



GREEN CITIES

Swisscontact's Approach to Sustainable Urban Development

Urbanization is accelerating, particularly in low-income countries, where cities face growing challenges such as poverty, inadequate infrastructure, and climate vulnerability. **Yet cities also offer transformative potential:** they are hubs of innovation, economic opportunity, and social progress. Swisscontact embraces this duality by promoting sustainable urban development through its **Green Cities approach**.

In line with SDG 11, Swisscontact defines Green Cities as urban spaces that are resource-efficient, socially inclusive, economically dynamic, and environmentally responsible. These cities prioritize human well-being, reduce environmental impact, and build resilience to climate change.

Swisscontact's added value lies in its integrated and participatory approach. By working with public and private stakeholders, we strengthen urban governance, support inclusive development, and foster innovation across waste management, energy, mobility, and air quality. Our initiatives not only advance environmental performance but also unlock new pathways for job creation, income growth, and financial inclusion. Through tools such as green credits and circular business models, we enable SMEs, informal workers, and disadvantaged groups to access economic opportunities in the green transition.

Through targeted support and strategic dialogue, Swisscontact contributes to sustainable urban transformation that is locally grounded, climate-smart, and socially just.

Green Cities are not just a vision—they are a pathway to resilient, equitable, and thriving urban futures.

SWISSCONTACT

Swisscontact is an independent foundation for international development cooperation. Founded in 1959 by leading Swiss companies, it promotes skills development and entrepreneurship for sustainable economic growth in developing and emerging countries.

Through education, innovation, and entrepreneurship, we promote sustainable jobs, fair incomes, and functioning local markets. We apply a partnership-based, market-oriented, and effective approach.



BOLIVIA

1. WASTE MANAGEMENT & CIRCULAR ECONOMY

We advance integrated, inclusive solid waste management by **combining public services with private sector involvement**, guided by circular economy principles. Our solutions are tailored to specific waste streams—organic, plastic, scrap, electronic, or hazardous—and include decentralised collection models for underserved areas. We focus on **reducing, reusing, and reintegrating materials**, supporting sustainable technologies like composting, material recovery, and waste-to-energy, while tackling methane emissions from organic waste. By **enabling circular business models** such as repair, refurbishment, and recycling, we promote resource efficiency, climate action, and green jobs. Through capacity building, stakeholder coordination, and policy dialogue, we strengthen institutions and encourage behavioural change, supporting the shift from linear to circular resource management.



FUNDED BY:
SIDA 2020 – 2026

ZERO WASTE

Project Experience:
Turning Waste into Opportunity

The **Zero Waste** Project, implemented in cooperation with Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, promotes circular solid waste management in Bolivia to cut greenhouse gas emissions and protect ecosystems. In phase one, it improved waste collection and separation in nine municipalities—including full differentiated collection in La Paz—formally integrated over 120 (mostly women) waste pickers, trained 88+ municipal staff, and supported green businesses. The project enabled the recovery of over 305 tonnes of inorganic waste and 283 tonnes of organic waste per day.

Phase two aims to scale these models nationwide (Oruro, Sucre), strengthen regulations, and connect local innovations to national policy. Working with government and private partners, the project develops inclusive, efficient waste management systems that create green jobs and promote community engagement.



BANGLADESH

2. ENERGY EFFICIENCY & RENEWABLE ENERGY

We promote energy transitions through the introduction of renewable energy solutions across both high-consumption sectors—such as buildings, transport, and industry—and smaller-scale applications, including SMEs and households. Our interventions focus on replacing fossil-based systems with **decentralized renewable energy technologies**, such as solar PV, biogas, and hybrid systems, tailored to local energy needs and resource availability. We support the deployment of energy-efficient technologies, optimization of process controls, and the development of low-emission products. **Technical capacity building** is central to our approach, ensuring that stakeholders can implement, operate, and maintain these systems effectively. Alongside technical training, we strengthen **non-technical green skills**—such as systems thinking, environmental awareness, and collaboration—to foster the mindsets and transversal competencies needed for sustainable change. By enhancing environmental standards and enabling sustainable energy transitions, we contribute to climate mitigation, energy resilience, and inclusive economic development.



INSPIRE 2025 – 2028
FUNDED BY Swedish Embassy

PROGRESS 2022 – 2026
FUNDED BY the Embassies of Sweden and Switzerland

Project Experience: Powering Change in Bangladesh's RMG Sector

The **InSPIRE** project accelerates the green transformation of Bangladesh's RMG sector by enabling small and medium factories to adopt renewable energy and efficiency solutions. It tackles technical, financial, and capacity gaps through grants, training, and technical support, with a strong emphasis on gender equity and ESG standards. Through partnerships and knowledge sharing, InSPIRE fosters a more competitive, inclusive, and sustainable industry.

The **PROGRESS** project promotes green growth by advancing energy-efficient technologies and strengthening green skills. It prioritises decent, secure jobs—especially for women—and helps factories meet global sustainability standards. As part of a broader climate initiative, PROGRESS builds resilience and drives systemic change through capacity building and collaboration. Together, these projects show how targeted interventions can drive energy transitions, boost competitiveness, and support inclusive, climate-resilient growth in Bangladesh's vital RMG sector.



Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Peru

3. URBAN MOBILITY & AIR QUALITY

We promote sustainable urban mobility and clean air strategies to improve **public health, reduce emissions, and enhance city liveability**. Our approach prioritizes non-motorized and low-emission transport—like pedestrian infrastructure, bike lanes, and electric mobility—while optimizing transport planning and integrating multimodal systems for better accessibility and safety.

We also introduce air pollution monitoring, develop contingency plans, and support vehicle inspection centres to enforce **emission standards**. Through technical assistance, capacity building, and regulatory support, we help local authorities deploy clean technologies and strengthen air quality management, contributing to healthier, more resilient urban environments.



FUNDED BY:
SDC

CALAC+

Project Experience:
Healthier Cities Through Clean Mobility Solution

The **CALAC+** project is driving cleaner, healthier cities across Latin America by supporting the transition to soot-free, low-carbon public transport and off-road machinery in **Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru**. Through technical assistance and policy support, CALAC+ helps cities implement sustainable mobility solutions—such as electric and low-emission buses—while strengthening air quality monitoring and regulatory frameworks. By fostering collaboration among national and municipal authorities, private sector actors, and regional networks, CALAC+ accelerates the adoption of innovative technologies and best practices. The project also builds local capacity and shares lessons learned regionally and globally, ensuring that successful approaches are scaled up for greater impact.



Colombia & Peru

4. SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION

Our initiatives in the sustainable construction value chain aim to enhance competitiveness, boost productivity, and foster innovation. We **strengthen training systems** by improving curricula and implementing dual training models, ensuring that workers and professionals are equipped with up-to-date skills in sustainable construction. At the same time, we **promote innovative practices** such as managing construction and demolition waste for urban furniture and rural housing, exploring bamboo construction, and advancing healthy building methods that prioritize indoor air quality, temperature, humidity, lighting, and comfort. A key example is the **Construction Living Lab at the University of Santander in Colombia**, developed in partnership with the Institute of Engineering and Architecture of Fribourg and the University of Fribourg, which adapts Swiss models to test sustainable technologies and circular economy practices. Our work also focuses on improving **sustainable construction regulations**, facilitating public-private coordination—such as through the Colombian Sustainable Construction Roundtable—and contributing to the development of a national qualifications framework for the sector.



FUNDED BY:
SDC & Private Sector
CONSTRUYA



Project Experience:
Building better futures

The Construya project, implemented in **Colombia and Peru** with support from the **Swiss Development Cooperation and the Hilti Foundation**—established by the Martin Hilti Family Trust and co-funded by the Hilti Group, a global leader in construction technology—demonstrated the value of practical training for construction workers. This approach significantly reduced poor construction practices during progressive housing upgrades among trained workers. By applying a systemic approach, ten private construction material companies and four training institutions adopted Construya’s methods and became advocates for better practices. These companies, whose main clients are workers and low-income families (over 60% of sales), had strong incentives to participate. As a result, more than 40,000 workers were trained, and 160,000 people now live in safer homes, as shown by impact studies. Since 2024, in partnership with the Holcim Foundation—created by Holcim, a Swiss-based global leader in building materials—the model is being replicated in El Salvador to validate its effectiveness in a new context.

OUR IMPACT

By addressing pressing urban challenges such as waste, energy, mobility, and air quality, we help cities move **from vulnerability toward resilience**. Our work combines systemic approaches with practical solutions, ensuring that improvements are not only **environmentally sound but also socially and economically inclusive**. In doing so, we strengthen local governance, foster innovation, and enable communities to benefit directly from more sustainable urban systems.

Through sustainable solutions in waste management, energy, mobility, and air quality, we contribute to the transformation of urban areas into more liveable, inclusive, and climate-resilient spaces. Our work delivers measurable outcomes across multiple dimensions:



SOCIAL INCLUSION & INCOME GROWTH: Inclusive models empower communities, SMEs, and informal workers, creating equitable access to economic opportunities.



JOB CREATION: Green sectors, such as recycling, renewable energy, and sustainable transportation, generate new employment pathways, especially for young people and marginalized groups.



GHG REDUCTION: Circular economy practices, clean energy systems, and low-emission mobility contribute to significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.



IMPROVED TECHNOLOGIES: We facilitate the adoption of efficient, context-appropriate technologies that enhance environmental performance and long-term sustainability.

TEAM UP FOR IMPACT

Together with Swisscontact, you create impact both locally and globally. We develop solutions that merge your values and business objectives, leading to sustainable projects and partnerships. Your expertise steers economic development directly to the people. We will accompany you from concept creation to measuring impact, providing guidance even when you are facing individual challenges.

We provide in-depth expertise of the local context and trusted relationships with communities, to jointly develop programs that are inclusive, scalable, and sustainable. We share knowledge and information, collaborate in program implementation, and exchange experiences in evaluating our programs.

YOUR BENEFITS AND OUR SUCCESS FACTORS

- **Locally-driven development:** We support communities and local partners in initiating change, empowering them to take responsibility after the project, work sustainably, and increase resilience.
- **Private sector engagement:** We mobilize private funding, build strong partnerships, and leverage our networks to strengthen market systems and drive innovation.
- **Systemic approach involving diverse actors:** We bring together governments, civil society, and businesses to jointly develop scalable solutions for complex development challenges.
- **Climate-friendly and inclusive growth:** We integrate climate protection into all our projects, promote green jobs and a green economy, and focus especially on disadvantaged groups, particularly women and minorities.
- **Women economic empowerment and migration:** We support economic empowerment through qualification, entrepreneurship, and inclusive trade, enabling migrants and vulnerable groups to thrive.
- **Expertise and quality:** We deliver reliable, high-quality solutions based on values, professional excellence, and leadership in sustainability.

