Call for Proposals

Case Studies on the Intersectional Impacts of Air Pollution on the World of Work of Vulnerable Groups including Women and Youth in Southeast Asia

Submission deadline: 23:59, 13 August 2021 (Bangkok local time)
Only submissions sent to Ms Jaee Nikam (jaee.nikam@sei.org) will be accepted.

The Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) announces a call for proposals for research partners to conduct case studies in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Thailand and Vietnam. Total funds available are up to 400,000 Swedish Krona (SEK) per country.

1) Introduction

Air pollution is a growing problem in Asian countries. While its impacts on human health are becoming increasingly known, its impacts on the world of work, including disproportionate exposure of worker’s groups and consequences on their health and wellbeing, work quality and quantity, remain understudied. Specifically, there is a dearth of research on how exposure to and impacts of air pollution in the world of work are influenced by social categories and identities (i.e., gender and age), such as younger population groups newly entering the job market and migrants. While a substantial body of research on gender and air pollution has focused on women’s exposure to indoor (i.e., point source) air pollution, much less is known on exposure to outdoor air pollution (i.e., non-point source) by women, youths and migrant workers who are over-represented in informal employment such as street vending, daily wage labour, construction and agriculture.
SEI, an international research institute, with funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), and in the context of the UN Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth, is currently conducting a research on the impacts of air quality in the “world of work”. This research encompasses both the labour supply-side (i.e. workers and employment) and the demand-side (i.e. productivity, enterprises). The labour supply-side includes paid and self-employed, short-term, part-time and seasonal employment. The project seeks to understand the differentiated impacts of air pollution on those within the world of work in Southeast Asia and to identify recommendations on how to reduce air pollution and improve the quality and quantity of employment in a context of just transitions towards a low carbon economy. Following a scoping review of the existing evidence and knowledge about air pollution and the world of work in Southeast Asia, we are now looking for in-country research partners to carry out case studies in three of the four countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. This call for proposals provides information on the partners we are looking for and the work we sought to undertake.

2) The state of knowledge on the relationship of air quality, labour and inequality

This section provides a snapshot of the key issues that attend to the relationship of air quality, labour and inequality.

Firstly, environmental degradation, including air pollution, affects different social and age groups differently. Often, the nature of occupation and location of work are not the only factors causing uneven exposure to and impacts of environmental harm. Multiple and intersecting characteristics such as gender, age, class, education, ethnicity, etc., also play important roles. The interaction between structural inequalities with those characteristics render some people much more vulnerable to environmental harm and expose them to more precarious working conditions. For example, female migrant workers are more likely to be exposed to toxic residential and work place pollution due to their poverty status and overrepresentation in low-skilled labour (ILO and Labour Migration Branch, 2016). Therefore, assessing the impacts of air pollution should not only investigate who is more impacted by air pollution and what dynamics are at play (e.g. health, economic, wellbeing), but must also identify how vulnerability and precarity is underpinned by the intersecting identities of individuals or groups.

Secondly, policy imperatives for mitigating air pollution often do not sufficiently tackle the root causes of environmental problems (i.e., economic development policies that privilege pollution-intensive industries) (Dasgupta et al., 2006). Popular pathways or drivers of environmental sustainability are largely framed under “neutral,” green, or technocentric interventions (Bugge, Hansen and Klitkou, 2016) such as combustion control, agricultural and industrial waste management, transitions to renewable energy, improvement of energy efficiency, etc. While such developments are indeed crucial, the deployment of these technologies are neither power-neutral, nor equally applicable across all contexts (Ford and Wajcman, 2017). Hence, it is important to investigate the structural causes of air pollution from a political economy perspective, and to examine how the development and implementation of air pollution policies and technologies have reproduced gendered inequalities, with exclusionary or discriminatory effects for specific groups. Along this line, it is equally important to explore how policies related to green economy in general and air pollution control in particular affect businesses, their operation and employment practices. As business and enterprises play

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1 Further information on SEI’s strategy and approach can be found on the SEI website.
critical roles in job creation in the transition to green economy, whether those new opportunities meet the standards of decent work is also worth considering.

Thirdly, knowledge exists in different forms and is produced by not only by experts and scientists, but also through day-to-day experiences of people (Harcourt and Nelson, 2015). However, some forms of knowledge and knowledge production are legitimized and recognized (by state and influential actors) while others are disqualified as inadequate, naïve, and non-scientific (Foucault, 2002a). For example, the dominant forms of environmental knowledge produced through Western techno-sciences are presented as neutral, universal and superior to local/traditional knowledge of the environment (Brand, 2010). Similarly, statistical data is privileged over accounts of women and men’s everyday experiences with environmental changes (Fuentes and Cookson, 2020). To avoid the reproduction of hegemonic knowledge, it is important to integrate methodologies that co-produce knowledge by diverse stakeholder groups (i.e. policy makers, employers, science and academia, NGOs and impacted labour and employer groups) to contribute to the framing of air pollution problems and policy agenda.

Fourthly, the informal economy is currently underrepresented in existing studies. The informal economy refers to all economic activities which are insufficiently covered by formal arrangements, such as official contracts, taxation, social security, and policies and regulations. The absence of formal arrangements has important ramifications on the well-being of those in informal employment. There is often no minimum wage set and health and safety policies are limited. Workers in this sector are paid low and are at higher risk of occupational injuries or exposure to harmful air pollutants both in the workplace and the domestic sphere compared to those in formal employment due to lack of standards. At the same time, while the informal economy can also be a significant contributor to air pollution due to a lack of regulations and institutional oversight, there are very few studies that quantify the extent to which those in informal employment are exposed to air pollution and assess the contribution of different emissions sources to this exposure (Landrigan et al., 2017; Bonnet, Vanek and Chen, 2019; OECD and ILO, 2019).

3) About the call for proposals

Based on the above, SEI is looking for in-country research partners in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam to carry out case studies, which are guided by the following questions:

1. In what ways do air quality affect different worker and business groups across occupations and sectors? Do the impacts disproportionately affect certain groups based on inequalities related to social categories and identities such as gender, age, nature of occupation, sexuality, ethnicity, education, ability, migration status, class, etc.?

2. Do existing national policies (including labour market, economic development, and pollution control policies) address structural causes of air pollution and mitigate its impacts in the world of work? In what ways do those policies benefit or adversely affect different groups of business and workers? In particular, how does gender and age determine these benefits and impacts?

3. What are the entry points for interventions and policies to address air pollution, and what are the opportunities for ‘green jobs’ that are both decent and accessible for women and youths?

4) Methods

Based on these research questions, we envisage proposed projects to conduct research that brings to the fore an intersectional understanding of how air pollution is underpinned by social and economic structures. We expect proposals to articulate methodologies that follow principles of inclusive, feminist and participatory research. Applicants can choose specific industries to base their case studies around,
including work settings or labour groups they want to investigate in detail, while being mindful that we are looking for depth not quantity. In particular, we are looking for case studies that look at the informal sector and situation of women and youth. The methodology should be developed around the following lines of inquiry, as informed by the key issues outlined in Section 2:

- Capture the ways in which air pollution impacts worker groups differently (specifically women and youth), taking into account their intersecting social characteristics and different ways they understand and experience air pollution beyond mainstream framings of air pollution impacts.
- Assess the exposure of people employed in the informal sector to air pollution in all aspects of their lives, based on time activity data and the magnitude and sources of emission in the informal sector.
- Interrogate the structural causes of air pollution and main drivers of increased exposure for different labour groups via a political economy lens, by moving beyond a technocratic framework of understanding air pollution mitigation.
- Investigate the roles of business and enterprises in mitigating air pollution exposure and impacts.

Applicants are encouraged to combine innovative qualitative and quantitative methods in the research. As part of the methodology, it is important for the research partner to conduct stakeholder consultations and interviews, including the direct involvement of employers’ and workers’ organizations (such as labour unions).

SEI will assist the research partners in conducting an assessment of the magnitude and the exposure to different sources of air pollution in different locations, and would like to specifically focus on the exposure of those employed in the informal economy, with the vision of building this economy’s emission inventory and use it to assess exposure. This could be achieved by collecting the following data:

- Activity data on the informal economy, for example, on the number of street food vendors, in order to estimate emissions of GHG’s and air pollutants from the informal sector;
- PM$_{2.5}$ concentrations in different locations where manufacturing (e.g., construction) workers spend their time (i.e., place of work, home, outdoors); and,
- Time use surveys or time activity diaries which will provide data on where workers, both in the informal and formal sector, spend their time. Allowing for a full understanding of the socioeconomic impacts of air pollution on workers in the informal sector.

5) Budget

Up to 400,000 SEK is allocated for each country case study. A proposal may cover any of the following countries: Cambodia, Lao PDR, Thailand and Vietnam. A total of three projects will be funded.
6) Proposal selection criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

Knowledge of the fields of air quality, labour and gender/social sciences

The applicant should provide evidence of the applicant’s or team’s knowledge on air quality research, labour studies, gender studies, and social science approaches. Such evidence could include examples of previous research or work on these topics.

Demonstrate research and policy engagement capacity

The applicant should have demonstrated research and policy engagement capacity with good data collection methods and a clear plan of action as to how different stakeholders will be involved and how to ensure that key policy actors are engaged from the beginning, including employers’ and workers’ organisations. Demonstrated knowledge of relevant policy actors and the policy and planning process that will be targeted. SEI will provide technical support, as outlined in Section 10 of this call, but it is expected that the in-country partner can lead the implementation of the project on the ground and the analysis and writing up of findings, as well as engagement with relevant local stakeholders.

Ability to foster co-production of knowledge through an inclusive, multi-disciplinary approach

A fundamental approach encouraged in the research is knowledge co-production wherein the applicant will engage with multi-stakeholder groups including labour and employer groups with diverse identities and in different locations to capture their embodied experiences of air pollution. Thus, diverse stakeholder groups (i.e. policy makers, employers, science and academia, NGOs and impacted labour and employer groups) are expected to contribute to the framing of air pollution problems and policy agenda, using approaches such as key informant interviews, roundtable discussions, and focus group discussions. This means that the applicant should demonstrate understanding of and experience in knowledge co-production and describe how the research is designed applying its principles.

Research management capabilities

The applicant or consortium should demonstrate a proven capability to manage research projects. Description of previous projects and their outcomes is needed. Listing of project and publications could help as well as letters of support.

Ethical considerations

Proposals are expected to identify ethical issues the research might encounter and identify steps to address them during the conduct of the research. Where required in the country of implementation, the applicant must undertake ethical reviews. Duration of this ethical review will have to factored in the workplan.

7) Preferred lead

Proposals may be submitted by a single organisation or consortium. If a consortium, the proposal should be led by one lead institution (the contracting party) who will be responsible for the
administration of the project and its budget. The roles of each consortium member should also be specified in the proposal. The lead institution must remain in regular liaison with SEI.

Preference will be given to applicants or consortium already based in the proposed country of study to avoid any unnecessary delays due to international travel restrictions arising from the COVID situation.

8) Permission requirements

Where it is required, the recipient of the grant (the applicant) shall obtain in writing all permissions from the appropriate government authorities of the country or countries in which work under the project is to be performed. Each country will have different requirements, but SEI will provide advice on how to proceed with permissions during the contracting process.

9) Expected outputs

The outputs expected in the contract are the following:

- 1 research report based on a general outline to be provided by SEI.
- 1 policy brief following SEI format
- 2 blogs, op-eds or podcasts
- 1-2 stakeholder engagement workshops in each case study country as part of the data collection process, e.g. with representatives of labour organisations and employers organisations, or with government representatives
- 1 national policy roundtable in each case study country to share findings and identify recommendations

10) SEI’s role and support

Oversight and technical advice

SEI will provide support to the research partners in research design, data collection methods, sector/labour group selection, data analysis and stakeholder/policy dialogues. SEI will supervise the research process to ensure that the collected evidence and findings meet the research objectives and comply with ethical guidelines.

Data collection and analysis

SEI will assist the research partners in conducting integrated assessment of the magnitude and exposed time to different sources of air pollution. This includes not only workplace exposure but also the exposure from other pollution sources (ambient and household), assessing the time-activity patterns, and daily variation in PM$_{2.5}$ exposure that determine the pattern of air pollution exposure for different population groups. SEI will support the research partners in collecting primary and/or secondary data on time-activity patterns and PM$_{2.5}$ concentrations in different locations for workers. We would use measurement and modelling techniques to:

- Estimate air pollutant emissions from particular informal sectors
- Understand variation in time-activity patterns (i.e. how much time informal sector workers spend in different locations (micro-environments, e.g. home, work, outside, office etc.))
- Characterise variation in air pollution concentrations in the different micro-environments where workers spend their time
- Estimate personal exposure to air pollution for key workers in the informal sector
- Quantify the difference in total exposure to air pollution between informal and formal economy workers, including integrated exposure due to ambient and household air pollution.

**Collaboration and networking**

SEI will assist in building collaboration and networks between stakeholders at national and regional levels to identify pathways, policy options, entry points and research agenda to improve the quality of work and working conditions for all working people in order to contribute to a healthier and more resilient economy.

**11) Tender process**

Proposals must be submitted using the 2 templates provided:

- Annex 1 Proposal Template
- Annex 2 Budget Template.

All submissions are to be sent through email to Jaee Nikam, jaee.nikam@sei.org, by the deadline at 23:59, 13 August 2021 (Bangkok local time). Any proposals received after this time will not be accepted.

All proposals will be reviewed by the proposal review team from SEI, IDRC, and ILO. The proposal review team reserves a right to decline any full proposal that does not meet the minimum requirements set in the call document.

The key dates (based on Bangkok local time) in the process are:
1. Launch of the call for proposals – 14 July 2021
2. Deadline for full proposal submission – 13 August 2021, 23:59 Bangkok local time
3. Evaluation and selection of full proposals and grantee contract completion – 14–30 August 2021

For further information, questions or any queries, kindly contact Jaee Nikam, jaee.nikam@sei.org.

**12) References**


