

## GLOBAL | CLIMATE FINANCING

# The International Finance Corporation's APEX Platform: Mobilising Sustainable Investment in Cities

Introduced in over 20 cities, APEX provides city leaders with data-driven insights and best practices from around the world to formulate climate solutions tailored to the local context.



Lorraine Sugar is APEX Cities Technical Lead and Operations Officer at the World Bank Group's Climate Department. She holds a BSc in physics and PhD in civil engineering.



Kelvin Tagnipez is APEX Cities Engagement Lead and Operations Officer at the World Bank Group's Climate Department. He holds a BS in economics and MA in urban and regional planning.



## The Advanced Practices for Environmental Excellence in Cities Programme (APEX) helps transform cities' plans into priority actions for structured, evidence-based investment pipelines that explore financing and engage the private sector.



Cities are hubs for job creation, driving economic growth and opportunity by attracting businesses and connecting people to essential infrastructure and services. However, extreme weather events are putting pressure on already strained infrastructure, forcing municipal leaders to think more strategically about their infrastructure planning and investment.

For many of these municipal leaders, the biggest barrier is not the lack of ambition in developing resilient, sustainable cities, but the difficulty in translating plans into

bankable projects that can attract private capital. A tool that helps bridge this gap is the Advanced Practices for Environmental Excellence in Cities programme, otherwise known as APEX.

Developed by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group and the largest global development institution focused on the private sector in emerging markets, APEX helps transform cities' plans into priority actions for structured, evidence-based investment pipelines that explore financing and engage the private sector.

## APEX as a Transformative Tool

APEX is a free and easy-to-use web-based platform designed to help cities plan and invest in sustainable, low-carbon infrastructure. It provides city leaders with data-driven insights and best practices from around the world to formulate a Green City Action Plan, showing what achieving environmental excellence would mean for their specific context.

APEX focuses on four critical urban sectors: energy, water, waste and transportation, while also covering related areas such as the energy efficiency of buildings, wastewater and sanitation, renewable energy, solid waste management, and urban mobility solutions.

In practice, APEX guides municipalities in identifying sustainable investments and policy measures across key sectors, while quantifying their

impacts on greenhouse gases (GHGs) and other performance indicators. It allows cities to answer questions such as:

- What would it take to meet our climate targets?
- How much would it cost?
- And what tangible impacts, including emissions reduced, resources saved, or jobs created, could be expected?

Substantially lowering the carbon footprint of cities is a core focus of APEX. The platform explicitly aims to help cities achieve this by establishing emissions baselines and then charting long-term reduction pathways. The platform's goal is to translate a city's climate ambitions into a concrete pipeline of sustainable projects tailored to its local reality.



APEX is designed to help transform climate plans into structured, evidence-based investment pipelines. The tool has been introduced in over 20 cities.  
Image: International Finance Corporation



Apex provides an easy-to-use, affordable, and recognised climate action and investment planning tool for cities.  
 Image: International Finance Corporation

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 APEX aims to lower carbon footprint of cities by establishing emissions baselines and charting long-term reduction pathways.  
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An APEX training session by the IFC in Visakhapatnam, India.  
 Image: International Finance Corporation



Cape Town's use of APEX is a benchmark for how cities can move from climate ambition to structured and actionable investment planning.  
Image: Unsplash

## Financing Climate Solutions in India, Indonesia and South Africa

In Visakhapatnam, India, APEX was used to develop a comprehensive Green City Action Plan. This plan builds on the city's environmental campaign and includes a GHG inventory and climate investment roadmap, specifying priority projects and policies to address on-the-ground issues and GHG reduction.

In Jakarta, Indonesia, APEX was used to analyse over 30 priority measures from the city's regional development and climate action plans. The tool also estimated that US\$33 billion of investment—with 70% needing

private capital—was required for the city to achieve its ambitions, such as the transition towards green buildings and electric vehicles.

But what makes APEX a truly strategic tool lies in its ability to connect planning with financing. In many cities, especially those in emerging economies, the challenge is not only in identifying what to do, but also how to pay for it.

The use of the APEX tool by the city of Cape Town in South Africa is a benchmark for how cities can move from climate ambition to structured and actionable investment planning.

Rather than treating APEX as a one-off diagnostic tool, Cape Town embraced it as a strategic planning engine to guide long-term infrastructure transformation, and APEX was used to integrate technical analysis with institutional realities. The prioritisation process accounted for the city's financial context, regulatory environment and governance structures. Collaborative workshops with city officials were conducted to validate key assumptions, refine implementation models, and confirm that the proposed measures were both effective and administratively feasible.



**By quantifying impacts and linking them to financing strategies, APEX helps cities make informed decisions, attract investment and deliver results.**



Using APEX, Cape Town projected a 23% reduction in GHGs by 2030, with an estimated US\$6.3 billion investment needed for its climate strategy. The platform supported technical analysis and factored in financial, regulatory and governance considerations during prioritisation. APEX also organised interventions into five investment clusters:

- Zero-carbon municipal buildings
- Sustainable infrastructure
- Electric vehicles
- Private sector energy solutions
- Mobility solutions

For each cluster, the platform provided tailored financing models, including energy performance contracts, leasing mechanisms, public-private partnerships and sustainability-linked bonds, allowing the city to move from planning to implementation with a clear roadmap. In 2024, Cape Town secured funding from the IFC and financial institutions to improve its infrastructure. This included upgrading electrical and transport systems as well as expanding water, sanitation and wastewater management—all of which are key priorities in the city's 10-year infrastructure investment plan.

For cities with limited resources, this methodology is transformative. It shows that even in complex urban environments, it is possible to build a coherent, data-driven roadmap for sustainable infrastructure. By quantifying impacts and linking them to financing strategies, APEX helps cities make informed decisions, attract investment and deliver results.

## Partnerships Drive Scalability

Looking ahead, scaling APEX will depend on several enabling factors. Cities must show commitment to climate action and planning. Equally important is connecting cities to financing and private sector partners so that the identified pipelines of investments lead to real implementation. Partnerships, national government backing and global networks, such as C40 Cities, can facilitate adoption, while showcasing successful pilot cases will build momentum for replication.

By providing actionable insights to municipal leaders and directly linking climate ambitions to financing, APEX is well-positioned to be scaled globally and become a transformative platform to help build the resilient and sustainable cities of the future. 🌐