

Small WORLD

Issue 78 January 2023

Forever learning
Discover our approach to
building on our successes...



**Practical
ACTION**

Big change starts small

CLEVER BRAINS AND SKILFUL HANDS

In his groundbreaking book, *Small is Beautiful*, our founder, the radical economist E.F. Schumacher, set out a new philosophy for making a world that works better for everyone. Key to this was helping people help themselves, through collaboration and applied ingenuity. “The priceless resources which are possessed by all human beings, their clever brains and skilful hands,” he said.

2023 is the 50th anniversary of *Small is Beautiful*, and its message continues to inspire and motivate us. In the 31 years that I have been working at Practical Action, I have felt inspired and motivated so many times when I’ve seen new and innovative solutions put into practice and making a huge positive impact on communities. Equally satisfying has been speaking with

supporters like you and hearing what you think of our work with communities.

In this issue of *Small World*, we wanted to give you the opportunity to tell us which of our solutions excites you the most. On pages 6–11, we explore some of the most impressive and life-changing solutions in our recent history. We’d love you to tell us which is your favourite.

You can vote using the form enclosed with this letter, or online at practicalaction.org/smallworld

These solutions did not just pop into existence fully formed. They were hard-won, through trialling solutions and learning with each iteration. Over the page, my colleague, Al Richardson, explains how learning is at the core of everything we do, and how it creates a state of continual improvement.

As always, thank you for your support. All the work you read about in this magazine is only possible because you and your fellow supporters continue to make generous gifts to Practical Action.

Warmest regards,

Dawn McGahey,
Supporter Services
Manager



Is the Gravity Goods Ropeway your favourite Practical Action solution?

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Cover image

Community members celebrate their new solar-powered water pump in Sudan.

A culture of CONTINUAL LEARNING

Al Richardson, Head of our Impact and Learning team, talks to us about how Practical Action is always looking for ways to improve what we do, for the benefit of the communities we work with.



How is learning important to Practical Action?

It's vital that we are constantly learning and developing, always moving forward and improving. Learning isn't just an activity for us – it's a *culture*.

We look for opportunities to learn from our experiences, and the experiences of others. We also make sure we share everything we learn – within Practical Action, and with our partners and others, so that everyone's understanding and capabilities are increased.

At what stage does the learning happen?

Learning is baked into every stage of the project: before, during and after.

For example, before we began working with farmers in

Zimbabwe to find a way to beat ongoing droughts and create a decent income, we needed to fully understand the problem and all the factors involved. We spent time talking to and learning from the community.

We discovered that new climate resilient farming skills alone wouldn't be enough to solve the challenges they faced. Once they were able to grow abundant crops, they would also need to sell the surplus produce for an income. That meant looking at the local markets and seeing what opportunities were available to farmers. Where those opportunities didn't exist, we helped create them, facilitating conversations between farmers and everyone involved in the market chain, so that together they could create a solution that benefits everyone.

How do you learn during a project?

Throughout a project, we build-in time for reflection, and see if there are aspects we need to adjust. We plan very thoroughly before a project begins of course, so I'm not talking about making a 180-degree turn mid-way! But sometimes unforeseen circumstances pop up, and we need to adapt.

With our Renewable Energy for Refugees project in Rwanda, we spent time with communities designing the project, but then once the work had begun, we learned that while some things were working well, there were also some new challenges to consider, which we couldn't have anticipated. The project involved working with renewable energy companies who came into the refugee camps to help set up the energy solutions. But these private sector companies each had their own ways of working, and so we needed to do a bit of adapting along the way, discussing and discovering what were the win-win solutions for the communities and the companies.

And how about learning after the project is complete?

Yes, it's also vital that what we learn on one project is used to inform other ongoing and future work around the world. So we're in constant conversation with colleagues in other countries, sharing and joining up our thinking. Of course, that sharing extends out beyond our own teams, to other organisations and governments. We want others to benefit from our work and spread the solutions as far and wide as possible. It's our "big change starts small" principle.

A great example of this is our plastic waste recycling initiative in Bangladesh. After working with one community to turn plastic waste into profit, our solution has now been picked up by the government of Bangladesh. They are making plans to roll it out to other cities, meaning many more people benefit. Sharing what we learn is how we ensure our solutions have the biggest possible impact.

What's the most important thing you've learned in your role?

The most important thing is that development is about feeling our way forward. None of us knows everything, and we're constantly working in new locations, under new conditions, and with new challenges. By using all our expertise and skill, we listen and plan with communities, and we test out

solutions. We improve through trial and error, iterating and innovating. It's an ever-evolving journey, and it is great to have supporters who are keen to walk alongside us.

Make a gift to help us share more of what we've learned with more communities around the world: practicalaction.org/smallworld



Mavis Nkala in Zimbabwe is now growing abundant crops, beating the drought and making a decent income.

VOTE

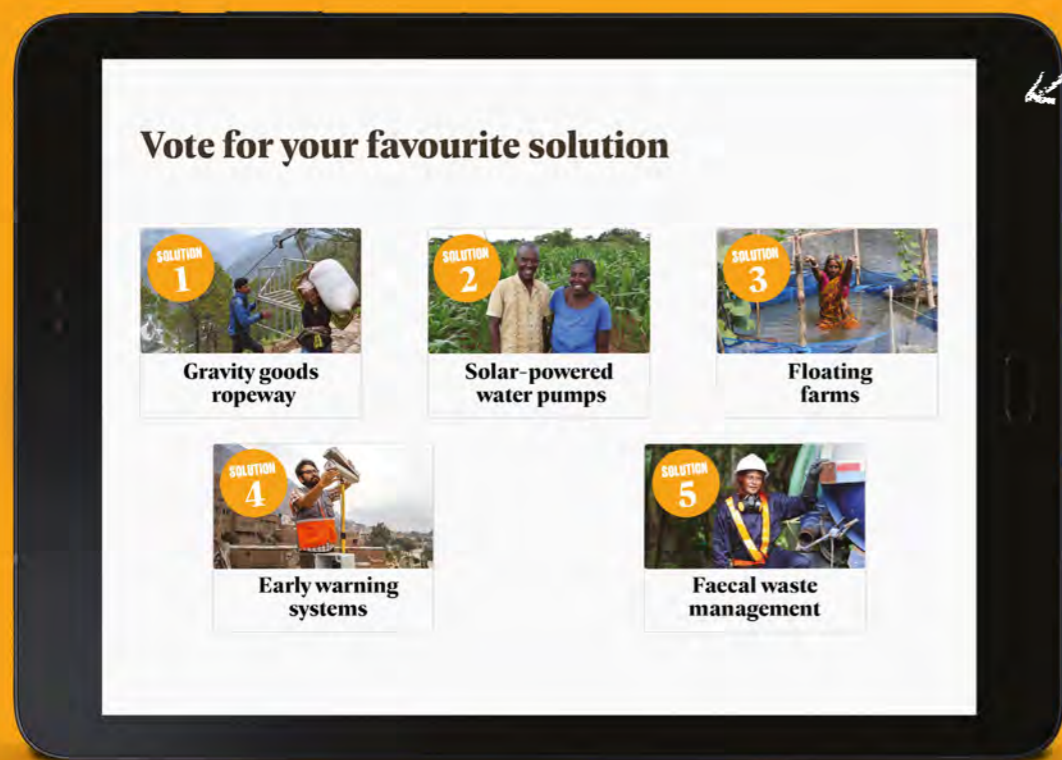
FOR YOUR FAVOURITE SOLUTION

After decades of working with communities, we've learned that we can overcome droughts, floods, and even gravity. Which solution impresses you the most?

Since Practical Action began in 1965, the challenges faced by communities around the world have grown in scale and complexity, especially where the changing climate is a factor. At Practical Action, we've kept pace with the changing world, working hand in hand with communities to discover new solutions and new ways to increase the impact of our work.

We asked some of our team members to nominate solutions they think are having the most impact. Over the next five pages, we'll introduce you to some of those solutions and community members using them. Which is your favourite?

Vote for your favourite solution, and make a gift to support more work like this.



You can use the form enclosed with your letter, or vote online at: practicalaction.org/smallworld

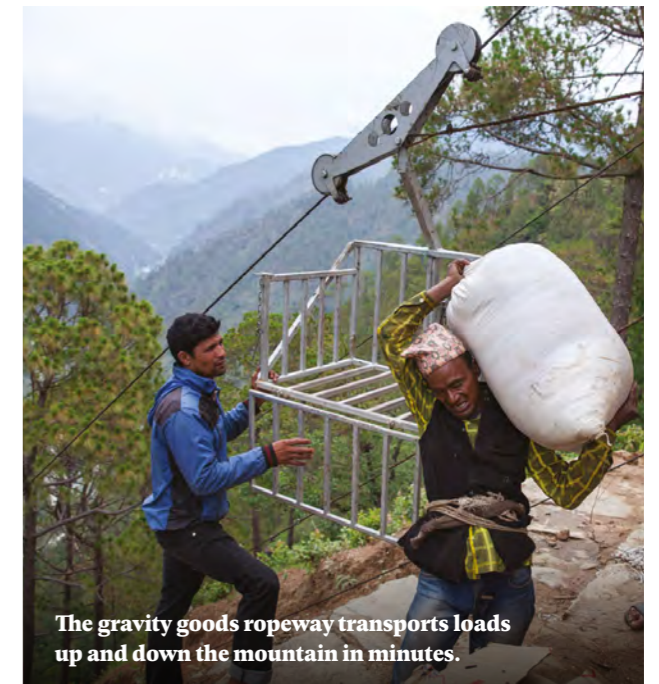
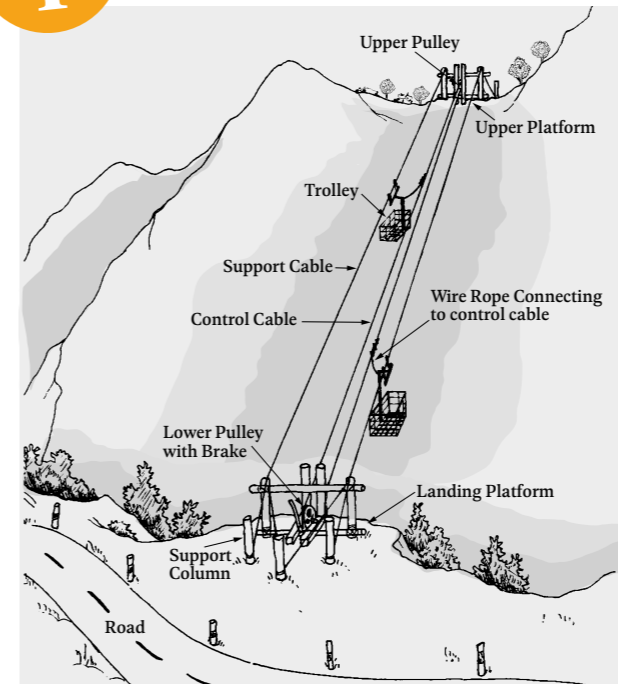
We'll announce the favourite in your next issue of *Small World*.



Scan with your phone camera to vote.

SOLUTION 1

Gravity goods ropeway



The gravity goods ropeway transports loads up and down the mountain in minutes.

The challenge

In the remote high hills of Nepal, farming communities face a gruelling challenge at harvest time. They live near the top of the hills to avoid seasonal flooding, and to be close to areas of pasture where they can farm. But the markets where they sell any surplus produce are at the bottom of the gorges. This means carrying punishing weights downhill on their backs. It's a treacherous journey that takes several hours, and often causes serious injuries.

The solution

Working with local communities, our engineers developed the gravity goods ropeway for the Nepali landscape. It's a simple, inexpensive solution, which uses a pulley system to take heavy loads up and down the mountain. This innovation reduces hours of labour to just a couple of minutes.

The team says...

"Even small ingenious solutions can have a cascading impact on the communities. The gravity goods ropeway has not only helped transport farm produce to markets, but also encouraged the farmers to grow more. Their improved incomes mean a better education for their children, better housing and raised living standards."

Sanjib Chaudhary,
part of our communications team in Nepal

The community says...

A huge weight has been taken off Janu's back.

After the installation of the gravity goods ropeway, Janu was able to devote more time to farming, grow more produce, and dramatically increase the amount of food she took to market to sell.



“

The installation of the ropeway in my village has improved so many lives and I am now supporting my fellow villagers for better agriculture production as a leader farmer, something I never thought, as a woman, I would be able to achieve.”

Janu Maya, a farmer in Nepal

Key benefit: Reduces hours of dangerous, backbreaking work to minutes.

SOLUTION
2

Solar-powered water pumps



Marvis champions sustainable farming in her community.

The challenge

Severe and ongoing droughts in rural Zimbabwe have left the fields of farming communities dry and barren. With limited access to water, farmers have not been able to water their crops. This means little food and no income for farmers' families.

The solution

We've been working with communities to find ways to boost their harvests and their incomes. Together we have created community gardens, and with the aid of solar powered water pumps, farmers are able to draw water up from deep underground – even when there has been little or no rainfall. The solar-powered pumps mean farmers can irrigate their crops year-round.

The team says...

"The technology is so user friendly that everyone can use it, no matter their age or physical ability. It was an emotional moment for me, seeing the elderly women in the village singing and praising the team when they used the irrigation system for the first time. Some had tears streaming down their cheeks. It had solved a long-standing problem for them."

Hilton Zvidzayi,
from our communications team in Zimbabwe

The community says...

Marvis is enjoying a bumper harvest. After struggling for years to grow enough crops during the drought, Marvis and her husband are now able to grow abundant crops – enough to feed their family and surplus to sell for a decent income.



“

We weren't making any money with farming. Some months we barely grew enough food to feed our family. We didn't know how things would get better. Now we have solar-powered pumps. The pumps are reliable – we never run out of sun! I have become an irrigation champion. It makes me feel happy and proud.”

Marvis Ndovlu, Mashaba, Zimbabwe

Key benefit: Allows farmers to irrigate crops all year round, even during drought.

SOLUTION
3

Floating farms



Suborna's floating farm produces abundant fish and vegetable crops.

The challenge

For farmers living in coastal Bangladesh, heavy rainfall can spell disaster. Rising sea levels combine with the rain to inundate fields with salty water. After flooding, the salt and sediment leave the land infertile, making it impossible to grow crops.

The solution



Practical Action has worked with coastal communities to develop floating farms. These bamboo cages contain below-water fish nurseries, and

above-water vegetable farms. Attached floats mean that as water levels rise and recede, the farms rise and fall. "Aquageoponics" is a climate resilient solution that provides food and income for hungry families.

The team says...

"When I hear about communities using our floating farms, it always makes me feel so happy to see how successful the farms are, and the farmers having fresh food for their families."

Mehrab Goni, from our team in Bangladesh

Key benefit: Provides a flood-proof source of food and income.

The community says...

Suborna's floating cages provide year-round food. In Suborna's village, flooding occurs regularly, and malnutrition is a big problem. But with training in aquageoponics, Suborna is rising to the challenge and growing ample food for her family.



“

For the last two years, our land has remained under water. So, we could not grow any crops there. Now we are farming fish in a cage with support from Practical Action, and cultivating bottle gourd over the cage.”

Suborna Sarkar, Kopalua, Bangladesh

SOLUTION
4

Early warning systems



Project manager Miguel checks the monitoring station.

The challenge

For farming communities living in the foothills of Peru, the rainy season is full of sleepless nights. Heavy rains cascade down hills, rivers swell and burst their banks, and floods wash away homes, crops and lives, often with as little as two minutes' warning.

The solution

As part of the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance, Practical Action works with communities at risk of severe flooding to develop early warning systems. Through a combination of risk awareness, river level and rainfall monitoring systems, alert systems and community response capability, we have increased warning time from minutes to hours.

The team says...

"It's been amazing to see community volunteers taking charge of protecting their neighbours as part of community 'brigades.' Through their engagement in these brigades, many community members have developed skills that go far beyond being able to respond during floods. Their passion for their communities and their increased knowledge and confidence mean they are now calling for local government to do more to protect their lives, homes, and livelihoods from floods. And many of these local leaders now work with Practical Action to reach more communities at risk of floods."

Anna Svensson, part of the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance team

Key benefit: Increases flood warning time from a few minutes to several hours.

The community says...

Camila is keeping her community safe. One terrifying night, Camila's family home was flooded without warning. As part of a community flood resilience brigade, she is no longer afraid.



Now I feel proud of the response we have been able to create within the community and my family. We are more prepared to face challenges. I am committed to being a brigade member. I have two younger sisters and I do that for them. To make sure they have a future."

Camila Tello, Santa Eulalia, Peru

SOLUTION
5

Faecal waste management



Improved equipment and safety gear protects workers' health.

The challenge

In the urban slums of Faridpur, Bangladesh, communities live without proper sewerage, their waste flowing into pit latrines. It is the 'sweepers' who have the job of emptying these tanks, often with nothing more than a bucket and their bare hands. It is hazardous work, for which they are paid little.

The solution

With communities and local authorities, we are making the work of sweepers safe, and making the city a healthier place to live. Protective clothing and mechanical pumps keep sweepers safe from toxic gases. Transporter vehicles carry the faecal sludge safely to new processing plants. And new co-operatives we've established ensure fair pay and working conditions.

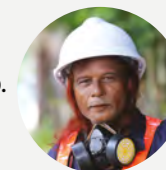
The team says...

"Key to the project is creating value from the waste. Faecal sludge is treated and combined with food waste to create 'co-compost'. This sustainable fertiliser can be sold on to local farmers, providing a lasting business model."

Caspar Way, Cities Fit for People programme

The community says...

Rafique has become a local hero. Rafique's work used to be dirty, dangerous and unprofitable. But since working with Practical Action, he now runs a local co-operative for waste workers, helping members of his community provide a valuable service and make a good livelihood.



We are self-sufficient and don't need to take help. We look after our members. We want to be more resilient."

Rafique Sheikh, sweeper in Faridpur, Bangladesh

Key benefit: Transforms a dangerous, dirty job into a safe, dignified career.



It's all thanks to you. It is your gifts to Practical Action that allow us to work with communities to come up with ingenious solutions to their greatest challenges.

Please **make a gift today** to make more solutions like this possible, and **vote for your favourite solution:** practicalaction.org/smallworld



Leyla's Kilimanjaro triumph

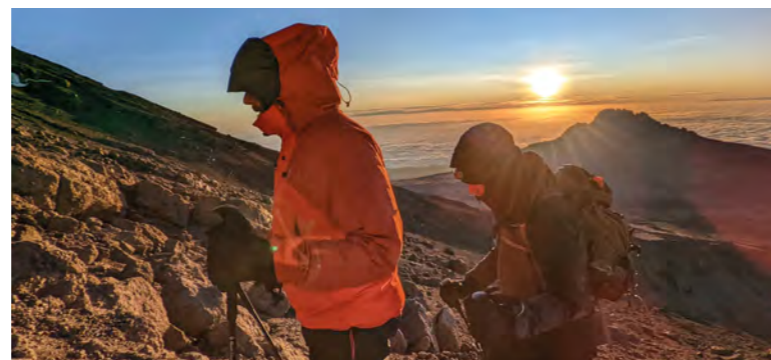
Presenter of BBC Radio 4's *The Food Programme*, BBC One's *MasterChef: The Professionals* critic and Practical Action ambassador Leyla Kazim has taken on an extraordinary challenge to raise funds for our work. She sent us this message to share with you:

"We did it! We summited the tallest mountain in Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro's Uhuru Peak in Tanzania, at 5,895m above sea level. It's the hardest thing I've ever done. I almost didn't think I'd make it, but I did – thanks to the amazing guides who got our group to the top. Without them, their incredible Swahili mountain songs, the cooking, the camaraderie, the energy and humour motivating every step, it would not have been possible."

"I'm sending a humongous thank you to everyone who donated to this fundraising cause. Thanks to you amazing lot, we've raised a fantastic £2,337.61 for Practical Action. I'm so humbled by people's generosity in such trying times – you're all totally awesome. The funds we've raised together will go so far in making a difference to the lives of so many less fortunate than us."



Thanks so much Leyla for your amazing support!



The Gundersons' in-memory fundraiser

To raise funds for Practical Action, the Gunderson family decided to climb Snowdon – not just once, but six times!

Andrew Gunderson and his wife have been long-term supporters of Practical Action. When Andrew sadly passed away just before his 65th birthday, his brothers David and Quentin challenged themselves to raise money in his memory. Quentin told us: "Andrew served overseas with Agape International in Uganda for five years during the 1980s. During his time there, he supported local communities to develop more sustainable

farming methods and improve crop irrigation and better use natural resources. Whilst in Africa, he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. I wanted to do a similar challenge in his memory, but to climb mountains nearer to home with my family. Coincidentally, there are six paths up mount Snowdon, and it turns out that the combined height of these is equivalent to climbing Kilimanjaro!"

The Gunderson family completed their ascents this summer, raising over £1,000 to support our work.



Thank you so much to the Gunderson family for taking on a fundraising challenge in memory of a lost loved one.

Dorcas's marathon achievement

Thank you to Dorcas Pavry for taking on a personal challenge to help support the communities we work with.



Dorcas Pavry wanted to run the London marathon because her 14-year-old son didn't think she could. We're happy to report that she proved him wrong, and we're thrilled that she used the opportunity to raise funds for Practical Action.

"The event was an amazing day! I wanted to raise the profile of such a brilliant charity and raise funds for at-risk communities on the front line of climate change."

Dorcas completed the 26.2-mile course in just over 5 hours, and she raised over £1,500.

Well done Dorcas, and thank you!

Would you like to take on a fundraising challenge of your own, or set up an in-memoriam fundraising page in tribute to a loved one?

You'll find tips and advice at: practicalaction.org/smallworld

Pioneering insurance for flood-risk farmers

Practical Action has launched a pilot project to test an innovative new approach to insuring farmers in Nepal against climate disaster.

For farmers in Nepal, the monsoon season is a time of great worry. The high risk of flooding means their crops could be washed away overnight. Losing their crops means they also lose the money they invested in those crops to begin with, driving them deeper into poverty. It's a cycle that can prove impossible to break free from.

Taking out an insurance policy is a way to reduce the risk and provide certainty, but traditional insurance policies are simply not an option for farmers living in poor, rural communities where the flood risk is so high. Practical Action is working with the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance and InsuResilience Solutions Fund to develop a new type of insurance for communities in the most flood-prone areas of South-West Nepal.

Traditional insurance is based on an individual evaluation of the losses suffered, which requires a lengthy and complicated assessment process. But this 'index-based insurance' is automatically triggered when a flood exceeds a certain threshold. The level of compensation is also pre-agreed, based on the average price for local crops.

This streamlined process is quicker, simpler and cheaper for the insurer to administer. And it means that farmers receive their compensation quickly.

We've been laying the groundwork for this pilot for over a year, bringing the partners, community and local government together. Within three weeks of the pilot launch, more than 900 smallholders had bought the new policy to protect their rice fields. One of them is Asharam Tharu, who insured 1.4 hectares of his land. He said, "If the pay-outs are successful as and when the agreed triggers are met, I plan to purchase the same policy to insure more of my land next year."

Following floods in Nepal in September, the first payments have already been made, arriving within 20 days. Once the monsoon season has finished, we'll review the success of the project. The learnings we gain will help us develop a scheme that can be offered much more widely, for farmers facing natural disasters across Nepal, and the wider world.

Discover more of our work with the Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance at: practicalaction.org/smallworld

Our ambition is to create financial resilience for farmers across Nepal who face the threat of floods.

Practical Action at New Scientist Live

We were thrilled to be part of the world's greatest festival of ideas in October.



Using VR headsets, we transported visitors to Turkana, Kenya.



Over three days at the ExCel London, we joined some of the top names in science and technology to share our vision for a world that works better for everyone. New Scientist Live was a fantastic opportunity for us to showcase our work and ingenious solutions. We talked to thousands of interested and interesting people, including hundreds of children attending the schools-only day.

The highlight of our stand was our virtual reality experience, where we transported visitors to Turkana in Kenya, so they could experience how solar-powered water pumps are transforming people's lives.

You can see the virtual reality film for yourself on our website at: practicalaction.org/smallworld



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