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## SUMERNET Phase 3-Call for Concept Notes

### Research grants for Mekong Region researchers

The Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) announces a call for concept notes for its research grants for 2014. Total fund available in this round is 3,000,000 SEK (approximately US\$460,000) and for 5-6 research projects with 500,000-600,000 SEK/project (approximately US\$77,000-92,000 /project).

**Submission deadline: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 (Bangkok local time)**

### Programme overview

The Sustainable Mekong Research Network (SUMERNET) is a long-term research network that informs and influences policy development on sustainable development issues in the countries of the Mekong Region: Cambodia, China (specifically Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region), Laos PDR, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. It has supported research on a number of critical development challenges in the Mekong Region. Launched in 2005 with support from the Government of Sweden, SUMERNET has grown from 14 to 50 member institutions by the end of its Phase 2 in 2013 with additional support from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN). The SUMERNET Secretariat is hosted by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI)-Asia Centre, Bangkok.

**SUMERNET Phase 3 (2014-June 2017)** will continue working towards sustainable development of the Mekong Region by putting knowledge-based policy engagement at the heart of its activities.

SUMERNET will support the formation of long-term innovative partnerships among research institutions, knowledge users and policy makers at different levels and in different sectors through four programme components: (1) deliver credible research, (2) convene and contribute to regional assessments, (3) communicate and engage with the policy process for impact and visibility, and (4) ensure effective management, network sustainability and monitoring and evaluation.

### Phase 3 financial support

SUMERNET provides financial support and technical assistance to consortia of researchers from the Mekong Region together with the possible involvement of other Southeast Asian country partners. Consortia will carry out policy-relevant research over two years (24 months) in one of the following research themes:

1. Climate-compatible development
2. Ensuring the environmental sustainability of regional economic integration
3. Maintaining ecosystem services critical to local development

SUMERNET will fund participatory action research and other innovative approaches for linking research to policy settings to meet programme goals. For this reason, those receiving grants from SUMERNET are required to do several tasks, some of which go beyond traditional research:

- Collaborate with researchers in more than one Mekong country to carry out high-quality, policy-relevant research and report on that research in peer-reviewed articles,
- Engage throughout the programme with policymakers, communities, and other potential long-term beneficiaries of the research,
- Summarize research outputs for popular publications and venues to disseminate new scientific findings and to influence relevant policies
- Contribute to the capacity building and knowledge sharing among the members from different organisations in different countries, with different levels of experience.

## Phase 3 themes

### *Climate-compatible development*

Climate-compatible development promotes human development and ecological sustainability while taking into account the need to both mitigate and adapt to climate change in ways that are socially- and gender-equitable.

Projects under this theme might address:

- Development and vulnerability to climate change, such as
  - How development creates new vulnerabilities to climate hazards and affects adaptive responses to climate change
  - How large-scale infrastructure projects affect climate-related impacts
- Governance and fairness, such as
  - Distributional implications of low-carbon, green growth strategies
  - Addressing global climate concerns through REDD+ projects
  - How adaptation projects redistribute risks
- Urbanization and its consequences, such as
  - What leads programmes and policies supporting climate-compatible development to benefit the poor and vulnerable, and when they lead to further marginalization
  - The possibility of reducing emissions while creating green jobs in cities
  - Flood risk and risk management under current and future climate
- The food, water, and energy nexus, such as
  - The implications from bio-energy expansion on natural resources and poverty
  - Impacts of large dams on food production, energy supply, and ecosystems
  - Challenges and opportunities for a low-carbon economy arising from links between water, energy, and food

### *Sustainable regional economic integration*

Sustainable regional economic integration means that the increased flows of investment, people and goods – for example, as envisioned for the ASEAN Economic Community – lead

to socially inclusive and equitable human development gains and greater environmental sustainability.

Projects under this theme might address:

- Unanticipated consequences, for the environment and disadvantaged groups, of policies that support integration, such as
  - The emergence of large private land concessions
  - Large road and corridor projects which benefit the endpoints rather than residents along the route
- Implications of transboundary flows on people and environments in border regions, such as
  - Opportunities for people to engage in trade
  - How distinct rules and norms that are active in border regions shape outcomes
- The effect of investments on land use and livelihoods in rural and natural-resource dependent communities.
- The impact of large transboundary or regionally-funded development projects.

### *Ecosystem services for local development*

The benefits people receive from local ecosystems can be substantial. They include provision of food and clean drinking water as well as timber, fuel wood and protection from natural hazards.

Projects under this theme might address:

- Integrative studies that take existing knowledge and conceptual frameworks to ensure policies such as payments for environmental services (PES) and development plans reflect ecological processes, such as
  - Critically evaluate from an integrated ecological, gender analytical and institutional perspective the contributions of PES-type schemes in upland watersheds to local development
  - Assess the value of services provided by peri-urban and urban wetlands and whether these services exacerbate people's gender- and class-stratified access to food and resources.
- Implications of PES policy in sharing of benefits throughout the development process.

### Research grants and process

SUMERNET will provide research grants to consortia of research institutes, universities, non-governmental and civil society organizations. The minimum requirement is that at least two organizations, from at least two different countries within the Mekong Region, participate in each project. Only a limited number of grants in the range between 500,000-600,000 SEK (approximately US\$77,000-92,000)/project are available for this call. Projects should extend over two years (24 months). It is expected that 5 or 6 grants will be awarded within this call.

There are two stages to proposal submission:

1. Concept note: Applicants must first submit a concept note (see below for details). The concept notes will be reviewed by SUMERNET advisors and regional experts suggested by the SUMERNET Secretariat and approved by the SUMERNET Steering Committee.

2. Full proposal: Those consortia (not more than ten) whose concept notes have been shortlisted will be invited to submit full proposals. The SUMERNET Secretariat will provide support for writing the full proposal. All full proposals will be reviewed by SUMERNET advisors and regional experts and either 5 or 6 proposals will be approved by the SUMERNET Steering Committee following the review.

### *Selection criteria*

The following criteria, both required and suggested, will be used to evaluate research concept notes.

#### **Required criteria**

##### **1. Original research**

Research outputs must be compelling for both policy and academic audiences, so concept notes must explain how **the project will lead to original and significant scholarly results.**

##### **2. Collaborative approach**

Projects consortia must include agencies, organizations, or institutions in **two or more countries, of which at least two are from the Mekong Region.** Organizations from Southeast Asian countries outside the Mekong Region can join a consortium if they contribute to capacity building of organizations in the Mekong Region and if project activities focus on the Mekong Region. **A minimum of two organizations** should be involved in each proposal including **at least one organization from the SUMERNET network.**

A list of SUMERNET organizations, with contact information, is attached to this document.

Proposed projects must explain convincingly why the particular consortium is strategic. The consortium should be fully integrated and unified, with one research management structure, rather than a programme of linked but separately managed research projects. In particular, researchers are expected to participate in fieldwork in each other's countries.

##### **3. Participatory project design**

SUMERNET considers participatory project design – that is, consultation with potential beneficiaries and other stakeholders as boundary partners<sup>1</sup> in a knowledge-based policy process – a critical factor while selecting a project. Grant recipients are expected to **engage stakeholders throughout the project cycle, including project identification and preparation stages.**

##### **4. Policy outcomes**

Each grant application should **state what policy and planning outcomes will be achieved or how the research will positively impact policy and planning processes at local, subnational, national or regional levels.** Applicants should consult policy makers or planners when writing the concept note, while full proposals must contain an analysis of the policy and planning process that the research is intended to contribute to.

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<sup>1</sup> Boundary partners are those individuals, groups, or organizations with whom the project interacts directly and with whom the programme can anticipate opportunities for influence.

## **5. Research topic of regional significance**

Concept notes should **clearly indicate where links to regional priorities exist, and how the project will build on them.**

## **6. Research management capabilities**

Each consortium will have **an administrative lead institution with whom the contract will be signed** and that will be responsible for the administration of the project and budget. This institution will be expected to have a proven capability to manage research projects, including ones involving more than one organization.

## **7. Financial leverage and cost-effectiveness**

It is expected that research **grant recipients will leverage co-funding, either cash or in-kind**, from national or regional level sources or other related projects. While co-funding is not a precondition for the submission of a concept note, the evaluation process will consider cost-effectiveness through leveraging funds. Applicants should state tentative co-funding amount, source, whether secured or unsecured, and how co-funding will make the research cost-effective.

## **8. Capacity building**

Each project should include at least **1-2 graduate students or post-doctoral researchers and have a clear plan** to help bridge the knowledge and fill in capacity gap among the project members from different organizations and countries, as well as from different levels of experience.

## **9. Project outputs**

Apart from various reports to update on the progress and achievements, the project should produce at least two peer review papers in reputable publications, one chapter for the SUMERNET Phase 3 book, one policy brief (in English and local languages), and one product for dissemination to the wider public (e.g. press release, article for newspapers, TV news, film).

## **Suggested criteria**

The following criteria are strongly encouraged but are not required.

### ***Gender responsiveness***

Projects that integrate a gender perspective into their design will be viewed more favourably by SUMERNET reviewers.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Inclusion of partners from Myanmar and China***

In SUMERNET Phase 3, particular attention will be paid to proposals that include a partner from Myanmar and collaborate with China. SUMERNET is unable to fund the organizations from China directly due to funding conditions of the financial supporters but would strongly encourage the project to collaborate with China by seeking additional funding from China or other sources.

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<sup>2</sup> A useful source is the post on the Funds for NGOs site: <http://www.fundsforngos.org/writing-gender-into-proposals/writing-gender-into-proposals/>. Integrating a gender perspective, however, should not preclude applications that position gender as a central focus in investigating any of the three research themes above.

### ***Nomination of potential mentor(s)***

Each funded project under SUMERNET has at least one mentor to provide advice on research design, data analysis, and other topics. Consortia are encouraged to suggest possible mentor(s).

### ***Concept note short-listing and proposal selection process***

The key dates (based on Bangkok local time) in the process are:

1. Call for concept notes – 17<sup>th</sup> February 2014
2. Concept note submission deadline – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014
3. Notification of short-listed concept notes and invitation for full proposals – 15<sup>th</sup> May 2014
4. Proposal-writing workshop for short-listed consortia – May-June 2014
5. Full proposal submission – July 2014
6. Evaluation and selection of full proposals and grantee contract completion – August-September 2014

*Note:* For full proposals, a separate guidelines and selection criteria will be made available to the short-listed consortia when they are notified of successful selection.

### ***Concept note format***

Concept notes should not exceed 1,500 words, excluding the title section, budget, and appendices.

**Please copy and use the following template for your concept note submission** (kindly use font Times New Roman, size 12 to fill in the sections.)

**Please also fill in the selection criteria.**

Please email your submission **by the deadline of 31<sup>st</sup> March (Bangkok local time)** to:

Mr. Agus Nugroho at the SUMERNET Secretariat ([secretariat@sumernet.org](mailto:secretariat@sumernet.org))

## **TEMPLATE FOR CONCEPT NOTES**

RESEARCH TITLE:

DURATION (Max. period of 24 months):

TOTAL FUNDING REQUESTED FROM SUMERNET (specify in Swedish Krona (SEK) with US\$ equivalent):

COUNTERPART FUNDING (in-kind or cash (in SEK with US\$ equivalent) – indicate whether secured or tentative):

RESEARCH PARTNERS (give names of two or more institutions from at least two countries in the Mekong Region, and at least one of them a member of SUMERNET):

RESEARCH GOAL, SPECIFIC PURPOSE, ORIGINALITY (200 words)

In this section explain:

- The overall development goal: the desired long-run outcome to which the project will contribute
- The specific project purpose: what the project will achieve and how it will contribute to the development goal
- Why the project is original

LINKS TO SUMERNET THEME AND GOALS (100 words):

In this section describe: how the research links to the SUMERNET Programme and the chosen research theme

VISION AND MISSION (RATIONALE) (400 words)

In this section explain why the research idea is feasible considering past, existing and future research and development undertakings in the region

## CONSORTIUM DESCRIPTION (100 words)

Briefly describe the management structure, including why it is strategic.

## BOUNDARY PARTNERS (100 words)

Mention a few key boundary partners that the project will try to influence or work with directly, and how they will be engaged.

## RESEARCH DESCRIPTION AND APPROACH (max 700 words)

State 3-5 research questions that your research seeks to answer. Explain how they are linked to the research topic, and how the project will lead to original and significant scholarly results. Describe research approach, methodology, cross-country partnership, means of implementation, and plan for capacity building.

If the proposed research has been funded or is being funded by other funders, state clearly which activities SUMERNET will contribute to – this should not duplicate other funding sources.

## POLICY IMPACT (max 150 words)

Provide a causal narrative explaining how the project will inform policy during the project cycle. State what policy and planning outcomes will be achieved or how the research will positively impact policy and planning processes at local, subnational, national or regional levels.

## SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY (max 100 words)

Describe how the outputs of research will continue to influence policy process after the project ends. Please indicate any environmental, social, economic, or financial sustainability that the research may bring in or contribute to.

Research output (max 100 words) Identify the research outputs that the project will produce by the end of project period. These must include:

- At least two peer-reviewed papers
- One book chapter (for the SUMERNET Phase 3 book)
- One policy brief
- One product for dissemination to the wider public

## OUTLINE BUDGET (100 words)

A summary budget indicating the main lines of expenditure e.g. professional fee, direct cost for different activities (in SEK with US\$ equivalence).

Indicate potential co-funding if it is available.



## APPENDICES

- References
- Short CVs (1-2 pages) of lead researchers/key personnel of each organisation
- Short descriptions (max 100 words/project) of 1-3 projects managed by the administrative lead institution to demonstrate capacity to manage research projects and multi-country partnership.

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### *Selection criteria checklist*

Please check that you have satisfied each of the selection criteria using the following checklist. The reviewers will use this checklist when reviewing your concept note.

Required criteria
<p>The proposal fits one or more of the following research themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Climate-compatible development</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring the environmental sustainability of regional economic integration</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining ecosystem services critical to local development</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The project will lead to original and significant scholarly results</li> </ul>
<p>The project consortium includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Agencies, organizations, or institutions in two or more countries: (names of countries)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> At least two partners from the Mekong Region: (names of partners)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> At least one organization from the SUMERNET network: (name of partner)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> A lead institution with a proven capability to manage research projects involving more than one organization: (name of lead institution)</li> </ul>
<p>The concept note explains:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Why the particular consortium is strategic for promoting sustainable development in the Mekong Region: (max 3 bullet points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How the consortium will engage stakeholders throughout the project cycle, including project identification and preparation stages: (max 3 bullet points)</li> </ul>
<p>The route to policy and planning impact is clear:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The level is indicated (local, subnational, national or regional): (which levels?)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The nature of the interaction, either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="radio"/> The specific policy and planning outcomes will be achieved: (please indicate) <b>or</b></li> <li><input type="radio"/> How the research will positively impact policy and planning processes: (max 3 bullet points)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Links to regional priorities are clearly indicated: (max 3 bullet points)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> How the project will build on those links are clearly described: (max 3 bullet points)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The concept note lists tentative co-funding amount (if any), source, whether secured or unsecured, and how co-funding will make the research cost-effective: (max 3 bullet points)</li> </ul>

<p>The project will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Include 1-2 graduate students or post-doctoral researchers: (names of potential students/researchers)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Have a clear plan to bridge the capacity gap among the project members from different organizations and countries, as well as from different levels of experience: (max 3 bullet points)</li> </ul>
<p>The budget and plan includes each of the required outputs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> At least two peer-reviewed papers: (expected titles, if possible)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One book chapter (for the SUMERNET Phase 3 book): (expected titles, if possible)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One policy brief</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> One product for dissemination to the wider public: (type of product)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Suggested criteria</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The project either has gender as its primary focus or it integrates a gender perspective into the design: (please clarify, max 3 bullet points).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The project includes partners from Myanmar and/or China (but note funding restrictions for China on page 5): (names of partners).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> The concept note lists one or more possible mentors: (names and affiliations of mentors).</li> </ul>