** Conflict Sensitivity-Ethics **as integral to the conduct of research, from the design of projects to the collection and analysis of data, and finally to the publication and communication of findings and recommendations.** SUMERNET is building a culture of good ethical practice to support SUMERNET PLUS striving to improve policies and practices to support a just and sustainable transition for enhanced climate resilience in the Mekong Region.

The SUMERNET Steering Committee (SSC) has delegated the tasks for supporting research partners on research ethics to the SUMERNET Secretariat with the support from different thematic advisors, as necessary. Given that developing and implementing conflict sensitivity-ethics is relatively new for many network members, thematic advisor position on Conflict Sensitivity-Ethics is therefore recruited to work in cooperation with the Secretariat and other advisors. The Conflict Sensitivity-Ethics Advisor will provide support to SUMERNET project partners and the SUMERNET Secretariat in implementing the six ethics principles: Integrity, Respect, Responsibility, Competence, Social Equity, and Ethical Balance, and provide advice in addressing ethical issues in SUMERNET research.

**B. GENERAL TASKS:**
1. Review the applications for SUMERNET grants in the areas of conflict sensitivity expertise considering call documents and selection criteria.
2. Plan and ensure cross-cutting themes are incorporated into the research and policy engagement efforts of the Network.
3. Work with Component Coordinators and network partners to ensure that cross-cutting themes are issues central to the problem sets designed for each Component.
4. In collaboration with Component Coordinators and network partners design specific research activities related to the subject matter represented in the cross-cutting themes.
5. Design and organize training activities and mentoring support to improve and update the knowledge of researchers on conceptual and methodological approaches to addressing the subject matter in the cross-cutting themes.

6. Review and provide inputs into research and policy products.
7. Advising on mechanisms or entry points where research findings and policy recommendations can be used to contribute to relevant national and regional strategies, policies, planning, and institutes effectively in practice.

## C. SPECIFIC TASKS:

### 1) Capacity development
- Review and update the SUMERNET Ethics Guidelines
  - To include guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in research productions and other communications materials
  - To include guidelines for engaging the private sector in a research project consortium
  - To include a broad set of criteria to help research projects to identify their 'go' 'no-go' decisions on private sector engagement
  - To develop a short FAQ on ethics process
- Review and update the SUMERNET Conflict Sensitivity Guidelines
- Based on the review, reflect and analyse any capacity building needs in the following year to enhance conflict sensitivity implementation in within granted projects
  - Lead workshop training sessions and other awareness-raising activities, with SUMERNET partners and grantees on the value of, and approach to ethics & conflict sensitivity based on the SUMERNET Ethics Guidelines & SUMERNET Conflict Sensitivity Guidelines
  - Support any future iterations and updates to the Ethics Guideline, Ethics Process and form as necessary

### 2) Ethics review
- Engage in discussions with project leaders/teams on ethics review forms submitted (online meetings, emails or other)
- Provide any clarifications/suggestions on the ethics process to other ethics reviewers (i.e. Research Coordinator, Policy Coordinator, etc.)
- Advise granted project teams on aspects and issues related to conflict sensitivity and ethics.
- Provide advice and recommend interventions for any ethical issues or conflicts of interest that may arise, especially those that could affect programme implementation, including its reputation, and grant project delivery

### 3) Monitoring and Evaluation
- Participate in discussions related to Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning of SUMERNET and specific projects
- Provide advisory support to programme monitoring on research-engagement ethics & conflict sensitivity concerns across the Mekong region.
  - Monitor and provide reflections and feedback on how ethics & conflict sensitivity is being implemented in SUMERNET, especially to its granted projects
  - Identify how implementation of ethics & conflict sensitivity could be enhanced more in the future.

### 4) Perform other specific tasks relevant to SUMERNET ethics & conflict sensitivity as requested by the Secretariat

## 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.

**E. DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE**

| No. | Deliverables | Description | Tentative Timeline |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Develop program Conflict ensitivity-Ethics workplan based on SUMERNET PLUS program workplan 2026-2029 | Ethics Guideline and Ethics Review Process reviewed | February 2026 December 2026 December 2027 December 2028 |
| 2. | Review and update SUMERNET Ethics Guidelines | SUMERNET Ethics Guidelines updated & approved <br> - To include guidelines on the use of artificial intelligence in research productions and other communications materials | March 2026 |
| 3. | Review and update SUMERNET Conflict Sensitivity Guidelines | SUMERNET Conflict Sensitivity Guidelines updated & approved | March 2026 |
| 4. | Develop ethics training materials & trainings | Trainings for all relevant grantees, SSC and SUMERNET Secretariat on the topics related to ethics are designed and delivered | June 2026 2027 (TBC) 2028 (TBC) 2029 (TBC) |
| 5. | Develop conflict sensitivity training materials & trainings | Trainings for all relevant grantees, SSC and SUMERNET Secretariat on the topics related to conflict sensitivity are designed and delivered | June 2026 2027 (TBC) 2028 (TBC) 2029 (TBC) |
| 6. | Comments/suggestions on the project ethics review and implementation | Upon request the advisor will provide comments/suggestions to the grantees on how they can address ethics in the project design and implementation (ad hoc, time permitting) | January – December, during 2026 – 2028 January – May 2029 |
| 7. | Review and approve projects' ethics review applications | projects' ethics review applications are reviewed and approved within 7 working days upon submission | February 2026-May 2029 |
| 8. | Visit granted project's sites upon request from the Secretariat and depending on time availability | Upon request, advisor may visit the project sites for monitoring relevant issues | January 2027-May 2029 |

| No. | Deliverables | Description | Tentative Timeline |
|---|---|---|---|
| 9. | Contribute to the SUMERNET Annual Meeting | Advisor will contribute to the design of the annual meeting, develop and deliver materials, and facilitate relevant sessions | January 2027-May 2029 |
| 10. | Annual reflection report | Advisor to reflect on the support and contributions provided to the programme and on the results of the support in terms of achievement of the expected outcome.<br>Specific support to research projects should also be referred. Advisor should mention any capacity building needs in the following year.<br>Advisor also update on any external factors that might affect ethics of research-engagement activities under SUMERNET | 31 December 2026<br>31 December 2027<br>31 December 2028 |
| 11. | Final reflection report | Advisor to reflect on how ethics is being implemented in SUMERNET, on support provided during SUMERNET PLUS, and contributions to SUMERNET PLUS outcome achievement.<br>The report should mention lessons learned and experiences, and recommendations for enhancing ethical practice in SUMERNET. | End of the engagement period or 31 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 76 working days in total. Following include indicative working days during service period. This could be adjusted based on the need of the programme.

| Indicative time allocation (working days) | |
|---|---|
| February - Dec 2026 | 24 |
| Jan – December 2027 | 16 |
| Jan – December 2028 | 16 |
| Jan – May 2029 | 20 |
| **Total** | **76** |

Additional notes:

- **Payments will be 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:**

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