



Terms of Reference (TOR)

Thematic Advisor on Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion

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.

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Advisor

SUMERNET PLUS is committed to embed and mainstream GEDSI in all its relevant research and policy engagement activities to address climate resilience issues of socially marginalized groups in the Mekong Region. This will cover consideration of the concepts and analysis on gender and social equality, gender responsive assessment, and mainstreaming gender into research and policy in climate resilience in the Mekong region and others.

Since GEDSI is considered a key priority issue and there are several project grantees that the programme needs to support, SUMERNET will seek the support from a team of GEDSI experts, including from internal SEI and from outside SEI.

B. GENERAL TASKS:

- Review the applications for SUMERNET grants with a gender equality, disability and social inclusion lens and note gender blindness in proposals with a view of how to address these gaps.
- Plan and ensure gender equality, disability and social inclusion 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 gender equality, disability and social inclusion 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 gender equality, disability and social inclusion perspectives are tied to these activities.
- Design and organize training activities and mentoring support to improve and update the knowledge of researchers on feminist conceptual and methodological approaches to addressing the subject matter.
- Review and provide inputs into the methodology and work plans of research projects undertaken within the Network from a feminist methodology perspective.
- Review and provide inputs into research and policy products from a gender equality, disability and social inclusion lens.

- Advise gender mainstreaming mechanisms 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 the applications for SUMERNET grants with a gender equality, disability and social inclusion lens and provide recommendations on how to improve them.
- Review granted research/project reports and other products with a focus on the issues related to gender equality and social equity.
- Provide gender equality, disability and social inclusion capacity building to all relevant grantees, SSC, SUMERNET Secretariat and network members through various activities including but not limited to the following:
 - Review and update the existing SUMERNET Gender Action Plan (GAP), including a brief document of GEDSI guidelines and organize training workshops for SUMERNET research/project grantees on how to develop GEDSI Strategy, including action plan based on research/project work and review GEDSI action plans that will be developed by all research/projects.
 - Provide mentoring support to the research/project teams.
 - For SUMERNET network members, help introduce/promote the relevant tools and products related to GEDSI that they can consider using them for their purposes. These tools and products might be produced under SUMERNET.
- Pay the visits on sites to provide the advice on how to integrate GEDSI into their research/projects support SUMERNET's research/project teams and their engagement with socially marginalized groups (as per time permitting and subject to invitation by the programme secretariat).
- Provide the advice and support to realistically address the recommendations from the SUMERNET Coping Studies and of the future Midterm Evaluation (MTE) of SUMERNET PLUS on the issues related to gender equality, disability and social inclusion.
- Participate in key events of SUMERNET programme as the speakers and advisors upon request e.g. Annual Meeting, Research and Policy Dialogues, trainings, and other meetings (as per time permitting and subject to invitation by the programme secretariat).
- Contribute to other activities as per request by the programme (as per time permitting and subject to invitation by the programme 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.

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

E. DELIVERABLES AND TIMELINE

No.	Deliverables	Description	Tentative Timeline
1.	Develop GEDSI annual workplan based on the programme workplan 2026-2029	The advisor to work together with GEDSI experts of the Secretariat to deliver the GEDSI 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 gender equality, disability and social inclusion lens and provide the recommendations on how to improve them.	May 2026- December 2028
3.	Comments and suggestions on how to improve the research /project work and outputs	The advisor to review granted research/project progress reports and other products with the focus on the issues related to gender equality, disability and social inclusion.	May 2026-May 2029
4.	Provide mentoring support to activities	The advisor to provide mentoring support to the research/project teams.	February 2026-May 2029
5.	Develop GEDSI Strategy, including action plan, from existing SUMERNET Gender Action Plan (GAP)	The advisor to review the existing SUMERNET Gender Action Plan (GAP) To develop GEDSI Strategy, including action plan, to be align with SUMERNET PLUS Programme Design, including brief guidelines	February -June 2026
6.	Training workshops on GEDSI action plan development	The advisor to deliver workshops on building relevant capacity of SUMERNET research/project grantees on how to develop GEDSI action plan based on research/project work	July 2026 (TBC) June 2027 (TBC) June 2028 (TBC)
7.	Comments/feedback on GEDSI action plans developed by granted teams.	The advisor to review GEDSI action plans that will be developed by all research/projects.	August 2026- December 2028
8.	At least one blog written to promote the tools and products related to GEDSI to be published on SUMERNET website	The advisor to help introduce/promote the relevant tools and products related to GEDSI to SUMERNET network members. These tools and products might be produced under SUMERNET and other initiatives.	June 2027-May 2029

No.	Deliverables	Description	Tentative Timeline
9.	Reports on the project visits and support on sites including the findings and recommendations	The advisor to pay the visits on sites to provide the advice on how to integrate GEDSI into their research/projects support SUMERNET's research/project teams and their engagement with socially marginalized groups.	July 2026 – March 2029
10.	Specific advice and support for enhancing GEDSI considering the future recommendations from Midterm Evaluation (MTE) of the programme	The advisor to provide the advice and support to realistically address the recommendations of the Midterm Evaluation (MTE) of SUMERNET PLUS on the issues related to GEDSI.	Jan 2028-Jun 2028
11.	SUMERNET Annual regional network meetings, Learning Forum and other key events delivered with a strong focus on GEDSI	Adviser will contribute to the design and organization of the annual network meetings and other key events of SUMERNET programme, develop and deliver materials for the relevant sessions	August – November 2027 August – November 2028 January – May 2029
12.	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
13.	Reflection report (for annual and final). Part of reports could be published the blogs on the SUMERNET 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 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 and endorsed by the SUMERNET Steering Committee.
- **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**.