



# Co-designing REDAA in Southeast Asia

Regional consultation  
workshop report



## About the report

This workshop report summarises discussions from a Southeast Asia regional consultation workshop, which was organised to help inform the grant calls and strategy for the Reversing Environmental Degradation in Africa and Asia (REDAA) programme.

## About the REDAA programme

REDAA is a programme that catalyses research, innovation and action at local, national and regional levels across Africa and Asia through a series of grant calls.

For more information about this report, contact: [enquiries@redaa.org](mailto:enquiries@redaa.org)

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## Acknowledgements

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## Introduction

The research-to-action programme Reversing Environmental Degradation in Africa and Asia (REDAA) is supported by the UK government's Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and managed by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). REDAA aims to expand the technical knowledge and evidence base for environmental restoration and sustainable natural resources management in Africa and Asia over at least four years starting in 2023. It will include a grant-making facility to support primarily locally led initiatives putting research into action.

Drawing on a range of scoping studies, and on the initial results from several 'demonstrator projects', a draft REDAA strategy is being developed. One of the scoping studies, carried out by RECOFTC — The Center for People and Forests — focuses on potential research-to-action priorities for REDAA in Southeast Asia. These priorities are in the form of promising areas of research-to-action that REDAA could potentially support where: evidence can be improved and taken up; tools can be improved and well used; and governance systems can be improved for environmental restoration and sustainable natural resources management. The RECOFTC-led study also identified emerging ecosystems and degradation hotspots where research-to-action priorities may be located. The IIED REDAA team shared the scoping study results in an online survey of 97 key experts within the region, from local to region-wide levels, seeking their further input to refine the potential priorities. Some 40 experts responded in detail to the survey.

Drawing on the scoping paper and the online survey results, on 8–9 March 2023, 12 experts from the region met with RECOFTC and the REDAA team at RECOFTC headquarters in Bangkok to further co-design priorities that the REDAA programme in Southeast Asia can address — and to ensure that the REDAA programme is shaped to work closely with key stakeholders in the region on locally led research, innovation and action to help people and nature thrive together. See Annex 1 for the participant list.

All the organisations represented by the workshop participants are already working on issues related to environmental degradation and are deeply committed to helping people and nature to thrive together. Some are focusing more on research and others more on policy and action on the ground. Inspired by the scoping paper and survey findings, and drawing on their own experiences, workshop participants discussed and highlighted: key opportunities and challenges for addressing environmental degradation in Southeast Asia; and ways forward to reverse environmental degradation in the region. The discussions also helped further refine the priorities for the REDAA programme in Southeast Asia.

## Key challenges and opportunities for addressing environmental degradation

### Challenges

**Exclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities in research and government decision-making processes:** many government officials are yet to be convinced that local communities and Indigenous Peoples can manage land and natural resources sustainably and they exclude them from policymaking processes. As a result, many policies undermine local communities and Indigenous Peoples' ability to



make land use decisions and manage natural resources collectively and effectively. In addition, research on environmental degradation and natural resource management is seldom driven by local communities and Indigenous Peoples, and rarely considers how research can create tangible benefits for those key local stakeholders or integrate their local and traditional knowledge. Integration of local knowledge in research, and more participation and leadership of research by those local stakeholders, are not only vital to support the necessary inclusion of those local stakeholders in policy processes but are also vital to prospects for reversing environmental degradation.

Participants noted though that some terms that are frequently used in international policy discussions, notably 'Indigenous Peoples', are contested or politically sensitive. In some contexts, usage of such terms may lead to polarised dialogue or evidence and voices being excluded from policy discussions. Contested identification of 'Indigenous Peoples' and 'local communities' may also drive divisions or exacerbate problems for marginalised groups at local level. Terminology applied to processes that are 'locally led' or 'locally driven' may be preferable to foster more inclusive approaches.

**Climate change impacts, adaptation and resilience:** Southeast Asia is highly vulnerable to climate change, with many countries with long coastlines highly susceptible to rising sea levels and increasingly intense and frequent coastal storms. Countries across the region are also already experiencing record heat waves, floods and droughts, and more frequent and widespread wildfires. Rapid economic growth and urbanisation in the region is not only driving environmental degradation but also contributing to climate change and intensifying its impacts. Those climate change impacts also exacerbate further environmental degradation causing a vicious circle. Indigenous Peoples, local communities and other marginalised groups such as women and youth are also more vulnerable to such impacts. How to adapt to these strengthening impacts, and build resilient local communities and economies, is one of the key concerns of local stakeholders.

**Migration and environmental degradation:** migration and social mobility present complex issues in the region, including their impacts on environmental degradation. Cross-border migration and migration between rural and urban areas are among the major dynamics. Forced migration may be due to conflicts, climate change impacts or major infrastructure developments such as dams, while more voluntary migration is seen in the large numbers of people moving in search of better job and income opportunities, with related issues of social mobility.

These movements of people reallocate financial and human resources in the region dramatically and create new dynamics between urban and rural populations, and among rural communities. There may be positive impacts on nature, for example, in contexts where people move to cities and supply remittances helping improve livelihood options in rural areas and providing more opportunities for sustainable land use practices. Negative impacts on nature are also likely to be widespread, for example, where people are forced to move out from highly degraded and/or climate-vulnerable areas and put more pressure or cause conflict and new vulnerability in the areas they move into. Such dynamics appear to be insufficiently understood and weakly incorporated in policy decisions in the region. The political sensitivity of some migration issues may partly explain this.

**Putting intersectionality theory into practice:** intersectionality relates to theories and methodologies for examining and improving the intersections of race, caste, ethnicity, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, age and socioeconomic status. While those social dynamics and related inequalities are important to consider in any efforts to reverse environmental degradation, organisations at different levels vary in their interest and capabilities in working on intersectionality in a meaningful way. For example, while gender equality and social inclusion is a policy priority for many international donors, in practice some donors struggle to realise this priority in their programming. In some contexts, gender equality and social inclusion is far from a priority for local organisations and resistance to moving beyond token efforts on inclusion can be deeply entrenched. Even apparently locally driven or locally led approaches may not have considered intersectionality issues well and may even exclude, for example, women, youth and migrants. Therefore, it is important to better understand context-specific existing barriers for more equal and inclusive societal approaches and develop practical approaches to address those barriers.

**Shrinking civic space:** in many countries, including some in Southeast Asia, civic space is becoming increasingly restricted. Citizens, researchers and civil society organisations are facing increasing interference from the state and are not able to freely organise, participate and communicate in the decision-making processes and social structures around them. It is increasingly difficult for civil society organisations to ask difficult questions and engage in politically sensitive topics, such as land and resource rights, and migration and intersectionality issues, that address entrenched power imbalances.

**Rural and urban links:** almost half of the region's population resides in cities and many countries are still experiencing high urbanisation rates. Urbanisation and related infrastructure development can drive environmental degradation — for example, degradation of wetland and forests to make way for construction of buildings and roads, and air and water pollution. Migration from rural to urban areas may also introduce new social dynamics and bring both challenges and opportunities in addressing environmental degradation.

Understanding these dynamics can help better address challenges and leverage opportunities. For example: targeting urban consumers to create demands for sustainably produced food; creating payments for ecosystem services schemes where urban dwellers can finance conservation and restoration activities that enhance their water and food supplies; and remittances from urban areas helping to foster a more resilient rural economy where investments can be made in sustainable land use practices.

## Opportunities

**Locally led initiatives — networked Indigenous Peoples and local communities:** given the threats to civic space, the land and resource decision-making powers of local communities, and the current lack of inclusion of traditional and local knowledge in research and policies, it is of paramount importance to empower and support Indigenous Peoples and local communities to participate actively in both research and policymaking processes. More initiatives and funding could support those local stakeholders and the organisations with effective systems to support them and help them to organise and build their capacities to engage with more powerful stakeholders like government organisations and companies. With strengthened capacity and more united voices



through organisations and networks that can connect local voices to national, regional and global levels, those local stakeholders' knowledge and voices are more likely to be reflected in research and policy, and natural resource governance will improve as it will be more likely to be more participatory and inclusive.

**Multi-stakeholder governance of landscapes and restoration initiatives:** multi-stakeholder dialogues and governance processes among governments, community-based organisations, smallholders and businesses can help build trust and reduce the risks of powerful interests dominating the narratives — and therefore the policies and practices — on what constitute 'sustainable' land uses. Such processes can also provide the much-needed space to integrate the voices and knowledge of local communities and Indigenous Peoples if their capacity to engage in those processes can be strengthened as discussed above. It can also help minimise competing demands on limited natural resources and reduce conflicting land use policies.

**Multi-objective participatory land use decision making and assessments:** current land use decisions are often based on economic assessments alone, with little consideration given to the social, cultural and environmental costs and benefits of different land use practices. They are also often based on single land use objectives, for example, maximising food production, which creates sectoral siloes and ignores the complex interdependencies and trade-offs among the multiple land use objectives of different stakeholders dependent on the same land and limited natural resources. Aided by technologies like Geographic Information Systems and mobile app-enabled citizen science, participatory and multi-objective land use decision-making tools developed by researchers are increasingly being taken up by governments making land use decisions based on multiple objectives — for example, devising land use plans to optimise synergies among food, water and energy security in a changing climate. These tools can also be made usable by local organisations if they can integrate local and traditional knowledge and practices, which often emphasise diverse cultural, social and economic values of nature. In turn, the use of such tools may stimulate the kind of multi-stakeholder land use governance discussed above, where different stakeholders' interests and objectives can be incorporated.

**Sustainable, equitable and climate-resilient business models:** business models that are only designed to maximise short-term economic returns have resulted in unsustainable land use practices across the region. Those business models are also less climate resilient as they often focus on single-commodity and mono-cultural production systems that are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. They undermine traditional and local practices, which often place multiple values on nature, and thus exacerbate inequality. Alternative business models are emerging in the region that thrive on a diversity of products and income streams, and are owned and managed by local communities and Indigenous Peoples. These businesses often require capacity-building support including support to access markets, develop business plans, assess and manage risks including climate risks, and build trust and partnerships with other stakeholders.

**Direct and patient long-term financing for locally led initiatives:** limited nature and climate finance currently flows to the local level where actions to address those interlinked challenges are best taken. Sustainable, equitable and climate-resilient business models also often need public financing to cover initial start-up costs or to scale up. Different public and private financing models are needed to make funds flow

to local communities and Indigenous Peoples. This is not only relevant to more market-based nature and climate financing schemes, such as carbon and biodiversity offsets, but also to bilateral and multilateral climate and nature funding schemes and national schemes such as the payments for forest ecosystem services scheme in Viet Nam. Experience already shows that to support locally led initiatives, funders must be willing to invest in capacity building at local level and provide long-term financing as trust and effective partnerships among key stakeholders take time to build.

**Youth engagement:** youth-led initiatives can be among the most innovative and powerful drivers of change. They may wield technologies and form agile organisations more effectively than other initiatives, and can usefully challenge the status quo, for example using digital platforms to build environmental movements. They are important for a sustainable future and are key for the transfer and preservation of traditional knowledge. Young environmental entrepreneurship can help unlock new business models and effective support for this could create an alternative economic development pathway in the region.

**Working across landscapes and ecosystems:** the above opportunities to address environmental degradation are evident in many landscapes across Southeast Asia, while some may require action at regional level that can connect across key landscapes. Some indicative priority landscapes for REDAA were captured in the RECOFTC-led scoping report and the workshop participants further highlighted the importance of mangroves and mountain ecosystems, which provide ecosystem services on a massive scale for many people in the region but are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Participants proposed that it is inappropriate to rank landscapes by urgency of attention required since different stakeholders have equally legitimate perceptions and interests about this and the needs and opportunities can shift as local, national and regional political and economic contexts also change.

## Ways of working — to strengthen prospects of reversing environmental degradation

**Strengthen collaborations and build new partnerships among existing complementary initiatives:** there are many ongoing initiatives in the region that are working to reverse environmental degradation and put some emphasis on research-to-action. See Annex 2 for a list of initiatives highlighted in the workshop. The organisations championing those initiatives have complementary networks and can support each other and build synergies where possible. For example, the Mekong Institute facilitates collaborations among governments and other civil society stakeholders and can provide opportunities for civil society organisations and researchers to use evidence to influence policies in the region. Different initiatives may provide different but complementary capacity building for the same stakeholders. Partners can share announcements and knowledge of different and complementary funding opportunities among their networks. The REDAA programme should aim to join and help foster this partnership, not duplicating but supporting and complementing other initiatives. Partnership can also ensure that lessons learnt and good practices are shared and utilised to inform policy and practice. Some initiatives can be effective at bringing local experiences to international policy forums, and programmes like REDAA can foster cross-regional learning, as well as intra-regional learning, about good natural resource governance practices and research-to-action tactics.





### Box 1. Investing in capacity that enables more funding to flow to locally led initiatives

While there is increasing recognition from many donors of the importance of providing direct support to locally led initiatives, experiences from those existing funding mechanisms also highlight that funders can often underestimate the time and resources needed to provide capacity-building support to make funds accessible for local actors, especially those who have previously been excluded from such funding opportunities. Some examples shared during the workshop include:

- Catering to diverse capacity needs: Capacity needs can vary a lot among local organisations, so tailored training and mentoring or coaching is often needed to fill different capacity gaps.
- Forging consortiums: Some local organisations may have complementary skills and, while individually they may not have sufficient capacity to be funded, funders can help facilitate and encourage organisations to work together and build strong proposals collaboratively.
- Overcoming language barriers: Many local organisations may not be proficient in English, for example, and may require dedicated budget support for translation and proofreading, even in proposal development stages.
- Supporting financial management and monitoring: Many local organisations have limited financial management and monitoring capacities. On one hand, donors will need to simplify their financial and technical reporting requirements for those organisations, but on the other hand, targeted capacity-building support on the basis of a good project prospect can help recipients improve their management and reporting capabilities.

Such experience suggests that effective grant-making to local groups requires an iterative process, where tailored support is provided to local organisations from the proposal development stage all the way through to project conclusion and final reporting. It also requires patient funding that can potentially continue to invest in capacity building in those local organisations such that they can access further necessary support in the long term.

### **Mobilise and advocate for more patient public financing for locally led initiatives:**

there are increasing numbers of initiatives in the region aiming to address the existing funding gap for locally led initiatives, for example: EXPLORE channels research funding and provides capacity building for local university research groups to improve forest landscape governance; Forest Foundation Philippines provides grants and technical assistances to local organisations and individuals that empower people to protect and conserve forests; the Non-Timber Forest Products — Exchange Programme (NTFP-EP) provides small grants to local communities to effectively manage and develop non-timber forest products and other resources; VOICE provides accessible grants to local



formal organisations and networks as well as informal groups to amplify and connect often marginalised voices. These initiatives, and others, can share lessons learnt in administering funding and use their collective experience to demonstrate the value of such grants, highlighting challenges in making funds effectively flow to local actors and tactics to address those challenges. See Box 1 for some of the lessons learnt about such funding that were discussed during the workshop.

## Next steps for REDAA

Building on the scoping paper, survey results and the co-design work done in the workshop, the REDAA team will now install the priorities identified in the strategy for the REDAA programme. These priorities can be summarised as follows:

REDAA's priority in Southeast Asia is to **support locally led initiatives — organisations with effective systems supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities' work** to improve their evidence, tools, civic space and governance powers. Such locally led context-specific initiatives could be on:

- Research capability and local research networks
- Multi-stakeholder governance of landscapes and restoration initiatives
- Integrated multi-objective participatory land use assessments
- Business models that are sustainable, equitable and climate resilient
- Financing mechanisms for locally led initiatives that are direct, patient and long term.

In addition, REDAA will encourage initiatives that: are youth-led or have strong youth engagement components; address climate change impacts and climate resilience; and consider and address migration and urban-rural dynamics.

REDAA will encourage action in certain ecologies and landscape types but will not prescribe a list of specific landscapes in which it aims to support initiatives. Rather it will encourage potential grantees to demonstrate in their proposals the rationale for their choice of scale and location (which could be at regional, national or specific landscape level).

REDAA will aim to work through organisations with proven systems supporting Indigenous Peoples and local communities' work by offering support and grants of an appropriate size to those organisations. This proposed 'support for the supporters' of local organisations recognises: the proportionately high level of investment of time and resources that are needed to build trust and support effective capacity among small local organisations; and the many existing effective organisational systems and processes in the region that already support smaller local groups which REDAA can build upon.

REDAA will also aim to support grantees to learn from each other and to facilitate intra- and cross-regional learning.

The facilitators of the workshop would like to thank the participants for generously offering their time and expertise, and the REDAA programme team invite comment on this report, which can be sent to: [enquiries@redaa.org](mailto:enquiries@redaa.org)



## Annex 1. Participant list

Name	Organisation
Jian Wang	Mekong Institute
Jose Andres Canivel	Forest Foundation Philippines
Muhammad Alif Sahide	University of Hasnuddin, South Sulawesi
Kate Mana-Galido	The Non-Timber Forest Products – Exchange Programme (NFTP-EP)
Irish Baguilat	Asian Farmers Association
Martua Sirait	The Samdhana Institute
Khoem Koembuoy	Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI)
Phoutthasinh Phimmachanh	Lao Farmer Network
Jonathan E Koehuan	Department of Agricultural Engineering, The Artha Wacana Christian University
Tun Tun Zaw	Myanmar Environmental Rehabilitation-conservation Network (MERN)
Ohnmar Myo Aung	Landesa
Samuel Thomas	The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

### Resource people for the workshop:

FCDO: Victor Bernard

RECOFTC: David Ganz, Pete Cutter, Ronnakorn Triraganon, Sirichai Saengcharnchai, Martin Greijmans, Regan Pairojmahakij, Sophie Lewis, David Gritten

IIED: James Mayers, Xiaoting Hou-Jones

## Annex 2: Some existing initiatives in Southeast Asia that address environmental degradation with some emphasis on research-to-action

Initiative	Objective and main activities	Geographic focus	Lead	Funder	For more information:
EXPLORE	A research network dedicated to expanding and applying knowledge on forest landscape governance in Southeast Asia. It provides research grants and capacity building for small universities and research institutes across the region.	Viet Nam, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia	RECOFTC	SIDA	<a href="#">Link to website</a>
VOICE	A grant facility that supports the most marginalised people in ten low- and lower-middle-income countries in Africa and Asia. It aims to amplify and connect unheard voices in efforts to leave no one behind through providing accessible, user-friendly and innovate grants to (local) formal organisations and networks as well as informal groups.	Laos, Cambodia, Philippines, Indonesia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania	OXFAM, Novib and Hivos	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs	<a href="#">Link to website</a>
Mangrove forests, climate change and livelihoods	The programme aims to strengthen the coastal tenure rights for up to 73 million people while mitigating up to 943 million metric tons of carbon and protecting up to 4.6 million ha of mangrove forests in the Bay of Bengal and Southeast Asia. The programme offers guidance around forest tenure, land use planning, climate mitigation and adaptation to regional policy bodies as well as bilateral policy collaborations between countries.	Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, West Bengal (India)	LANDESA	King Philanthropies and other supporters	<a href="#">Link to website</a>



Sustainable Rural Development for the Asia Pacific Farmers' Programme	The programme aims to contribute to an enabling environment for rural poverty reduction through support to rural smallholders and their organisations at the national, sub-national and regional levels in Asia and the Pacific. As part of programme, there are small grants provided directly to farmers' cooperatives and organisations to build sustainable businesses as well as support to national and regional-level platforms to build capacity and organise smallholder farmers.	29 countries in the region	Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development (AFA)	IFAD	<a href="#">Link to website</a>
Forest Farm Facility	The programme provides direct financial support and technical assistance to strengthen forest and farm producer organisations representing smallholders, rural women's groups, local communities and Indigenous Peoples' institutions.	Global programme. In Asia, there are regional collaborations with AFA and country-level activities in Vietnam.	FAO, IIED, IUCN, Agricornod	Sweden, Germany, Finland, Netherlands, EU-FLEGT, US, Norway	<a href="#">Link to website</a>
The Pastor Rice Small Grants Fund (PRSGF)	A community-oriented grant facility that provides small grants for grassroots organisations to build up and strengthen their capacities in conservation, food security, health and sustainable resource use and livelihoods with particular attention to: - Inclusive, sustainable and gender-just climate actions - Innovative and sustainable solutions to environmental and poverty-related issues - Empowerment and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women and youth, and - Partnership and collective action initiated and led by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women or youth.	Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, India	NTEP-EP	Various	<a href="#">Link to website</a>



Sustainable Energy and Environment Department, Mekong Institute	<p>Under this department, Mekong Institute aims to open more investments in the green economy by enhancing micro- small, and medium-sized enterprises and strengthen resilience of farmers and the private sector. It also facilitates multi-sectoral coordination and cooperation through policy dialogues to promote good practices, lessons learnt and opportunities that will protect environmental sustainability, food security and livelihoods. Under this department, examples of ongoing projects include: sustainable development in the Lower Mekong Basin on the water, energy and food nexus which focuses on providing technical solutions based on needs of Lower Mekong Basin countries; and facilitation of various regional knowledge networks to influence policy, including Greater Mekong Subregion knowledge network and ASEAN Climate Resilience network.</p>	Mekong Institute	Link to <a href="#">website</a>	
Forest Foundation Philippines	<p>A non-profit organisation providing grants and technical assistance to individuals and organisations that protect and conserve the forests. It has supported over 700 projects since it was established in 2002.</p>	Philippines	Forest Foundation Philippines	Governments of Philippines and US
SUMERNET — Sustainable Mekong Research Network	<p>Building research for policy towards sustainable development in the Mekong Region. In its current phase to 2028 the programme supports initiatives in the network focused on reducing water insecurities for all, in particular the poor, marginalised and socially vulnerable groups of women and men in the Mekong Region.</p>	Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam	Secretariat Stockholm Environment Institute— Asia office at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok	Sida



KONEKSI	KONEKSI aims to achieve an enduring relationship between Indonesia and Australia that advances mutual interest and supports Indonesia's inclusive and sustainable development. KONEKSI's purpose is to increase the use of knowledge-based solutions for inclusive and sustainable policies and technologies with the priority theme on	Indonesia	Australia and Indonesia governments	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australia	<a href="#">Link to website</a>
Vulnerable Deltas in Southeast Asia: Climate Change, Water Pollution, and Socio-Economic Transformation	The project engages in capacity-building learning activities, building co-teaching modules and multimedia outreach capacities for producing applied knowledge on the sociocultural and biophysical transformations needed to protect important but vulnerable deltas in Southeast Asia. The project also aims to build bridges between China and Southeast Asia by focusing on China's direct investment into the region and its social environmental impacts on delta environments, including plastic waste.	Southeast Asia with main focus in three important deltas	East West Center	Henry Luce Foundation	<a href="#">Link to website</a>