

## Program 1: Societal Transformation under Environmental Change

### **Program Goal**

This program aims at providing realistic perspectives and options to facilitate the transformation towards a society that can flexibly respond to environmental changes caused by human activities such as global warming and air pollution, as well as to natural disasters.

### **Mission**

To demonstrate the fundamental significance of global environmental sustainability for human society, we need to make the links between environmental change and natural disasters, and social issues such as livelihood, inequality, social security and conflict, intellectually explicit, and reinforce them in the real world. RIHN's Societal Transformation under Environmental Change research program contributes to this task.

The Program follows two lines of inquiry. The first conducts research on Asia's long-term paths of social and economic development in relation to climate change and environmental history. Such studies offer historical understandings of the human-nature interface, and evaluate each region's political and economic conditions and cultural and social potentialities in comparative perspective. For example, postwar development of the industrial complex along the Asia's Pacific coast was made possible by the combination of imported fossil fuels and utilization of rich local resources of land, water and biomass. Industrial development in the region produced both rapid economic growth and at times severe environmental pollution and degradation. It is important to recognize the causes and consequences of these historical processes in their own light, as well as for their significance to future societal change and policy deliberations.

The Program's second line of inquiry examines the kinds of motivations that affect people's livelihood, by working closely with various stakeholders in local society in Asia. Our project based in Sumatra's tropical peat swamp forest, for example, has identified four principal kinds of motivations—local livelihood; profit of local farmers and agricultural and industrial enterprises; local and centrally-based governance; and conservation measures implemented by governments, NGOs and international institutions—and examines how they can best be coordinated to promote sustainability at the village level. Project research also helps implement policies at local, national and international levels. This ongoing project, which cooperates with local universities, companies and officials, has already contributed to the development of regional and national policies to control peatland fires, which became a significant environmental issue in Indonesia and beyond.

This program coordinates a variety of research projects along these lines in order to develop a perspective that helps direct research and social transformation in Asia.