



# Practical Action

## UN Global Compact Communication on Engagement

**December 2023**

### **Big change starts small**

T +44(0) 1926 634400 | E [enquiries@practicalaction.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@practicalaction.org.uk) | [www.practicalaction.org](http://www.practicalaction.org) | VAT No. 880 9924 76  
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Registered office – The Robbins Building, 25 Albert Street, Rugby, CV21 2SD, United Kingdom | Patron HRH The Prince of Wales.

H.E António Guterres  
Secretary-General  
United Nations  
New York NY 10017  
USA

20<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Dear Mr Secretary-General,

## **Statement of continued support for the UNGC**

I am pleased to confirm Practical Action's continued support for and the renewal of its ongoing commitment to the UN Global Compact initiative and its ten principles. Practical Action's strategy, operations and ways of working are fully compatible with the *Ten Principles on human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption* and our thematic focus areas are very much aligned with the aims of the *UN Sustainable Development Goals*.

2023 is a special year for Practical Action as it marks the 50th anniversary of our founder, E.F. Schumacher's seminal book, *Small is Beautiful*. The sub-title of the book is 'A Study of Economics as if People Mattered', and this philosophy is as relevant today as it has ever been. Schumacher's focus on locally appropriate solutions tailored to context, and centred around empowering people with skills and knowledge, continues to inspire and inform our work today. This overarching approach aligns very well with the principles of the Global Compact.

In 2022-23 we worked across 14 countries, and through their engagement with our programmes and our partners, we reached 2.2 million people, 1.2 million of whom are women. Furthermore, via the adoption of our approaches by governments, business and other NGOs, we catalysed wider positive change for 8.4 million people, 4.2 million of whom are women. We provide some highlights from this work in the following sections, as well as links to further information available online.

As part of our commitment to membership of the UN Global Compact, we submit our Communication on Engagement and we will ensure we communicate this to our stakeholders and the general public via your website. The report that follows is a summary of the most relevant activities from 2021 to the end of 2023.

Yours sincerely,



Sarah Roberts  
Chief Executive Officer

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# Practical Action & UN Global Compact

Practical Action continues to champion the UNGC's ten principles. This is achieved in several ways, including: advocating with and building capacity of local, national and global decision-makers; engaging in UNGC local networks; conducting applied research to advance best practices; and support to business partners and other stakeholders as they implement sustainability initiatives that benefit local communities.

Practical Action has four thematic focus areas: Resilience that Protects, Energy that Transforms, Cities Fit for People, and Farming that Works. Practical Action works across Africa, Asia and Latin America, taking the knowledge and learning from projects, advocacy work and research activities and extending its reach and influence through its consulting arm <https://practicalaction.org/consulting/> and its publishing <https://practicalaction.org/publishing/>

## Human Rights

Human rights including rights of women and minority groups are key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The right of women to access energy has been a key focus for our work in East Africa, where we have worked with and provided technical assistance to Kenya's national and county governments to mainstream gender in the energy sector. In 2019 a national Gender and Energy Policy was approved that cites the contribution made by Practical Action. Further information is available [here](#).

As the climate crisis worsens, affected communities, especially those who have done least to contribute to global greenhouse gas emissions, have the right to compensation for loss and damage. Practical Action has observer status for UNFCCC and attends the annual Conference of Parties (COP) including most recently in 2022 in Sharm El-Sheikh and 2023 in Dubai. We have played a key role in influencing decisions around the structuring of the Loss and Damage fund. Further information is available [here](#).

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Communities and local stakeholders have the right to determine the development approaches most suitable for their context. Locally led adaptation is a pillar of Practical Action's work from community-managed integrated water resources in Sudan to regenerative agriculture practices in Zimbabwe. Practical Action is a long-standing member of the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance connected through the Zurich Foundation to the Zurich Insurance Group. Community informed resilience mapping has proved effective in community-led climate resilience responses, contributing to a scaling up of further funding of \$566 million for flood risk prevention since 2018. Further information is available [here](#).

Practical Action is committed to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through all our work. At Practical Action we work with women and men. We work with women to understand how the current system can be changed to better meet their needs, reflect their views, and support their lives and wellbeing. We engage and work constructively with men to challenge assumptions, prejudices, and behaviours. We believe that gender equity is development, and nothing is gender neutral. Gender is a shared responsibility at Practical Action, and our approach is underpinned by our Gender Policy, available [here](#). Our Board currently consists of 30% women, our Global Leadership Team are two thirds women, and we are led by a woman CEO. We have Gender Focal Points in all offices and an active Global Gender Group that shares learning and experiences across the organisation. Further information about our approach to gender transformative change is available [here](#).

Practical Action has been at the forefront of working with refugee communities to ensure access to clean energy. Our successful initiative Renewable Energy for Refugees, which ran from 2017-22 across four refugee camps in Rwanda, is now being scaled up to reach all refugee camps in the country. It supports refugees (and host communities) to access clean cooking solutions, solar home systems, and solar powered street lighting. We have used our achievements in this area to influence the wider humanitarian system on the importance of this issue.

All women, men, girls and boys we work with have a right to be safe. Our safeguarding policy and procedures are reviewed annually. Trained Safeguarding Focal Points are in place in all country offices and all staff and partners are trained. All staff, partners and consultants acting on behalf of Practical Action are required to sign the safeguarding policy and Code of Conduct. All reported safeguarding incidents are taken seriously with leadership. Practical Action is a member of the international Misconduct Disclosure Scheme to reduce safeguarding risk across the international development sector.

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## Labour

Practical Action is committed to nurturing a workplace that is empowering, diverse and equitable. Recruitment is transparently based on skills and experience. Some proactive strategies are under development to encourage and support applications from women in countries where there is

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underrepresentation of women in key teams. Our offices across South Asia, Africa and Latin America are almost exclusively staffed by local nationals. This helps ensure our teams have a deep understanding of priority issues in the communities where we work, and that they have the language skills and local networks to respond effectively and efficiently.

Over the last two years Practical Action has run training sessions on ‘race, power and white privilege’ with UK staff to explore unconscious bias and ways to increase diversity in our organisation. An Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion group has been established to support leadership in this area. It includes staff and Board members from across our offices in Africa, South Asia, Latin America, and the UK. Since 2022 the organisation has been transitioning to a more regional based leadership model, with the Global Leadership team now including Regional Directors from Africa and Asia. Our Global Diversity and Dignity at Work policy underpins our work; available [here](#).

As mentioned above, Practical Action is committed to advancing gender equality through our work, and this applies as much to our internal organisational practices and culture as it does to our programming work. We report annually on our gender pay gap data in our annual report. This is part of our commitment to diversity and inclusion. In 2023 we have a significant mean pay gap in favour of women (27%) which is driven by the high proportion of women employed in the UK office (61%) and the high value of UK salaries in context of the global list; when we exclude UK employees from our data set, we have a much smaller, 9% mean pay gap in favour of women.

Practical Action is committed to combatting modern slavery and forced labour. Our organisational policy covers our own operations, as well as our suppliers and contractors; available [here](#). Our Public and Private Engagements Policy (available [here](#)) ensures that our engagements with other actors aligns with our values and that due diligence processes are followed prior to any contracts and partnerships being agreed.

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## Environment

Our vision is of ‘*a world that works better for everyone*’ and is delivered via four thematic focus areas:

- Energy that Transforms:
  - focus on decentralised renewable energy technologies and access for remote communities.
- Farming that Works:
  - regenerative agriculture that works for people and planet.
- Cities fit for People:
  - resilient water, sanitation, and waste systems, ensuring cities are safer and cleaner.
- Resilience that Protects:
  - community resilience to natural hazards and climate change impacts.

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We are working to mainstream environmental protection and resilience to the changing climate across all our programmes. In Nepal for example, our Summanati programme is supporting smallholder farmers in remote communities to improve incomes and food security via climate adaptive agriculture practices that boost agrobiodiversity and farm resilience. In Bangladesh, we are working in partnership with RiverRecycle to introduce the recycling of single use plastic while improving the working conditions and providing dignified jobs for waste workers. Our green energy work is transforming the lives of people across Latin America, Africa and Asia, including via our support to Last Mile Distributors reaching remote communities with renewable energy products.

Internally Practical Action is looking to reduce the environmental impact from its operations. This is underpinned by our strengthened environment policy, currently under development. We have also baselined our global carbon footprint and developed a reduction plan in line with net-zero targets.

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## Anti-Corruption

Practical Action is committed to transparent and accountable governance. We ensure adherence to our ethical code of conduct and risk management protocols through quarterly meetings of Trustees and their delegated committees, together with Director level meetings. All staff sign and are oriented on our anti-corruption policy, including fraud, extortion and bribery (available [here](#)), with fraud incidents tracked and addressed with oversight by leadership and trustees. Our partner due diligence process includes processes to reduce third party corruption and risk.

Financial policies and audit processes are reviewed and updated regularly. Annual audits are carried out by leading external firms in the UK and in all our countries of operation. Data protection is embedded via the data protection policy and data retention policy. We are compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and staff are trained and supported by a data protection working group. Practical Action publishes data on funding received and activity spending via the International Aid Transparency Initiative. As detailed in our Open Information Policy, we respond to all reasonable requests for information about our work; further information [here](#).

We offer an external whistleblowing and complaints service for all to use, including staff, partner staff, communities where we work, and anyone else who comes into contact with our work. All staff read, sign and follow our Complaints Framework, which explains their duty to report concerns and how to handle complaints. Further information available [here](#).

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Everything we do at Practical Action is designed around the needs of the people we work with and aims to contribute to changing the systems that hold them back. We work in varied and connected ways to achieve impact as well as constantly strengthening our own internal approaches to ensure we are an accountable and equitable organisation.

**This report is a summary of key highlights that illustrate Practical Action's commitment to the UNGC. More detailed information can be found in our most recent and previous Annual Reports** (available online here).

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