

Media Release

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Founded in 1959: Swisscontact, Swiss Foundation for Technical Cooperation

60 years of Swisscontact: development cooperation in transition

The focus of international development cooperation is currently being heavily debated. On the one hand, the discussion about the objectives of international development cooperation is strongly influenced by domestic policy. On the other, the UN's Sustainable Development Goals require new forms and strategies for collaboration. For the international development sector, change is nothing new – as Swisscontact, celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, has come to learn.

The Swiss private sector must contribute to economic development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It was with this goal in mind that eminent figures from Swiss business and science founded the Swiss Foundation for Technical Development Assistance in 1959. Its first President was Hans Schindler, from the Maschinenfabrik Oerlikon factory, and its first Managing Director was Ambassador Fritz Real. The Board of Trustees included Anne-Marie Im Hof-Piguet and Prof. Jacques Freymond, who had launched the foundation.

Since being founded in 1959, Swisscontact's approach has evolved constantly while new partner countries and areas of specialisation were added. However, through all these years Swisscontact remained true to its conviction that effective development cooperation must always be market-oriented and business-friendly in order to have a sustainable impact.

The Swiss Precision Mechanics School in India since 1962

In the 1960s, Swisscontact began focusing on implementing the Swiss model of vocational education. In doing so, Swisscontact wished to support industrialisation and economic development of developing countries striving for their independence. In 1962, the first precision mechanics trade school was opened in Chandigarh, India. Young men and women are trained here to this day. From 1971, this foundation took on the name "Swisscontact".

In the 1980s, promotion of small and medium enterprises became one of Swisscontact's main activities, from Peru to Indonesia. Ten years later, the foundation began supporting the creation of savings and credit cooperatives. Swisscontact encouraged these entities to focus their services on the needs of a rural client base. For the promotion of trades and industry, environmental issues would be a constant focus.

The poor are also economic actors

In the 2000s, Swisscontact developed new methods in order to integrate poorer populations more closely into the economy. The "Inclusive Markets" approach primarily uses market mechanisms and stimuli to improve production or create jobs. This decisively increases the range of effect that interventions have. Today, this market-focused and systemic approach constitutes the basis of all Swisscontact's project interventions. In Bangladesh, for example, Swisscontact helped to improve the livelihoods of 4.7 million people in the Katalyst project from 2002 to 2017.

For some years now, Swisscontact has been implementing more global programmes in even more countries simultaneously. It brings local market actors together, and by doing so encourages them to take initiative. In turn, this will ensure project sustainability.

Creating opportunities for 60 years

Over 60 years, Swisscontact's objectives have remained unchanged: The foundation will continue to create opportunities for people to grow financially and escape poverty through their own initiative. A critically constructive dialogue between government, civil society and the private sector helps Switzerland determine how it can continue contributing effectively and sustainably to international development cooperation in the future. The common search for appropriate solutions to existing challenges is important, and not in the least because global development problems define the domestic policy agenda.

Website 60 years Jubilee: www.swisscontact.org/60years

Download stock photos: http://bit.ly/scMediaRelease_60years

About Swisscontact

Swisscontact promotes economic, social and ecological development by giving people the opportunity to improve their living conditions on their own. In its project work, Swisscontact facilitates access to vocational training, promotes local entrepreneurship, creates access to local financial services and supports the efficient use of resources with the aim of effectively promoting income and employment.

Swisscontact was founded in 1959 as an independent foundation of personalities from the Swiss economy and science. It is exclusively active in international cooperation and has been carrying out its own and mandated projects since 1961. Since its foundation, Swisscontact has been close to the private sector. In 2018, Swisscontact was active in 35 countries with around 1,400 employees. The Foundation's registered office is in Zurich.

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