



# Communication on Progress Report

October 2015

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| STATEMENT OF CONTINUED SUPPORT                     | 3  |
| ABOUT US   | 4  |
| IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 10 PRINCIPLES                | 5  |
| INTEGRATION IN STRATEGIES AND OPERATIONS           | 5  |
| HUMAN RIGHTS MANAGEMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES      | 6  |
| LABOR MANAGEMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES             | 7  |
| ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES     | 8  |
| ANTI-CORRUPTION MANAGEMENT POLICIES & PROCEDURES   | 8  |
| ACTION IN SUPPORT OF BROADER UN GOALS AND ISSUES   | 9  |
| CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP | 11 |

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## STATEMENT OF CONTINUED SUPPORT

Dear Esteemed Stakeholders,

It is with pleasure that we publish Ahead of the Curve's first United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) Communication on Progress (CoP) report. This report covers our activities between October 2014 and September 2015.

This report acts as an affirmation of our commitment to maintaining accountability and transparency, and to support the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact in the areas of Human Rights, Labor, Environment and Anti-Corruption.

As ATC has constantly encourages and supports businesses and organizations to report on their sustainability efforts over the years, we are now setting an example and taking action by reporting on its own efforts to align with the principles of sustainability.

In this annual Communication on Progress, we will describe our actions to continually improve the integration of sustainability and the Global Compact's principles into our business strategy, culture and daily operations.

Sincerely,

Dina Sherif  
Founding Partner and CEO,  
Ahead of the Curve  
Cairo, Egypt

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## ABOUT US

Ahead of the Curve (ATC) is the first of its kind social enterprise dedicated to the promotion of sustainable management practices, inclusive market growth and social innovation across growth markets.

Our mandate stems from our firm belief that companies, non-profits and government entities alike will not be able to exist in the long run while positively impacting society, without becoming stakeholder-driven combined with clear shared value creation agendas.

We work towards the fulfillment of our mandate through four main streams of work:

### 1. Knowledge Creation and Awareness Raising

We produce world-class knowledge pieces about regional insights and practices related to the areas of sustainable management practice, entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship, and inclusive economic expansion across growth markets. We also continuously engage in raising the awareness levels of our different stakeholders around these topics.

### 2. Consulting and Training Services

We offer our clients and partners tailored consulting and training services, enabling them to integrate the principles of responsibility and sustainability into their company culture and day-to-day operations.

### 3. ATC Ventures Lab

ATC is committed to ensuring more sustainable and inclusive growth models in the region. We realize that groundbreaking efforts are needed for this to materialize. We have consequently launched the ATC Ventures Lab, through which we design and implement our own programmatic initiatives in support of more inclusive and responsible growth models across the Arab World, and eventually growth markets at large. To date, our Ventures Lab has launched two unique efforts, namely:

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a. Entrepreneurship with Impact Ventures (EwIV)

EwIV is a subsidiary of ATC that was created to support the proliferation of social and inclusive business models across the Middle East and growth markets beyond.

b. Arab Women's Leadership Network

The Network is currently being incubated at ATC. We plan on expanding it to become the region's first of its kind online and offline community that is supportive, celebratory and inclusive for women both in the formal labor market and outside of it.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 10 PRINCIPLES

### *Integration in Strategies and Operations*

ATC's mission and approach revolves around ensuring more sustainable societies through enabling businesses, civil society organizations and the public sector to create shared value by adopting responsible and inclusive management practices.

Our work takes the form of consulting, training, and research services. We incorporate the principles of sustainability within our own operations by:

- Basing all of our core corporate functions on the achievement of more responsible and sustainable growth.
  - Mainstreaming the principles of accountability and transparency within our corporation:
    - We have developed comprehensive bylaws to ensure effective board oversight.
    - We maintain an open work culture whereby employees and management openly communicate and are held accountable for any potential sustainability violations.
    - We integrate a comprehensive sustainability management paradigm overview in our new employee induction trainings.
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- Our employee handbook addresses issues of corruption, human rights, non-discrimination, and integrity at large, and explains the company's zero tolerance policy for any violations.

### *Human Rights Management Policies & Procedures*

ATC is committed to promoting human rights by reference to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights dated December 10, 1948, and adheres to the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact.

ATC not only promotes human rights internally through integrating human rights principles in the framework of the company, but also through providing services to the private sector and civil society organizations to foster human rights principles within their organizations.

We have zero tolerance for human rights violations within our own internal operations. As per ATC's bylaws and employee handbook, neither the corporation nor its duly authorized agents shall discriminate against any individual or group for reasons of race, color, sex, age, marital status, sexual preference, disability, religion, or any other basis for discrimination. Our open communication culture allows for any such violations to be detected and addressed at an early stage; there have been no such violations to date.

With regards to supply chain integration, members of our supply chain are largely service-oriented. In support of ensuring more inclusive growth, we prefer locally-based suppliers that are small or medium sized (SMEs). We have zero tolerance for suppliers that violate human rights principles. While we do not have a formal supplier screening process, we cease dealing with any given supplier should we become aware of their engagement in violations of the principles of integrity and human rights.

With regards to advocating for the protection of human rights within the corporate sector, we have engaged in multiple consulting, training, and research activities around the topic. Details of which are included on page 9-11.

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**PLANS FOR 2016**

- We plan on developing a comprehensive supplier screening mechanism over the next two years. It will include criteria related to social accountability at large, including labor rights, human rights, and environmental sustainability.
- We plan on continuing to engage in core business activities related to the promotion and protection of human rights within the private sector. This includes sector-specific engagement around sustainability in the finance and textiles sectors.

*Labor Management Policies & Procedures*

ATC surpasses the national minimum wage and goes beyond labor laws to ensure that its employees are effectively engaged and fairly treated within the company. We have zero tolerance for child labor, forced or compulsory labor; our employee handbook explicitly states their prohibition at any point in time.

Employees are currently contracted using letters of assignment. We offer all full-time employees with a life insurance plan through the Commercial International Life Insurance Company (CIL). Furthermore, ATC provides competitive salaries that are sufficient for the employees, including interns and seasonal hires.

We continuously invest in the growth and development of our employees by:

- Granting them full ownership of their work, allowing them to innovate new streams of work and unleash their leadership potential
- Maintaining a coaching system whereby the company's founding partners closely coach employees and employees coach each other
- Continuously offering our employees exposure and training opportunities that focus on developing their technical and interpersonal skills.

ATC has flexible working conditions that allow employees to tailor their working hours to their needs and personal commitments, while not sacrificing the quality of their work. Employees work in an office building that is equipped with safe evacuation mechanisms. The office's physical condition is well maintained to allow employees a comfortable and safe working environment.

As of 2015, ATC has not experienced any incidents of bullying, verbal or physical harassment or any unethical behavior. No employees have been subject to safety hazards as a result of working with the company.

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**PLANS FOR 2016**

- Issuing formal comprehensive contractual agreements for full and part-time employees.
- Introducing a health coverage plan for full-time employees.

*Environmental Management Policies & Procedures*

Given the nature of our work, our environmental footprint is minimal. However, we are committed to maintaining an environmentally sustainable office. Currently, we engage in the following efforts to reduce our environmental impact:

- A recycling paper station where employees dispose of unwanted documents; paper is collected by an NGO for recycling
- Using double-sided printing whenever possible
- Reducing print publications by relying on digital publications whenever possible
- Re-using supplies and materials (including handouts, nametags, etc.)
- Encouraging employees to carpool; employees frequently travel from and to the office together.

**PLANS FOR 2016**

- Introducing a waste segregation system to facilitate waste recycling.
- Installing a water dispenser to minimize plastic waste resulting from using plastic water bottles in the office.

*Anti-Corruption Management Policies & Procedures*

ATC has a board of directors that is fully independent; board members do not derive any economic benefits from the company. Moreover, ATC's bylaws dictate that the board of directors must disclose any relevant interest, financial or otherwise, which may pose conflict of interest questions upon election or appointment to the board. In the event that any matter comes before the board in which a director has an interest, this interest shall be immediately disclosed to the board. Board members who have disclosed their interest are not allowed to vote in this matter. To prevent confusion, interest is determined as the director deriving an individual economic benefit, either directly or indirectly, from the board or committee's decision on the matter.

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Moreover, employees are carefully hired based on their commitment to ethical practices. Our employee handbook includes a dishonesty and plagiarism policy, violations of which would negatively affect an employee's standing. ATC encourages its employees to report any concerns they have about the company or its activities, to ensure transparency and minimal violations. While there have been no instances of ATC employees engaging in giving or receiving bribes, our current handbook and contracts do not include clauses on anti-corruption monitoring practices, or their monitoring thus far.

### **PLANS FOR 2016**

- Integrate anti-corruption monitoring practices in the ATC handbook and employee contracts.

### *Action in Support of Broader UN Goals and Issues*

While employees are encouraged to volunteer for social and developmental projects outside the working hours, no formal volunteering program exists so far. Nevertheless, ATC's main purpose is to ensure sustainable societies, and shared value creation across private sector, public sector and civil society organizations. The strong overlap between ATC's work, the UNGC principles, and the UN's development goals are described below:

#### *Promoting a comprehensive corporate sustainability approach*

Over the past year, we have enabled three large corporations conduct comprehensive sustainability diagnostics and issue sustainability reports conforming to internationally accepted standards. Two of the advised companies are holding companies with a diverse portfolio of subsidiaries and considerable potential for affecting multiple stakeholders as they enhance their sustainability performance. We have also enabled one of the region's largest logistics companies conduct a stakeholder engagement exercise, allowing it to gather actionable stakeholder insights on how to enhance the company's sustainability performance.

To raise awareness around, and advocate for, the adoption of sustainability management, we have also engaged in several research and awareness raising efforts around the topic. These include:

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- A 7-country study of Corporate Sustainability Practices in 7 Arab countries, conducted in partnership with The American University in Cairo and The American University of Beirut.
- A 17-country diagnostic study of Sustainability Reporting Practices among stock-listed companies, conducted in partnership with the GIZ's RIBH\_MENA.
- A diagnostic study of sustainability practices in Egypt's textiles sector, in collaboration with the Egyptian Corporate Responsibility Center.
- A 1-day forum on 'Corporate Responsibility in the Textiles, Tourism and Finance Sector', in collaboration with CREM, and the Netherlands Embassy in Egypt, among several other partners.
- Engaging over 200 stakeholders in awareness sessions around the topic through multiple forums and conferences.
- Conducting 4 pro-bono sessions on Sustainability Reporting in partnership with RIBH\_MENA's Sustainable Business Circle.
- Conducting the first of its kind training on 'Happiness in the Workplace', to equip employees and HR managers with the knowledge needed to ensure balanced work styles that do not compromise wellbeing.

#### *Supporting inclusive and social business*

Our subsidiary company EwIV solely focuses on the promotion of social and inclusive business models, with the goal of mainstreaming a more responsible, sustainable, and inclusive paradigm of capitalism. Over the past year, EwIV has engaged in multiple training, awareness raising, and research activities, including:

- Designing and implementing a 5-day experiential training boot camp titled 'The Impact', which covers the principles of social entrepreneurship and was specifically developed by EWIV to match the region's specific needs and local realities. Over the past year, we developed The Impact's training manual, conducted a Training of Trainers, and successfully implemented it in Cairo and Dubai. The boot-camps were attended by over 50 participants from 8 different countries.
  - Conducting awareness sessions on social entrepreneurship across multiple governorates in Egypt, in partnership with Education for Employment (EFE).
  - Conducting tailored training sessions for the MIT Pan Arab Forum's Arab Start-Up Competition's Social Enterprise Track.
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- Engaging over 200 stakeholders around the topic through speaking engagements at multiple conferences in the US, UAE, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt.

### *Promoting Gender Equality*

Stemming from our commitment to the inclusion and empowerment of women, we recently launched a women's network that aims at creating a supportive, celebratory and inclusive community for women in the Arab region, both in the formal and informal labor market. The network's first activity was a first of its kind experiential 4-day retreat with the goal of helping participating women find their unique strengths as leaders and to help participants develop leadership skills that resonate with their respective personalities and identification as women. The retreat was attended by 38 women from Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Over the past year, we also conducted a 1-day tailored training program for potential applicants to the Cartier Women's Initiative Award; acquainting them with the fundamentals of business planning and the Award's application process.

### **PLANS FOR 2016**

- Formalizing employee volunteering efforts by dedicating 10 hours of full-time employees' time to 1-2 NGOs or social enterprises on a monthly and pro-bono basis.
- Sustaining our core business, which naturally supports UNGC's principles and the newly established UN Sustainable Development Goals.

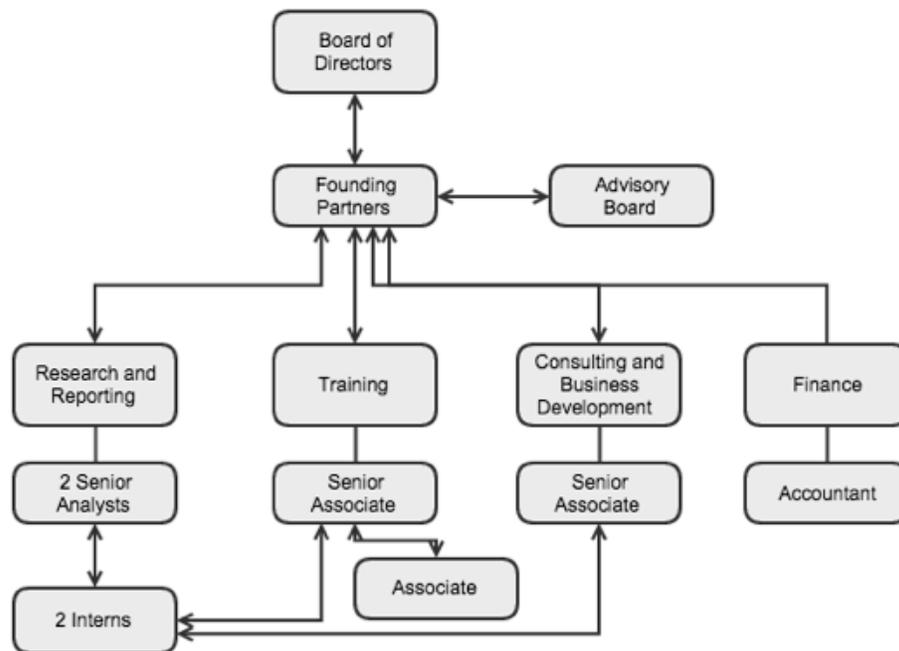
### *Corporate Sustainability Governance and Leadership*

We are a small-sized company that employs 8 full time employees and 2 part time. We are governed by a fully independent Board of Directors, and are advised by a fully independent advisory board.

Our Board of Directors does not derive any economic benefits from the company. Both our Board of Directors and Advisory Board include some of the region's top thought leaders on sustainability.

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The below figure demonstrates our current organizational structure:



Our Founding Partner and CEO, Dina Sherif, is strongly committed to advancing the principles of sustainability within the company, and across other organizations through the company's core business. Our Founding Partner and CTO, Mohamed El-Kalla is one of the foremost experts on sustainability management and inclusive business in the Arab World; he was involved in the creation of Egypt's UNGC chapter and other UNGC chapters across the region.

Members of our Board of Directors are:

- Fadi Ghandour, Founder and Vice Chairman, Aramex
- Arif Masood Naqvi, Founder and Group Chief Executive Officer, Abraaj Group
- Loay El Nazer, Chairman and Founder, Nazer Group

Members of our Advisory Board are:

- Hala Fadel Chair, MIT Enterprise Forum of the Pan Arab Region
- Raji Hattar Chief Sustainability and Compliance Officer, Aramex
- Ovais Naqvi Managing Director, Abraaj Performance Acceleration Group (APAG)
- Yasser Moustafa Managing Director, Alvarez & Marsal (A&M)

The Board of Directors and Advisory Board are constantly engaged in enhancing ATC's operations and potential for reaching its goals of sustainable and inclusive growth.

While ATC has not conducted a comprehensive stakeholder engagement exercise, feedback is always gathered after any project or activity undertaken by the company. Furthermore, ATC staff members provide and receive feedback from partners throughout partnerships, and conduct debriefing meetings following the end of a partnership.

As any new program or initiative is designed, relevant key stakeholders are engaged in the project design to ensure that the project is built on a participatory approach, is relevant, and thus will achieve sustainable impact.

When it comes to employee engagement, ATC management maintains an open door policy for employees to discuss any arising issues, while ATC employees are also encouraged to provide feedback for each other.

### **PLANS FOR 2016**

- Introducing and implementing a 360 degree feedback mechanism for all engagements with clients and partners.
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