
COMMUNICATION ON ENGAGEMENT

From: 01.01.2020

To: 31.12.2021

1. Part I. Statement of Continued Support for the UN Global Compact

Zurich, 22.09.2022

To our stakeholders

I am pleased to confirm that HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation reaffirms its support to the United Nations Global Compact and its Ten Principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour, Environment and Anti-Corruption. HELVETAS lives and supports the principles expressed in the UNGC and perceives the UNGC initiative as an important step in the claim and breakthrough of responsible business practices. HELVETAS believes that commitments and rules must become more explicit and binding for companies worldwide in order to achieve a real transformation to sustainable and fair business practices around the globe.

In this Communication of Engagement, we describe the actions that our organisation has taken in the context of the UN Global Compact and its Principles. We also refer to our annual report and our web site for full transparency of our actions.

Sincerely yours,

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation



Melchior Lengsfeld
Executive Director



Remo Gésu
Director International Programmes

2. Part II. Description of Actions

HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (hereinafter HELVETAS) is a civil society organisation for development and humanitarian response. We strive to empower people, so they can determine the course of their lives in dignity and security, using environmental resources in a sustainable manner.

As per our organisational strategy, our work is guided by the following values:

- Our engagement is based on solidarity and partnership.
- We work towards achieving human rights and upholding the principle of self-determined development.
- We are committed to social equity and strive for equal opportunities for men and women regardless of age, origin, language, religion, culture, mental and physical capacity, sexual orientation, or political convictions.
- Our collaboration with our partners is based on mutual respect for cultural values and principles.
- We stand for development that balances economic viability, environmental appropriateness and social benefits.

The organisational values are the basis for the attitude, behaviour and high standards that HELVETAS requests to be respected and adhered to by its employees.

Further, we expect that all individuals and institutions with whom HELVETAS engages, respect these values and act in accordance with them, as well as with national and international laws.

HELVETAS signed UN Global Compact in 2020. Since then, HELVETAS has taken a number of actions to promote the ten principles of the UNGC both at the organisational level and at programme level. In this Communication of Engagement (CoE), we highlight some of the key efforts and activities.

2.1 Human Rights

Adherence to international human rights standards and the International Bill of Rights is an integral part of HELVETAS' internal policies and processes. Our commitment to human rights is reflected through multiple policies such as - HELVETAS' Code of Conduct, Gender Equality and Social Equity Policy, Regulations on Child Protection, Regulations on Mobbing, Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority, Regulations on Anti-Money Laundering, Organised Crime and Countering the Financing of Terrorism, Regulation on Corruption, Fraud and Conflict of interest, Regulation on Child protection, Whistle-blower policy and Private Sector Collaboration policy.

We follow the principle of non-discrimination through our GSE policy. Our organisational stance in support of gender equality and social equity is based on the recognition that all people, no matter their sex, or gender identity, or sexual orientation, have equal rights and shall have equal opportunities and equal responsibilities in realising their potential. This is reflected through diversity of our staff members in our offices and on the field and is manifested in all our activities in our programmes and projects.

Social equity can be understood in different ways in different contexts, but we take it to encompass the upholding of human rights and the promotion of social justice. We seek to reduce

or remove the unequal life chances that prevent discriminated and/or disadvantaged individuals and groups from playing an active role in their individual, communal and societal development. Such inequalities may relate to the individuals themselves, in terms of their health, education and skills; to social practices that discriminate ethnic groups, castes or religions, women, girls or LGBTQ+ persons; and to ways of community organisation and political systems that are dominated by elites and allow little or no room for the voice of others.

Additionally, at the programme level, our human rights-based approach is an integral part of all our programmes. Working to alleviate poverty and reduce inequality is directly linked to fundamental rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and core international human rights conventions. Human rights and development both promote well-being and freedom, based on the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings. Integrating both of them means anchoring development policies and strategies in the human rights framework. We build upon these principles and aim to empower right-holders to claim their rights, and strengthen the duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations through a human rights-based approach. Based on our thematic focus, we lay specific focus on strengthening right to life, right to water and sanitation, right to food, right to education, right to health, right to housing, right to culture, rights of minorities, equality before law and non-discrimination and upholding fundamental freedoms through our projects.

2.2 Labour

All our staff has the right to freedom of association and collective bargaining. This is reflected by the employee's commission (PEKO) that represents the interest of the staff in Switzerland and abroad towards the employer. It is supported by labour unions in negotiations and with legal advice. HELVETAS' personnel regulations, working time regulations and salary regulations ensure employees have decent employment conditions, social security, rights at the workplace and opportunities for participation and social dialogue as per the international labour standards.

All our employees or any other person involved in our activities have a right to work in a harassment-free and respectful environment. We are committed to promote the respect and protection of all our employees, partners and primary stakeholders against all forms of emotional, physical and sexual misconduct and/or aggression. Through our Code of Conduct, we have Zero tolerance to all forms of mobbing, sexual harassment and abuse of authority. We have a reporting mechanism to deal with a suspicion on mobbing, sexual harassment and/or abuse of authority and prevent retaliation related to the reporting of allegations of harassment. Whistle-blowers who express a suspicion of inappropriate behaviour are protected. Information concerning a suspicion is confidential. The presumption of innocence applies to accused persons. Our measures to deal with inappropriate behaviour are based on principles of fairness and impartiality.

Overall, HELVETAS endeavours to ensure that employees can report suspicions without fear of reprisal and that individuals who express a suspicion of harassment are adequately protected.

2.3 Environment

We are committed to sustainable operations and to reduce the environmental impact of our operations. Our Carbon Neutral strategy since 2019 is based on four milestones:

- Expanding the Carbon footprint calculations to all our country programmes starting from 2020: as an organisation, we can only become carbon-neutral, if all country programmes establish their carbon footprint.

- Becoming carbon neutral by offsetting all emissions by 2021 (through compensation payments)
- Explore shifting from offsetting to insetting in dedicated projects:
- Continuously reduce our carbon footprint.

At the programme level, since 2018, HELVETAS has an Environmental and Social Safeguards Management Policy for the implementation of an Environmental and Social Management and Safeguards System (ESMS) integrated into the HELVETAS Project Cycle Management (PCM) system. The ESMS serves to identify and if necessary, address potentially adverse environmental and/or social impacts of climate finance projects and programmes supported and/or implemented by HELVETAS. The ESMS ensures that project and programmes supported and/or implemented by HELVETAS will not cause significant adverse environmental and social impacts, and that any adverse environmental and social impacts generated from the implementation of projects and programmes will be mitigated to acceptable levels. The policy was updated in October 2021 to refer to the HELVETAS Environmental and Social Safeguards Manual that was introduced to ensure the implementation of HELVETAS' Environmental and Social Safeguard Management Policy. The manual describes the governance and procedures, roles and responsibilities within HELVETAS in detail and provides checklists for the implementation of the ESMS.

2.4 Anti-corruption

The Regulations on Corruption, Fraud and Conflicts of Interest explicitly formulate the stance of HELVETAS regarding corruption, fraud and conflicts of interest and define the main principles, roles and responsibilities, prevention measures and sanctions, as well as the complaint mechanism including the case management. These regulations contribute to:

- tackle corruption, fraud and conflicts of interest proactively and through effective preventive efforts;
- further sensitize the employees and partners of HELVETAS about corruption, fraud and conflicts of interest;
- assist employees and partners in difficult situations and assure others of our commitment and thereby prevent corruption, fraud and conflicts of interest;
- define the roles and responsibilities regarding corruption, fraud and conflicts of interest.

HELVETAS' code of conduct and regulations on anti-money laundering which applies to all its employees, board and management, provides clear rules and guidance on anti-corruption measures and conflict of interest. To monitor this, there are an Administration and Ethics Committee, Internal Auditors and a Compliance Officer who are responsible for ensuring governance and oversight on regulations on anti-money laundering. Additionally, HELVETAS has a whistle-blower policy that provides for confidentiality and protection from retaliation for whistle-blowers so that any person of the public can raise or disclose concerns about malpractice in the work of HELVETAS.

HELVETAS places the utmost importance on its employees being aware of these policies, regulations and codes of conduct, which they are obliged to follow. Employees are thoroughly trained in this regard.

3. Part III. Promoting good business practices

We conduct a systematic review process (due diligence) of potential partner companies, covering aspects of UNGC's ten principles in the areas of Human Rights, Labour and Environment as review criteria. HELVETAS also disposes and applies its policy for the collaboration with the private sector and the multistakeholder initiative assessment framework. In 2021 we examined 31 companies of which one was denied collaboration.

HELVETAS' human rights due diligence tool specifically designed for use by non-business actors for the due diligence of private sector companies was shared through a webinar with CSO partners from Alliance Sud and the Alliance2015. The Global Compact principles are integrated into the assessment standards of the tool. Specific emphasis is given to gender, children's rights, labour rights, environment, and anti-corruption. The human rights due diligence tool is shared with other organisations to help them assess their private sector partners and have a sound understanding on applying principles of UNGC as well as integration of UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

HELVETAS' Code of Conduct for Contracted Parties outlines the attitude and the behaviour that HELVETAS expects from consultants, services providers of goods and services, implementation partners, system partners and assisted organisations that are responsible for implementing projects, project components and/or recipients of contributions, etc. in Switzerland as well as abroad. The Code is binding for contracted parties and addresses components as civic duty, use of competences, means and assets, culturally sensitive behaviour, personal and professional conduct, protection of children and youth, mobbing and sexual harassment, conflict of interest, fraud and corruption, safety, security and health, environment and social safeguarding, anti-money-laundering, organised crime and countering terrorism, as well as respective reporting mechanisms and whistle-blower protection. The respective institutional policies, regulations and guidelines of HELVETAS are integral part of this Code of Conduct.

Through our membership and strategic roles in relevant multistakeholder platforms (Fairtrade Switzerland, Alliance for water stewardship, Sustainable Rice Platform, Swiss Water Partnership) we actively engage in sectorial discussions and support efforts to advance sustainability and the protection of human rights in specific sectors.

Through our membership in Alliance Sud, we actively contribute to better policy coherence for development in Switzerland, and help advocating the Swiss government to fulfil its international obligations and commitments regarding sustainable and inclusive development (Agenda2030), and climate protection (Paris agreement). Alliance Sud pools knowledge on Swiss foreign, trade, climate and tax policy, and advocates for policy coherence for development to tackle structural disadvantages for people living in the Global South.

Creating new perspectives

Through our programmes and projects in developing countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe we work with the private sector to create decent jobs and better income for disadvantaged women and men, and support small and medium sized enterprises in getting better access to markets.

In 2021 643,690 young and mostly disadvantaged women and men gained access to education and vocational training, found a job or started their own business with HELVETAS' support. Over the same period, 14,651 small and medium-sized enterprises improved their businesses, gained better access to markets and created jobs for disadvantaged people, while also offering sustainable products and better services.

Currently HELVETAS carries out 30 joint projects in which large and medium-sized companies engage and is active in nine multistakeholder initiatives with CSO, state and private sector partners which promote fair business practices, companies' safeguards, decent contracts for small scale producers and sustainable value chains. HELVETAS acts as co-implementer, advisor, facilitator and/or fund manager and upholds UNGC principles in its work and interaction with the private sector including formalisation of collaboration and capacity building to managers.

The UN Global Compact Switzerland is in the process of establishing a working group for non-business partners. HELVETAS has indicated keen interest in learning and sharing events as well as networking.

Strengthening good governance

In 2021 93,071 women and men have been empowered to claim their rights to basic public services or to transform local conflicts, with support from HELVETAS. 4,968 local governments and councils increased their capacity to deliver services to all their citizens, including women and disadvantaged people in 2021.

Over the same period, HELVETAS cooperated with authorities and partner organizations to help 588,299 women and men plan their labour migration safely, responsibly, and profitably.

Ensuring basic rights

In 2021 3,303,121 women and men gained sustainable access to water, sanitation, good hygiene, better nutrition or natural resources and benefited from higher yields or improved climate resilience. They worked with HELVETAS to install pumping wells and latrines as well as learning important hygiene principles or new, climate-adaptive farming techniques.

Three examples of our projects promoting UNGC principles are:

- **Our EYE (Enhancing Youth Employment) project** in Kosovo focuses on education and vocational skills, gender & social equity, youth, and urban engagement. 55% of the Kosovar population are under the age of 30 - a potential asset and opportunity for the country's future. However, the economy is growing very slowly, and the job market suffers from nepotism. Young people suffer most from this situation: Three out of five 15 to 24-year-olds are out of work, and every year another 36,000 young people enter the job market. So many of them migrate because they see no prospects for themselves in Kosovo. More than one fifth of Kosovo's original population now live abroad. Through our project, we have enabled nearly 12,000 young people to find a job so far. The focus in the first phase was on furnishing information about the employment market, career counselling and job placement. One approach is to entertainingly present important factual information about the labour market and job applications by using the vehicle of

a popular reality TV game show – with a job for first prize. (**Promoting UNGC principles 1, 6, 10**).

- Our **Swiss Water and Sanitation Consortium** mandate has [Blue Schools as a signature approach](#). The concept is to make students broadly environmentally aware where children learn hands-on about hygiene and environmental conservation. It offers a healthy learning environment and exposes students to environmentally friendly technologies and practices that can be replicated in their communities. (**Promoting UNGC principles 8, 9**).
- **Our JIKURA project** (the word means «new water» in Bambara) in the South of Mali, works with municipalities to develop their capacity to provide effective water and sanitation services. The project funds some of the local authorities most in need, who decide on a participatory basis which infrastructure and activities are most urgent and how they will be built and run. Each partner municipality involved in the project consults local residents to set intervention priorities and then draws up an action plan which may e.g. include the installation of solar water pumps or building school latrines. A steering committee led by local authorities distributes the available budget between the partner municipalities so that each can implement its action plan. This original and innovative approach puts local actors firmly in control, giving them an opportunity to decide on their own development. Water and sanitation services generate income that is reinvested to ensure their sustainability and autonomy, and the municipalities incorporate funding for water and sanitation management in their budgets. The scale of the project reflects the available funding, but the assistance provided to each municipality is time limited. The project also works with communities and schools to encourage families and pupils to adopt good hygiene and sanitation practices such as washing their hands with soap, purifying drinking water and using latrines. (**Promoting UNGC principles 1, 3, 8, 9, 10**).

4. Part IV. Measurement of Outcomes (2020 - 2021)

Human Rights (UNGC Principles 1 and 2)

- 5,455,599 people lifted themselves out of poverty in 2020 (Economic, Social, and cultural rights, right to development)
- 4,833,588 people lifted themselves out of poverty in 2021.
- 557,081 people have gained access to drinking water with HELVETAS in 2020 (Right to water and sanitation)
- 592,070 people have gained access to drinking water with Helvetas in 2021 (Right to water and sanitation)
- 11,383 people attended conflict resolution and peace building courses in 2020.
- 11,257 people learned in 2021 to identify and address the causes of conflict in their communities and to change the situation.

Labour (UNGC Principles 3 to 6)

- 126,000 people were supported by HELVETAS in 2020 to mitigate the economic impact of Covid-19 (Right to health, right to work).
- 791,594 people were supported for gainful employment and income opportunities through promotion of basic education, skills development, and private sector development. (Right to education) in 2020.
- In 2021 643,690 young and mostly disadvantaged women and men gained access to education and vocational training, found a job or started their own business.
- 431,045 people, especially women were empowered to participate in decision-making processes through local partners. (Access to justice, right to equality, prohibition of discrimination against women in political life) in 2020.
- In 2021, 81,814 people have been empowered to raise their voice and claim their rights.

Environment (UNGC Principles 7 to 9)

- 750'098 farmers, fishers, woodland owners and animal breeders started applying sustainable methods in 2020 thanks to HELVETAS.
- 691,765 farmers, fishers, woodland owners and animal breeders started applying sustainable methods in 2021 thanks to HELVETAS.

Anti-corruption (UNGC Principle 10)

- 4,968 local governments/council received training to plan in a participatory manner and/or to deliver services to citizens in responsive, accountable, and inclusive way in 2021.

22.09.2022