

**UNGC: Communication on Progress**

**Agulhas Applied Knowledge**

December, 2021

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## 1. Introduction

For more than 18 years, Agulhas Applied Knowledge has worked with organisations including development agencies, governments, corporations, development banks, and civil society to tackle global challenges, working across international development, sustainability and in the battle against inequality.

The company works with trusted, passionate individuals to ensure quality and company values are maintained. Driven by a desire to do valuable work and to participate in critical debates in development and sustainability, the directors have grown the company organically, responding to the needs of our clients, the markets where we work and the changing dynamics of the world in which we live.

In 2021, Agulhas Applied Knowledge transitioned its business model to employee ownership and is now wholly owned by an Employee-Owned Trust (EOT). As an EOT, there is an increased role for employees (co-owners) in the strategic direction of the company, the sharing of company profits, and in taking on meaningful roles in Agulhas' charitable giving and team well-being activities.

Agulhas provides consultancy and advice to help our clients achieve their ambitions in a world of insecurity, inequality and interdependence, using research, evidence and learning to improve strategy and accomplish goals. In doing so, we commit to providing the highest level of professionalism, operating in compliance with the highest international standards. Our organisational principles, policies and guidelines have been established to help us do this.

The company was founded in 2003 and it is incorporated in England with the company number 4644326.

## 2. Our Work

Agulhas' expertise is centred in two practice hubs: The Climate Hub and the Conflict, Crisis and Global Challenges (CRUNCH) Hub. Our approach is rooted in our expertise in Evaluation, Learning, Knowledge and Strategy (ELKS), and the work of these thematic hubs are rooted in the SDGs themselves.

Figure 1: Agulhas Applied Knowledge – thematic hubs and the SDGs



Our Climate Hub specialises in strategic and programme research, analysis and evaluation using quantitative and qualitative techniques. It has provided support to numerous organisations including the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), the Climate Coalition, the multi-donor Initiative for Climate Action Transparency (ICAT), the European Climate Fund, and the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI). International climate finance expertise is well established in the team, and its work includes five international climate finance related reviews for ICAI, as well as climate finance reports for multilateral development banks.

The CRUNCH Hub comprises of a diverse team of specialists with extensive expertise in conducting mixed method research and analysis in fragile and conflict affected states. The team is experienced in designing results frameworks, baseline research, and conducting formative and final evaluations. Central to its approach is a commitment to the localisation agenda, safeguarding and ethics, as well as gender transformative and participatory approaches.

The two hubs work to the highest standards and best practice in MEL and research. Our approach to Evaluation, Learning and Knowledge in Strategy (ELKS) ensures that lessons are captured effectively and woven into future work. The Hubs are multidisciplinary and team members may work across both Hubs depending on project focuses, reflecting the interconnected nature of the challenges on which we work.

### 3. Statement from the Director

Dear Stakeholders,

Agulhas Applied Knowledge is pleased to submit its Communication on Progress for 2021, and with this statement we hereby renew our firm commitment to the Ten Principles of the United Nations Global Compact.

In this, our third annual Communication on Progress, we describe our actions to integrate the Global Compact and its principles into our business strategy, culture and daily operations. Although 2021 has been a challenging year, we have continued to uphold the principles in our new ways of working, during the COVID 19 pandemic. We are also committed to share this information with our stakeholders using our primary channels of communication.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nigel Thornton', written over a light blue horizontal line.

Nigel Thornton  
Director

## 4. Our approach to the Ten Principles

In the spring of 2018, Agulhas Applied Knowledge signed up for the UN Global Compact. This coincided with the company's decision to carry out a major reworking of its core policies. The Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact were integral to this reworking and were used to guide the direction of the company's policies and will continue to make a positive difference to the way that Agulhas carries out its work.

Taking into account our commitment to the UN Global Compact, we defined five major [principles](#) that all Agulhas employees are required to commit to:



**Integrity** – we conduct ourselves in a way of which we can be proud. We are honest with each other, our clients and ourselves. We provide challenge where it is needed and praise where it is due.



**Respect** – we treat each other and our clients, contractors and communities with respect. We take the time to listen to others, look for the best in people and strive to empower others to be their best.



**Openness** – we share ideas and good practice, and raise concerns quickly and deal with them fairly.



**Commitment** – we always bear in mind Agulhas' goal of harnessing knowledge and learning for sustainable development.



**Effectiveness** - We strive to deliver the highest quality work in the areas where we can use our skills to make the greatest impact. We will continually look for ways to do better: individually; together; and with clients, contractors and communities.

The second stage of implementation will be to ensure that all members of our wider network of consultants, sub-contractors and suppliers also adhere to principles that are similar, if not the same.

All employees are required to read our policy pack, formally sign up to the 'Agulhas way', and encouraged to return any comments as to where the policy can be updated and refined over time, thus encouraging future initiatives to be employee-informed.

## 5. Description of Actions

### 5.1 The environment

Agulhas has always strived to take a sustainable approach to its work, by managing and minimising the environmental impact of our operations and services. We apply the waste hierarchy to day-to-day operations and consistently work towards having a net-zero carbon impact. This includes offsetting carbon generated on travel and flights through Pure Leapfrog, the best provider of carbon offsetting in the UK.

**Principle 7:** Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges

**Principle 8:** undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility

**Principle 9:** encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

#### Means of compliance

Agulhas complies with all relevant UK environmental legislation.

Agulhas has made a cycle to work scheme available to UK employees through the Cyclescheme; an employee benefit utilising a government subsidy to help spread the cost of a new bike and accessories, to encourage more employees to cycle to work. Moreover, the company is introducing a 'salary sacrifice scheme' to make it easier and more affordable for employees to purchase electric vehicles, which are better for the environment.

In our London office, we recycle and use recycled products wherever possible and raise awareness of more sustainable behaviours with our staff and consultants. We source Fairtrade certified and organic, locally produced or refined products for the office, with a mind to contributing to the local economy and where environmental impacts have been taken into consideration. We also purchase our energy from specialist providers of renewable energy (currently Good Energy).





We actively seek opportunities to support our local community and the local environment. This year, Agulhas employees helped to plant a fruit tree orchard at the Hoxton Trust Community Garden. The garden provides a green space for local residents that may not have access to their own gardens, while the Hoxton Trust is a charity providing free legal advice to improve people’s lives and mental wellbeing. In time, the orchard will provide free fruit to anyone living in the local area. tools

Environmental compliance: Measurement checklist

Target	Update on Progress
All staff are aware of environmental policies and suitably trained in environmental awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Recycling is a requirement in our London office, where recycling is sorted and equipment quality checked on a three-times weekly basis</li> </ul>
Our business processes result in the least possible environmental damage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agulhas has made available a cycle to work scheme</li> <li>○ Our business premises use ecologically sound cleaning products and refillable options</li> <li>○ All flights are carbon offset</li> <li>○ Our premises in London are powered by renewable energy</li> </ul>
We carry out our work according to the highest environmental standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agulhas is certified to ISO 9001, which encompasses a drive for continual improvement, greater efficiency and evidence-based decision making</li> <li>○ Agulhas has begun the process of obtaining ISO 14001 accreditation, though this is a longer-term goal</li> <li>○ In 2022 Agulhas will be pursuing B Corp accreditation</li> </ul>

## 5.2 Labour

Agulhas provides a set of standard HR Policies / Guidelines to its employees as part of our, and their, contractual obligations. These policies are intended to provide clarity on employment procedures and are available on the company Dropbox. They include:

- Agulhas – Absence Policy
- Agulhas – Employee Behaviour and Conduct Policy
- Agulhas – End of Contract Policy
- Agulhas – Starting Employment Policy
- Agulhas – Grievance Procedure

Agulhas upholds the principles of freedom of association and recognises the right to collective bargaining for staff members.

**Principle 3:** Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining

**Principle 4:** the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour

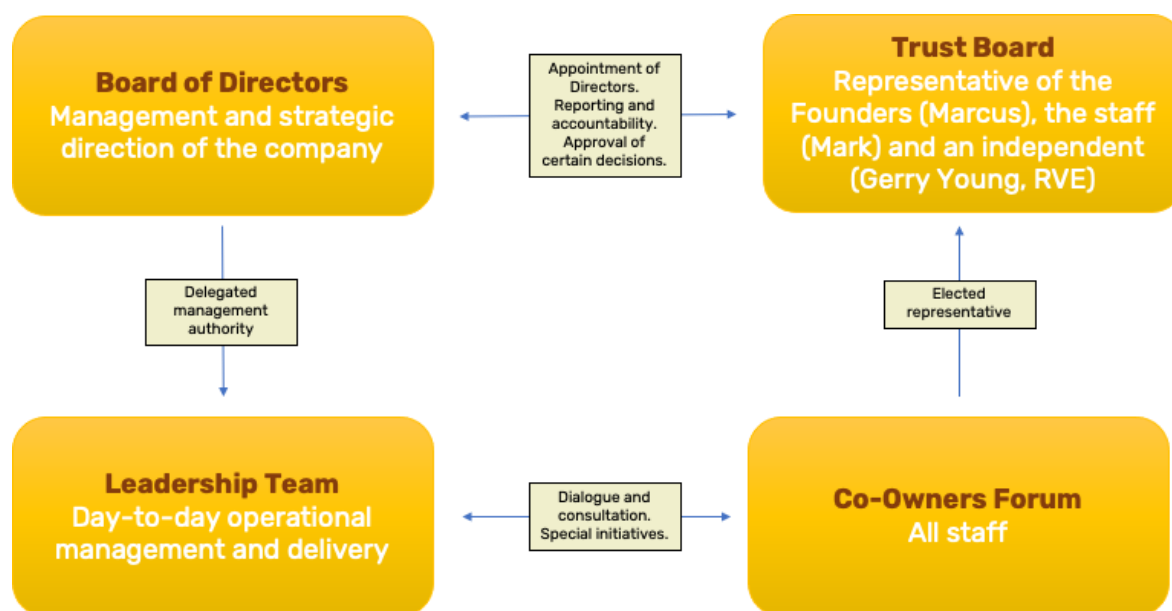
**Principle 5:** the effective abolition of child labour

**Principle 6:** the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.

### Means of compliance

2021 has been a challenging year for all staff and Directors, who have had to balance working from home during the pandemic for a large portion of the year. Over summer, Agulhas initiated a measured and non-compulsory return to the office in London, following the UK government announcement recommending a return to work from 19<sup>th</sup> July 2021.

During 2021, staff members responded to two anonymous surveys to gauge enthusiasm for returning to in-person working and to assist with the planning of a safe and secure workplace. A transparent rota system has since been established, enabling employees to indicate days that they would like to attend in-person at the office and ensuring a safe maximum attendance. All staff agreed to adhere to COVID-19 safety measures whilst in the office, including taking lateral flow tests prior to attending, and maintaining safe distances with their colleagues during the working day.



Since becoming an EOT in January 2021, the staff at Agulhas have formally become co-owners of the business and are now represented by an employee trustee at director-level meetings.

To provide a greater share of voice to employees on company strategy and management, a Co-Owners Forum (COF) was established, which is comprised of all staff members that are not at Director level. The COF represents staff priorities and requests to management, but also has its own working groups for carrying out specific activities that are of direct interest to COF members. This now includes convening a wellness group and thought leadership on thematic areas of interest (see human rights section for more information on the Unlearning group).

**Modern Slavery:** At Agulhas, we take the issues of modern slavery and human trafficking very seriously. We are committed to embedding practices to combat slavery and human trafficking in our business and in our supply chain. We submit our policies and procedures annually to UK Government for their supplier Modern Slavery Assessment tool, which has designated our business activities as low risk. The assessment report is used to set a pathway to improvement, including the instatement of key performance indicators to continually improve our corporate approach to modern slavery.

**Policies on Anti-slavery, Diversity and Inclusion, Whistleblowing, Health and Safety:** Agulhas has a well embedded suite of policies on the aforementioned, which are available on the [company website](#). As an organisation that works towards supporting global justice, we care deeply about creating a diverse and inclusive workplace, and this is reflected in our workforce and leadership.

## Labour compliance: Measurement checklist

Target	Update on Progress
Our office, working environment and working practices are inclusive and accessible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Our London office is accessible to people with disabilities</li> <li>○ Agulhas complies with the 2010 UK Equality Act</li> <li>○ Agulhas is an accredited Living Wage company</li> </ul>
Agulhas is a diverse, inclusive and gender balanced workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We consistently monitor ethnic, gender and age composition of the workforce and apply these considerations to our hiring practices</li> </ul>
All staff have an equal share of voice and are able to provide feedback directly and indirectly to decision makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agulhas is an employee-owned company and is represented by an employee at board level</li> <li>○ The Co-Owners Forum provides an interface between management and staff</li> </ul>

### 5.3 Human Rights

Agulhas is committed to complying to international standards of Human Rights, including adhering to the UN Global Compact. Agulhas supports and respects the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights and strives to work ethically and for the advancement of human rights in our client work. Agulhas does not have an explicit policy on Human Rights, however several of its internal policies incorporate Human Rights such as: Duty of Care, Code of Conduct, Supplier Due Diligence, Safeguarding, Anti-slavery, Recruitment Equality, Anti-Bullying and Harassment, Whistleblowing/Complaints, Health and Safety, and Stress Management policies.

Through internal policies, practice, and company culture, Agulhas commits to supporting human rights. It is the duty of Agulhas staff, as actors in International Development, to report any transgressions or abuses of Human Rights, and this includes the monitoring of our supply chain and any partners we work with.

Human Rights, and the support and protection of them, is central to Agulhas' delivery of client work. Agulhas' staff and researchers follow international principles on respectful and ethical research methods. The organisation supports all staff through internal trainings and coaching for researchers that may interact with vulnerable individuals during the course of their project work.

**Principle 1:** Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights

**Principle 2:** make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses

The Agulhas Unlearning project is an employee-led initiative, supported and backed by the COF, that facilitates a regular programme of 'unlearning' sessions which challenge and expose behaviours and attitudes that are prejudiced or biased. These sessions and resources enable Agulhas and its partners to reflect on and change internal practices, and to continuously adjust ways of working to ensure we are operating in diverse, inclusive and equitable ways across all our operations. Agulhas also provides pro bono support to [The Equity Index](#), a social enterprise advocating for greater equity across the international development sector. The Equity index is an anti-racist and feminist UK social enterprise, which advocates for greater equity across the international development sector. Agulhas have provided support via the Advisory Committee, and also providing research for mapping exercises. It was also one of a small number of organisations who voluntarily took part in the [Pilot Index](#) in 2021.

Agulhas donates between 1% and 2% of profits each year to charity. This year the charities we intend to donate to support legal aid, improving the local environment, domestic abuse services and assistance for young refugee mothers. It is important to Agulhas not only to support charities that cover issues relevant to our wider work, but that we support charities that are local to us, and through direct giving build that relationship with organisations in the local community.

## Means of compliance

All staff adhere to a strict code of conduct which covers adherence to these principles, and these are also reflected in the code of conduct we set for sub-contractors and consultants. Going forward, Agulhas will continue to review and advance internal Human Rights policies in order to reflect the organisation's commitment to supporting and protecting international Human Rights.

## Measurement

Target	Update on Progress
<p>All staff are aware of policies relevant to Human Rights and suitably trained in awareness raising activities and reporting mechanisms to ensure these are upheld</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Unlearning team have continued their work in 2021, leading the wider Agulhas team to reflect on racism at different levels of society. In 2021, the Unlearning team have broadened their work and are now engaging with clients on the issues of diversity, inclusion and equality.</li> <li>○ Agulhas conducts monthly reporting updates of any safeguarding incidents that involve or are witnessed by Agulhas staff or by our contractors. There have been no safeguarding incidents reported this year.</li> </ul>
<p>We actively contribute to positive shifts towards a more inclusive global development sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agulhas provide in-kind support and advisory services to the Equity Index and have conducted a comparative mapping exercise of the different ways in which equity can and has been measured, assessed and approached. As a part of the pilot index, Agulhas had its internal equity standards assessed and can use this to make further progress, as well as encourage others to do the same.</li> </ul>
<p>We carry out work that supports the advancement of the Human Rights agenda</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Work in 2021, including a final evaluation of <i>'Strengthening the Resilience of Syrian Women and Girls and Host Communities Programme'</i> for UN Women, examined the extent to which programmes were guided by a human rights approach and gender equality principles.</li> </ul>

## 5.4 Anti-corruption

Agulhas has zero tolerance approach to bribery and corruption. This means we ensure appropriate measures are in place to prevent bribery and corruption and that we act on upon all suspicions of bribery and corruption. We are committed to always investigate and take disciplinary and/or legal action against those who commit, or assist anyone committing, fraud or any other improper activities in our operations.

**Principle 10:** Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery

### Means of compliance

Agulhas conducts a weekly review of Conflicts of Interest (COI) – real or perceived – with reference to our work across all specific programmes, projects and potential bids. All new business opportunities are screened for real or perceived COI conflicts and are graded according to the risk factor attached.

All Agulhas staff must immediately report any suspicions of bribery or corruption to a Director, in accordance with our Whistleblowing policy, and in some cases, directly to the client.

Agulhas’ Chief Operations Officer has overall responsibility for ensuring that anti-corruption, bribery and whistleblowing policies are up-to-date, compliant with both legal and ethical obligations, and are fit for purpose for the work that we do. However, we believe that ensuring an anti-corruption approach runs through all our work and therefore the detection, reporting and prevention of corruption and bribery is a shared responsibility for all people working for Agulhas, including staff, contractors and suppliers.

Our [whistleblowing policy](#) is available on our website and the Agulhas anti-corruption policy is made widely available to all staff and the people with whom we work.

### Measurement

Target	Update on Progress
We can confirm to our colleagues and clients that we are a corruption-free organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ No instances of corruption, bribery or accepting gifts/hospitality have been reported this year.</li> </ul>
Agulhas applies the most stringent anti-corruption principles to its work and its professional ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ We apply the ISO 37001 Anti-Bribery and Corruption guidelines and have tailored the guidelines to fit Agulhas’s organisational context. We are seeking certification on this ISO.</li> </ul>

<p>Agulhas' anti-corruption principles are communicated and understood</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Agulhas has clearly articulated anti-corruption policies that are available on our website and to anyone who wishes to review them.</li><li>○ Anti-corruption policies are communicated to new starters and consultants as a part of the induction process.</li></ul>
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## 6. Future Initiatives

While delivering the highest quality contracted work and core functions, Agulhas has managed to remain committed to the Ten Principles of the UN Global Compact and the support and advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Our commitment has included bringing our work on Unlearning into our project work, increasing the diversity of our team and the gender balance of our senior leaders, and through our transition to an employee-owned company, increasing the share of voice of all staff in the running of the business.

In 2022, we aim to increase the participation of staff in the strategic direction of the company and become more involved in important decision making through the Co-owners Forum. We intend to use our strategic planning via our two hubs to review how we work with partners in the global south, and how to make these stronger, more equal partnerships in future. As part of this endeavour, we have started the process to become a certified [B Corporation](#). Certified B Corporations use profits and growth as a means to a greater end and are considered leaders in the global movement for an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economy.

We are accountable to not only owners and clients, but the community and environment, and will continue to strive to achieve the highest standards across all the Ten Principles.