



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



GREEN CITIES DIVISION OVERVIEW

Cities are home to more than half of the world's population, while making up only two percent of global landmass. Urban residents generate 80% of global GDP, but they also consume more than 75% of the world's natural resources, produce over 50% of solid waste, and emit up to 60% of greenhouse gases. Moreover, the land that urban centers occupy is expanding even faster than urban populations, encroaching on natural habitats that are critical to sequestering carbon emissions and providing essential services like food and water for urban residents. These patterns of economic growth, unfettered consumption, and urban expansion are rarely distributed evenly within cities. More than one billion people continue to live in densely packed informal urban settlements and often lack access to basic services. Rapid urbanization, therefore, marks its footprint on multiple global crises including but not limited to climate change, biodiversity loss, pandemics, pollution, and food and water security. By 2050, two-thirds of the world's population will be living in cities, where the benefits of urbanization can be directed and leveraged to address these intersecting urgent challenges.

At USAID, the Green Cities Division uses a local systems and community-centered approach that cuts across various sectors and development issues to improve local and planetary well-being. With a variety of backgrounds and expertise, we help developing countries and cities tackle development and environment challenges like pollution, waste, and climate change, while enabling growth and prosperity for all people - especially the most marginalized populations, like the urban poor. Our division recognizes that sustainable urban design is possible by harnessing the opportunities that cities provide. We work with USAID Missions to identify the root causes of urban development challenges, and we collaborate with other donors, national, state, and municipal governments, private sector partners, academic institutions, and civil society organizations around the world to address these challenges.

GREEN CITIES VISION

Create healthier and more livable cities for all people, driven by an inclusive, climate-resilient, and circular economy that respects the planet's boundaries.

GREEN CITIES TEAM

The Green Cities team currently has programs on ocean plastic pollution, air pollution, and climate change. In addition, our team is an agency-wide resource for urban programming and design support to USAID Missions and other Operating Units on a range of urban and environmental issues.

KEY ISSUES

OCEAN PLASTIC POLLUTION



Each year, 11 million metric tons of plastic waste leaks into the ocean. The majority of ocean plastic pollution comes from rapidly growing cities and towns along rivers and coastal areas in the developing world - where waste management systems, infrastructure, and governments struggle to keep pace with growing populations and increasing amounts of waste. In 2022, USAID launched the Save our Seas Initiative to scale our efforts to prevent plastic from getting into the natural environment, including oceans, by improving the capacity of and encouraging private sector investment in solid waste management systems and strengthening policies and incentives to shape behaviors for the 3Rs (reduce, reuse and recycle). Through our flagship program, [Clean Cities, Blue Ocean](#), USAID is leveraging its extensive networks, expertise, and global experience for a collaborative, cross-sectoral approach in working with cities and local governments to promote locally led solutions and women's economic empowerment, and engage the private sector in addressing the plastic waste challenge and promoting a circular economy.

AIR QUALITY/ AIR POLLUTION & HEALTH



Cities are at the center of a growing health and climate crisis caused by air pollution, which is the largest environmental health risk in the world. More than six million people die annually from air pollution-related causes, more than HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis combined². Air pollution contributes directly to climate change, and the causes of both crises are often the same, e.g. fossil fuel extraction, land use and open waste burning. Reducing air pollution can advance climate mitigation by reducing emissions from combustion processes (like heating, electricity generation), transport, agriculture and wildfires. The recent US-EU-led Global Methane Pledge to cut global methane emissions by 30% by 2030 is an example of progress needed to achieve both climate and air quality goals. [Clean Air Catalyst](#) is USAID's flagship program to accelerate clean air solutions to deliver better health, climate, and development outcomes, with pilot activities in Indore, India and Jakarta, Indonesia. The aim is to design replicable approaches and build focused coalitions to deliver interventions that lead to sustained progress on cleaner, healthier air.

CLIMATE CHANGE



Cities around the world are experiencing the effects of the changing climate. Over 90% of all urban areas are coastal and at risk of flooding from rising sea levels and extreme weather events. Many cities also experience greater temperature increases than national or regional averages, increasing demand on energy and water systems. Cities can also lead their countries in climate and sustainable development ambition. Major emission reductions in the buildings, transportation, and waste sectors in particular - by about 24% in 2030 and by nearly half in 2050¹ - can be combined with transformative adaptation to build resilient, net zero cities. To this end, USAID is a key partner in the Net Zero World Initiative to accelerate global energy system decarbonization in partner countries. Net zero cities allow national and subnational leaders to make globally significant contributions to climate change mitigation, while fulfilling local health, economic development, equity, and competitiveness objectives. USAID also co-leads the President's Emergency Plan for Adaptation and Resilience ([PREPARE](#)), which will support developing countries and communities in vulnerable situations to adapt to and manage the impacts of climate change.

LEARN MORE

Visit urban-links.org or contact USAID's Green Cities team at greencities@usaid.gov.

¹ C40 Cities. [Latest Research](#).

² Landrigan et al., 2018. "[The Lancet Commission on pollution and health](#)." *Lancet*; 391:462-512.