



Message from the Director-General

Most human beings have benefited greatly from modern civilization. If we continue down the current civilizational path, however, weather and water-related natural disasters will intensify, ecosystem degradation and loss of biodiversity will increase, and human livelihood, health, and safety will be at ever-greater risk. Modern civilizations have incessantly expanded the scale of production and consumption, but at nature's expense, and humans are both the perpetrators and victims of this path of development. The Covid-19 pandemic clearly shows the result, as it was caused by ever-expanding global human activities.

New technological fixes will not offer fundamental solutions to such complex problems, unless human lifestyles also change to achieve harmonious relationships with nature on Earth. For the last 20 years RIHN has conducted research with the awareness that the roots of global environmental problems are found in human culture. Based on the results of our past projects, it is time for us to promote new practical research.

Cultural diversity is based on the diversity of nature. However, nature forms ecosystems in which regions are connected through the circulation of materials and energy, while cultures insist on their uniqueness and are sometimes in conflict. Solutions to global environmental problems therefore depend on connecting cultures through common environmental ethics. Great traditions of Eastern environmental wisdom and experience still

exist, as do those of other regions; their valuable insights can help to break the deadlock in modern science and capitalism. It is for this reason that RIHN undertakes interdisciplinary research spanning the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and in recent years, has evolved towards transdisciplinary research seeking to expand the kinds of knowledge that are considered valid in scientific inquiry.

RIHN has recently established three Research Programs, one Core Program, and the RIHN Center to promote such research. We have enhanced collaboration within the institute, across the diverse research community linked to RIHN research projects, and with society in general. RIHN also collaborates with the international research platform Future Earth, which aims to integrate global environmental change research and contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. As part of this effort, RIHN hosts the Future Earth Asian Regional Centre to strengthen research collaboration and capacity building across the region.

We will strive to expand these activities in the coming years, and implement new research initiatives in the search for solutions to the many environmental challenges of our planet.

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RIHN Philosophy and Approach

Environmental problems now confront human communities at all scales. Despite extensive research carried out the disciplines, however, many environmental problems remain unresolved. There is therefore need to go beyond partial descriptions of discrete environmental problems in search of holistic understandings of their underlying causes and integrated approaches to their solutions.

The Research Institute for Humanity and Nature is a national research institute established by the Government of Japan in 2001. As a member of the National Institutes for the Humanities, RIHN research starts from the premise that environmental problems are rooted in human culture and societal values. RIHN's goal is to seek concepts, theories and mechanisms that enhance human quality of life in direct relation to environmental conditions and ecological processes. RIHN research therefore involves a normative dimension, as it asks what the relationship between humanity and nature ought to be. To this end, RIHN solicits, funds, and hosts integrative research projects investigating environmental change problems in specific settings. Research projects are undertaken by interdisciplinary teams at RIHN, working together with partner institutions and communities in Japan and abroad.

RIHN promotes the co-design and co-production of research, in which societal actors are directly involved in defining environmental problems and developing new research approaches and potential solutions.

RIHN research is increasingly transdisciplinary in that it seeks to redefine the role of science in society, improve dialogue between different traditions of knowledge, and stimulate new multi-actor local, national and international collaborations. This approach draws from

the natural and social sciences, arts and humanities, and engineering and design.

Environmental science cannot be conducted or applied uniformly to the world. RIHN science is informed by lived social practices and communal values, especially as found in Asia. The most populous region of the world, Asia is essential to any global sustainability. At the same time Asia is home to many examples of long-term cultural-ecological continuity whose significance to contemporary environmental challenges is still largely unstudied. RIHN depends on long-established research networks in Asia and contributes to transdisciplinary initiatives in the region, including by serving as host of the Regional Centre for Future Earth in Asia.

RIHN research is guided by the following three objectives:

- Conduct research that analyzes the interaction between humanity and nature and critically examines the sustainability of human societies, based on past RIHN research and international literature and experiences
- Apply research results to solve real-world sustainability problems
- Promote solution-oriented research on environmental challenges that is co-designed and co-produced in close collaboration with societal stakeholders

While other regions are not excluded, the primary geographical focus of RIHN research is on Asia. More broadly, RIHN strives to deploy an Asian perspective in its research on global environmental change.