

Small WORLD

Issue 84 January 2025



HOPE IN THE FACE
OF INSTABILITY

**Practical
ACTION**

Big change starts small

CONNECTED THROUGH CRISIS

This past year has brought immense challenges for the people we work alongside. Political unrest, conflict, and the worsening climate crisis have left many families struggling.

In my role at Practical Action, I support our teams around the world whenever a crisis unfolds. When an emergency hits, although I'm confident in our response, I also feel worried, knowing what my colleagues are facing on the ground – the fear, uncertainty, and risks they're up against. It's both concern for their safety and admiration for their dedication to the people we work with, even in the hardest times.

A few months ago, I met with Elmutaz, one of my Sudanese colleagues. He showed me the handful of SIM cards he constantly swaps in and out of his phone to stay connected as different networks go down, working to deliver our support in the midst of conflict. It was a striking reminder of how something as basic as communication – something many of us take for granted – becomes an exhausting challenge in a crisis.

Moments like this remind me of the daily struggles faced by my colleagues and the people they work with in places impacted by instability. This year has pushed people's resilience to the edge. Yet despite everything, I've seen incredible determination – from our teams, the people we support, and you. Your generosity and commitment make this work possible, and I want to thank you for the crucial role you play.

This issue is dedicated to that resilience. I hope you find these stories as inspiring as I do.



Alex Bush,
Head of International Operations

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▲ Cover Image: Thanks to our resourceful team and Practical Action's trusted reputation in Sudan, we've kept moving forward despite civil war and the impact of the climate crisis.



STANDING STRONG IN SUDAN

Making a difference during a forgotten war



Muna Eltahir,
Sudan Country
Director

The country I call home is being torn apart in one of the world's largest humanitarian catastrophes, yet it barely registers in the global news. It breaks my heart to see the devastation caused by the civil war here, which is being compounded by droughts, famine and disease.

In the past year, I've seen the terrible conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine dominate international headlines, while the war here in Sudan remains largely ignored. Over ten million people have been displaced, and more than half the population of nearly 50 million is facing crisis levels of hunger, made worse by increasingly erratic rainfall and prolonged droughts driven by the climate crisis.

Every day I hear news of death – friends, neighbours, family members. At times I've found the weight of this tragedy unbearable, but, against all odds, the team's work in Sudan continues. My colleagues are on the ground, creating long-term positive change, even as they face extraordinary challenges themselves. It feels almost miraculous – but the results are tangible, and they're possible because of generous donations from supporters like you who have refused to close your eyes to the reality of what's happening here.

Thank you so much.

▲ Significant achievements include the construction of the Malih dam in Korga Nornga village, providing water for livestock and irrigation.

Building hope against all odds

Civil war broke out in Sudan in April 2023. Darfur, where my team has two offices, has been one of the hardest-hit regions. My colleagues are also working on projects in Kassala and Blue Nile states, which are farther from the immediate terrors of war, but where people still face the harsh realities of hunger and displacement. Despite everything, we've been able to continue our work building vital agricultural projects, water systems, and training programmes in all these areas, where it's safe to do so.

For many people I've met, these projects are a lifeline. A farmer told me of her relief at having the seeds and equipment she needed to grow crops. Even in the middle of war, fields are being harvested. In Darfur, my colleagues have worked alongside people to install solar-powered water systems that have provided water to more than 70,000 people, including refugees. These water facilities are essential for daily survival and for preventing outbreaks of disease in areas already battling cholera and other deadly infections.

I've seen for myself how worsening climate conditions have made farming even more difficult, with water scarcity and soil degradation adding further strain. Yet, where our work continues, there is still food, there is still water, and amid destruction, families share what little they have with people who have fled from other regions. Your donations have helped to give people hope, and that hope sustains them in these incredibly difficult times.



Creative solutions in the face of chaos

Since the war began, I often feel like everything that once worked has unravelled. Even simple tasks like paying our staff are massive hurdles now. The banking systems are in pieces, funds are inaccessible, and the power cuts are relentless. We've had to adapt, finding whatever opportunities we can. When banks open, even briefly, my colleagues rush to process months of salaries in advance. It's a scramble, but knowing it helps people support their families makes it worth the effort.

The resourcefulness and dedication of my colleagues has been hugely inspiring. Holding online meetings in the early hours of the morning has become routine, as that's often the only time the internet connection is stable enough. When hospitals became unsafe and insurance companies ceased functioning, I made the decision to give lump sums to cover medical expenses. I felt strongly moved to make sure my colleagues had what they needed, as many became the sole providers for their immediate and extended families who had lost everything. Your donations helped make these acts of compassion possible and mean our team was able to continue their life-changing work.

One colleague insisted on driving a truck full of building materials through an active conflict area to deliver supplies to a site before the rainy season. I stayed awake all night in fear and worry, waiting for confirmation that he was safe. Many of our team members spent days in the field, living alongside the communities they were helping because it was too dangerous to return home. Their bravery and dedication are a constant source of inspiration.

When crisis strikes, hope needs this kind of action. And it needs like-minded people like you to help make it happen.

▲ Farmers learn how to use organic fertiliser in a workshop focused on practical, sustainable farming techniques.

▼ 25 tonnes of potato seeds mean farmers have a resilient, climate-hardy food source to keep their families healthy and earn an income.



Why long-term work still matters

While humanitarian aid provides immediate relief, our work goes beyond that – it is addressing the root causes of poverty and instability. Even during war, my team is laying the groundwork for a more stable future. In Blue Nile, for example, we've created more than 35 farming groups, helping people grow essential crops like sweet potatoes. These potatoes have become a staple food because they are more affordable than even basic items like onions. I recently saw a video of a market full of sweet potatoes, and it struck me how important these initiatives are, not just for food security but also for giving people a sense of normality.

In Kassala, I met farmers who, with our support, have learned how to adapt their farming to the changing climate and now have the tools they need to process and store their crops. This has allowed them to access new markets, helping them secure a livelihood. These are small but impactful steps toward rebuilding the social and economic fabric of these communities.

Water access is another critical issue here, and we've focused on sustainable solutions like solar-powered water systems. In Darfur, these systems provide water both to residents and displaced people. Access to clean water is a basic human right. In Sudan, I believe it's also a way to reduce tensions and prevent further conflict over increasingly scarce resources, a situation worsened by the effects of climate change.

“Access to clean water is a basic human right. In Sudan, I believe it's also a way to reduce tensions and prevent further conflict.”



▲ A farmer harvests jute, grown from seeds we provided to support her income and food supply.

“When peace finally comes, it will be the communities strengthened by our work that will lead the way in restoring their country.”

I couldn't just walk away...

▶ “I was determined to make progress on our work and get the weirs built, because I knew how much it meant to the people living here.”

When the war began, we had received funds to build three water weirs. They would provide life-saving water to **over 50,000 people**. Despite the escalating violence and uncertainty, I made the personal decision to do what I could to see it through, knowing how essential water is for survival.

I visited the sites and told the communities, “I’m not leaving. We need to finish this together.” The people stepped up immediately. They organised night watches to protect the equipment and trucks. One man said to me, “We’ll guard this water source with our lives if we have to. It’s our lifeline.”

Negotiating fuel prices, so we could transport supplies to the build sites, was extremely difficult. The cost of fuel had hugely increased, and checkpoints were everywhere. The extra donations from generous supporters meant I was able to secure fuel, but even getting it to the site was dangerous. My home was hit by artillery three times, and on one occasion, I narrowly escaped an attack while discussing fuel prices at the local government office.

Despite the danger, we completed the weirs. Today, those weirs are fully operational and providing water to thousands. When people tell me, “Because of the water, my children are alive” I know it was all worth it. There is no greater reward.

Awadalla,
Project Manager, Darfur

Tackling the root causes of conflict

The scarcity of resources like water and food has fuelled tensions here. That’s why I think it’s so important to focus on sustainable development even during crises. The work we’re doing here addresses the root causes of instability, helping to create resilient families better equipped to withstand future challenges, including those exacerbated by the climate crisis.

While much of the world looks away from Sudan, Practical Action does not. And I know you won’t either. Every day, our teams on the ground are proving that even in the darkest moments, there is hope. And when peace finally comes, it will be the communities strengthened by our work that will lead the way in restoring their country. Thank you for standing alongside us.

Visit practicalaction.org.uk/small-world to watch a video of my colleagues and I discussing the Sudan conflict, its effects on our lives and Practical Action’s projects.



“Donations from generous supporters meant I was able to secure fuel, but getting it to the site was dangerous.”

NAVIGATING CHANGE

How global events in 2024 shaped our work

Our work with people facing the worst impacts of poverty and the climate crisis means operating in regions experiencing unrest, political instability, and climate-related disasters. Tackling such complex and unpredictable conditions calls for adaptability, flexibility, and ingenuity – qualities made possible by the consistent support of people like you, which gives us the stability to respond effectively.

Below are some of the key countries impacted last year, showing how your support helps people thrive despite the challenges.

Burkina Faso

Ten years ago, we began work improving access to renewable energy in refugee camps in Burkina Faso, driven by the need to support people in the north of the country who had fled political instability in neighbouring Mali and Niger. While the north remains unstable and at risk from armed groups, we now focus on areas further south. These regions are relatively calm but face significant challenges from the presence of millions of internally displaced people. Our resourceful team, with their language skills, experience and local knowledge, effectively demonstrate to decision-makers the importance of supporting farmers to boost production through renewable energy access.

Peru

Peru has faced significant political turmoil, with three congresses and six presidents in just five years. To navigate this instability, we focus on building partnerships with regional and indigenous governments. Despite the uncertainty, one consistent trend is the growing commitment of decision-makers to prioritising biodiversity and tackling environmental degradation. We're adapting our projects in the country to align with this national focus.

UK

The UK has been through a period of significant political change, bringing with it new priorities and opportunities. The new Government has signalled a stronger commitment to climate and nature at a high level, offering hope for progress. At the same time, floods have disrupted farming, and the cost-of-living crisis continues to impact many. These shared challenges highlight the connections between local and global issues. As part of this, we continue to amplify the voices of those we work with, ensuring the effects of the war in Sudan stay on the UK government's agenda and that UK aid reaches those who need it most.

Sudan

Since April 2023, Sudan has been engulfed in civil war. Our staff, embedded in the communities we work in, are specialists at getting things done and leveraging longstanding trade networks to share knowledge and resources. In areas where farmers and pastoralists once clashed over limited water and grazing land, dams we've constructed and land-use agreements we've facilitated are helping secure livelihoods for both groups. While we previously focused on Darfur, much of our work now supports displaced people in Kassala, with a growing emphasis on food security – protecting harvests so that people affected by the war have a reliable food supply into the future.

Bangladesh

In July and August, political unrest erupted in Bangladesh. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled, triggering widespread protests, curfews, and communication blackouts. Daily life came to a halt, making it difficult to continue our work with farmers and informal waste workers in the country. Despite these challenges, our strong community ties, established presence and reputation meant we could adapt quickly and continue improving livelihoods through planet-friendly farming practices, better waste management, and sustainable energy solutions.

Kenya

In April, severe flooding devastated farms across Kenya, destroying crops, disrupting livelihoods and leaving families struggling to recover. Just two months later, anti-tax protests claimed 22 lives, compounding the climate challenges with political instability. Through our strong relationships with partner organisations and regional governments, we continued supporting farmers throughout the unrest. Families have embraced sustainable, climate-resilient practices – such as water management and crop diversification – to replant lost crops, improve soil health and safeguard their livelihoods against future challenges.

Zimbabwe

Political unrest and economic instability in Zimbabwe have made it challenging to secure funding for new initiatives. Despite this, we continue to work with long-standing partners and communities. Navigating the shifting political landscape means focusing on regional and local government levels, where collaboration is often more direct and effective. Our work includes improving drainage systems to reduce flood impacts and supporting farmers to adopt regenerative practices – like crop rotation and composting – helping them restore soil fertility, increase yields and better withstand the challenges of the climate crisis.



Caleb, a tomato farmer in Kisumu County, Kenya, assesses the damage to his land.



A renewable energy training session for farmers in Gampela village, Burkina Faso.

Tackling unpredictable challenges like these takes flexibility and ingenuity – possible only with the consistent support of people like you.

Please consider a donation today to help people overcome adversity and thrive.

The human impact of conflict

Richard's story



Richard, a farmer and refugee in Rwanda, is using sustainable techniques and co-operative support to grow thriving crops and rebuild his life after fleeing conflict.

“
I've discovered the power of sustainable farming to change my life and the lives of others”

Current and past conflicts in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo have forced tens of thousands of people to flee to refugee camps in Rwanda.

With limited resources and few employment opportunities, many families are stuck in limbo, unable to rebuild their lives. Long-term support is often overlooked, as the media tends to focus on the initial chaos of displacement, but millions of refugees end up spending years, sometimes their entire lives, in temporary camps.

While we can't resolve the crises that forced people from their homes, we can help them live with dignity, support their families, and contribute to society. This is central to our work with refugees and the people who host them.

Farming for a better future

Richard is a farmer whose life was turned upside down when conflict in his native Burundi forced him to flee his home. He found himself in a refugee camp in Rwanda, but like many others, he struggled to make ends meet and relied heavily on aid. When some land became available, he started farming, but despite his hard work, he struggled to turn a profit. A lack of training, tools and access to markets meant low yields and few ways to improve his situation.

Things started to turn around for Richard when we supported him and others in his community with specialised training in agriculture and essential farming tools, which have significantly boosted his crop yields. The training introduced more efficient farming techniques, allowing him to make the most of his small plot of land.

A key part of Richard's success has been his involvement in a local co-operative, which connects him with people from the host community. Through the co-operative, he now has access to crucial resources like organic compost materials and tools to produce his own fertilisers and pesticides. These practices have not only made his farm more sustainable but have also reduced his need for external inputs. His neighbours in the host community have also benefitted, with local markets full of nutritious produce grown by him and other refugee farmers.

Entrepreneurs like Richard show that with the right support, people can rebuild their lives, even in difficult circumstances. With access to training, tools, and opportunities, refugees can gain independence and contribute to their communities.

Your continued support can help more people like Richard find stability and hope for the years ahead.

Project update

HOPE AND GROWTH in Sudan



▲ Amani and Amal show their carrot jam, pumpkin preserves, and hibiscus juice, made after we supported them with training in food processing.

◀ Ahmed and his students work together in their school's garden, growing plants and learning sustainable farming skills.

◀ A farmer in Darfur holding a 'Raka', which is used to collect crops from her farm.



Despite the turmoil of Sudan's civil war, because of supporters like you, farmers in Darfur are turning the tables on climate change. Your donations to our appeal in 2019, matched by the UK government, mean that **34,000 people** in Sudan have the skills and resources they need to tackle the effects of the climate crisis and build resilience in the face of conflict.

As this project draws to a close, together, we've achieved amazing results:

- **375 farmers** are now equipped with sustainable practices, and **over 3,000** have seeds and tools to improve their harvests.
- Agricultural production has surged by nearly **90%** for **883** women-led households.
- A new dam now supports **1,500 farms**, while improved reservoirs mean better water access for livestock.
- Community forests and terraces are protecting the land and **boosting crop yields**.

**Your support is changing lives daily.
Thank you for making such powerful progress possible.**

“
The impact of this project goes beyond immediate relief. We are laying the groundwork for long-term resilience.”

Awadalla,
Project Manager, Darfur

34,000

people in Sudan supported with skills and resources



News in brief

Women in Nepal take charge of finances with tech

We're delighted that thousands of tech-savvy women in remote areas of Nepal are experiencing the benefits of a programme that has helped challenge longstanding gender stereotypes. They've learned new skills and now use technology to take on their household's financial responsibilities.

► Sushma is sharing her newfound digital literacy with other women in her community.



Zimbabwe's farmers build resilience to the climate crisis

With new funding from USAID, we're working alongside farmers in Zimbabwe struggling to adapt to the climate crisis. The project, which began in October 2024, aims to support farmers in boosting agricultural production through the rehabilitation of community irrigation systems and training on low-cost practices for adjusting to new weather patterns.



▲ Climate resilient seeds are one of the solutions being used by farmers in Zimbabwe to grow bountiful harvests despite the effects of the climate crisis.



New tools for sustainable land use in the Amazon

We're introducing a "forestry backpack" in the Amazon to support indigenous groups access green finance. This toolkit is designed for remote communities who face challenges engaging with the private sector and decision-makers due to language barriers.

The toolkit provides guidance on securing funding from sources like carbon credits. It will help people who have lived and worked in the Amazon for generations to manage their land according to their own priorities.

▲ The 'forestry backpack' initiative will support indigenous groups to manage and protect their land.

For more in-depth news and updates visit our website: practicalaction.org.uk/news-stories

Supporter question

“

How do you stay politically neutral while still addressing the political limits that affect aid allocation and your work with governments?”

Answer

Our neutrality comes from a commitment to providing support impartially, allowing us to work effectively with local people, governments, and partners without putting the safety or success of our projects at risk.

Neutrality is essential to our work, especially in politically complex and conflict-affected areas. It allows us to operate safely, collaborate openly, and focus on meeting people's needs. Being seen as politically aligned could force us to leave a country, lose funding, or put colleagues' lives at risk. However, we still use our influence to address systemic issues, advocate for essential changes, and amplify the voices of the people we work with, all while remaining impartial.

Although we're politically neutral, we attend events such as the UN Climate Change Conference (COP), the world's largest summit on the climate crisis. As Official Observers, we use this platform to amplify the voices of the people we work with and push for policies that improve their lives.

This balance enables us to create sustainable solutions and protect the trust we've built with diverse stakeholders, keeping our focus on the people who need it most.

Charity news

Celebrating a Life Well-Lived: Simon Boas

You may be aware that Jersey Overseas Aid (JOA) is one of our longest standing partners. Very sadly, their CEO, Simon Boas, passed away in the summer, aged 47. Simon's life profoundly impacted the lives of thousands in Jersey and hundreds of thousands in vulnerable communities across the world.

As a champion of global humanitarian and development aid, Simon embodied the values of respect for human dignity and community well-being. During his eight years as Director of JOA, our decades-long relationship continued, driving innovative projects in Zimbabwe, South Sudan, Nepal, and Bolivia.

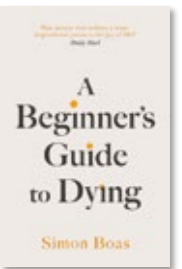
Under his leadership, JOA funded initiatives that promoted agriculture, market access, and digital finance, benefiting over 20,000 people, primarily women. We will always remember Simon's inspirational leadership and unwavering commitment to creating a better world. Our heartfelt condolences go to his family, friends, and the people of Jersey.

We're committed to continuing our work alongside JOA to continue Simon's legacy of compassion and positive change for generations to come.



▲ Simon visiting a JOA-funded project supporting farmers in Ethiopia in 2020.

► Simon's critically acclaimed book, *A Beginner's Guide to Dying*, was recently published and is a heartfelt exploration of life, love and mortality.



Supporter focus

CREATE THE FUTURE YOU WANT TO SEE



Liz Webb,
Legacy Team

“

The work Practical Action does to enable individuals and communities around the world improve their lives and those of their children is both essential and truly inspiring.

Such support will be needed for many years, hence my decision to remember Practical Action in my Will.”

Janice,
Practical Action Supporter

I love helping people like Janice create a legacy that reflects their values, knowing it will make a real difference for others long into the future.

If, like Janice, you care about helping people around the world improve their lives, a gift in your Will to Practical Action means your commitment can continue long into the future. You'll be helping people around the world overcome their biggest challenges – bringing clean energy to villages, supporting farmers as they adapt to a shifting climate, and delivering solutions that lift people out of poverty.

Every day, we face new challenges, whether it's conflict, effects of the climate crisis, or unexpected hurdles that demand resilience. When people choose to leave a gift in their Will, it means we have the ability to act quickly and meet these challenges head-on. It's a decision that can make a lasting difference.

Ready to find out how? Request our free Will guide today and see how your legacy can support people through even the toughest times: practicalaction.org/small-world

Get in touch:

Email: Liz.Webb@practicalaction.org.uk or call: 01926 634 400

KICKSTART 2025

with Practical Action

As the new year begins, many of you will be thinking about setting new challenges or finding ways to support causes you care about. It's the perfect time to explore fundraising, and **your support can help people on the frontlines of poverty and climate change find solutions to their toughest problems.** Whether you're running a marathon, cycling across continents, or hosting events, your efforts are so valuable.

Here are just a few of the actions you can take, inspired by fellow supporters.

Johnny's run for change



On 9th June, Johnny Agnew took on the **Strathspey Marathon** in Scotland, raising an incredible **£955** for Practical Action. His dedication to completing the marathon and raising funds is an inspiration. If you love running or enjoy taking on a personal challenge, you too could turn your passion into a force for good, just like Johnny.

Adrian's cycle challenge



Adrian Bennett took on a monumental challenge: **cycling from Cape Town to Johannesburg** in just 14 days. Adrian was inspired by his uncles, who had raised money for us, back when we were known as the Intermediate Technology Development Group. Carrying on their legacy, Adrian used his love of endurance sports to raise an amazing **£2,000**.

Kate's awareness raising event



Kate Mulkern raised **£800** at a charity event hosted by Rose Garden Events by **giving a talk** about Practical Action, along with hosting a **raffle and auction**. Sharing your passion for Practical Action with others can have a powerful impact! You too can raise both awareness and funds to support our work.

Raise funds your way in 2025

Thank you to all of you who support us in so many different ways.

If you're feeling inspired, why not take on your own challenge or organise a fundraiser for Practical Action this year?

To download our guide to fundraising, which is full of tips and inspiration, visit: **practicalaction.org/small-world**

If you enjoyed reading Small World, please make a donation today:



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practicalaction.org/small-world



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