BAQ 2026
BETTER AIR QUALITY CONFERENCE
11-13 MAR • BANGKOK

Together for Clear Skies:
Driving Action, Accelerating Investment

CONFERENCE REPORT

2026

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
AQ	Air Quality
AQM	Air Quality Management
AQMx	Air Quality Management Exchange
BAQ	Better Air Quality Conference
CCAC	Climate and Clean Air Coalition
CMAQ	Community Multiscale Air Quality Model
HYSPLIT	Hybrid Single-Particle Lagrangian Integrated Trajectory Model
ICIMOD	International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
IGP-HF	Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills
LEZ	Low Emission Zone
PCD	Pollution Control Department (Thailand)
$PM_{2.5}$	Fine particulate matter (diameter of 2.5 micrometres or less)
SLCPs	Short-Lived Climate Pollutants
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
WRF	Weather Research and Forecasting Model

Executive Summary

Better Air Quality Conference 2026 (BAQ 2026)

Together for Clear Skies: Driving Action, Accelerating Investment

Context

Air pollution remains one of the most significant global environmental health risks, with Asia and the Pacific bearing the greatest burden.

Over 90% of the region's population, around four billion people, are exposed to pollution levels exceeding health-based guidelines. In 2023, air pollution was responsible for about 7.9 million premature deaths worldwide, with People's Republic of China (PRC) and India accounting for more than half of the global total.

The economic costs are substantial. Air pollution's annual cost to the global economy exceeds $8 trillion because of higher healthcare spending, lower worker efficiency, and slowed economic expansion. In Southeast Asia alone, health-related costs are projected to reach $43 billion in Indonesia, $18 billion in Thailand, and $1.2 billion in Cambodia by 2030 under current policy trajectories.

Evidence shows that sustained improvements are achievable. Fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) concentrations declined in 47% of cities globally between 2014 and 2024, reflecting the impact of sustained policy action and investment. Country experience further demonstrates this progress.

In PRC, coordinated policy and investment have reduced $PM_{2.5}$ levels by around 40% since 2015, while in Mongolia, residential energy reforms reduced winter pollution by half within two years.

Against this backdrop, the 12th Better Air Quality Conference (BAQ 2026), held in Bangkok from 11 to 13 March 2026, brought together over 1,000 participants from over 50 countries to focus on accelerating the implementation of climate and clean air solutions at scale.

A Shift in the Clean Air Agenda

BAQ 2026 confirmed a shift in the clean air agenda from identifying solutions to delivering them at scale.

A consistent message emerged from the discussions: well-established scientific evidence, policy frameworks, and technological options are already available to address air pollution.

The primary constraint is implementation, including limited investment-ready project pipelines, fragmented institutional responsibilities, and uneven technical capacity, particularly at the city level.

Emerging regional approaches, including coordinated airshed-level strategies, demonstrate how integrated action across air quality, climate, water, and agricultural systems can support implementation at scale.

Clean air is framed not as a standalone environmental issue, but as a development, health, and investment priority, with strong linkages to transport, energy, agriculture, and urban systems.

Strategic Priorities for Accelerating Clean Air Action

BAQ 2026 highlighted three overarching priorities for accelerating clean air action across Asia and the Pacific: driving action through strengthened implementation and governance; accelerating investment by mobilising finance and developing bankable project pipelines; and strengthening collaboration through regional cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

1. Driving Action through Strengthened Implementation and Governance

Effective air quality management depends on strengthening implementation systems. This includes improving institutional coordination across sectors, enhancing regulatory frameworks, and building technical and administrative capacity, particularly at subnational levels.

Cities play a central role as key emission sources and primary sites of implementation. However, many cities face constraints in governance, technical capacity, and access to finance. Strengthening city-level capability and enabling environments is therefore critical to delivering sustained improvements in air quality.

2. Accelerating Investment by Mobilising Finance and Developing Bankable Pipelines

A persistent financing gap remains a major barrier to scaling clean air solutions, with investors often struggling to identify projects that deliver air quality benefits.

Addressing this requires stronger project preparation to develop investment-ready pipelines, alongside expanded use of blended finance, guarantees, and risk-sharing mechanisms. Increasing private sector participation across transport, energy, and agriculture will also be essential.

At BAQ 2026, nine (9) funding organisations shared information on their criteria for funding, and 79 project ideas were submitted by project proponents, and over 70% of participants who responded to the post-event survey reported new partnerships, showing early progress in building investment pipelines. These approaches include blended finance and climate-linked funding, alongside emerging mechanisms such as carbon markets targeting short-lived climate pollutants.

Integrated investment platforms and clean air matchmaking mechanisms further show how project concepts translate into investable opportunities at scale.

3. Strengthening Collaboration through Regional Cooperation and Partnerships

Air pollution is transboundary, requiring coordinated responses across cities, regions, and countries. Airshed-based approaches are gaining traction, using scientific modelling to align policy responses with pollution dynamics. Regional initiatives, including those in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills, highlight the growing importance of coordinated action across countries and sectors.

Regional cooperation frameworks, South–South collaboration, and knowledge-sharing platforms are critical

to scaling effective solutions. Strengthening partnerships across governments, development institutions, research organisations, civil society, and the private sector will be essential to align policy, finance, and implementation.

Key Messages

Evidence presented at BAQ 2026 highlights several key messages for policymakers:

- Clean air must be treated as a development priority, with strong links to public health, economic performance, and urban systems
- Greater investment in clean air is needed, supported by stronger project preparation and financing mechanisms
- Proven solutions must be implemented at scale, moving beyond pilot projects towards integrated, multi-sector programmes
- Air pollution and climate action must be addressed together, particularly through reductions in short-lived climate pollutants
- Cities must be empowered to lead implementation, supported by improved governance, capacity, and access to finance
- Regional cooperation is essential to address transboundary pollution
- Robust monitoring and data systems are critical for evidence-based policymaking and implementation
- Clean air transitions must be inclusive and human-centred, prioritising vulnerable populations

Priority Actions

To accelerate progress, BAQ 2026 highlights the following priority actions to strengthen the enabling environment for implementation:

- Mobilise finance at scale by strengthening project preparation and expanding investment pipelines
- Integrate air quality into infrastructure and development planning across transport, energy, industry, and urban systems
- Strengthen governance and institutional coordination across sectors and levels of government
- Expand monitoring systems, emission inventories, and data transparency
- Promote airshed-based approaches to support regional coordination
- Enhance technical capacity and knowledge exchange, including city-to-city collaboration
- Support sustainable land management and alternatives to open burning
- Protect vulnerable populations through human-centred and inclusive policy approaches
- Expand the use of implementation tools, platforms, and guidance to support delivery across sectors

Conclusion: From dialogue to delivery

BAQ 2026 reinforced that the priority is no longer to define solutions, but to accelerate their implementation at scale. The scientific evidence, policy frameworks, and technological options required to address air pollution are well established. Progress will depend on

strengthening the enabling environment to support sustained delivery.

The central challenge now lies in translating this alignment into sustained delivery. New initiatives, tools, and partnerships emerging from BAQ 2026 show growing momentum towards implementation, supported by stronger enabling environments, increased investment, and enhanced cooperation across sectors and borders. Country experience shows that these elements, when aligned, enable measurable air quality improvements within short timeframes.

The message emerging from BAQ 2026 is clear: the challenge is less about understanding air pollution but ensuring the effective and sustained delivery of solutions.

With coordinated action, countries in Asia and the Pacific are well positioned to achieve cleaner air, improved public health, and more resilient development pathways.

1 Introduction

The 12th Better Air Quality Conference (BAQ 2026), held under the theme *'Together for Clear Skies: Driving Action, Accelerating Investment'*, brought together 1,016 delegates from 50 countries, with an attendance rate of 86%, reflecting strong international engagement in advancing clean air action.

Organized by Clean Air Asia in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and co-hosted by Thailand's Pollution Control Department (PCD) and Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), and with Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) as local partner, the conference convened stakeholders across government, development finance, research, civil society, and the private sector.

Governments (24%) led participation, followed by non-governmental organisations (21%), academia (20%), and private sector actors (17%), alongside development finance institutions (6%), development organisations (5%), and other stakeholders, underscoring the need for coordinated, multi-sectoral action.

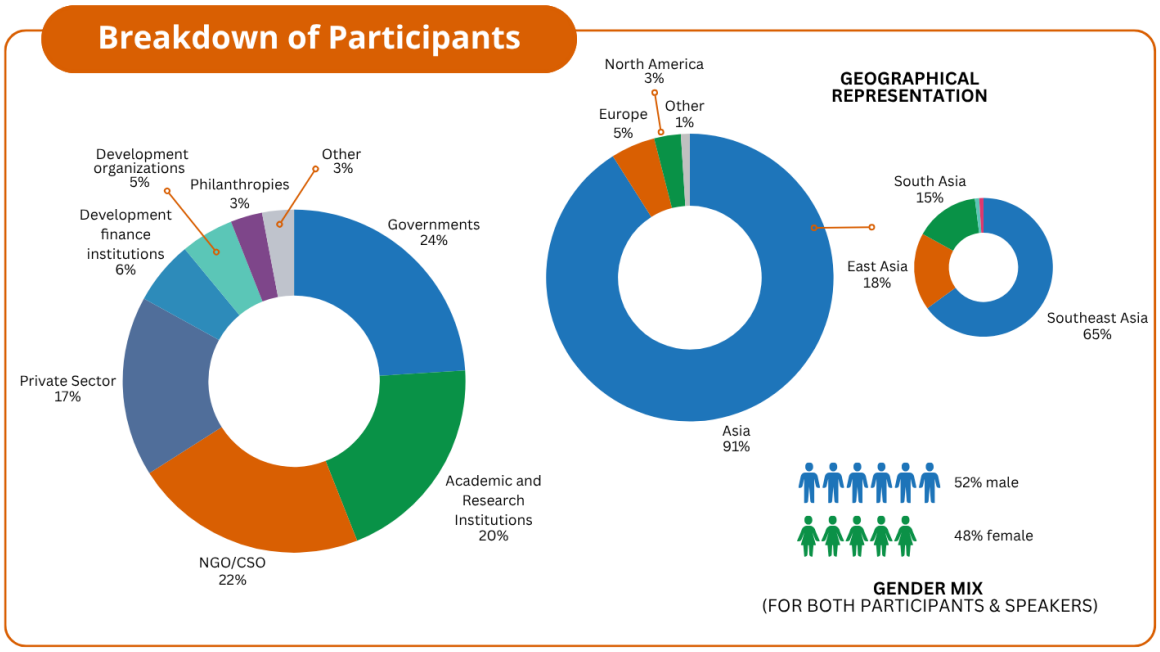


Figure 1. Breakdown of BAQ 2026 participants

Participation was predominantly from the Asia Pacific region (91%), with partial representation from Europe (5%), North America (3%), and limited representation from Africa and other regions. Thailand (28%), the Philippines (17%), Indonesia (9%), PRC (8%), and India (7%) showed strong representation, reflecting both the concentration of air pollution challenges and regional leadership in advancing solutions. Women accounted

for 48% and men 52% of participants, showing balanced gender representation. Half of BAQ 2026 speakers were women (48.28%, 126 of 261), reflecting progress towards gender inclusivity in participation and speaking roles.

This participation profile reflects alignment across the policy, finance, and implementation communities. The presence of development finance institutions, private sector actors, and government agencies alongside research organisations signals stronger alignment between policy, investment, and delivery. Despite this momentum, air pollution remains a persistent and large-scale challenge across the region, requiring accelerated and sustained action.

Against this backdrop, BAQ 2026 took place during a broader transition in the clean air agenda, with increasing emphasis on implementation and investment. Discussions reinforced that air quality links to development, public health, and economic performance, and strongly connects to transport, energy, agriculture, and urban systems. Air pollution also affects food security and livelihoods, where agricultural productivity is impacted.

The conference provided a platform to present and advance a range of existing tools, reports, and initiatives supporting implementation, alongside new and emerging partnerships.

This report synthesises the outcomes of BAQ 2026 and identifies priority actions to accelerate implementation. A central conclusion is the need to mobilise finance, strengthen institutional and technical capacity, and develop investment-ready project pipelines to support coordinated action at scale.

2 Air Pollution as a Regional Challenge

Air pollution remains one of the most significant environmental health risks globally, with Asia and the Pacific at its centre. Evidence presented at BAQ 2026 draws on a well-established body of research confirming both the scale and persistence of the challenge across the region.

Over 90% of the population[1], approximately four billion people, face pollution levels above health-based guidelines, with the region including six of the ten most polluted countries worldwide.[2] In 2023, air pollution caused about 7.9 million premature deaths worldwide, with PRC and India each recording over two million deaths and together accounting for more than half of the global total.[3] This underscores both the magnitude of the public health burden and the region's central role in shaping global air quality outcomes.

[1] United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC) and Asia Pacific Clean Air Partnership (APCAP) (2018). Air Pollution in Asia and the Pacific: Science-based Solutions. Available at: https://www.ccacoalition.org/content/air-pollution-measures-asia-and-pacific
https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-7

[2] United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2025). Global Environment Outlook 7: A Future We Choose – Why investing in Earth can lead to a trillion-dollar benefit for all. Nairobi: UNEP. Available at: https://www.unep.org/resources/global-environment-outlook-7

[3] Health Effects Institute (HEI), Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), and NCD Alliance (2025). State of Global Air 2025. Available at: https://www.stateofglobalair.org/resources/report/state-global-air-report-2025

The economic burden is substantial. The global cost of air pollution exceeds $8 trillion annually, with disproportionate effects on developing economies through higher healthcare costs, reduced labour productivity, and constraints on economic growth.[4] Projections of health-related costs in Southeast Asia could reach $43 billion in Indonesia, $18 billion in Thailand, and $1.2 billion in Cambodia by 2030 under current policy trajectories.[5]

These effects are driven by structural factors, including rapid urbanisation, industrial activity, and rising energy demand, with major sources spanning transport, industry, agriculture, and waste. Air pollution also has implications for food security and livelihoods, particularly in regions where agricultural productivity is affected.

Global and country experience show that sustained improvements are achievable. $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations declined in 47% of cities worldwide between 2014 and 2024, reflecting the impact of sustained policy action and investment.[6] City-level experience further illustrates this progress. Cities such as Beijing, Jakarta, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and Qingdao show how coordinated interventions across transport, energy, and urban systems can contribute to improved air quality outcomes.[7]

At the national level in PRC, successive clean air action plans combining regulatory measures, industrial restructuring, and investment have reduced $PM_{2.5}$ levels by around 40% from 2015-2025, while in Mongolia, residential energy reforms reduced winter pollution by nearly half within two years. These examples show that well-designed and implemented interventions can achieve significant improvements within short timeframes.

Taken together, the evidence shows that meaningful air quality improvements are achievable when policy commitment, investment, and institutional coordination align, and when interventions are scaled up.

3 What BAQ 2026 Delivered

BAQ 2026 identified three overarching priorities for accelerating clean air action across Asia and the Pacific: driving action through stronger implementation and governance; accelerating investment through finance mobilisation and developing bankable project pipelines; and strengthening collaboration through regional cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Evidence from plenary sessions, technical discussions, and country experiences underpins these priorities, reflecting a shift from problem identification towards implementation and delivery at scale.

[4] World Bank (2022). The Global Health Cost of PM2.5 Air Pollution: A Case for Action Beyond 2021. Available at: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/c96ee144-4a4b-5164-ad79-74c051179eee

[5] Klimont, Z. and Slater, J. (2023). The Cost of Inaction: Tackling Air Pollution in the ASEAN Region (IIASA Policy Brief #40). International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA). Available at: https://iiasa.ac.at/sites/default/files/2023-10/PB40_Airpollution_FINAL_OCTOBER_0.pdf

[6] Clean Air Asia (2023). Air Quality in Asia: Status and Trends 2023 Edition. Available at: https://cleanairasia.org/our-resources/publications/air-quality-asia-status-and-trends-2023-edition

[7] Breathe Cities (2026). Breathe Better: How Leading Cities Have Rapidly Cut Air Pollution. Available at: https://breathecities.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Breathe-Better-Report.pdf

Figure 2. BAQ 2026 at a glance

A Shift in the Agenda: From Knowledge to Implementation

BAQ 2026 highlighted a transition from diagnosing air pollution to focusing on implementation and delivery. This includes emerging regional approaches, such as the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development's (ICIMOD) work in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills, which links air quality, climate, water, and agricultural systems through coordinated airshed-level strategies.

Discussions pointed to persistent structural barriers. Governments often lack a pipeline of investment-ready projects, institutional responsibilities remain fragmented, and implementation capacity, particularly at the city level, is uneven.

This transition is reflected in a growing emphasis on:

- investment platforms rather than pilot projects
- integrated programmes rather than sectoral interventions
- governance mechanisms aligned with pollution sources and dynamics.

Strategic Takeaways from BAQ 2026

The primary constraint is now implementation

Across sessions, discussions highlighted that the foundations for air quality management are established, with attention now focused on implementation.

The increasing emphasis on integrated investment platforms reflects this transition. The ADB presented a proposed Thailand Integrated Air Quality Investment Program, structured as a long-term platform combining policy reform, technical support, and

financing across sectors including transport electrification, agricultural residue management, industrial emissions, and urban development. This approach moves beyond isolated pilot projects towards coordinated, multi-sector implementation.

Country experience further reinforces that improvements are achievable when interventions are implemented, as shown by PRC's sustained reductions in $PM_{2.5}$ levels through long-term, phased policy and investment.

Structural constraints remain. Governments and cities continue to face:

- limited pipeline of investment-ready projects
- coordination challenges across sectors
- capacity constraints at the subnational level.

The key constraint is therefore not identifying solutions but enabling delivery through effective systems and institutional arrangements.

Clean air action must be integrated into climate and development strategies

BAQ 2026 reinforced a shift in how air quality is framed, with increasing emphasis on its integration into broader climate, health, and development agendas.

This was clear across sectoral discussions. In transport, the electrification of bus fleets in Thailand was presented as a key intervention delivering multiple benefits. Evidence highlighted that urban bus fleets are a major source of emissions, and that electrification can reduce $PM_{2.5}$ exposure while becoming competitive in terms of total cost of ownership.

In agriculture, discussions focused on crop residue burning, peat fires, and wildfires in Southeast Asia. These sources also have implications for food security and agricultural productivity. It was emphasised that regulatory bans alone are insufficient. Effective responses require integrated approaches combining:

- economic incentives for farmers
- development of residue management markets
- improved land-use planning and agricultural practices.

The role of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) was also highlighted. Reducing pollutants such as black carbon and methane can deliver near-term improvements in air quality while contributing to climate mitigation. In regions such as the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills (IGP-HF), these pollutants are also associated with wider environmental effects, including impacts on glaciers and agricultural systems.

Health evidence played a central role in framing this integration. There is no safe level of exposure to air pollution, and analytical tools such as AirQ+ are used to quantify health and economic impacts, strengthening the case for integrating air quality into development and investment planning.

Stronger cooperation, investment, and capacity are essential

Scaling clean air action will require increased investment, alongside strengthened institutional capacity and enhanced regional cooperation.

Financing constraints were a recurring theme. Air quality continues to receive a small share of development and climate finance, and investments that deliver air quality benefits are often not identified as such. A key barrier is the limited availability of bankable project pipelines at the city level.

In response, new mechanisms are emerging. A clean air matchmaking platform, developed in collaboration with the ADB and Clean Air Asia, aims to connect project developers with financing sources and support the development of viable, investment-ready projects across sectors including transport, agriculture, energy, industry, and urban systems. At BAQ 2026, 79 project ideas with 52 projects categorized as complete and tackling multiple topics as shown in Figure 3 were submitted to the platform and nine (9) funding organisations shared criteria for funding, with over 70% of participants who responded to the post-event survey reporting new partnerships, signalling strong early progress in developing investment pipelines. Blended finance, carbon markets, and climate-linked funding targeting short-lived climate pollutants support these efforts.

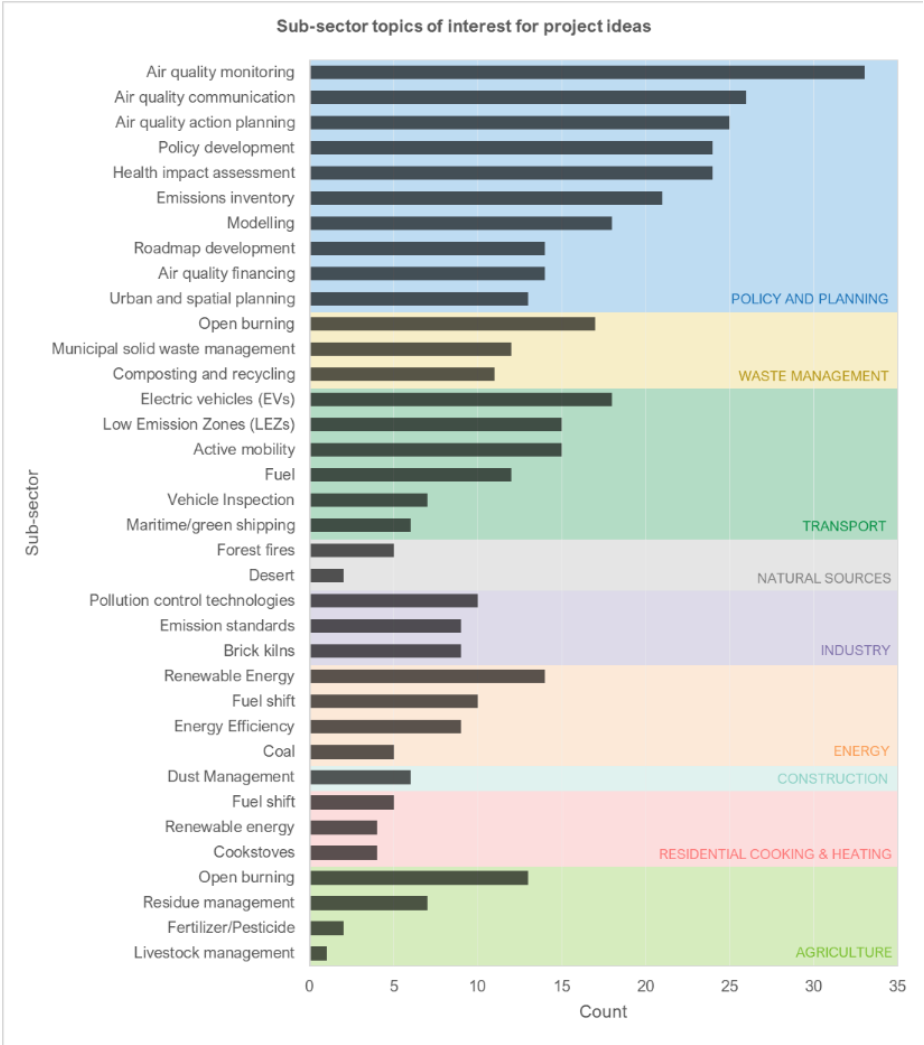


Figure 3. Sub-topic categories of proposed projects

Regional cooperation is also critical. A session on airshed-based management highlighted how air pollution moves across administrative boundaries, while policy responses often remain fragmented. Modelling tools such as WRF, CMAQ, and HYSPLIT are being used to map pollution transport pathways and inform coordinated responses.

Evidence from India shows that airshed-based approaches are informing coordination mechanisms under national programmes, supporting more aligned policy responses across regions.

South–South collaboration is emerging as an important area of progress. A pre-event involving participants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America highlighted strong demand for knowledge exchange on monitoring systems, policy design, and market-based mechanisms. Planned follow-up initiatives include regional dialogue platforms and shared case studies to support capacity building.

Capacity constraints remain a cross-cutting issue in relation to implementation and delivery at scale. Discussions emphasised the need to strengthen:

- capacity for project preparation and development to support investment-ready pipelines
- institutional and technical capacity for implementation at the city and subnational levels
- monitoring systems and emissions inventories
- technical expertise in modelling and data analysis
- coordination mechanisms to support implementation across sectors and levels of government.

Taken together, these discussions show that the clean air agenda has entered a new phase. Technical solutions are well understood. The primary challenge now lies in enabling their implementation through coordinated systems of governance, finance, and institutional capacity.

When these elements are aligned, significant improvements in air quality can be achieved. The priority is to scale these approaches across countries and regions.

Key Announcements and Initiatives from BAQ 2026

BAQ 2026 also served as a platform for the launch and advancement of several new initiatives, tools, and partnerships supporting clean air and climate action:

- ICIMOD's forthcoming regional action framework and guidance products supporting coordinated approaches to air pollution and short-lived climate pollutants across the IGP-HF
- Revised national air quality standards in PRC, strengthening regulatory ambition
- Expansion of the Air Quality Management Exchange (AQMx), including new sectoral guidance on vehicle emissions standards and inspection systems
- The Energy Policy Institute (EPIC) Air Quality Fund called second round of funding

- Climate and Clean Air Coalition's forthcoming Global Economic Assessment supporting scalable clean air investment
- Clean Air Asia toolkits, including science communications toolkit, road dust management strategies, clean construction tools, and sectoral training modules
- Open-source air quality monitoring toolkit supporting low-cost, community-based monitoring systems
- ADB's Low Emission Zone (LEZ) Maturity Assessment Toolkit supporting cities in preparing for emissions control policies
- New regional and global reports, datasets, and analytical tools supporting policy development and implementation.

Figure 4. Examples of from dialogue to delivery implementation from BAQ 2026

4 Key Messages from BAQ 2026

Clean air must be treated as a development priority

Air quality is a core development issue with direct implications for public health, economic productivity, and urban resilience. Integrating air quality into transport, energy, agriculture, and urban planning enables multiple co-benefits, including improved health outcomes, more liveable cities, and more resilient livelihoods.

Greater investment in clean air is needed

A persistent financing gap continues to constrain progress. Air quality receives a limited share of development and climate finance, and co-benefits are not reflected in investment decisions. Strengthening project preparation and pipeline development, including developing investment-ready projects and financing mechanisms, is essential to unlock finance and scale implementation.

Proven solutions must be implemented at scale

Effective interventions are well-established, but implementation remains uneven. The priority is to move beyond fragmented and pilot-based approaches towards coordinated, large-scale programmes across sectors and jurisdictions.

Air pollution and climate action must be addressed together

Air pollution and climate change share common sources, through short-lived climate pollutants such as black carbon and methane. Addressing these emissions can deliver rapid air quality improvements while contributing to climate mitigation, with wider benefits for water systems, agriculture, and livelihoods.

Cities must be empowered to lead implementation

Cities are central to addressing key emission sources, including transport, waste, and urban development. However, gaps in governance, technical capacity, and access to finance limit progress. Strengthening city-level capacity and enabling access to investment are critical to accelerating implementation.

Regional cooperation is essential

Air pollution is transboundary and requires coordinated responses across jurisdictions. Strengthening regional cooperation, through airshed-based approaches, is essential to align policies with pollution dynamics and improve outcomes.

Robust monitoring and data systems must support implementation

Reliable data systems are fundamental to effective policy and implementation. Data must also be shared, open, accessible, and locally owned to advance scientific research, inform stronger policies, and ensure greater accountability. Expanding monitoring coverage and strengthening the capacity to translate data into actionable policy and investment decisions are critical to improving outcomes.

Clean air transitions must be human-centred and inclusive

Air pollution affects vulnerable populations, including children, older people, and low-income communities. Clean air strategies must prioritise public health, equity, and inclusive decision-making to ensure that benefits are shared across society.

5 Enabling Environment

Building on the findings of BAQ 2026, priority actions are required to enable implementation at scale. These actions support the three core areas identified at the conference: driving action through effective delivery systems, accelerating investment through strengthened project pipelines and financing mechanisms, and strengthening regional cooperation and partnerships. Together, they define the enabling conditions required to translate policy commitments into sustained, large-scale improvements in air quality.

Mobilising finance and investment

Scaling clean air action will require increased investment, supported by stronger project preparation and financing mechanisms.

Strengthening project preparation capacity is essential to develop investment-ready initiatives and expand funding for air quality programmes. This includes strengthening pipelines at the national and city levels to improve access to finance. Mobilising blended finance, guarantees, and risk-sharing mechanisms can help attract private sector investment in clean air solutions and support the creation of bankable project pipelines. The BAQ 2026 clean air matchmaking platform connected project developers with funding organisations to support investment-ready projects across transport, energy, and urban systems. The conference also facilitated engagement between 79 project proponents and nine funding organisations to strengthen project pipelines and financing opportunities. Ensuring explicit recognition and integration of air quality benefits into investment decision-making processes is critical to unlocking climate and development finance at scale.

Strengthening implementation and governance

Effective implementation will depend on integrating air quality into infrastructure and development planning, alongside strengthening institutional capacity at national and subnational levels.

Transport, energy, industry, waste management, and urban development investments need to be aligned with air quality objectives. This requires coordinated planning across sectors and levels of government. This includes expanding clean public transport systems, zero-emission mobility, green ports and shipping, and renewable energy solutions. BAQ 2026 showed how long-term policy commitment and coordinated implementation can deliver measurable improvements. PRC's multi-phase clean air actions initiated in 2013 combined industrial restructuring, clean energy transitions,

strengthened emissions standards, and investment, contributing to an estimated 40% reduction in $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations over the period 2015-2025.

Strengthening public transport systems is a critical foundation for electrification strategies, such as electric buses. Infrastructure planning should also consider electricity grid capacity, charging infrastructure, and integrated urban planning to support the transition to cleaner mobility systems. This includes integrated transport planning approaches, such as the proposed Thailand Integrated Air Quality Investment Program which links transport electrification, agricultural residue management, industrial emissions reduction, and urban development within a coordinated investment framework.

Accelerating the reduction of SLCPs remains a priority. This includes advancing the mitigation of methane and black carbon and integrating these actions into national climate commitments.

Expanding air quality monitoring and data systems is also essential. This requires strengthening monitoring and data capabilities to support evidence-based policymaking. Greater emphasis is needed on translating data into implementation and regulatory action. Digital monitoring systems and analytical tools can further support regulatory enforcement and policy design. Examples discussed at BAQ 2026 included open-source monitoring systems such as the AirGradient toolkit, designed to support affordable, community-based air quality monitoring networks in areas with limited technical capacity.

Strengthening implementation capability is a cross-cutting requirement. Governments and cities require technical guidance, training programmes, and peer-learning platforms. This includes strengthening capacity for project development, delivery, and inter-agency coordination. City-to-city exchange and knowledge-sharing initiatives can support the replication of effective approaches.

Strengthening regional cooperation and partnerships

Regional cooperation is critical to address the transboundary nature of air pollution and to support coordinated policy responses.

Promoting airshed-based approaches can improve alignment across cities, regions, and countries by addressing pollution based on atmospheric dynamics rather than administrative boundaries. Strengthening shared monitoring systems and coordinated policy frameworks will be essential to improve regional air quality management. ICIMOD's coordinated airshed-level approach across the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills links air quality, climate, water, and agricultural systems through harmonised monitoring, regional emissions inventories, and aligned policy frameworks. Evidence from India also shows how airshed-based approaches are informing coordination mechanisms under national programmes.

Partnerships across governments, development institutions, philanthropy, the private sector, civil society, and research organisations must be strengthened to support coordinated action. These partnerships play a key role in aligning policy, finance, and implementation efforts.

South–South cooperation and regional knowledge exchange are also important. Expanding collaboration through regional dialogue platforms and shared case studies can support capacity development and accelerate the adoption of effective solutions.

Sustainable land management is a further priority. Supporting farmers and rural communities with viable alternatives to crop residue burning, alongside strengthening wildfire prevention, peat land management, and land-use planning, will be essential. Economic incentives and market mechanisms can support the transition away from open burning practices.

Protecting public health and vulnerable populations

Clean air action must remain human-centred and inclusive. Policies should prioritise public health and incorporate equity considerations, recognising the disproportionate impacts of air pollution on vulnerable populations. BAQ 2026 highlighted the links between air quality, health, and social vulnerability, including the impacts of extreme heat and air pollution on at-risk populations in urban areas. Discussions under the ADB Climate and Health Initiative emphasised the importance of integrating heat and air quality risk considerations into urban resilience and public health planning.

Policies include strengthening protections for children, older adults, and low-income communities, and ensuring that clean air interventions deliver fair outcomes. Greater engagement of communities, including older people, people living with disabilities, and youth, in decision-making processes will also be important to support inclusive and sustainable transitions.

Together, these priorities translate the outcomes of BAQ 2026 into a practical framework for accelerating implementation and delivering sustained improvements in air quality at scale.

6 Conclusion: From dialogue to delivery

BAQ 2026 reinforced that the priority is no longer to define solutions, but to accelerate their delivery at scale. Across plenary sessions, technical discussions, and country experiences, a consistent conclusion emerged: there is a need to align policy, finance, and institutional systems. The primary challenge now lies in translating this into effective and sustained delivery.

Progress will depend on strengthening the enabling environment for implementation. This includes improving project preparation capacity to develop investment-ready pipelines, enhancing coordination across ministries and levels of government, and embedding air quality objectives within broader development, climate, and infrastructure strategies. Initiatives such as integrated investment platforms and the clean air matchmaking mechanism show emerging approaches to bridging the gap between project concepts and financing.

Country experience shows that sustained improvements are achievable where policy, investment, and institutional coordination are aligned. Integrated programmes combining regulatory reform, financial support, and sectoral interventions can deliver measurable reductions in $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations within short timeframes. Scaling these

approaches will require strengthened governance systems at city and subnational levels where implementation is concentrated.

Regional cooperation will be critical. Air pollution remains transboundary, and approaches such as airshed management, shared monitoring systems, and coordinated policy frameworks are necessary to address pollution. The growing emphasis on South–South collaboration and regional platforms reflect the recognition that shared challenges require coordinated responses.

Maintaining momentum beyond the conference will depend on sustained engagement across stakeholders. This includes operationalizing financing mechanisms, strengthening implementation capacity, expanding monitoring and data capabilities, and reinforcing partnerships across governments, development institutions, the private sector, and civil society.

The message emerging from BAQ 2026 is clear: the challenge is ensuring the effective delivery of solutions at scale.

Sustained progress across Asia and the Pacific will depend on aligning policy, investment, and institutional frameworks, while strengthening cooperation within and across countries. With continued implementation, it is possible to achieve cleaner air, improved public health, and more sustainable development.

7 Photos and other materials from BAQ 2026

Clear Skies for Bangkok: From Vision to Action pre-event (9 March)

ADB Networking Reception at the Sukosol Hotel (10 March)

Opening Plenary at the UN Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand (11 March)

Mr. Pornphrom Vikitsreth of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA) providing his Keynote Speech during the Opening Plenary (11 March)

Investing for Clean Air plenary panel discussion (11 March)

Breathing Hope: Inspiring Health amid Heat and Haze session (11 March)

Dialogue on Scaling Up Investments on Air Quality Management (AQM) in Thailand session (11 March)

Designing integrated bankable solutions for air quality with private sector participation session (11 March)

Financing Modalities for Clean Air session (11 March)

Networking Reception hosted by the Clean Air Fund (11 March)

Driving Actions and Solutions plenary (12 March)

Breathe Better: What leading cities are doing differently special session (12 March)

Accelerating Investment for Clean Air in Indonesia: Unlocking Financing Opportunities at the Subnational Level session (12 March)

Clean Air Across Borders: Advancing Regional Action in the Indo-Gangetic Plains and Himalayan Foothills (12 March)

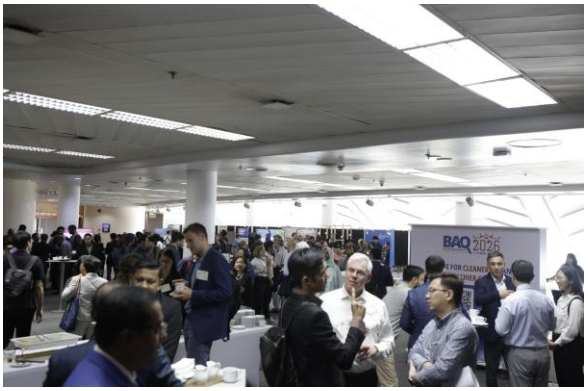
Networking Reception hosted by the Ministry of Environment of Japan (12 March)

Bangkok Air Walk (12 March)

Forging South-South Partnerships and Accelerating Collective Action on Air Pollution plenary (13 March)

Shared Atmosphere, Shared Responsibility: ASEAN Solutions for Better Air (13 March)

Poster presentations/Lightning talks



Exhibition and networking

Presentations, recording of sessions, and event photos and videos are available on ADB's DevAsia page of BAQ 2026.