

SWISS
FOUNDATION
FOR TECHNICAL
COOPERATION


swisscontact

SOUTH ASIA REGIONAL REPORT 2022





Manish Pandey
Director, South Asia

MESSAGE FROM THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR

In 2022, we continued to face challenges around COVID-19, although less severe compared to previous years, and the war in Ukraine has had a significant impact on the world economy, including South Asia. The relevance of our work of fostering inclusive economic development and contributing to the SDGs increased in this time, and we were able to leverage our partnerships with the private sector and public bodies to achieve lasting impact at scale.

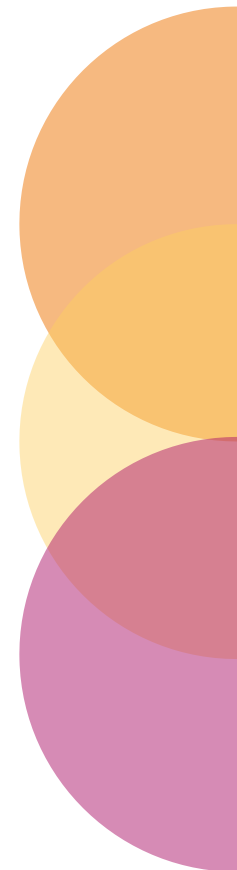
We are pleased to share with you a glimpse of our experience and achievements in 2022. In Bangladesh, we embraced technology and promoted insurance products to address farmers' vulnerability to climate change. In Nepal, we helped accelerate inclusive commercialisation of the agriculture sector through investments from the private sector. In Myanmar, we partnered with employers to build a resilient workforce in times of crisis. In these and numerous other instances, our team in the region lived up to the challenges and seized opportunities.

In the process, we leveraged around CHF 3.5 million from our private sector partners in reaching over 550,000 people and enterprises and contributing to over CHF 24 million in additional income generated in 2022.

In 2023, we will continue to, among others, prioritise our focus on climate change, a key development challenge, and deepen and expand our engagement with the private sector to catalyze inclusive economic development.

Our deepest appreciation goes to our colleagues in Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Nepal for their commitment and professionalism to drive lasting change.

We are grateful to our funding partners for their trust and collaboration to create a more sustainable and equitable world.



MAKING MEANINGFUL PROGRESS – SOUTH ASIA MAIN RESULTS

As we reflect on the past year, South Asia Region oversaw the implementation of 17 projects in Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. In this 2022 South Asia Regional Annual Report, we highlight our progress and accomplishments over the past year showcasing how Swisscontact has continued to thrive and make a positive impact for our partners and funders.

A YEAR OF IMPACT BY THE NUMBERS 2022

REACH (Number of People & Enterprises)

560,682

INCOME GENERATED (in CHF)

24,459,263

BENEFICIARIES (Number of People)

486,226

PRIVATE SECTOR FUNDING (in CHF)

3,440,701

BENEFICIARIES (Number of Enterprises)

1,346

PARTNERS (Number of Public & Private Organisations)

128

BANGLADESH

Swisscontact started its operation in Bangladesh in 1979, helping to establish and strengthen the Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Center (BITAC), which remains a vital training centre to this day. Current Swisscontact portfolio in Bangladesh includes projects in agriculture, light engineering, leather goods, international trade, ready-made garments (RMG), health, water & sanitation, ICT, financial services, and microinsurance sectors. For the benefit of Bangladesh's marginalised communities—particularly women and young people—these projects promote entrepreneurial ecosystems, industrial productivity, decent work, green growth, local economic development, and climate resilience in collaboration with local and multinational businesses and public agencies.

Interventions unique to each project include assisting RMG factories in raising environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards and increasing productivity; assisting SMEs in becoming more resilient to shocks like climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic; and introducing market-led products and solutions that assist farmers in raising productivity and enduring financial shocks in the event of climatic events and natural disasters. Our private sector partners drive and co-invest in these interventions, ensuring their longevity and commercial viability. We also work with government entities like municipalities and the land port authority to help them provide digitalised, accessible services to local businesses and underserved communities.

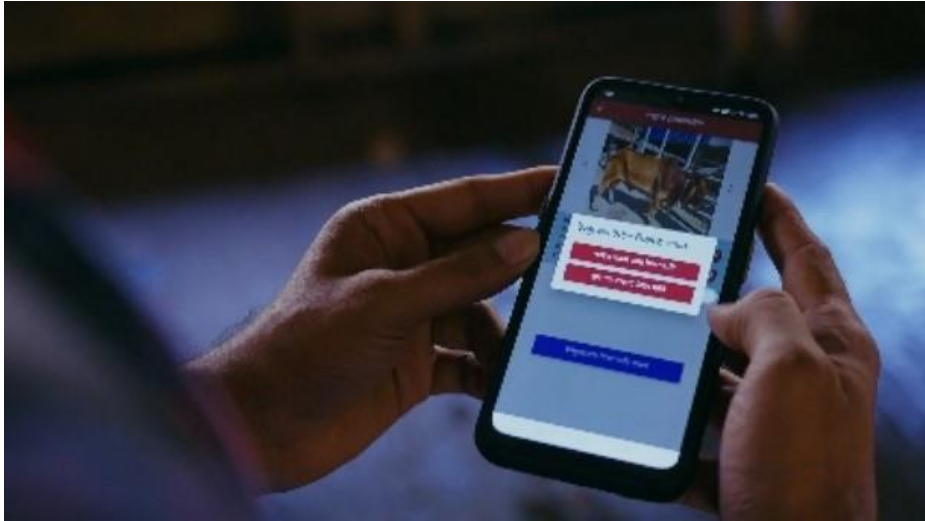
Swisscontact's ongoing work in Bangladesh demonstrates its steadfast commitment to promoting systemic changes and sustainable development.

To learn more about our projects in Bangladesh, click on the tabs below.

ASTHA * BMMDP * PRABRIDDI * Uttoron * GATF * M4C * B-SkillFUL * Sarathi * H2O * BYETS * PROGRESS

Impact story

Technologies & innovation reduce the vulnerability of farmers in Bangladesh



Bangladesh is the seventh most climate change-vulnerable country in the world and ranks fifth in terms of economic losses due to climate change, which in the past 20 years (2000-2019) totalled USD 3.72 billion. Around 56% of Bangladesh's population live in "high climate exposure areas" with 53 million subjected to "very high" exposure. Farmers in Bangladesh are one of the world's most climate-vulnerable groups as they continue to suffer catastrophic losses due to weather-related risks. Without access to insurance, smallholders' only available strategy for reducing weather risks is to limit their investment in high-value inputs and diversify into off-farm activities.

Swisscontact-implemented Bangladesh Microinsurance Market Development Project (BMMDP), also referred to as Surokkha, works with private sector partners to provide microinsurance bundled with high-in-demand products such as credit and farm supplies. Also embedded in these microinsurance products are climate-resilient extension services for agriculture and livestock that can withstand the effects of a changing climate.

The project has been instrumental in supporting the introduction of the innovative 'Cattle Health Insurance' product, which reimburses farmers for the veterinary costs of treating insured cattle, cushioning producers against unexpected financial shocks. This revolutionary product employs state-of-the-art 'machine learning' technology to recognise individual insured cattle based on their muzzle prints.





Similarly, Swisscontact's Making Market Work for the Chars (M4C) Project played a vital role in transforming the markets in the chars, which are hard-to-reach remote riverine islands in Bangladesh, through semi-commercialisation of the livestock sector. The project was able to achieve this feat by bridging the gap between traders and farmers with access to quality seeds and fertilisers and soil health preservation training and developing small infrastructures (storage services) to reduce wastage. The project also facilitated the introduction of solar irrigation and collaborated with the local government to establish the Chars Development Research Center.

In 2022, over 300,000 farmers and households, including women farmers, women-headed households, youth, and other marginalized people, benefited from these projects, increasing their income by CHF 13 million. In the same year, the two projects mobilized approximately CHF 2.1 million in investment from the private sector for the development, customisation, and distribution of products and services targeting farmers. This illustrates Swisscontact and its partners' commitment to improving farmers' and their family's quality of life by delivering vital products and services that enable them to prosper despite adverse conditions.





“Thanks to M4C's intervention, we now have three agro-input retail shops in our bazaar, and my business has significantly improved. I borrowed half of the BDT 200,000 (CHF 1,678) worth of inputs I needed for this crop season from ESDO, M4C's partner, and paid it back after the harvest and sale of the crop. It's been a successful arrangement for all of us.” - MD. JAHIRUL ISLAM, trader cum farmer, Kurigram.

The Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, has designed the Bangladesh Microinsurance Market Development Project.

Click on this link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iwb0GUYybcM> to learn how Bangladesh's First Cattle Health Insurance and Muzzle-based Cattle Identification System is helping farmers reduce risks.

NEPAL

The private sector in Nepal has a promising potential to contribute to Nepal's economic development and address numerous challenges related to poverty, growing trade deficit, unemployment, inequality, and climate change to name a few. These challenges are interlinked and can be addressed by focusing more on SME growth, commercialisation of export sectors, promotion of trade, employment generation through SMEs and entrepreneurship, and agricultural development. Likewise, there is a need to further strengthen the vocational education and training system in Nepal, to increase the employability of the labour force, especially the youth, locally and in global labour markets.

To address these challenges and to promote inclusive and sustainable economic and social development, Swisscontact in Nepal has been operating in Nepal since 1991 and currently has six development projects across all seven provinces. Through these projects, Swisscontact focuses on sustainable agriculture, initial vocational education and training, labour market insertion, and entrepreneurial ecosystem. Swisscontact utilises an approach to systems development that promotes inclusivity, particularly in relation to gender and social aspects, fostering active participation, inclusiveness, and adaptation to local conditions.

To learn more about our projects in Nepal, click on the tabs below.

Step Up * NAMDP- Sahaj * NVQS-P * SEC * CASA * QualiTY

Impact story

Expanding economic opportunities through strategic private partnerships



Swisscontact, through the Commercial Agriculture for Smallholders and Agribusiness (CASA) and NAMDP (Sahaj) Projects, works with Agri-SMEs in Dairy and Agriculture value chains to attract more investment into the sector. It does so by facilitating tailored technical assistance and business development services on key areas like marketing strategies, market research, product diversification, and adoption of new technologies to attract investment.

CASA's support to 13 private sector partners in 2022 led the organization to secure CHF 361,153 in investment into partner Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) - through debt financing. Our partnership with Mangalam Dairy and Foods, a private dairy processor, helped them establish a modern dairy plant with the vision of bringing more milk from the informal to the formal sector - providing local farmers with a secured market to sell their milk. The strategic partnership secured the required finances making Mangalam investment-ready by developing concrete business and investment plans, conducting investor matchmaking, and providing technical assistance to develop the structural blueprints of the dairy plant, designing its production floor, and installing equipment.



Sabal Singh, Managing Director of the company remarked, *“CASA’s support came at the right time as we were struggling to start construction of the new dairy plant due to the pandemic. CASA helped us secure investment for the construction and operationalisation of our dairy plant. As the dairy plant is in operation, CASA’s support has been instrumental in strengthening our milk collection network and market expansion.”*



On the agriculture front, the NAMDP (Sahaj) project collaborated with the private sector for commercialisation of value-added agriculture products. Innovation is key for these engagements. In 2022, NAMDP partnered with 22 private sector players where it contributed CHF 399,076 and leveraged CHF 656,108 from its partners making their business sustainable.

Tapasya Business Management, an accounting agency, offers a range of business-related services like financial and accounting services to SMEs. We partnered with Tapasya to offer legal and business management services to agribusinesses in the Koshi Province.

The CEO of Tapasya, Mr. Keshab Prasad Bohora, said, *“Sahaj has been instrumental in facilitating the expansion of my business and in identifying various opportunities for growth in the remote areas of the Koshi Province. Without Sahaj, discovering these business opportunities in the region would have been prolonged. I intend to establish two new branches in 2023.”*



Sahaj works together with its partners to innovate and expand their services for growth and business development in the Agri sector by facilitating marketing services, hiring, and training new employees and technical and management experts. Swisscontact in Nepal engages with private sector enterprises to increase their competitiveness to achieve impact at scale.

Check out our video from Nepal to see how our projects are empowering women to create opportunities
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8g8L4wOYBsY>

MYANMAR

A person wearing an orange jumpsuit and a yellow hard hat is standing in front of a blue tractor engine. The person is looking directly at the camera. The background is slightly blurred, showing the mechanical parts of the tractor.

The significant lack of an appropriately skilled workforce in Myanmar, particularly for vocational occupations, is seen as a major factor restraining the economy's potential for growth. To tackle these challenges, Swisscontact in Myanmar launched the Vocational Skills Development Project (VSDP) in 2013 with the ambitious goal of transforming and solidifying Myanmar's skills development system to respond to the growing labour market demands for skilled workers across all sectors. The 2015 democratic elections generated optimism. However, in February 2021, the military reassumed power through a coup, and a state of emergency was announced.

The coup took place in the middle of VSDP's Phase 2. The project had to pivot and find new ways to implement training for its target learners who come from some of the most underprivileged communities in Myanmar – focusing on skills development in the hospitality industry and trade. VSDP Phase 2 contributed to improving the vocational skills development system and making it more inclusive and relevant in Myanmar. It works closely with the private and non-profit sectors and targets learners in ways that ensure the high relevance of training to labour market demands.

To learn more about our project in Myanmar, click on the tab below.

VSDP

Impact story

Building a strong workforce in times of crisis

Amid COVID-19 restrictions and political turmoil, Swisscontact has continued to make significant progress in empowering vulnerable youths in Myanmar by providing them with training opportunities. Swisscontact partnered with six agricultural companies and 19 restaurants and hotels to offer on-the-job training to 33 cooks and 24 agricultural machinery mechanics over 18 months. This has helped transform the lives of many young people and offered them hope for a brighter future.

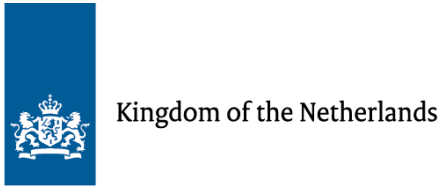
Training for Vulnerable Youths: For Seng Hkam, a trainee from a remote village, becoming a chef in a top hotel seemed like an unattainable dream. However, after completing her training, Seng received a job offer from one of the best hotels in Myanmar. This has transformed her life and given her a path to financial independence. The dedication shown by the apprentices has been praised by Khine Myintzu Tun, training manager at the Melia Hotel, who emphasized the importance of training initiatives that equip young people with skills relevant to the labor market. Practical training is particularly valuable in this regard, as it offers a pathway to success and stability for those who might otherwise be left behind.



Empowering Young People: Htet Arkar Soe, an agricultural machinery mechanic apprentice, has been similarly impacted by the training he has received. He has gained the skills required to set up a small business in his village and provide services to farmers who need assistance repairing agricultural farm equipment. In addition, his newfound skills have equipped him to train more young people like himself, creating jobs and building a strong work environment that empowers vulnerable youths.

The success stories of Seng Hkam and Htet Arkar Soe demonstrate the transformative impact of such training programs, which offer hope for a brighter future for vulnerable youths in Myanmar.





Julius Bär



We are a leading organisation for the implementation of international development projects. Founded in 1959 and registered under Swiss law, we are an independent non-profit organisation. We are politically and denominationally neutral.