

Terms of Reference (ToR): Director – Air Quality

Position Title: Director – Air Quality

Duty Station: South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP) Secretariat, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Contract Duration: Until 30 June 2026 (subject to availability of project funding and performance review)

Reporting To: Director General, SACEP

1. Background

Air pollution is one of the most pressing environmental and public health challenges in South Asia as the region is home to several of the world's most polluted cities. Rapid urbanization, industrialization, transport emissions, biomass burning, and poor waste management contribute to extremely high levels of particulate matter and ground-level ozone, with direct implications for human health, economic productivity, and climate change. Concentrations of fine particulate matter (PM 2.5) is particularly a problem causing an estimated 2 million premature deaths in the region each year and incurs significant economic costs.

Transboundary nature of air pollution is another issue in the region, requiring regional cooperation, policy harmonization, and joint action. Recognizing this need, the South Asia Co-operative Environment Programme (SACEP), the only intergovernmental body in South Asia mandated to coordinate regional environmental and climate actions, has been playing a facilitative role in addressing transboundary air pollution engagement, notably through inputs to frameworks such as the Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Transboundary Effects. The Seventh meeting of the Governing Council of SACEP, held in April 1998 in Malé, the Republic of Maldives, adopted the Declaration. From 2010 – 2016, UNEP in partnership with SACEP with the financial support from SIDA supported the implementation of the Malé Declaration. In the past, SACEP also partnered with UNEP and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition to promote integrated action on air pollution and short-lived climate pollutants, particularly within the context of achieving co-benefits for health, climate, and development.

2. Objectives of the Position

With the rising air pollution and complexities in the prevention, control and management of transboundary air pollution, SACEP is reinvigorating its work on providing sustained technical and thematic leadership, diplomacy, and project delivery on air quality sector. As part of its institutional strengthening under the World Bank-supported Plastic Free Rivers and Seas for South Asia (PLEASE) Project, SACEP is recruiting thematic Directors to provide leadership in key environmental domains. The Director – Air Quality will lead SACEP's regional work on improving ambient and transboundary air quality across South Asia.

3. Scope of Work/Roles and Responsibility

The Director-Air Quality will provide high-level technical leadership, strategic guidance, facilitate regional cooperation, and policy direction to achieve coherent, regionally coordinated responses to foster a coherent and collaborative regional response to air pollution, aligned with the priorities of Member States. S/he will also undertake any other tasks or responsibilities assigned by the Director General to support SACEP's broader mission.

Strategic Leadership and Direction

- Develop and lead the implementation of the organization's strategic framework, plans, and initiatives on air quality for SACEP to act as a regional convener.
- Provide expert advice to senior leadership on emerging trends, risks, and opportunities related to air pollution and atmospheric issues.
- Align air quality objectives with broader environmental, health, and climate goals, and development targets, and cross-thematic integration into all program initiatives.

Technical advisory and support

- Provide policy guidance and technical assistance to SACEP Member States on air pollution control and monitoring strategies, and developing national action plans and air quality standards.
- Coordinate regional forums, technical working groups, and advisory panels on air quality management.
- Facilitate technical workshops, training sessions, and knowledge exchanges.
- Lead and implement existing air quality interventions by SACEP such as Malé Declaration on Control and Prevention of Air Pollution and its Likely Transboundary Effects.
- Promote science-based decision-making by overseeing research, air quality assessments, and innovation in monitoring technologies.
- Lead the development of analytical reports, drafting of key policy documents, regional action frameworks, and advocacy materials.
- Establish and strengthen partnerships with regional and international organizations, research institutions, and development partners.
- Establish and maintain regional air quality data hub through partnerships with scientific institutions, Member States, and data platforms.

Resource Mobilization and Programme and Project Oversight

- Identify funding opportunities and lead proposal development to support air quality programmes and projects.
- Engage with donors and development partners to secure sustainable financing.
- Oversee the design, implementation, and evaluation of air quality programs and projects, ensuring alignment with the Intergovernmental organization's mandate.

- Create, lead and manage inclusive, collaborative, and high-performing multidisciplinary team of experts, analysts, and support staff to ensure smooth implementation of programmes and projects.
- Monitor progress, document results, and contribute to SACEP's institutional learning and reporting of air quality initiatives.

Stakeholder Engagement and Partnerships

- Develop and implement a regional work plan and/or regional programme/project on air quality in consultation with Member States and relevant stakeholders.
- Facilitate cross-border collaboration on transboundary air pollution and harmonization of air monitoring protocols and data, and facilitate regional consensus-building on air quality management.
- Foster cooperation among member states, UN agencies, regional bodies, civil society, academia, and the private sector.
- Represent the organization in international forums, negotiations, and technical working groups on air pollution.

4. Qualifications and Experience Required Qualifications, Expertise, and Competencies

- Master's degree in Environmental Science, Atmospheric Science, Public Health, or a related discipline.
- Minimum of 10 years of relevant experience in air quality management, environmental policy, or related technical fields.
- High-level of scientific and technical knowledge of principles, practices and policies in air quality management planning.
- Demonstrated experience in regional cooperation, technical project implementation, or environmental governance.
- Experience with intergovernmental processes or working in a multi-country context is an asset.
- Experience in coordinating and participating in missions and high-level meetings.
- Excellent communication and interpersonal skills, with the ability to effectively engage with stakeholders at all levels, including government officials, international organizations
- Excellent analytical and demonstrated ability to draft clear and concise technical and policy papers; and proposal and project reports.
- Fluency in English is required; knowledge of regional languages is an advantage.
- Proficiency in using MS Office suite (e.g. Word, Excel, PowerPoint) for report preparation, and use of digital collaboration tools (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google docs) for team coordination and stakeholder engagement is necessary.

5. Employment Terms

- This is a full-time position based at the SACEP Secretariat in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

- Contract duration is until 30 June 2026, subject to availability of funds and satisfactory performance.
- A monthly salary of USD 4,500 will be paid, along with a USD 500 monthly allowance for fuel and communications.
- Medical insurance will be provided as per SACEP's service regulations.
- SACEP will bear the cost of onboarding including airfare, visa, and other admissible incidental costs.
- The selected candidate shall not receive a home country salary during the period of employment with SACEP.

6. Supervision and Performance Evaluation

- The Director – Air Quality will report to the Director General of SACEP.
- The Director General will monitor the performance and take final decisions on continuation based on periodic evaluations.

7. Nomination and Selection Process

- SACEP Member countries are invited to nominate qualified candidates for the position. *Nomination of qualified female candidates are encouraged.*
- SACEP will review all nominations and conduct interviews to finalize one candidate for appointment.
- Only one expert will be appointed as Director – Air Quality.