

CLOSE THE GAP - COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT (COE) - UNITED NATIONS

Period covered by this Communication on Engagement: January 2020 to December 2021

Part I. Statement of Continued Support by the Chief Executive

January 12, 2022


To our stakeholders,

It is my pleasure to express with enthusiasm our continued support and commitment to the Global Compact and its Ten Principles concerning Human Rights, Labor, Environment and Anti-Corruption.

Over the years, Close the Gap has been implementing different activities advocating for the Ten principles of the United Nations Global Compact, especially in terms of sustainability, social entrepreneurship and human rights.

In this Communication of Engagement, we describe the activities we have been carrying on over the years and their impact. Close the Gap believes access to information through ICT is key for the sustainable development of everyone, especially for people in emerging and developing countries, ensuring human rights, job opportunities, environmental and anti-corruptions standards are respected.

I cannot close this statement without expressing a word of appreciation and thanks to all our strategic partners and sponsors, to our service partners in Africa, to the members of the Board as well as to the members of the staff of Close the Gap for supporting our organisation and therefore, supporting the UNGC and its principles.



Olivier Vanden Eynde
Founder & Managing Director
Close the Gap

Part II. Description of Actions

ABOUT CLOSE THE GAP

Close the Gap aims to bridge the digital divide by offering high-quality, pre-owned IT devices (laptops, desktops, smartphones, tablets, ...) donated by large and medium-sized corporations or public organisations to educational, medical, entrepreneurial and social projects in developing and emerging countries. All the projects are demand-driven and share the common denominator of being non-profit oriented initiatives.

In 2008, Close the Gap identified the need for accessible environmentally safe recycling processes for the ICT hardware used in their beneficiary projects in the developing countries. After exploring the possibility of creating a public-private partnership to create an environmentally friendly e-waste management system for these regions, the World PC Project was born.

Based on a feasibility study and thanks to the support of Computer Aid International, Safaricom Foundation, Close the Gap set up a pilot project in 2011 in Nairobi, Kenya, enabling inauguration of the WEEE Centre in Dec 2011, the first e-waste recycling facility in East Africa.

2012 marked a year of transition for the pilot project. Through the invaluable support from sponsors and partners, the WorldPC project was able to take off as a separate organisation with the new name **WorldLoop** and a dedicated management team, becoming an innovative solution of e-waste in Africa.

In 2015, Close the Gap partnered to build and launch the **first digitruck**. This mobile IT lab is an innovative solution for African off-the-grid communities that enables them to have access to ICT. Since 2015, Close the Gap has supplied eight additional digitrucks (2 in South Africa, 2 in Kenya, 1 in Congo, 1 in Zambia, 1 in France and 1 in Ethiopia), thus reaching a growing amount of people off-the-grid in need of its services.

The **Close the Gap Foundation**, operational since 2014, developed a strategy to empower African entrepreneurial organisations with technology driven solutions. Here again, the technology aspect is an instrument to achieve some of Close the Gap's goals such as better access to education, increased employment opportunities and a more equitable ecosystem for entrepreneurship.

In 2017, this new strategy was piloted with the launch of the **LEAP 2 programme**, which supports young African entrepreneurs developing and scaling digital solutions for societal issues. The LEAP 2 programme was rebranded to the **BOOST programme** in 2020.

In 2019, Close the Gap set foot on the ground in Kenya with its own Circular Economy Hub, a remanufacturing facility where ICT material is refurbished, and the Close the Gap Hub, focusing on education, innovation, and manufacturing through a makerspace.

In 2019, Close the Gap acquired its own ITAM facility, CTG Circular, from Arrow Electronics as a way to insource the IT asset management business of Close the Gap Int. This acquisition enabled Close the Gap to safeguard a sustainable solution for end-of-life ICT devices for businesses in the Benelux and abroad.

CLOSE THE GAP ACTIVITIES AND THE UNGC PRINCIPLES

Close the Gap collects decommissioned IT devices from companies and arranges for other organisations to clean the hard disks and then check and configure the hardware according to the requirements of its end-users. The computers are then shipped off to the destination country by sea or air transport. Since it was created in 2003, Close the Gap received 1.136.540 computer assets donated by more than 650 companies. The ICT devices that meet stringent quality standards are refurbished and sent to different projects (a medical center, a school for example). Since 2003, over 7.600 projects have been supported in Africa and elsewhere.

The ICT devices that do not meet the quality standards and therefore, cannot be reused, are properly recycled.

Close the Gap would not exist without its partners and aims to create partnership through enterprises' Corporate Social Responsibility programs, which ultimately improve their performance towards being a sustainable enterprise. Consumers aren't the only ones who are drawn to businesses that "give back or do good", employees are now also looking to work for companies that have a CSR program. Through its many partnerships with Private Companies, Close the Gap aims to align its partners' CSR strategies and operations with the UN Global Compact Principles.

Through collaboration with the UNGC, Close the Gap has created opportunities to share knowledge and best practices about sustainable development goals, and emphasizing the importance of high standards in terms of human rights, job opportunity, environment and anti-corruption. A countless number of projects have demonstrated that ICT can contribute directly or indirectly to the UN Global Compact Ten Principles.

Human Rights

Access to ICT is a key driver for the development of any society in today's world. Improving access to information contributes to the elimination of poverty and disease, leads to better education and more gender equality. However, the cost of new equipment, limited infrastructure and the lack of IT knowledge and proficiency mean that many people still have no access to IT. The digital divide is not only a divide between people who have access to ICT and people who don't. It's also a divide between people who have knowledge of ICT and those who don't, between people who realize the opportunities presented by ICT and those who don't. It consists of an infrastructure gap, a knowledge gap and a psychological gap. High-quality reused IT equipment gives access to information at unprecedented levels, empowering poor and disadvantaged communities living in developing and emerging countries. **Close the Gap contributes to defending the Human Rights, through access to ICT.**

Labour Standards

Access to ICT involves information on the benefits for parents and children to attend school instead of obliging them to work in the field/ factories/ mines. Indeed, letting the children attend school will, in the future, be much more beneficial for the children and their families. A child that attends school will be better educated and, therefore, will have a higher chance to access a job that requires specific intellectual skills, and will earn a higher salary. By providing access to information through ICT, **Close the Gap contributes to the eradication of child labour.**

By supporting young African entrepreneurs who develop and scale digital solutions for societal issues through its BOOST programme, **Close the Gap contributes to the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.**

Environment

At end-of-life, IT equipment does not have to be an environmental liability. Through responsible recycling it can pose new opportunities in communities creating green jobs, stimulating local economies and recovering precious material that can be used in new IT equipment. Through Close the Gap's e-waste offsetting program, operated by WorldLoop, computer donors can support the responsible recycling of a similar asset in a developing country. Therefore, **Close the Gap promotes greater environmental responsibility and counts on its partners to encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly behaviors.**

Anti-Corruption

Close the Gap's strategic partners are social enterprises based mainly in Africa. Close the Gap sells the refurbished computer assets to those social enterprises at an affordable price. These service partners then sell them to schools, medical center, social projects etc. Close the Gap makes sure the donated computers in Europe go to one of pre-cited destinations, thus bridging the digital divide.

Close the Gap is committed to compliance with all applicable anti-bribery and anti-corruption laws and regulations, and promotes this compliance amongst its partnerships. Close the Gap does not accept bribes, and avoids doing business with others who may harm its reputation by not respecting these values. **Therefore, Close the Gap works against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.**

OUR IMPACT

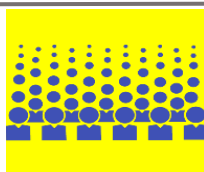


It is important to keep in mind that **15 devices** constitute a computer lab,



and **1 computer** lab can reach **240 kids per week**.

Every device donated, refurbished and sent to a project in Africa can have a significant impact in people's lives.



In total, more than 7.600 projects have been supported in 56 countries, and reached over 3.970.000 beneficiaries.

In 2020, 190 companies were involved in donations, and donated more than 130.000 computers assets. This enabled the support of 1.356 projects in mainly African countries and reaching an estimated 175,000 beneficiaries.