

Long-term action plan (LTAP) 2016–2021

- approved by the Executive Board of Siemenpuu Foundation on 20 May 2015

Siemenpuu Foundation supports cooperation among civil society actors internationally. It was founded in 1998 by fifteen Finnish environmental and development policy NGOs and is today a recognized supporter and partner of civil society movements in developing countries.

Mission statement

The objective of Siemenpuu Foundation is to promote environmental protection and democracy, to defend human rights, and, particularly, to advocate cooperation among environmental and alter-globalist civil movements. The Foundation supports sustainable practices, conceptions and forms of culture that preserve and protect biological and cultural diversity instead of encouraging overconsumption. The conveying of and learning from the experiences in the Global South is an integral part of the Foundation's work.

Siemenpuu Foundation supports NGOs in developing countries through development cooperation funds provided by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland. This support strengthens the possibilities of civil societies in the Global South to act for their environment and to help improve the state of the environment both in the South and North.

Siemenpuu Foundation is an expert on the central issues of the projects it supports. It advocates cooperation between civil movements in the South and North.

Context

The rate of global environmental degradation is accelerating, despite numerous well-meaning attempts to counter this development. The latest data on the intensity of climate change, the decrease in biodiversity, the pollution of air, water and earth, and the destruction of ecosystems motivate pursuing deeper and wider social changes.

The modern industrial culture, economy based on continuous growth, rising inequalities, increasing environmental pressures and population growth, and the economic-technical understanding of nature are among the causes of environmental problems. In order to solve these problems at their source, Siemenpuu Foundation considers it crucial to identify the root causes of environmental problems by applying e.g. scientific knowledge and understanding coming from the experience.

In many countries, the possibilities for civic participation are weak and worsening due to restrictive governmental policies and violent pressure by individual actors. Nevertheless, the willingness for and activeness in promoting positive change is strong within civil movements. Major improvements in the status of local communities and in the consideration given to environmental issues have indeed been achieved through civic participation.

Project funding

During this LTAP period, Siemenpuu Foundation strives in particular to improve the equal opportunities of threatened communities in the Global South, and NGO actors defending their rights, to participate in international advocacy work regarding environmental issues, human rights and democracy. The aim is to resolutely transform such local, regional and global structures and factors that lead to violations of local communities' rights, excessive use of natural resources and environmental pollution. Improving the status of women and dismantling patriarchal structures is an important part of this transformation.

General project cooperation criteria

The following criteria are applied in preparing and making project funding decisions. The criteria are used to assess the expediency of project funding and the conditions for the projects' success. Partners may be supported in developing their work towards the direction pointed out in the criteria.

- the work aims at improving the environment
- the work aims at improving the status of disadvantaged groups and communities in an environmentally, culturally, economically and politically sustainable way
- communities participate in defining, planning and implementing the work
- priority is given to NGOs, networks and movements working at the grassroots level, and to those supporting them
- the work aims at improving opportunities for civic participation and making political decision making more democratic and transparent
- the work advances civic society networking and cooperation
- the work is non-violent
- the work promotes gender equality and the rights of marginalized groups, such as the people with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and ethnic, religious and sexual minorities
- the activities and results are, to the extent possible, repeatable with local resources and expertise after the project funding ends
- the work entails new and innovative approaches whenever possible
- the funded organization is formally registered, has the means to administer project funding, and is democratic and egalitarian in its internal decision making

Project funding clusters

In order to increase effectiveness, project cooperation is developed by grouping projects and partnerships into operational clusters per stated goals and geographical regions. Within these clusters, new partnerships and projects to be funded are identified in accordance with separately defined, more precise delineations. The number of projects is limited in order to deepen cooperation and improve the quality and effectiveness of the projects.

Project cooperation resources are channelled into the development of collaboration between partners and other stakeholders. The aim is in particular to achieve the following goals and to strengthen the ensuing set of objectives.

- strengthening the rights of local communities, in particular defending the rights of forest dwellers and other rural and coastal communities, and community based environmental protection
- improving the state of the environment, in particular the protection of biodiversity, saving rainforests and other essential ecosystems, stopping climate change, promoting renewable, socially and ecologically sustainable energy, and the struggle against environmental pollution
- comprehensive ecological democratization of society, in particular themes highlighted by our partners, such as *buen vivir*, *harit swaraj*, *ubuntu*, epistemic justice, *alternativas sistémicas*, climate justice and *Rights of the Earth*
- transition to sustainable economy, in particular reducing the social and environmental damage caused by energy economy, mining and corporate agriculture, and advocating solidarity economy and the commons

Projects are funded in South and Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America. Support is increasingly directed at the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Furthermore, those groups of people in other Global South countries whose life conditions, human rights or living environments are particularly vulnerable even in comparison to the majority of the LDC populations remain an important target for support. In directing the support, specific regional environmental values are taken into consideration as well. As for individual countries, at least Indonesia and India remain central targets during the entire LTAP period, and so will the Mekong Region.

The support recipients continue to range from local community NGOs to international professional networks. Ideally, as a result of such a wide spectrum of support recipients, the perspectives of local communities figure as much as possible in the initiatives launched by international civil movements. The goal is to strengthen this kind of cooperation.

Project cooperation continues to focus on bigger and longer partnerships. During the LTAP period, long-term partnerships are continued at least with the following partners: Jikalahari (Indonesia), Mekong Energy and Ecology Network (MEE Net) (Mekong), National Adivasi Alliance (India), South Asian Dialogues on Ecological Democracy (India and Nepal), Global Forest Coalition, La Via Campesina, MFC-Nyetaa (Mali). Through in-depth assessments and discussions, decisions on ending existing project cooperation and starting new partnerships are also made.

In justified cases, resources can also be used to develop smaller partnerships with community-based, administratively most challenging actors formed by the poor themselves.

Communication and information work

The Foundation's communication work aims at giving publicity in Finland to the issues advocated by Siemenpuu and the ideas arising from the cooperation in the South. The work focuses on raising Finnish people's awareness on environmental problems in the South and on introducing Southern voices, different kinds of realities and less harmful cultures into the Northern discourse. Emphasis is put on shared learning and dialogue between the South and North, so as to promote environmental protection, human rights, land, water and forest rights, ecological democracy, and good living (*buen vivir*).

The Foundation's communication is conducted mainly in Finland. Attention is drawn to the negative effects of global overconsumption, and more sustainable alternatives developed by the

Foundation's partners are introduced. The communication work aims at informing Finnish people about the environments of the communities in the South in the way the communities themselves see them and experience living in them. Dialogue supporting such understanding is advanced e.g. by organizing discussions, active workshops and brainstorming sessions during field and other visits. Dialogue is held for example regarding local and traditional knowledge.

The Foundation's international communication work advances cooperation among partners and provides support in the exchange of knowledge and experiences and in confronting different realities. The most important channel of international communication is the Siemenpuu Foundation website. The website is developed to better enable the sharing and spreading of information among the Foundation's partners, as well. Moreover, the communication work is developed as part of project cooperation, for example by funding joint international publications.

The Foundation's main communication channels are the website and other network communications, general brochures, publications and events. Once a year, a bigger communication project is implemented in which e.g. a high-quality book or a prominent event dealing with a single issue is produced. Other channels and methods are also applied in the communication work, including various art forms, reading circles and meetings. In planning the communication work, possibilities for new and different channels and ways of communicating are taken into consideration.

All Siemenpuu Foundation actors participate in the communication work. The Foundation can also engage in advocacy work jointly with partners.

Organization of activities

Project cooperation and the clusters of projects are supported and developed by volunteer groups consisting of members of Siemenpuu Foundation's executive board and council, representatives of the founding organisations, and other experts and activists. During this action plan period, the work and tasks of these groups are developed so as to further improve the operational prerequisites of volunteers and staff. The groups are crucial for identifying project cooperation partners, preparing project funding decisions, deepening cooperation and developing communication. The work of the groups is administered by members of board-appointed core groups, but meetings of the groups are generally open for everyone interested.

Intra-office division of labour is developed to make the projects' shared goals more visible and to increase the work's effectiveness. Human resources remain on current level in proportion to funding.

The council appointed by the founding organizations participates in developing the Foundation's work. It also selects executive board members. The executive board plays an active role in managing the Foundation's affairs. The board members' dedication and expertise is a major asset. The allocation of responsibility between the various actors of Siemenpuu Foundation is further elaborated during the LTAP period.

Cooperation with founding organizations is intensified to enhance expertise and to increase the work's effectiveness. Association with like-minded funders in other countries is also increased.