Making science useful for policy and practice: reflections on how research organisations can support a more sustainable future

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SEI Stockholm Environment Institute

Who we are: SEI at a glance







Non-profit international research institute, founded in 1989

Focus areas: climate, environment, sustainable development.

Combining the academic excellence of a university with the agility to accelerate implementation

Our researchers contribute to high-impact publications, projects, global and regional governance and UN programs.

We work across sectors to deliver policy relevant research and tools

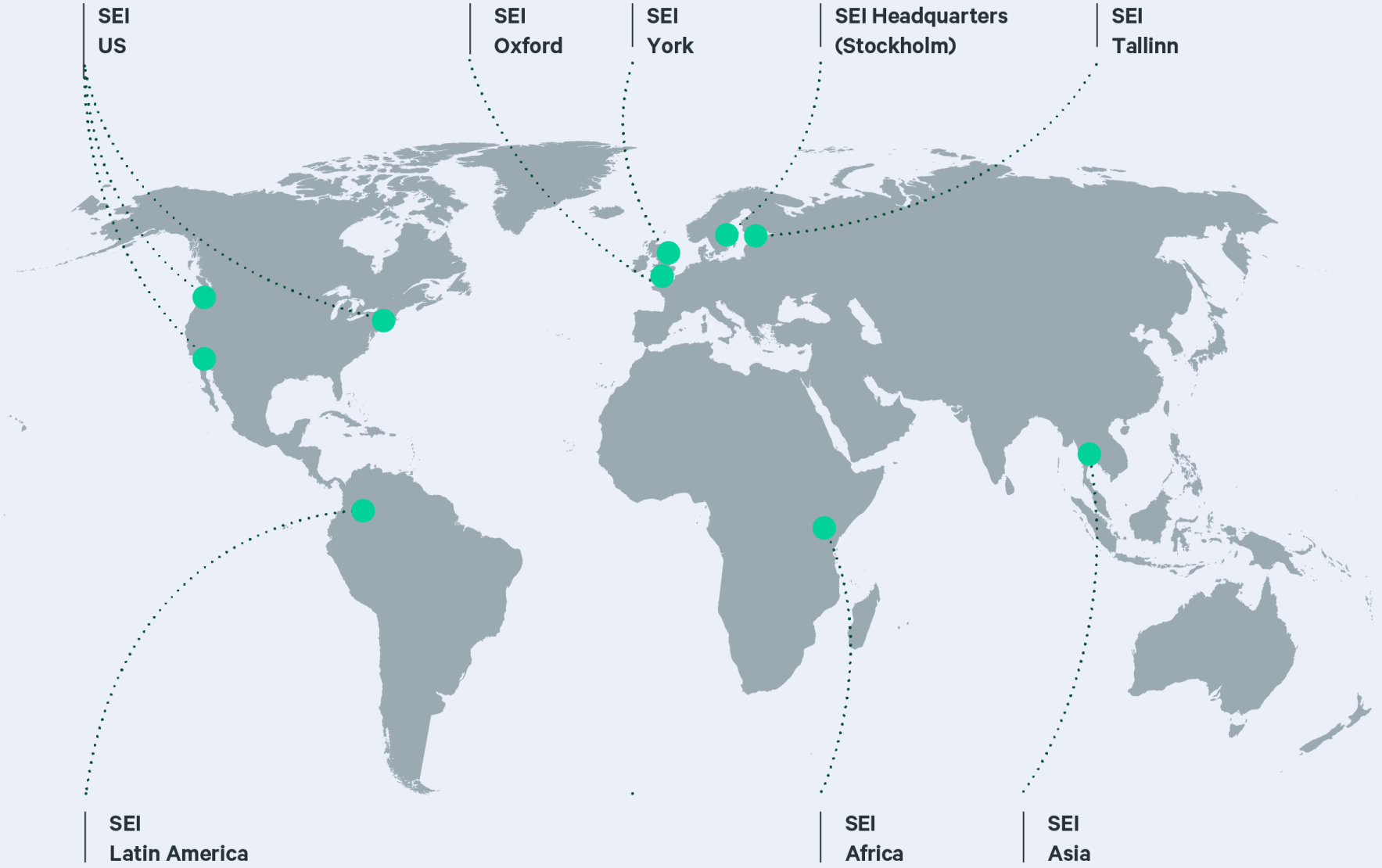
With our partners, we drive systemic change in by working across siloes and disciplines.

Photo: SEI Asia

SEI global

8 centres on 5 continents

Multicultural teams deeply embedded in local and regional contexts and connected for greater impact



SEI research drives global impact – some examples

- The originators of the **2°C climate target** behind the Paris Agreement
- Produced the UN-backed **Production Gap Report** on fossil fuel phase-out
- Built **LEAP** and **NEMO** tools, shaping the climate goals (NDCs) of 60+ countries (21% of global population)
- Co-created **Trase**, mapping trade flows and influencing EU deforestation rules
- Developed **WEAP**, used in 100+ countries for climate-smart water planning
- Enabled **IKEA** to become a leader on air-quality transparency in corporate climate reporting

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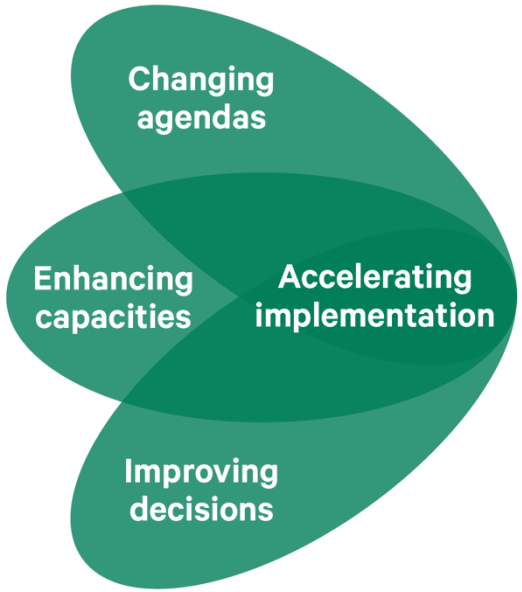
Theory of change

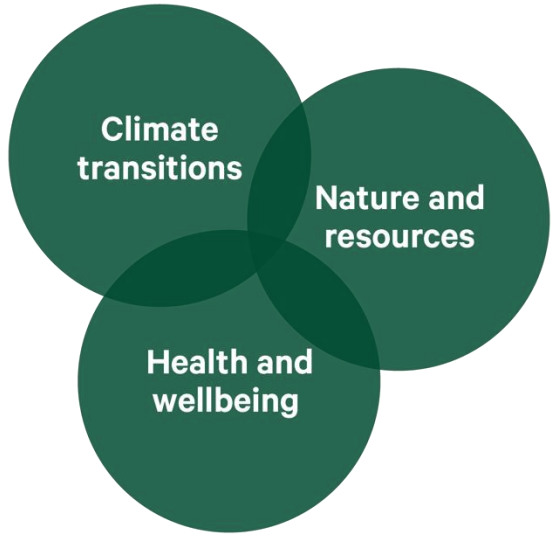
Outputs

- Scientific research
- Tools and data
- Knowledge co-production
- Networks
- Training and education
- Policy and practitioner engagements
- Communications
- Media

Outcomes

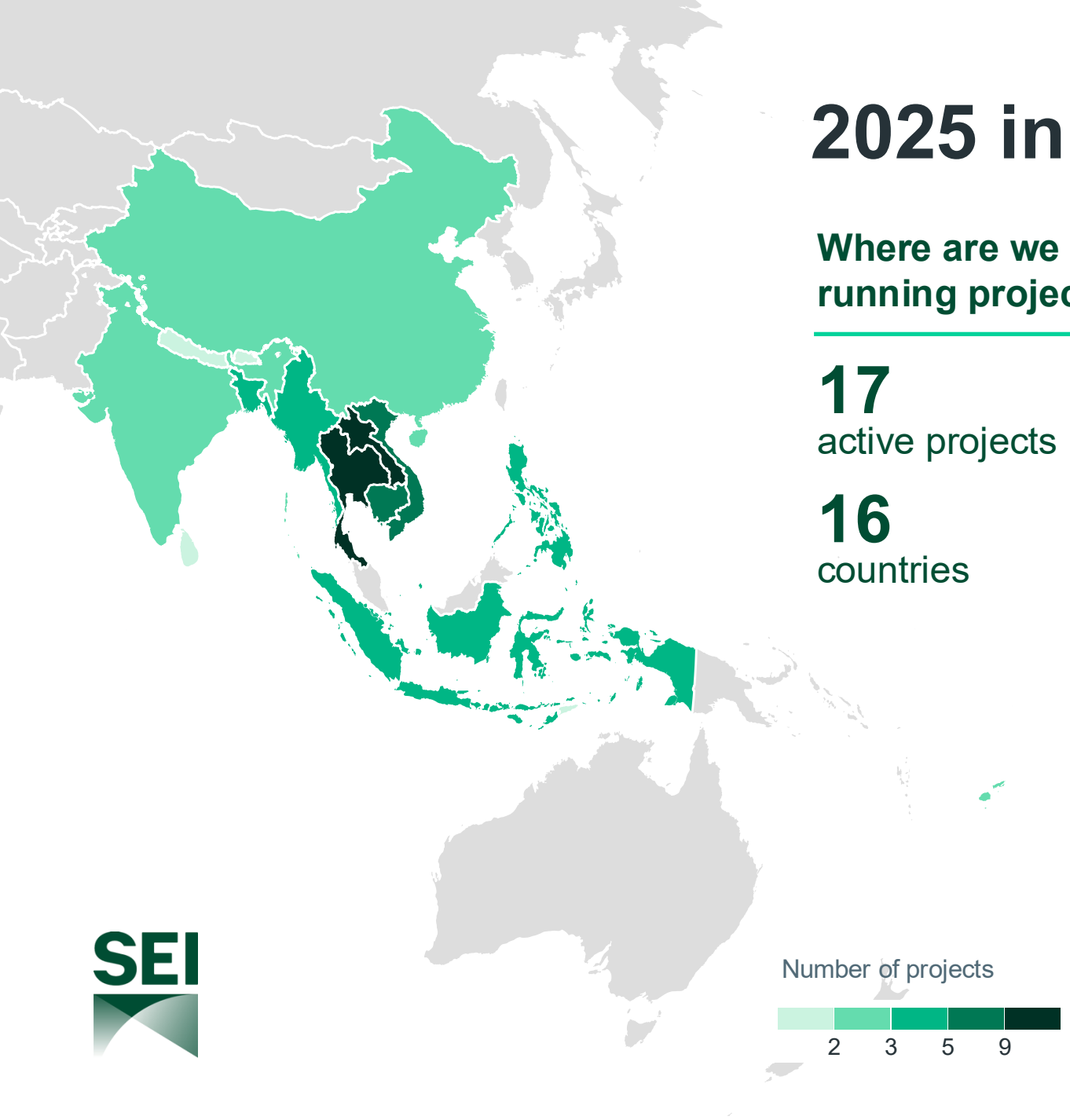


Impact



Enablers

Scientific excellence	Trusted partnerships	Operational excellence	Communications for impact
Societal relevance	Financial resilience	Competence and culture	One SEI



2025 in numbers

Where are we running projects?

17
active projects

16
countries

Our team

45
employees

21
nationalities

Wide variety of funding sources

7.5
million USD funding

Widespread communication

33
scientific publications

22
blogs and features

6
multimedia content

8
instances of media coverage

Research themes



Climate adaptation, disasters and migration



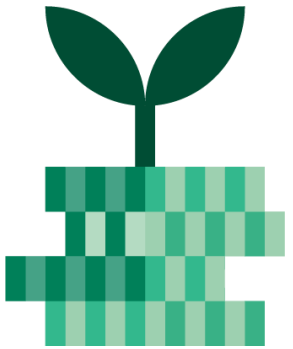
Gender, environment and justice



Water resources management and climate smart agriculture and food systems



Urban health and wellbeing, air quality, waste management and circular economy



Accessible and efficient climate finance

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Policy and practice impact examples

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Saving lives from flash floods on the Thailand–Myanmar border



Photo: SEI Asia



1

A region at risk

Every monsoon season, flash floods sweep through the Sai-Ruak River basin, destroying homes, roads and livelihoods. In the floods of 2021, the early warning system failed, exposing a critical gap in the knowledge and institutions needed to protect local people.



2

What did SEI do?

Working with local partners, SEI carried out water modelling and a baseline assessment of water resources, developing tools for local authorities and communities to help prevent floods and respond effectively.



3

From research to early warning

The assessment directly guided the identification of five new hydro-met monitoring stations. SEI researchers also helped build an app that for detailed local flood and drought warnings, putting timely, actionable information in the hands of those at risk.

Collaboration for lasting flood resilience



Bridging borders and institutions

The project built the cross-border relationships and shared data infrastructure that communities depend on when flood waters rise.



Science that reaches decision-makers

SEI’s flood modelling gave Mae Sai's mayor the evidence needed to plan infrastructure investments and collaborate across borders.



Serving exposed communities

SEI is now developing land-use scenarios linked to climate projections, working with local policymakers to ensure science serves communities at risk.

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The business case for cleaner air: bringing pollution into corporate sustainability reporting



Photo: Radski Photography



1

A neglected threat with enormous costs

Air pollution is the second-leading cause of death worldwide – including for children under five – and costs an estimated 6.1% of global GDP. But businesses have lacked a way to account for their emissions.

2

Breakthrough methods help businesses report emissions

In 2025, SEI published the Integrated Guide for Business Greenhouse Gas and Air Pollutant Emission Assessment in 2025.

3

Designed for uptake

The guide allows businesses to extend their environmental reporting in a familiar, practical way, rather than building new systems from scratch.

Leading the private sector



Accountability in the private sector

SEI, as technical lead of the World Economic Forum's Alliance for Clean Air, worked with Maersk, Inter IKEA Group, Haleon and Oracle to help them include air pollutants in their reporting for the first time.



Embedding air quality in global standards

Global Logistics Emissions Council's 2025 framework (used by 180+ multinationals and suppliers) now includes air pollutants, via SEI's collaboration with Smart Freight Centre.



EU points thousands of businesses to the guide

A 2024 voluntary EU sustainability reporting standard issued now directs businesses to SEI's integrated guide to quantify their emissions.



A momentum shift for public health

SEI's work connects business accountability to one of the world's most serious public health challenges.

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“SEI provided crucial technical expertise … and were collaborative and focused technical partners, ensuring their work was adapted to the logistics sector whilst retaining its technical rigour. By integrating its guidance into the globally recognized GLEC Framework, SEI’s work has reached over 2000 logistics experts since 2025 – giving shippers, carriers and logistics providers a familiar methodology to calculate air pollutants and accelerate cleaner transport.”

– Rebecca Powell, Global Logistics Emissions Council (GLEC) Program Manager, Smart Freight Centre

Key pillars to support change in policy and practice

- Do your research – credibility, innovation, neutral
- Make your research findings accessible – pragmatic
- Work in partnerships outside academia
- Listen to understand what useful looks like
- Build trusting relationships
- Communicate in plain and simple language
- Timing and priorities – we can only take it so far



Thank you for your attention

SEI