



**STRATEGIC**

**DIRECTION**

**2023 - 2027**



## About SIAS

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies, abbreviated as SIAS, is a policy research institute based in Nepal. Established in 2011 as a platform for advanced research, policy engagement, and scholarly exchange across Southasia, SIAS strives to become a 'Centre of Excellence' in policy research in Nepal and South Asia. Operating in a research-policy-practice interface, SIAS has expertise and experience in leading and contributing to impactful research and evidence-informed policy solutions in natural resources management; climate change, water, and urbanisation; disaster risk management; rural livelihoods, and ecosystem services; democratic processes and local governance. It aims to utilise its research to create state-of-the-art knowledge to understand, engage, and inform public policy decisions, capacitate researchers, policy actors and professionals, and contribute to sustainable development that leads to positive impacts on the people and the environment. Based in Kathmandu, it has been working in collaboration with research institutions in South Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

# Vision, Mission, Objectives, Governance



## Vision

SIAS envisions becoming a think tank that supports evidence-informed policy and practices and contributes to inclusive and sustainable development. It is committed to realising this vision and receiving regional and global recognition as a unique South-based high-quality policy research organisation.

SIAS's mission is to initiate, coordinate, nurture, organise, and promote critical knowledge, research, and scholarly learning in nature-society relationships and social, economic, and environmental issues that inform evidence-based policy-making in Nepal, South Asia, and beyond.



## Mission



## Objectives

- To conduct cutting-edge research and analysis and generate evidence-based, action-verified lessons and state-of-the-art knowledge to address environmental, socio-economic and political challenges.
- To engage with policy processes critically and constructively at local, national, and regional levels.
- To build and improve the capacity of the researchers, policy actors and professionals to evidence-informed policymaking.
- To inform academic communities, policymakers, local communities, and practitioners with rigorous analysis and outreach to help understand the problems and seek solutions.

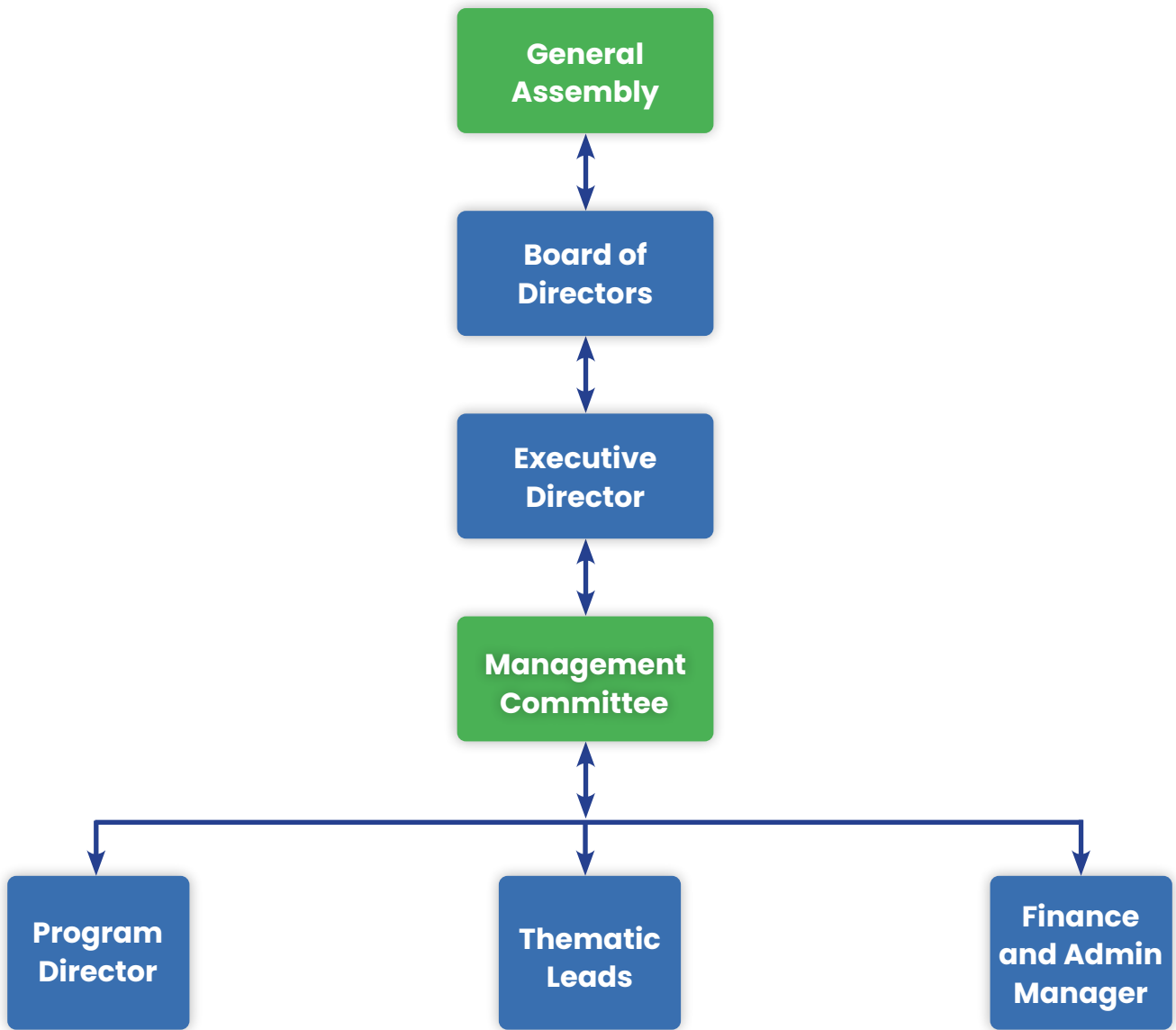


Figure 1: SIAS Governance

### SIAS Governance

SIAS is registered as a profit-not-distributing company in Nepal. It is governed by the Board of Directors (BoD) elected by the General Assembly. For internal management, there is a Management Committee (MC) chaired by the Executive Director (ED). The management committee comprises the Program Director, Research Director, Operation Head, and Finance and Administration Manager. The MC is accountable to the BoD (see Figure 1). Project Leaders are authorised to drive project activities, with strategic inputs from the ED and MC.

SIAS Board of Directors set out the general strategic direction and prepared and adopted the Administrative and Financial Policy 2011, which provides guidelines for the operation of SIAS finances, including the creation and maintenance of its accounts, handling of expenses and reimbursement, handling the petty cash, procurement, financial reporting, fund mobilisation, bank account, and audit. SIAS has also endorsed its Human Research Ethics Policy 2016, Publication and Authorship Policy 2018, and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Policy 2022 to ensure an inclusive research process and deliver high-quality outcomes.



## A decade of SIAS in a nutshell

In its 13<sup>th</sup> year, SIAS continues to work at the interface of research-policy-practice, linking science with public policy-making and local practices to positively impact people's lives. The central focus of its work has been on conducting cutting-edge research, doing policy analysis, and engaging in policy processes to seek solutions to a range of problems in environment and climate change, natural resources management, urban and disaster resilience, and promoting inclusive local governance. SIAS secured several highly competitive international research grants and forged partnerships with organisations like the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada, the Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF), UK Research and Innovation (URRI), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the UK, the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Swedish Research Councils (VR and Formas), and the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO), to name a few. It has developed professional networks with universities and research institutions in Southasia, Europe, Australia, and the Americas. SIAS is enhancing its research competency, human resources, and other organisational

capabilities to expand its research collaboration worldwide.

SIAS hosted the Secretariat of the Nepal Policy Research Network (NPRN), a loose network of policy research organisations in Nepal, and continues to publish the '[New Angle, a Nepali Journal of Social Science and Public Policy](#)'. The institute has also enriched its publications and expanded its outreach through diverse forms of research communications, including journal articles, books, book chapters, policy briefs, toolkits, blogs, and video documentaries. Continuing its focus on capacity enhancement, SIAS has offered fellowships and scholarships, supervised and coordinated training, exposure visits, and collaborative learning activities for early and mid-career researchers, professionals, local leaders, and graduate students. Generating research-based evidence, coordinating evidence-informed policy dialogues, and providing critical policy-relevant recommendations, SIAS has contributed to evidence-informed, cross-sectoral policy engagements, worked with diverse stakeholders at the local, provincial, and federal levels in Nepal, and organised research and scholarly exchanges at regional and international levels.



## Achievements in the past four years

In the last strategic period (2019–2021), which extended until August 2023, SIAS advanced policy-oriented research and engagements through its action research, focusing on four core themes: (i) Sustainable natural resources management, (ii) Climate change and disaster risk management, (iii) Water security and urban resilience, and (iv) Democratic processes and local governance followed by two cross-cutting themes, Gender equity and social inclusion and public policy processes. SIAS demonstrated its commitment to research excellence by continuously expanding its thematic focus and geographical coverage. Besides its established focus areas, SIAS has embarked on research initiatives in women entrepreneurship in the post-COVID context, the alarming wildlife problems for farming communities and its implications for food and livelihood security, and the role of community institutions in forest restoration. This expansion has also involved forging partnerships with new national and international collaborators and enhancing the institute's reach and impact.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, SIAS remained committed to research, policy engagements, and scholarly exchange, strategically adopting physical, virtual, and hybrid modes. Through innovative methodologies

such as transdisciplinary research and co-production, SIAS has continued its signature multistakeholder dialogue on water issues called *Pani Chautari* and embraced new approaches for stakeholder engagements and dialogues such as visioning workshops for risk-responsive urban planning, deliberative forums and participatory mapping of hazards and hydro-social knowledge. These strategic and methodological innovations have allowed the understanding and unfolding of the complexities added by climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, facilitated the exchange of ideas and experiences, and fostered meaningful national, regional, and international collaborations. Continuing the capacity-building activities, SIAS convened training and seminars involving nationally and globally renowned researchers and provided emerging researchers the opportunities to participate in national and international conferences and short courses. During this period, SIAS published three issues of *New Angle* focusing on water security and sustainability and urban disaster risks. It also disseminated research findings and insights in Nepali and English, ensuring broader accessibility to evidence-based information, knowledge, and impact for inclusive and sustainable development outcomes.

# Theory of Change

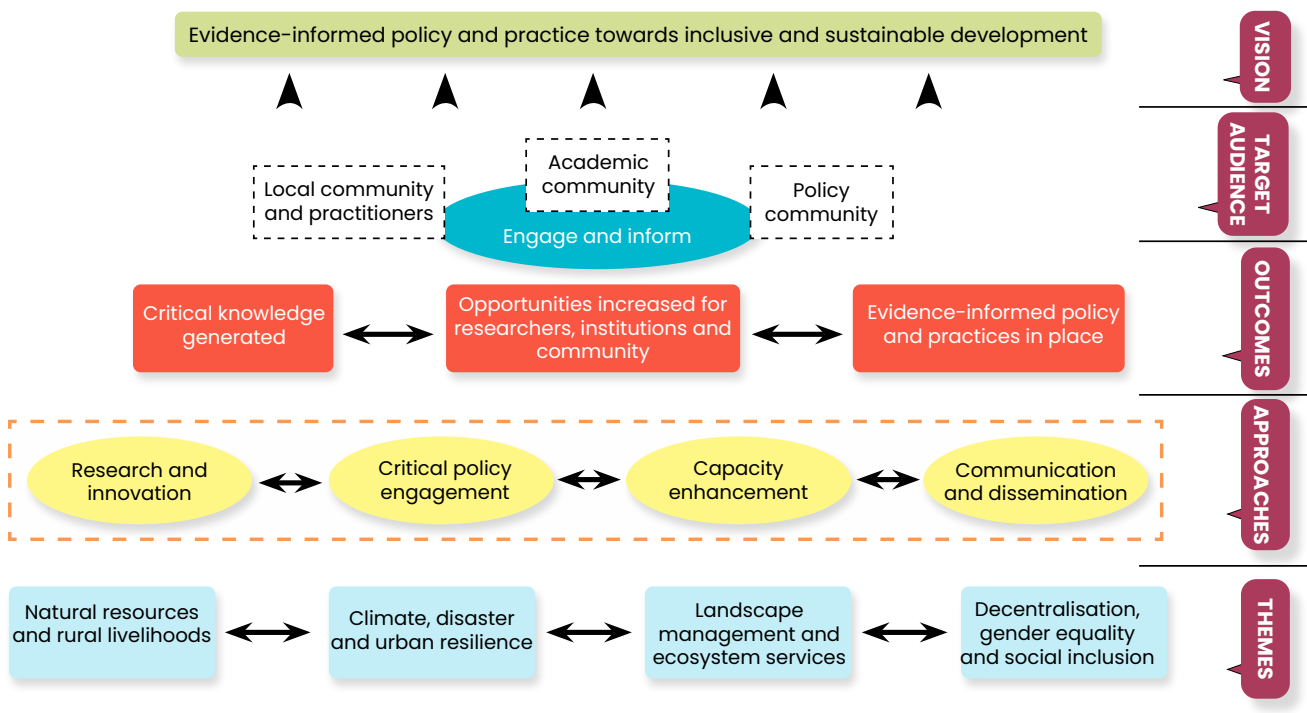


Figure 2: SIAS Theory of Change

SIAS has adopted the theory of change as its organisational development framework (Figure 2). The theory of change describes how it contributes to realising its vision of evidence-informed policy and practice towards inclusive and sustainable development. As illustrated, SIAS invests in research interventions and policy analysis that leads to achieving desired outcomes, informing its target audience, and contributing to achieving its vision. Considering the evolving socio-environmental and national policy contexts and research collaboration opportunities, SIAS has revisited its past thematic priorities and defined four central thematic areas: i. Natural resources and rural livelihoods ii. Climate, disaster,

and urban resilience iii. Landscape management and ecosystem services iv. Decentralisation, gender equality and social inclusion (Figure-2 themes). Working across these areas, SIAS strives to generate critical knowledge and evidence (Figure 2-outcomes) to inform and capacitate policymakers, practitioners, and academic communities (Figure 2-target audience) to foster evidence-informed policy and practices. In doing so, it adopts four interconnected approaches: research and innovations, critical policy engagement, capacity enhancement (of researchers and stakeholders), and communication and dissemination (Figure 2-approaches).

# Thematic Outcome Areas

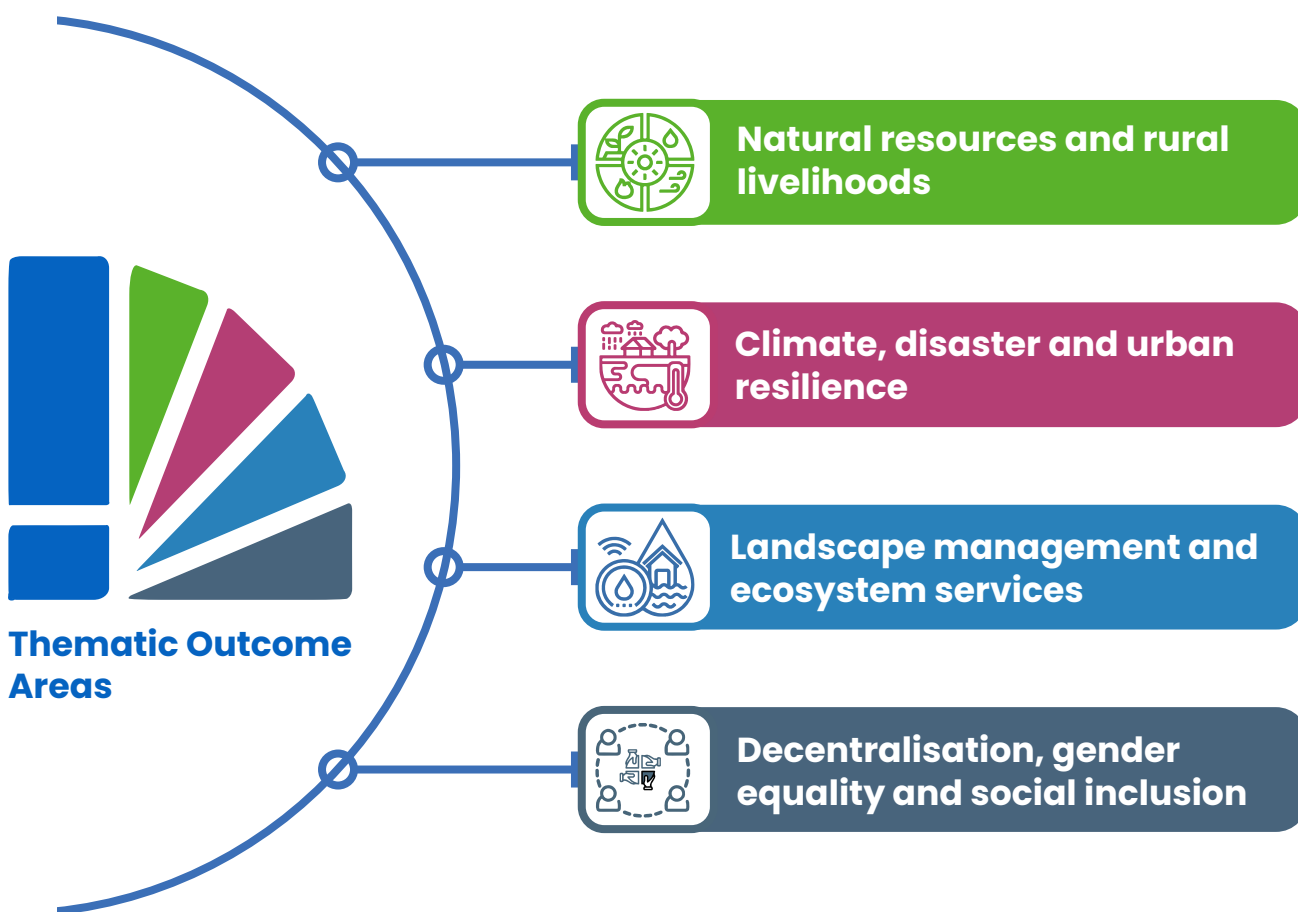


Figure 3: SIAS Thematic Outcome Areas

## Natural resources and rural livelihoods

The livelihoods of communities in the Himalayas heavily rely on natural resources such as forests, water, and agricultural land. Rapid socio-economic changes and growing out-migration have changed resource landscapes, people's livelihood strategies, management priorities, and practices and affected rural communities in many ways. Social hierarchies based on caste, class, gender, and other intricate power relations intersect with these changing rural dynamics and perpetuate inequities and injustices in natural





resource governance. In addition, climate change has posed unsettling challenges to water availability and agriculture, disrupted the communities' traditional practices, and increased vulnerability. SIAS recognises that addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach that heeds

the interlinkages of social, economic, and environmental dimensions. It continues critical research to unpack sociopolitical changes, strengthen the rural adaptive capacity, and contribute to transformative livelihood security in the Himalayas.

## Climate, disaster and urban resilience



Fragile geology and widespread poverty make the Himalayan Region a hotspot for climate change impacts and susceptible to disasters. Rapid and haphazard urbanisation at the expense

of rural and peri-urban land and livelihoods, and informal settlements proliferating in the risk-prone areas have further escalated disaster risks in the region. Given the socio-economic and geographic diversity in the Himalayan region, climate-friendly developments such as transitioning to renewable energy technologies can also reinforce inequalities and injustices. Considering the exposure of the Himalayan people to multiple hazards and uncertainties, SIAS adopts a broader perspective on risk and undertakes research promoting inclusive and improved disaster management and effective climate change adaptation, mitigation, and resilient development strategies.

## Landscape management and ecosystem services

Landscape management and the provision of ecosystem services play a crucial role in addressing the challenges faced in the Himalayas. Restoring degraded landscapes helps recover ecosystem functions, rejuvenate springs, and other water sources, reduce the risks of water scarcity and water-induced disasters, and enhance local livelihood opportunities and



biodiversity. SIAS aims to unfold the interlinked drivers and processes of watershed degradation and facilitate the integration of local and traditional knowledge and experiences. Through context-suited, science-informed, and inclusive approaches, SIAS aims

to strengthen local capacities in designing, piloting, and adopting nature-based solutions for sustainable environmental management practices and improved food, water, and livelihood security.

## Decentralisation, gender equality and social inclusion



The newly adopted federal structure in Nepal, with significant authority and resources devolved to the sub-national governments, has facilitated decentralised resource governance. Yet, many local governments still lack institutional capabilities to exercise their authority. In addition, gender and other social identity-and-class-based disparities continue to hinder inclusive and equitable development in the

country and the region. The COVID-19 pandemic aggravated the challenges, particularly for women, poor and marginalised groups enduring the effects of climate change and structural inequalities. In light of these intricate contexts, SIAS has integrated decentralisation, gender equality, and social inclusion as cross-cutting aspects in the above-mentioned three core themes. Additionally, SIAS is undertaking dedicated research to unpack and comprehend the compounded impacts of the pandemic and climate change on women and women-led businesses in Nepal. It aims to co-produce workable solutions for developing financially sustainable and shock-resilient agriculture and forest-based enterprises contributing to women's economic self-reliance. Moreover, SIAS recognises that the benefits and burdens of development are uneven and adopts an intersectional approach to understand and overcome societal discrepancies at all levels.

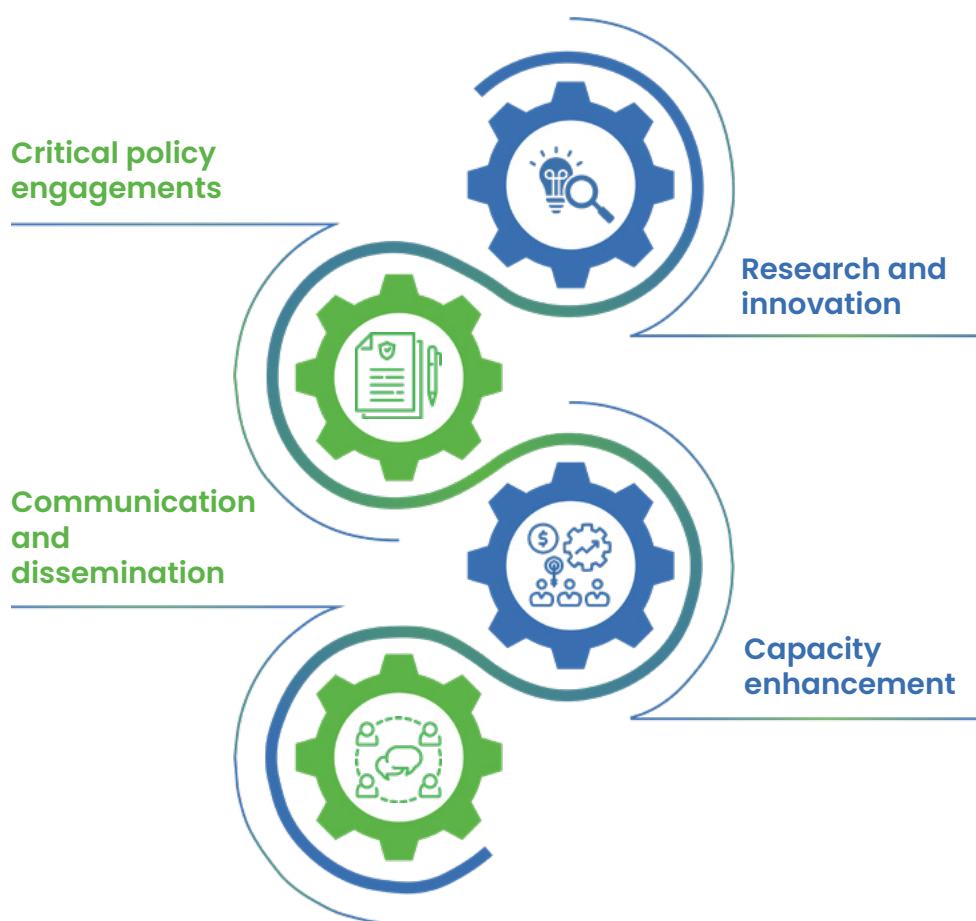


Figure 4: SIAS Approaches and Strategies

## Approaches and Strategies

Building on over a decade of research and policy engagements and acknowledging the feedback and inputs from its board members, staff, and stakeholders, SIAS endorses a collaborative and critical approach to research and innovation as one of

its central approaches in knowledge production, policy engagements, and capacity enhancement and research communication. The following section provides an elaborate description of the four approaches that SIAS has embraced (see also Figure 5).

## Research and innovation

SIAS has established itself as an eminent research organisation in Nepal with a global outlook. It acknowledges the value of pluralities of knowledge and aims to iteratively learn from and inform local practices, strengthen evidence-informed public policy processes, and enrich broader theoretical discourses around nature-society relations. Embracing the value of transdisciplinary research and co-productive approaches, SIAS has incorporated innovative methodologies such as '*pani chautari*' (water forum), visioning workshops, hazard and hydro-social knowledge mapping, deliberative forums, etc., as an integral part of its research. Building on rigorous and engaged research and methodological innovations, SIAS strives to stretch and deepen the understanding of socio-environmental problems, foster meaningful collaboration, and contribute to locally driven research-based policy processes and sustainable outcomes.

## Critical policy engagements

SIAS firmly believes in evidence-informed policymaking. Building on the knowledge gained from research, it engages in local to national policy processes, critical policy analysis, and multi-stakeholder dialogues in and across multiple sectors and at multiple levels. Policy briefs, blogs, critical analysis of policy texts, and deliberative platforms convened for policy debate using innovative tools such as policy labs (e.g., *Pani Chautari*- water forum, *Ban Chautari*- forestry forum, etc.) are the key research communication tools

SIAS draws on to convey clear policy messages and ultimately bridge the gap in the research and policy processes and theory and action.

## Capacity enhancement

SIAS recognises the importance of enhancing research capacity, expanding collaboration, promoting the research-policy-practitioner exchange of knowledge, and enduring collective efforts in achieving solutions to challenges the societies are facing. It continues to nurture young researchers and professionals through supervisory and funding support, internships, writing workshops, training, and research clubs and seminars. Besides research capacity enhancement activities, SIAS coordinates various co-learning events and facilitates platforms to enhance the capacity of stakeholders and beneficiaries toward democratic and sustainable resource governance. Responding to Nepal adopting a federal structure, SIAS has expanded its focus to engage with and capacitate local governments whilst also applying its research-based evidence and insights to inform the provincial and federal policy processes.

## Communication and dissemination

SIAS seeks to effectively communicate and disseminate research and policy analysis-based findings, insights, and knowledge to various stakeholders, including practitioners, policy actors, and the epistemic community. To cater to a diverse audience, SIAS produces a wide range of knowledge products such as research reports,



journal articles, books, book chapters, and discussion/working papers. Besides these academic publications, SIAS informs policy processes through policy briefs, policy reviews, and opinion-based articles such as blogs and newspaper op-eds, etc. published in English and Nepali languages.

Additionally, SIAS annually publishes 'New Angle', a national journal that specifically addresses public policy issues. Together, SIAS ensures that its research findings and analyses reach the intended audience and contribute to informed decision-making and public discourses.



Figure 5: SIAS research and policy engagement approach

# Strategic Future Priorities

Building on intense internal reflections among the SIAS management committee and staff, and iterative consultations with its Board and stakeholders, SIAS has set out six strategic priorities for the next four years (September 2023 to September 2027). These priorities are set out in line with its broader aim to generate and exchange state-of-the-art knowledge encompassing socio-economic, environmental, and political issues to strengthen science-policy-practice linkages.

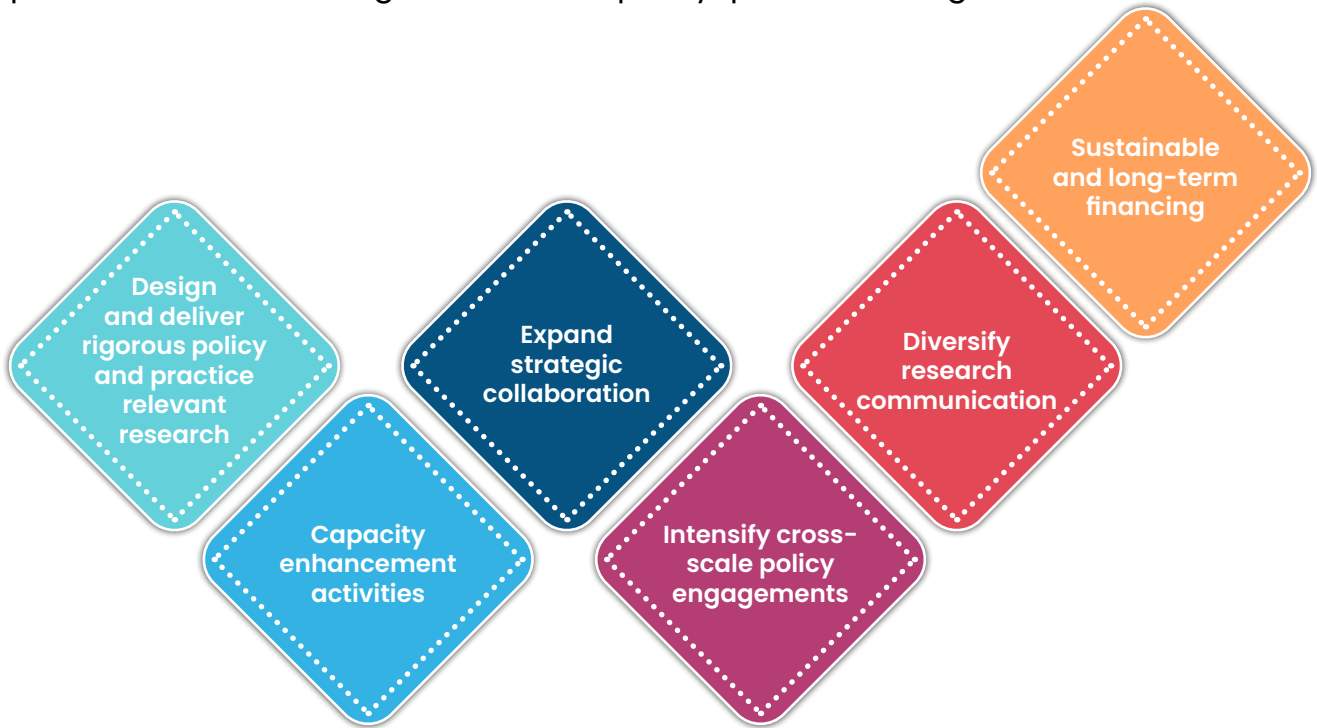


Figure 6: SIAS Strategic Future Priorities

## Design and deliver rigorous policy and practice relevant research

SIAS will maintain its focus on policy-relevant research around the aforementioned four core thematic areas to comprehend socio-environmental challenges and opportunities in the country and the region. Furthermore, SIAS will continue to generate rigorous research-based evidence on dynamic nature-society interactions and facilitate dialogues for evidence-informed policy processes and inclusive and sustainable practices.

## Capacity enhancement activities

Committed to nurturing and promoting critical knowledge, research, and scholarly learning, SIAS will continue to support emerging researchers, including its own staff, interns, and partners, towards improving their research competencies, analytical and reflective writing, and communication skills through tailored training, regular seminars, mentorship opportunities, and writing workshops. Encouraging inclusive and equitable resource governance, SIAS will also continue enhancing the capacities of practitioners, policymakers, and the



research and academic communities through research, policy dialogues, collaborative knowledge exchange, and research-informed pilot actions.

## Expand strategic collaboration

SIAS will work towards strengthening existing partnerships and develop these for long-term collaborations. Further, actively participating in regional and international events, networks, and platforms, SIAS will leverage its expertise in policy research to expand regional research partnerships and scholarly exchanges. It will also extend strategic alliances with policy think tanks, universities, and other research organisations at national, regional, and international levels.

## Intensify cross-scale policy engagements

SIAS has gained increasing recognition and trust as a credible research organisation for evidence-informed policy processes at the national and local levels. SIAS will make additional efforts to expand its policy engagement at the federal, provincial, and local levels, particularly with a focus on water and climate issues, and contribute to catalysing the shift from

sectoral to evidence-based integrated policy solutions, pivotal for sustainable nature-society relationships.

## Diversify research communication

SIAS will continue to produce a variety of scientific and policy outputs to communicate its research findings and translate them into policy messages. Prioritising the need to widen its research outreach and make research findings accessible to the public, SIAS will increase its publications in the Nepali language. This will be done by assigning a dedicated staff to update and improve its communication and outreach strategies.

## Sustainable and long-term financing

Along with diversifying its funding sources, SIAS will also focus on building long-term partnerships with relevant national, regional, and international institutions and continue lobbying for dedicated research funding from the Government of Nepal. Further, SIAS also aims to establish an endowment fund for generating resources for sustaining its core activities such as critical policy analysis and dialogues and research capacity building.