

Theme: Urban

Inclusive approaches to addressing urban pollution

1. Rationale

Urban pollution is a topic of increasing concern as cities concentrate people, emissions, consumption levels and pollution risk. Worldwide, 80% of the urban population is breathing air with particulate matter (PM2.5) exceeding World Health Organization (WHO) standards¹. 80% of the world's wastewater is dumped, mostly untreated, into natural water bodies like lakes, rivers and oceans². The Asia Pacific region produced about 468 million tonnes of waste in 2016, of which less than 10% was recycled³. SDG 11 emphasizes on the importance of making cities sustainable through providing safe and pollution-free living conditions, yet there remain many challenges to achieving this goal.

Pollution has differential impacts on urban populations, as city dwellers face varying levels of exposure to emissions, access to infrastructural services and green spaces. The urban poor and informal workers may handle or be exposed to solid or liquid waste without adequate protection in their homes and workspaces, and outdoor workers such as street vendors may have significantly higher exposure to air pollution. Urban pollution therefore is more likely to have worse effects on the most vulnerable from an intersectional perspective, based on gender, race, class and age – and so tackling pollution is essential for closing gaps in social equality.

This thematic call for proposals pertains directly to the SEI Urban Cluster's objectives of addressing urban poverty, strengthening livelihoods, encouraging a transition into circular economy and good urban governance in Asian cities. The call seeks to fund an event focusing on innovative solutions and research methods addressing pollution that can be directly implemented in Asia and involves multi-stakeholder engagement including policy processes. The focus on urban pollution directly relates to the Urban Cluster's current projects including the Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution project focusing on understanding the sustainable manufacturing practices in South Asia; the 'Closing the Loop on Plastic Waste' project; a new research project on 'Towards inclusive urban waste systems'; and the ongoing City Health and Well-being Initiative on urban environments. As SEI expands its work on urban air quality, we are also interested in proposals which focus on this topic, for example building on the opportunities provided by the LEAP IBC tool.

¹ www.who.int

² www.unwater.org

³ Kaza, Silpa; Yao, Lisa C.; Bhada-Tata, Perinaz; Van Woerden, Frank. 2018. *What a Waste 2.0 : A Global Snapshot of Solid Waste Management to 2050. Urban Development*; Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/30317> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

2. Description

We invite submission of concept notes for a regional event that will consider the possibilities and challenges for inclusive approaches to addressing urban pollution (of air, water or land) in Asian cities alongside social dimensions (including gender, poverty reduction, human rights, and social equity). The possibilities for exploring new collaborative opportunities with a variety of stakeholders in addressing this issue should also be considered – including local communities, civil society, and the private sector. Two possible sub-themes are offered as the focus for the events, though proposals which combine the two are encouraged:

1) Innovations in pollution abatement

We are interested to explore innovative, small-scale research approaches or technologies that are in their preliminary stage of development or have been proven to be successful at the pilot scale. The proposed event could bring together stakeholders who are implementing low-cost technological solutions or carrying out research that involve stakeholders from different sectors, addressing the equity dimensions of indoor and/or outdoor pollution, developing inclusive urban design principles that can reduce pollution, innovations in public transportation, solutions for improving de-carbonization and energy efficiency, and consideration of the necessary institutional and financing frameworks to enable this. Proposals in this sub-theme *must* also consider the social, equity and policy implications of scaling up these pollution-abatement solutions.

2) Sustainable and equitable urban development

We are interested in policies, initiatives and local solutions that have balanced the twin goals of attaining inclusivity and environmental sustainability (specifically air, land or water pollution) outcomes in urban development processes. An event on this theme may cover topics such as understanding and addressing the impacts of urban pollution on marginalized urban residents (such as outdoor workers), the potential of the informal sector in contributing to the circular economy, gendered and human rights dimensions of pollution, the impact of pollution on livelihoods, health and well-being, and policies and projects working towards a 'just transition for all'. Proposals in this sub-theme should also consider the necessary policy, institutional and financial frameworks these initiatives require in order address both equity and environmental priorities at scale.

3. Expected results

This event aims to increase recognition of the issues and challenges of achieving equitable outcomes while reducing urban pollution, across a broad range of stakeholders. While showcasing promising solutions, the event should also consider the necessary enabling environments required for these solutions to be applied at scale, and the lessons learned in integrating environmental and equity priorities into urban development processes. Beyond the event itself, the connections made should foster interdisciplinary collaborations and avenues for researchers and practitioners to further work on urban pollution issues, including opportunities for collaboration with SEI.

The successful applicant will be expected to produce the following outputs after the event:

- A detailed report that highlights discussions at the event regarding the current situation, opportunities, challenges and suggested way forward for inclusive pollution reduction approaches
- A communications product such as a blog regarding the event and its outcomes for a general audience

4. Theme-specific criteria

The successful event proposal will meet the following criteria:

1. **Equitable and inclusive solutions:** The event should consider the theme of urban pollution with a direct focus on inclusive approaches to addressing the pollution challenge and ensuring equitable and sustainable urban development. This also means ensuring that gender, equity and human rights are cross-cutting themes at the centre of the agenda.
2. **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** The event should be organized in such a format as to be inclusive to a diverse array of stakeholders, such as population groups particularly exposed to pollution, researchers, NGOs and civil society groups, private sector and government representatives.
3. **Scalable and innovative ways forward:** The event should explore innovative, small-scale approaches or technologies that are in their preliminary stage of development or have been proven to be successful at the pilot scale. This may include initiatives and partnership programs that could be 'good practices' for managing urban pollution at the local level.
4. **Integrated and context-specific approaches:** the event should consider pollution in an integrated fashion, exploring opportunities to address other SDG priorities alongside the pollution challenge, bearing in mind the particular needs of Asian urban areas and policy environments.