

**10<sup>th</sup> November 2020**

## **ActionAid UK Communication on Engagement – UN Global Compact**

To our stakeholders

I am pleased to confirm ActionAid UK's continued support of and commitment to the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption.

In this Communication on Engagement, we outline the activities ActionAid UK has taken to support and engage with the UNGC principles in the period November 2018 to November 2020. We welcome any feedback from our stakeholders. Our latest organisational Annual Report and Accounts are also available to download [through our website](#).

We are pleased to reaffirm our ongoing commitment to the UN Global Compact to 2021 and beyond.

Sincerely,



**Girish Menon**  
**Chief Executive**

## Introduction

ActionAid works in over 40 countries to bring about a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys their right to a life of dignity. ActionAid UK (AAUK) is proud to be a member of the global ActionAid International Federation, made up of 43 national organisations.

The protection and advancement of human rights forms the very foundation of our mission: to work with poor and excluded people to eradicate poverty and injustice. ActionAid focusses on women and girls because the denial of their rights is a grave injustice and one of the underlying causes of poverty worldwide. By working directly with communities, women's movements, groups and networks, social movements and other allies, we aim to tackle the structural causes and consequences of poverty and injustice.

In the UK, our role is to raise funds to reduce poverty in the communities and countries where we work, to take action for long-term change and to act in solidarity with women and girls fighting poverty and injustice. By working in partnership with ActionAid International and member countries around the world, we are able to make a bigger global impact. Our current five-year organisational strategy [Together, with Women and Girls](#) runs until 2022.

## Human Rights – Principles 1, 2

Our human-rights based approach (HRBA) to our work aims to ensure that people are drivers of their own change, and able to claim the rights they are entitled to. At AAUK, one of our main roles in the global federation is to raise funds to reduce poverty in the communities and countries we work. As we are an organisation with a purpose of supporting some of the world's most potentially vulnerable people, we take the risk of any human rights abuses and safeguarding breaches happening within our organisation very seriously.

In 2018, ActionAid International (AAI), who sets the safeguarding standards for the federation, took a number of important steps to review and build upon our safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure they are robust, fit for purpose and reflect best and current practice. New staff with safeguarding expertise were recruited to form a new dedicated AAUK Safeguarding Unit, changes were made to our policy framework covering child protection and Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (SHEA) at work, and a new Global Code of Conduct for all staff, volunteers and contactors working on our behalf was adopted. A three-year SHEA and safeguarding strategy was agreed and is currently being implemented.

In AAUK we also have robust, context-specific Whistleblowing and Safeguarding Policies in place, with mandatory training for all staff, and throughout 2019 we carried out work to promote a supportive organisational culture, for example by introducing a new Anti-Sexual Harassment Policy and by training qualified 'Mental Health First Aiders' able to assist

colleagues with mental health and wellbeing. We also appointed a dedicated Board Safeguarding Focal Person in our Board of Trustees, which helps ensure we maintain oversight of safeguarding across any work carried out around the world using funds raised in the UK. Throughout 2020 we have been carrying out our safeguarding trainings for staff virtually during the home-working period.

AAUK has a rigorous Procurement Policy and processes to ensure that we procure goods and services ethically and with best value for money. We have mechanisms in place to protect and safeguard our supporters' rights, such as a Treating Donors Fairly policy as well as clear complaints and whistleblowing processes available to the public.

As part of our commitment to demonstrate to a high standard our accountability to affected populations, AAUK, along with 14 other AA member countries, underwent the [Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability](#) (CHS) verification process in 2017 and 2018, receiving verified status in 2019, with a commitment to undertake an improvement plan to maintain and improve our performance against the nine CHS commitments. The next CHS audit is taking place in spring 2021.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we began a partnership in April 2020 with Unilever and the FCDO as part of the HBCC Coalition, to promote good hand hygiene practices and distribute much-needed resources to communities impacted by the virus in Kenya and Nepal; this partnership also incorporates advocacy and provision of support services for women & girls experiencing violence. ActionAid UK is also a member of the [Corporate Responsibility \(CORE\) Coalition](#), the UK civil society network which seeks to secure a policy of mandatory human rights due diligence legislation for UK businesses.

## Labour – Principles 3, 4, 5, 6

One of ActionAid UK's key strategic priorities is to fight for women's equal rights to economic opportunities, and we actively support access to safe work environments, equal living wages and social protection such as adequate, paid maternity leave.

In 2019, AAUK's [Promoting Opportunities for Women's Empowerment and Rights \(POWER\) project](#) mobilised women's groups in Bangladesh, Ghana and Rwanda, looking at new ways to reduce the hours that women spend on unpaid care work. The evidence from these pilots is being used to advocate with local and national governments for more gender-responsive public services. That same year, the global ActionAid #AllWomenWork campaign on women's labour, decent work and public services gained momentum. The global campaign alliance worked successfully for the adoption of the [ILO Convention on Violence and Harassment in the World of Work](#) at the 2019 ILO Conference.

As a federation ActionAid maintains a culture where human slavery and exploitation is unacceptable. ActionAid adopted an updated Global Anti-Modern Slavery policy in 2019, which has been rolled out to all ActionAid countries, including the UK. Compliance is monitored through ActionAid's Annual Policy Attestation exercise, the latest of which was completed in April 2020. AAUK was reported as fully compliant with this policy.

At AAUK we have implemented numerous additional actions to prevent modern slavery in our UK supply chains for goods and services, as detailed in our [Modern Slavery Statement](#), updated and ratified by the Board of Trustees annually. In 2019 we amended our standard supplier contract terms to include a right to terminate in the event that we find, or have reasonable grounds to believe, that modern slavery or any form of forced or involuntary labour is being used.

All ActionAid workers have the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of their interests and to engage in collective bargaining. AAUK staff have full union recognition, which means that union members at AAUK have a say on issues such as pay, HR policies and organisational restructures. Our recognised trade union is Unite. We have an active and dedicated internal Union staff group, with union representatives from each department across the organisation.

Diversity and Inclusion is an explicit priority focus area for AAUK in our current five-year strategy '[Together, with Women and Girls](#)' (2017-2022), and the AAUK senior leadership team continually explores different channels with staff and key stakeholders to encourage dialogue on how we can improve in this area. A specific Diversity & Inclusion Action Plan, led by a dedicated Inclusion Reference Group, is regularly updated and shared with all staff. In 2020, some of the actions include publishing updated Gender Pay Gap and Ethnicity Pay Gap reports.

## Environment – Principles 7, 8, 9

ActionAid UK has been increasingly investing and engaging in projects worldwide which tackle the effects of climate change, helping women and girls to prepare for and adapt to its various impacts. In addition to alleviating the effects, we also fight for climate justice through research and advocacy.

We focussed our 2019 Christmas fundraising appeal on the women and girls living through protracted emergencies that are driven by climate change. The appeal raised nearly £125,600 in public donations, with funds going towards our work on the ground in displacement camps in countries like Somaliland and Bangladesh, which have endured severe droughts and catastrophic flooding respectively.

Climate was one of the special themes of the World Bank's [IDA19](#) Replenishment meetings in 2019. Ahead of these meetings, AAUK participated in discussions on gender and climate justice with several DFID climate teams on the Green Climate Fund. This year we have also committed to raise funds in the first part of 2021 via the UK Aid Match funding mechanism to support climate work in Cambodia, a three-year project focussing specifically on facilitating gender alternatives to climate change and developing climate resilience and sustainable agriculture.

At the moment we are also engaging with businesses and constructing funding propositions for corporates to address women's rights issues in agriculture supply chains, to support women smallholder farmers and to engage in climate just practices across their operations.

We have committed to considering the environmental impact of each project we fund from AAUK, and under our improvement plan to fully meet the Core Humanitarian Standards, we

are also in the process of developing a new environmental impact analysis checklist. A first draft was produced in Q2 of 2020.

We naturally recognise that also our own activities in the AAUK offices have consequences for the environment, and it is our responsibility to minimise the negative impacts of these as far as is possible. The organisation operates in compliance with all applicable environmental legislations and we strive to use environmental best practices in all that we do.

In autumn 2019, we published an updated version of our AAUK Environmental Policy, where we detail our approaches to minimising our carbon footprint. These include areas from ethical trading and procurement of environmentally friendly energy to minimising single-use plastics and sourcing environmentally friendly office cleaning products. We have also begun to investigate our carbon offset, looking at the ways we can best offset our carbon emissions.

The COVID-19 crisis has also demonstrated our ability to carry out work remotely to equally high standards and we have therefore committed to significantly reduce our national and international travel budgets for 2021 and beyond, further helping to reduce AAUK's carbon footprint.

## **Anti-Corruption – Principle 10**

We take seriously our responsibility to safeguard funds entrusted to us and have a strict zero tolerance policy on fraud, bribery and corruption.

The detection and prevention of corruption and fraud is the responsibility of all staff and management, with management defining and implementing the processes behind it. In June 2019, the global ActionAid federation adopted a refreshed Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, which all AA members must comply with or adapt into their own country policies.

AAUK has its own separate Anti-Bribery and Corruption Policy, aligned with the UK Bribery Act 2010 and owned by our Head of Internal Audit. The policy includes guidance on gifts, hospitality and expenses, as well as how staff are able to raise suspicions of any wrongdoing or risk of bribery or corruption – staff and volunteers are able to raise concerns anonymously via a dedicated Whistleblowing email and/or a hotline. The policy applies also to all AAUK seconded workers, agency workers, volunteers, contractors, external consultants and third-party representatives.

AAUK has robust internal controls in place to prevent, deter and detect corrupt activities. These include, but are not limited to, thorough recruitment procedures, clear organisation of responsibilities and reporting lines, separation of duties, regular performance monitoring by management, secure audit trails, regular internal and external audits, and federation-wide policy attestations undertaken annually, monitored by the Global ActionAid Assurance Team.