

THE STRATEGIC COLLABORATIVE FUND PHASE II

2022 CALL FOR CONCEPT NOTES

Theme

Closing the loop: circular waste management in Asia's cities

About the Strategic Collaborative Fund

SEI Asia, with support from the Swedish government (SIDA), launched the Strategic Collaborative Fund Phase 2 (SCF2) programme in 2018 to enhance the current 2030 Agenda efforts in Asia. SCF2 aims to foster regional cooperation and policy dialogue for sustainable development and environmental sustainability through capacity building, knowledge sharing, and increased collaboration.

Human rights and gender equality are central to SCF2, as it champions regional and inter-regional collaboration for transboundary environmental policy development. To this end, the [Guidance Note on Integrating Gender and Human Rights-Based Approaches](#) in SCF2 supports the inclusion of gender equality and human rights into the SCF2 programme. We strongly encourage the potential partner organisations to use the note as a guide for developing the concept notes.

Learn more about the SCF2 programme and details for concept note submissions [here](#).

Specific Focus and Priority

The circular economy has been defined by the Ellen MacArthur Foundation as “an industrial economy that is restorative or regenerative by intention and design”.¹ Instead of a linear “take-make-waste” model, materials and products retain their value within systems, energy is recovered, and waste disposal is phased out – or, where unavoidable, effectively managed to be safe for human health and the environment.²

Despite growing momentum toward a circular transition, a focus on social equity and inclusivity is systematically excluded in both policy and practice.³ This event call aims to address this gap, considering distribution of opportunities, costs and benefits of circular models of waste management and how solutions can support marginalized and vulnerable urban populations such as the informal waste management sector.

¹ MacArthur, E. (2013). Towards the circular economy. *Journal of Industrial Ecology*, 2, 23-44.

² EU Science Hub. (2021). Waste and Circular Economy. Accessible at: <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/research-topic/waste-and-recycling>

³ Kirchherr, J., Reike, D., & Hekkert, M. (2017). Conceptualizing the circular economy: An analysis of 114 definitions. *Resources, conservation and recycling*, 127, 221-232.

Rationale

Together with Africa, the Asia-Pacific is the most rapidly urbanizing and industrializing region in the world, with 64% of the population projected to live in urban areas by 2050.⁴ Although these transformations have improved quality of life for many people, they also put significant pressures on natural resources and create challenges for sustainable development in the face of climate change.⁵ Landfills are approaching capacity, and rising incomes for some urban dwellers mean greater demand for consumer goods. The growing volume and diversification of waste streams compound these issues.⁶

Municipal authorities in developing countries can struggle to properly manage waste, with formal collection averaging 71% in East Asia and the Pacific and just 44% in South Asia. Even if waste is collected, 75% goes to open landfills in South Asia and 18% in East Asia and the Pacific.⁷ Open waste burning also remains a commonplace practice in many cities. Improper management of solid waste causes severe air, water, and soil pollution, which impacts human health and the environment, decreases urban liveability and is a major contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

The informal waste sector is critical to plugging the gap in many countries and plays a significant - and often unrecognised - role in reducing pollution. However, these jobs tend to be precarious, with irregular earning potential and little coverage by labour laws. There is often stigma attached to waste work, which is mainly carried out by groups at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder, and in some places by historically oppressed communities.⁸

As a transformational approach to the way we produce, consume, and manage resources, there is widespread support in the region for a more circular economy. A just circular transition entails supporting developing cities to “close the loop” upstream, midstream, as well as downstream while ensuring decision making and planning is gender- and socially-inclusive. In Asia, the informal waste sector is key to this movement.

Who is most affected?

Despite accounting for a fraction of consumption compared to the wealthy and middle class,⁹ the poor, as well as marginalized groups are disproportionately affected by improper waste management due to higher likelihood of exposure through living or working in polluted areas. Negative health outcomes are also more severe in susceptible individuals – particularly children,

⁴ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2014). Population Facts. Accessible at: https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/popfacts/PopFacts_2014-3.pdf

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme and United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) (2021). Global Environment for Cities-GEO for Cities: Towards Green and Just Cities. UNEP, Nairobi.

⁶ Bangkok 3R Declaration. (2019). Accessible at: http://www.env.go.jp/recycle/3r/results/pdf/results_09_pdf.pdf

⁷ Kaza, S., Yao, L., Bhada-Tata, P., & Van Woerden, F. (2018). What a waste 2.0: a global snapshot of solid waste management to 2050. World Bank Publications.

⁸ Scheinberg, A., & Anschutz, J. (2006). Slim pickin's: Supporting waste pickers in the ecological modernization of urban waste management systems. *International journal of technology management & sustainable development*, 5(3), 257-270.

⁹ Lynch, M. J., Long, M. A., Stretesky, P. B., & Barrett, K. L. (2019). Measuring the ecological impact of the wealthy: Excessive consumption, ecological disorganization, green crime, and justice. *Social Currents*, 6(4), 377-395.

the elderly and persons with underlying health conditions.¹⁰ Informal waste workers are particularly at risk due to direct handling of mixed waste without proper protective gear which often results in illnesses and disease.

Improper waste management can also exacerbate flooding due to blockages in drainage pipes and culverts, which endangers lives and threatens livelihoods. Poor and marginalized populations are more likely to live in high-risk areas such as in floodplains, along rivers that frequently overflow, or on steep slopes.¹¹ Meanwhile, access to healthcare, social security, insurance or other safety nets may be limited for already vulnerable populations. Climate change exacerbates these stressors, intensifying existing risks and vulnerabilities.

Waste production and management, and the above risks and stressors, are not gender neutral. For example, despite representation from both men and women in the informal waste sector, there tend to be gendered divisions of labour, with women limited to lower-income tasks like waste picking and separation, and men assuming positions of higher authority including the buying and reselling of recyclables.¹²

As countries move to bring in formalized systems of waste collection and more technologically advanced methods of processing and treatment, the livelihoods of the informal waste management sector are threatened. Measures to improve working conditions and safeguard livelihoods (including through support for alternative livelihoods) need to be a key part of the conversation to ensure that the transition to a circular economy is inclusive.

Inclusive, responsive circular waste management provides an opportunity to rethink the value of such jobs, include marginalized groups in decision-making processes, and address underlying gender and social inequalities that are currently prevailing in the waste management sector. As well as relieving environmental pressures, circular approaches to waste can also lead to significant improvements in health and wellbeing, particularly for the worst affected groups.

How can we address the gaps?

The waste generated in cities represents an underutilized source of recyclable materials for production, reusable goods, and electricity via waste-to-energy plants. Circular cities which are key to a sustainable and climate resilient future will require changes in our consumption and disposal patterns, innovation in waste treatment and processing, as well as supporting the informal systems which are dominating in many Asian cities.

Key policy frameworks in place to support the transition to a circular economy in Asia include the *Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community* which was adopted in 2021 and follows six guiding principles:

1. Promote ASEAN integration and the development of regional chains

¹⁰ Rushton, L. (2003). Health hazards and waste management. *British medical bulletin*, 68(1), 183-197.

¹¹ Satterthwaite, D., Archer, D., Colenbrander, S., Dodman, D., Hardoy, J., Mitlin, D., & Patel, S. (2020). Building resilience to climate change in informal settlements. *One Earth*, 2(2), 143-156.

¹² Ručevska, I., Seager, J., Schoolmeester, T. H., Gjerdi, H. L., & Westerveld, L. (2019). Gender and Waste Nexus: Experiences from Bhutan, Mongolia and Nepal.

2. Consider the broader impact on the economy and society
3. Recognise the unique circumstances of each member state
4. Encourage ASEAN-wide coordination of knowledge and technology sharing
5. Evaluate financial and institutional feasibility and sustainability prior to implementation
6. Function within the reality of international production linkages

This SCF2 event provides an opportunity to leverage principle 2, which draws attention to the impact of the circular economy on livelihoods and wellbeing, and principle 4 which calls for close cross-sectoral and cross-pillar coordination.¹³

Another prominent platform is the Regional 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) Forum in Asia and the Pacific¹⁴ and its associated declarations, including the Bangkok declaration that was adopted by 33 countries in the Asia-Pacific at the 9th regional 3R Forum.¹⁵

At a global scale, milestone progress was made in 2021 with 187 countries agreeing to add plastics to the Basel convention¹⁶ which regulates movement of hazardous materials between countries in an effort to combat the export of contaminated and mixed plastics, usually from higher income to lower income countries. Implementation, however, remains inconsistent.

Addressing sustainable waste management is also directly relevant to the following SDGs:

- **SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing**, specifically 3.9 to reduce death and illness from pollution
- **SDG 5: Gender equality**, specifically 5.5 to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life
- **SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries**, specifically 10.2 to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status
- **SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities**, specifically 11.6 to reduce the adverse environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management
- **SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production**, specifically 12.4 to achieve the environmentally sound management of chemicals and all wastes throughout their life cycle, and 12.5 to reduce waste generation through prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse

¹³ ASEAN. (2021). Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community. Accessible at: <https://asean.org/asean-adopts-framework-for-circular-economy/>

¹⁴ Information about the Forum available at: <https://www.env.go.jp/recycle/3r/en/>

¹⁵ Bangkok 3R Declaration Towards Prevention of Plastic Waste Pollution through 3R and Circular Economy. (2019). Available at: http://www.env.go.jp/recycle/3r/results/pdf/results_09_pdf.pdf

¹⁶ See: <http://www.basel.int/Countries/StatusofRatifications/PlasticWasteamendments/tabid/8377/Default.aspx>

Also relevant is Article 2 (viii) under the Kyoto Protocol which refers to “limitation and/or reduction of methane emissions through recovery and use in waste management, as well as in the production, transport and distribution of energy”. UNEP estimates that GHG emissions could be reduced by 15-20% with appropriate waste prevention as well as waste management using a lifecycle approach.

The Regional Strategic Collaboration

The goal of the strategic collaboration event is to strengthen commitment to circular economy approaches to waste management in Asia. We invite proposals for an event or series of events that have a regional and cross-sectoral focus and engage a range of stakeholders, with a particular emphasis on participation from marginalized voices. Proposals should show clearly how equity, social inclusion, human rights and justice are central to each topic.

Multiple entry points and interlinked priority areas could be explored, while considering how circular economy approaches can promote inclusivity and support a just transition. These include:

- **Challenging business-as-usual approaches to production and consumption**
 - Government and private sector-led initiatives to reduce waste and pollution, including incentivization schemes, polluter pays principles, compliance mechanisms, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainable business models
 - Consumer awareness and behaviour change for minimising waste and unsustainable consumption
 - Benefits/entry points for circular waste management throughout the supply chain, e.g. strengthening of the recycling value chain, opportunities for new value streams and green jobs, and how these models can improve livelihoods and empower vulnerable and marginalized groups,
 - Social, environmental and climate change mitigation co-benefits of circular approaches

- **Solid waste treatment and management**
 - Innovation and green technologies for waste collection, treatment, recycling, re-use and waste-to-energy, and how these can promote social equity and inclusion

- **Equity, social inclusion and justice**
 - Recognizing and revaluing the contribution of the informal sector to waste management
 - Bolstering the participation of the informal sector in waste management planning and decision making
 - Ways to improve working conditions, improve labour rights and safeguard livelihoods of the informal sector

- The gendered nature of waste and opportunities to promote gender equity within circular waste management

Contents could cover:

- Success stories, good practice and innovative ideas for inclusive approaches to circular waste management
- Examples of, or pathways toward, replication and upscaling
- Ways of supporting circular economy policy frameworks in Asia, such as the *Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community* and the *3R Declaration Towards Prevention of Plastic Waste Pollution* in a way which prioritizes the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups, and enables their empowerment and meaningful participation in implementing these frameworks.

The outcomes of the event should feed into larger policy processes and frameworks at country and regional scales (i.e., engaging with regional organisations or international coalitions of organisations). It should build upon outcomes of regional platforms and commitments such as the 3R Forum in Asia and the Pacific.

The event and corresponding communications and/or policy products should be delivered within 2022.

Theme-Specific Criteria

1. Innovative and inclusive solutions to urban circular transitions. The event should highlight innovative approaches to circular waste management in cities that promote inclusivity and support a just transition. It should ensure that gender, equity, and human rights are cross-cutting themes at the center of the agenda.

2. Multi-stakeholder engagement. The event format should proactively facilitate the meaningful participation of a diverse array of stakeholders, such as civil society organizations/non-governmental organizations representing vulnerable and marginalized populations, the private sector, academics, development organizations and government representatives. This should include simultaneous interpretation and translation of communication and policy products where appropriate. It should also encourage regional collaboration and highlight how local partners have been involved in the event design process.

3. Clear directions for policy influence. The event should have a clear pathway towards policy influence and policy outcomes (i.e. feeding into a larger regional or global platform for action), bearing in mind the particular needs of Asian countries and their policy environments. It can also identify initiatives and partnership programs that demonstrate good practices in circular transitions and sustainable urbanization, with consideration for gender, social equity and human rights implications, at a local scale.

4. Integrated approaches. The event should consider circular transitions and sustainable urbanization in an integrated manner, exploring synergies and social and environmental co-

benefits of circular approaches including for climate change mitigation, while considering issues within interlinked social, political and economic perspectives.

5. Engaging and feasible event delivery. Proposals are encouraged for events that include fresh ways of delivering and presenting information, which could include visualizations, audiovisual material, participant polls and quizzes etc. However, the event(s) should be feasible and realistic within the timeframe and budget allowance. Proposals should show how delivery will be achieved within the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Expected Results and Outcomes

The expected outcome of the event is enhanced regional and cross-sectoral collaboration and learning which will support countries and cities to implement circular waste management, including through policy pathways and upscaling and replication of effective approaches. A key result will be greater integration of social inclusion and justice into the discourse and implementation of circular cities.

Theory of change			
Outputs	Output 1	Output 2	Output 3
	A regional-scale event or a series of events with multiple and diverse stakeholders (can also include preliminary/side events).	A report outlining key messages of the event and next steps for policy influence	Communications and/or policy products about the events, in various formats to target diverse groups of stakeholders (e.g., local and sign language translation, infographics, podcasts, briefs, blogs, declarations)
Potential Target Participants/ Stakeholders/ Users	The informal waste management sector, academics and international development organizations, the private sector, government representatives	The informal waste management sector, academics and international development organizations, the private sector, government representatives	The informal waste management sector, academics and international development organizations, the private sector, government representatives
Outcomes	Awareness of the key role of the informal waste management sector in the circular economy is increased, and a range of stakeholder groups are able to use new knowledge to promote the circular economy, and	Partnerships and networks are leveraged to drive changes in policy and practical implementation including the replication and upscaling of successful approaches	Increased awareness in various stakeholder groups of the disproportionate impact of the linear economy on vulnerable and marginalized groups and strengthened capacity for action

	within it, shift discourses and conceptions toward greater social inclusion and justice.		
Relevant Policy Frameworks	SDGs; 3R Declaration Towards Prevention of Plastic Waste Pollution; Basel Convention; Framework for Circular Economy for the ASEAN Economic Community.		
Impacts/ Goals	Urban communities are more resilient, and have improved health and wellbeing (Impact 2.3)	Pressure on natural resources is relieved through more sustainable consumption and production (Impact 2.2)	Gender and social inequities in governance and outcomes are reduced and human rights are fulfilled