

11th Better Air Quality Conference (BAQ2023)

DAY 2: 16 November, 9am – 10.30am

Plenary session: Sectors Working Together to Achieve Clean Air for Health and the Climate

KEYNOTE SPEECH

**Bruno Carrasco, Director General
Climate Change and Sustainable Development Department
(10 minutes)**

Good morning distinguished delegates, ladies, and gentlemen.

I am delighted to extend a warm welcome every one of you to the second day of the 11th Better Air Quality (BAQ) conference. The Asian Development Bank is deeply honoured to be your host, as we come together to confront the pressing challenges of air pollution and climate change, issues that urgently demand our collective attention.

Air pollution and climate change are two sides of the same coin, both arising from the complex interplay of various human activities, industries, and natural processes. These problems know no borders, affecting communities and ecosystems far beyond the areas where they originate. They are not confined to a single country or region; they are global and require coordinated and concerted effort. The BAQ stands as the platform where we can translate our shared ambitions into concrete actions to safeguard the health and wellbeing of all.

It is alarming that the average adult inhales 17,000 to 29,000^{1 2} breaths of air daily, yet over 90 percent of the Asia-Pacific region's population breathes air considered to be unsafe, according to the World Health Organization. Globally, over 7 million

¹ <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324409>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK482502/>

premature deaths³ are attributed to air pollution, with four Asian countries ranking in the top 10 for exposure to fine particulate matter in 2019.⁴ This grim reality means that air pollution results in about 4 million premature deaths each year in Asia and the Pacific.

Air pollution also exerts a substantial economic toll on the nations in this region. The OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) estimate a reduction of 1% to 2.5% in GDP across different Asian economies by 2060 due to air pollution.⁵ These costs stem mainly from reduced productivity, and increased healthcare expenses.

But air pollution is not uniform, it varies between urban and rural settings. Urban areas, with factors such as traffic, industries, and dense populations, expose their residents to a higher concentration of pollutants like fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), ground-level ozone (O₃), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), sulphur dioxide (SO₂), and carbon monoxide (CO). Rural regions contend with agricultural emissions and biomass burning. Addressing these differences is crucial for improving air quality and public health.

In the coming two decades, Asia will undergo an unprecedented wave of urbanization, with an additional 1.1 billion people calling Asian cities their home by 2030.⁶ This urban expansion, leading to interconnected urban settlements like mega-regions, urban corridors, and city-regions, is intertwined with the prosperity

³ <https://www.unescap.org/news/towards-cleaner-skies-all-countries-gather-tackle-worsening-air-pollution-asia-pacific-region#:~:text=Nearly%2090%20per%20cent%20of,in%20the%20Asia%2DPacific%20region.>

⁴ <https://www.stateofglobalair.org/> - [South Asia Regional Snapshot on Air Quality](#)

⁵ <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/780921/air-quality-asia.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.adb.org/features/facts-and-data-about-cities-and-urbanization-asia#:~:text=ADB's%20strategy%20states%20that%20%22livable%20cities%22%20will%20be%20fostered,%2C%20housing%2C%20and%20housing%20finance.>

of nations. However, it also presents the challenge of more people breathing toxic air, adversely affecting both health and the economy.

South Asia, in particular, faces the brunt of air pollution impacts, with 9 out of the world's 10 largest cities situated in the region.⁷ Approximately 30 percent of fine particulate matter originates from residential sources, including the use of solid fuels for heating and cooking. A growing personal vehicle fleet and reliance on coal for energy production pose challenges for nitrogen dioxide levels and particulate matter. Exposure to PM_{2.5} in South Asia is among the highest in the world, with fewer than 1 percent of cities in the region meeting the WHO PM_{2.5} guideline. Air pollution is a leading environmental risk factor for poor health in South Asia, with the disease burden straining healthcare systems and affecting communities and economies.

Policies and measures that simultaneously address air pollution and climate change therefore hold immense value. Such policies can yield multiple benefits, particularly those that reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) or black carbon or focus on reducing ground-level ozone. These policies can complement broader initiatives aimed at mitigating global climate change.

Transitioning from coal-fired power stations to renewable energy sources, promoting electric vehicles, enforcing stricter emission controls for industrial plants, advocating for cleaner household fuels, and discouraging residue burning in agriculture are all vital steps. We need action across all sectors, with each of us playing a crucial role in reducing pollution that contribute to poor air quality and climate change.

⁷ <https://www.stateofglobalair.org/> - [South Asia Regional Snapshot on Air Quality](#)

There are promising opportunities for cross-sectoral collaboration, particularly in the synergy between clean energy and transportation. Embracing the management of agricultural waste for clean energy generation, such as the conversion of agricultural waste into biogas, represents another avenue for progress. These collaborative initiatives have the potential to make a substantial impact on enhancing air quality and safeguarding public health, ultimately paving the way for a cleaner and healthier environment.

Recognising the importance of cross-sectoral and transboundary collaboration, ADB has adopted a new operating model to deliver support more effectively to our developing member countries. The Asian Development Bank's Climate Change Operational Framework for 2017–2030⁸ plays an active role in facilitating the regional shift towards reduced greenhouse gas emissions and the promotion of climate-resilient development. This framework serves as a guiding force across all ADB sectors and thematic groups, reinforcing ADB's unwavering commitment to increase its investments in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

In conclusion, let us join hands and hearts to ensure that the breaths we take every day can be taken in clean air, nurturing our collective ability to lead healthy, happy, and productive lives. Only together we can move from ambition to action and make a significant difference in the battle against air pollution and climate change.

Thank you.

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⁸ <https://www.adb.org/documents/climate-change-operational-framework-2017-2030>