

Small WORLD

Issue 85 August 2025

LIGHTING THE WAY

The power of gender equality

Practical
ACTION

Big change starts small

CREATING SPACE FOR CHANGE

I see the impact of gender inequality every day. It shapes who gets to make decisions, who has access to opportunities, and who carries the heaviest burdens in times of crisis. But I can also see change happening – practical, meaningful change that is creating fairer futures.

I'm Mariette, Practical Action's Gender Advisor, and I'm excited to welcome you to this issue of *Small World* and share some of the transformational work you've made possible.

Strengthening gender equality is one of the most fundamental accelerators of sustainable development. When we improve gender equality, we enable more people to break free from poverty.

My role is to ensure both men and women benefit equally from our solutions. This means identifying barriers that prevent women's inclusion, making sure women have a say in decisions affecting them, and engaging men to recognise the benefits of equality. Real change happens when everyone is involved.

I've witnessed first-hand how your support is creating real, tangible change, including in refugee camps here in Rwanda. With the renewable energy we're helping people access, women are living safer, more independent lives.

I met a woman named Esther who was thrilled to have reliable electricity. Now, she earns an income as a tailor, supporting her children. Previously afraid to walk through the camp at night, Esther now confidently keeps her business open into the evening, thanks to new street lighting.

Every day, I meet people like Esther who are determined to build a better future. I see the strength of women who refuse to be excluded and men standing with them to challenge unfair systems. With your support, we're making this vision a reality. Together, we're working towards a world where everyone can reach their potential.



Mariette Utamuvuna,
Gender Advisor, Rwanda

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▲ Cover image:
In Bolivia, Alejandrina
is growing a bountiful
peach harvest thanks
to solar irrigation and
new farming skills.



RETHINKING SCHUMACHER *gender in a changing world*

Sarah Roberts, *Chief Executive*

Ensuring the world works better for everyone is what Practical Action is about and this means making sure that all the work we do benefits both women and men.

Our ethos has been shaped by that of our founder, E.F. Schumacher a bold thinker who believed passionately in starting from the needs and realities of communities and supporting them to build practical solutions to change their lives.

But Schumacher's philosophy had blind spots. When it came to women, his thinking was rooted firmly in his time, missing the deep importance women hold in economies and societies. Schumacher understood deeply that work is about more than money – that it's about dignity, self-respect, and the power to choose your own path. He wrote passionately that *"to organise work in such a manner that it becomes meaningless, boring, stultifying, or nerve-racking for the worker would be little short of criminal."* Yet he somehow missed the fact that women deserve meaningful work and independence every bit as much as men. He once wrote, *"Women, on the whole, do not need an 'outside' job,"* as if

women joining the workforce at scale indicated something had gone wrong economically. His viewpoint also overlooked the significance of sharing unpaid labour like cooking, cleaning, and childcare – work that is critical and often underappreciated, yet essential for any economy to function.

This labour has traditionally fallen on women, but everyone benefits when these responsibilities are shared more equally. Schumacher also anticipated a future where women would increasingly carry the load alone as men moved away from rural communities in search of work. He wanted desperately to avoid this outcome, but it has become our reality today.

As the climate crisis worsens, I've met countless women facing enormous responsibility alone, managing homes, farms, and businesses, often without support. It's a tough, complicated life – one we can't ignore.

Schumacher was always willing to challenge assumptions – today, it's our turn to build on his thinking and ask new questions that reflect our changing world.

Practical action for TANGIBLE CHANGE



Gender inequality is not an abstract issue – it shapes lives every day. It decides who eats first when food is scarce, who has access to education, who can own land, and who gets the time and opportunity to earn a decent living.

Forida from Bangladesh has experienced these inequalities. “When I came here, many women told me how their husbands were torturing them. I saw bruised women come to me for help. That’s when I realised I needed to create opportunities for them,” she says.

Many of the women who turned to Forida for help were trapped in abusive marriages with no financial independence. She realised the best way to support them was to create opportunities,

so with our help she set up a factory producing jute products. This factory now employs local women and has trained hundreds more. Many of these women had never earned their own income before. Now, they can make financial decisions, gain confidence, and break free from dependence on their husbands. But Forida isn’t stopping there – her dream is to expand into international markets and open a showroom in Dhaka. “We have no product showroom in Dhaka. I want a place where we can interact with buyers directly and take our business to the next level,” she shares.

Forida’s work with jute products is making a difference beyond financial independence. Jute is an eco-friendly alternative to plastic, and with global demand rising, there’s potential for Bangladesh to play a larger role in sustainable production. But more awareness and government support are needed to compete in the international market.

▲ Farida employs more than fifty other women in her factory, where they make sustainable jute homeware such as rugs, tablecloths and bags.

► Peninah supplies vegetables to local schools and mentors other women farmers, making her a prominent member of her rural community.

Hearing the voices that are often ignored

Too often, decisions that affect women’s lives are made without their input. Assumptions replace experience, and real-life challenges go unheard. Your support helps ensure that the women we work with shape the solutions that affect them.

In Kenya, Peninah is proving how valuable women’s expertise is. “Farming has been my passion since I was a young girl. I want to nurture sustainable practices and help other young women explore opportunities in agriculture,” she told us. Our support enabled Peninah to turn her love for farming into a successful business, growing and selling leafy vegetables. She learned good agricultural practices and market access, and now grows enough vegetables to supply multiple schools and nearby markets.

Peninah is also helping others grow their businesses. “Thanks to Practical Action, I was able to access training and market connections. Now, I’m helping young people get into farming and build their own businesses,” she says. By helping others to sell their vegetables in larger quantities, she’s opening up bigger markets and strengthening the agricultural sector in her region.

A future shaped by equality

Progress is happening, but there’s still work to do. Women are still often underpaid, overworked, and excluded from decisions that affect their lives. The climate crisis, conflicts, and economic instability are making these inequalities worse.

But equity is worth fighting for. When women have the same opportunities as men, families are healthy, businesses grow, and societies become more resilient. Our project teams see it every day, and studies show that when women farmers have access to



“Farming has been my passion since I was a young girl. I want to nurture sustainable practices and help other young women explore opportunities in agriculture”

▲ Every week, Peninah sells freshly harvested African leafy greens at her local market, making healthy food more accessible.

the same resources as men, food production increases, reducing hunger and lifting people out of poverty.

Every day, people like Forida and Peninah prove that change is possible. Forida started with just a sewing machine – now she’s transforming lives. Peninah’s passion for farming has grown into a thriving business that supports many people in the area. And even with all they’ve achieved, they’re not stopping. As Forida puts it, “My first dream was to make women economically independent so they could be free from their abusive husbands. Many of my dreams have come true, but I still want to do more.”

We’re working alongside people like Forida and Peninah towards a world where every person – regardless of gender – has the opportunity to succeed.



Everyone should have the opportunity, resources and support to achieve their potential. That’s why we champion women’s empowerment across our work.

When it comes to beating poverty, hope needs this kind of action.

Please donate today.

Visit: practicalaction.org/smallworld



WOMEN LIGHT THE WAY IN BOLIVIA

▲ Alejandrina is using solar power to irrigate her peach trees – her family's main source of food and income.

The climate crisis has left farming families in Bolivia struggling with drought, causing their crops to fail and their animals to die. Many people have been forced to leave their rural homes in search of work in cities. But thanks to donations from people like you, solar-powered water pumps are making farming possible again.

Verónica is among those benefiting. She lives in the once thriving farming village of Santiago de Callapa. “We had llamas, piglets, chickens. Then the rain stopped and the animals died”, she says. Now, with solar panels powering pumps, water is plentiful again. Crops like potatoes and barley are growing and animals are healthy – providing food, income, and stability.

As a woman, Veronica was often responsible for collecting water and growing food, so when water ran short, her work got harder. That’s why women have taken on a key role in maintaining the new water systems. More than 380 women have taken training to manage solar technology, gaining skills traditionally reserved by the community for men. With this knowledge, they have become local leaders, ensuring people can sustain farming despite the climate crisis. “This project gave me hope. Women have rights and we have to keep going”, says Verónica.

Thank you so much for helping restore livelihoods and lift women’s voices. With your support, we’re showing how sustainable solutions can help rural families adapt and succeed despite the climate crisis.

“This project gave me hope. Women have rights and we have to keep going”

Verónica, Farmer,
Pacajes Province, Bolivia



▲ Top: Over 85% of women in Bolivia work in farming and livestock, playing a key role in food security – often without access to technical training.

▲▲ Middle: Iris is one of five women trained as solar pumping system operators in her village. She relies on the steady water supply to grow her maize.

◀ Left: Verónica is one of many women in rural Bolivia who’ve learned to operate and maintain solar-powered water systems for their communities.





Subina Shrestha,
Programme
Associate

In Nepal's rural villages, change is often hard to achieve, but when it comes, it can be powerful.

In 2022, we launched a project to enable women to access digital and financial education. We decided to work with women because they make up 70% of smallholder farmers yet face major barriers to education and financial services. Our work has sparked a big shift in household dynamics, greater respect within families, and changing views on gender roles.

Recently, I travelled to Dang and Rolpa to see this change firsthand. The women had stories to tell, but so did the men. I wanted to hear what these husbands, fathers, and brothers thought about women taking financial control.

From skeptics to supporters

When I met Raman, his newfound pride in his daughter-in-law Bishni was clear. *"She pays the bills and manages big expenses,"* he told me. Bishni now handles everything from utility payments to construction costs for their new house.

For a society where men traditionally control family finances, this is no small shift. Raman said education helped, but so did family discussions encouraged by the project. Sitting together to plan tasks made them appreciate each other's roles and share the workload fairly.

When I met Sunita, who leads digital literacy classes, she recalled the resistance she first faced. *"Men would ask, 'What can a woman like you teach?'"* she said. But now, when she visits their homes, they listen.

Why women's education benefits everyone

In Triveni, I met a family that showed why this shift is working. Women like Parbata, who never attended school, are now managing finances despite limited literacy. The training is flexible and customised to their needs.

Men like Khadga, whose wife was a digital literacy trainer, once questioned teaching women who couldn't read. But when he saw their savings grow and how they used online bank accounts to earn interest instead of keeping cash at home, he understood the potential.

With many men migrating for work, women are stepping in as household leaders. This training makes them capable, not just dependent on money sent home. Equipped with digital and financial skills, they can now make informed decisions, manage household expenses, and even invest in their farms or businesses, strengthening their families' financial stability. Men returning home find their households financially stronger and more secure.

A ripple effect of change

Every man I spoke to had a different story, but the theme was the same: knowledgeable, skilled women are reshaping lives beyond finances.

Change doesn't happen overnight, but as I saw in these villages, it can start small – with one woman leading a class, one family sitting down to share responsibilities, and one man realising the value of women's contributions.

Your support makes change possible

A gift today helps work for a fairer future.

Donate today: practicalaction.org/smallworld

▲ After digital finance training, Pun taught her husband Nim how to make digital utility payments.

Project update

GROWING HOPE

with Nepal's farmers

Thanks to donations from the UK public in response to our 2020–21 campaign, matched by government funding, **over 6,000 farmers** in Nepal have gained the tools and training needed to grow food despite challenging conditions.

The climate crisis is making life harder for farmers in remote areas of Nepal. Deukala from Runtigadhi told us *"Farming was unreliable because we depended on rain, and there wasn't enough water to grow more than basic crops. We used to struggle to feed and educate our children."* But Deukala is adapting using practical methods that are already improving her harvest and boosting her income.

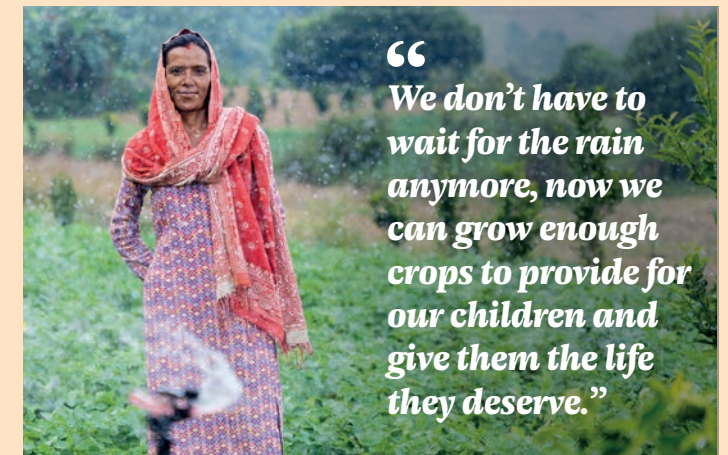
Tools that make a difference

Thanks to supporters like you, people have been able to improve irrigation systems by building new mini-reservoirs. They're also installing solar-powered irrigation pumps and using water-efficient tools like sprinklers and drip-irrigation tubes.

"We don't have to wait for the rain anymore," Deukala said, *"now we can grow enough crops to provide for our children and give them the life they deserve."*

For women farmers like Deukala, other small changes have brought big improvements. Labour-saving tools like corn shellers and farm rakes have reduced physical strain and freed up time for paid work or family responsibilities.

▼ With her family reunited, healthy food and a reliable income, Deukala's life has taken a turn she never thought possible.



Sharing knowledge locally

Over 220 climate field schools have been set up, where trained farmers share practical advice on techniques like sustainable planting and water management. This approach helps spread knowledge quickly.

We've trained women to take on leadership roles in local planning groups. This is important because it ensures their voices are heard in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives, from farming strategies to regional investments, leading to more inclusive and sustainable development.

This work shows that with practical solutions and your generous support, lasting change is possible – even in the face of the climate crisis.

Thank you for helping change grow.



News in brief

Thousands take practical action as floods hit Bolivia

In Bolivia, early warning systems helped thousands respond quickly to intense floods earlier this year. People shared alerts through loudspeakers, phones, and social media, helping families reach safety and protect their homes. Our support combines local knowledge with digital tools to help communities act early and stay safe from climate-driven disasters.



▲ Our Amazonas coordinator in Bolivia, Yolanda, talks to a farmer about the damage to his crops



▲ Kadija accepts her award – recognition of the relationships built with communities.

Solar success strikes twice in West Africa

In Burkina Faso, our solar-powered pumps, stoves, biodigesters, and refrigeration are helping over 7,000 farmers grow more food, cut waste, and adapt to climate change. The project just won two major awards. Our expert Kadija Simboro was named Young Project Developer of the Year for her leadership in community-driven energy solutions.



Sparking opportunities for Rwandan entrepreneurs

A new business centre in Mahama refugee camp is helping 300 entrepreneurs access reliable energy, modern equipment, and safe workspaces. It's part of a wider project reaching 147,000 people. Our Rwanda Country Director, Denyse Umubyeyi says "It demonstrates how good facilities, investment and local private sector involvement can help refugees integrate into local economies, creating a brighter future for themselves and the people living nearby."

▲ The business centre is designed with accessibility in mind, giving everyone the chance to access a range of businesses and services.

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

Thank you

for supporting people through funding cuts

When the US government suddenly cut 83% of its international development funding earlier this year, we were forced to close some projects early. We wrote to you asking for support to cover unavoidable costs caused by these cuts. You gave over £345,000, and with £50,000 in match funding, we exceeded our target! Many supporters either started a new regular gift or increased an existing regular gift which is expected to raise approximately a further £84,000 over this year.

Thank you so much for being there when it matters most. While we can't restart cancelled projects, your support means we can keep adapting and make long-term progress.

There's more good news! We've received new funding to expand our work in Sudan. We'll reach hundreds of thousands more people with sustainable farming, solar-powered water and irrigation, support for people with malnutrition, and income opportunities for young people and women. This is especially needed in Sudan, where conflict and the climate crisis are making life even harder and long-term resilience can prevent reliance on emergency aid.



▲ Our work alongside the World Food Programme has resumed following the funding freeze, providing a lifeline to people in Sudan.

You can still make a difference.

Donate today to support people facing conflict, poverty, and the climate crisis. visit: practicalaction.org/smallworld

TRIBUTES TO LASTING CHANGE



Everesting for a Practical Action pioneer

In 1990, Hugh Symonds (above left) ran all the 3,000-foot mountains in Great Britain and Ireland in a single, continuous journey. It took him 97 days and raised £20,000 for Intermediate Technology, now known as Practical Action.

Thirty-five years on, Hugh's sons, **Joe and Andy** (left), honoured his legacy in an truly extraordinary way. On 7 June, they set out to **break the world record for running the height of Mount Everest** (8,848m), up and down a single fell, in aid of Practical Action.

They chose Winder, a hill their dad had run countless times above his hometown of Sedbergh, and completed 48 laps in 10 hours, 8 minutes and 53 seconds. The weather was against them, but they still beat the existing record by over 36 minutes.

Joe and Andy are experienced mountain runners, but this was their first time fundraising – and what a way to start. **They've raised nearly £8,848** (a pound for every metre of Everest) in Hugh's memory to support our work fighting poverty and the climate crisis with sustainable solutions.

Joe said the highlight was reaching the finish and seeing how many people had braved the rain to cheer them on. We're so proud to have been part of this moving tribute.

Thank you, Joe and Andy. Your strength, spirit and generosity mean the world.



A marathon of impact and hope

We're so grateful to **Sarah Johnson** (right) for running the **London Marathon** in memory of her sister, Kat. It's a powerful way to honour Kat's life, and we're incredibly moved by Sarah's effort and commitment.

Sarah has raised over £5,000 for Practical Action and The Mix. Her contribution to our work will support people living on the frontlines of poverty and the climate crisis.

Thank you, Sarah, for your strength, generosity, and support – and congratulations on completing the marathon!



From marathons to raffles, there's more than one way to raise money, and any amount you raise has the power to fight poverty.

Download our fundraising guide to plan your own activity and turn hope into action. Visit: practicalaction.org/smallworld



The **BIG CHANGE** Network

Our teams work alongside communities to develop ingenious, lasting and locally owned solutions to their biggest challenges.

JOIN OUR NETWORK OF PARTNERS AND PHILANTHROPISTS

Our Big Change Network is a unique way for inspired partners and philanthropists who share our vision to come together to help solve some of the world's toughest problems.

Members commit to giving £5,000 or more in unrestricted donations each year for at least three years. In return for your generosity and commitment to shaping a world that works better for everyone, we'll offer a range of opportunities to connect you with the positive change that your giving enables us to achieve together. Your dedicated contact in the Partnerships & Philanthropy team will discuss what's right for you when you join, including:

- Invitations to a variety of in-person and on-line events to hear, discuss and ask more about our work, as well as meeting fellow members and senior staff from across the globe.
- Opportunities to share your own unique experience, inspiration, contacts or bright ideas.
- Hearing from our leaders and experts around the world to gain a deeper insight into the latest ambitions, challenges and successes.

By making this inspiring commitment, you'll play a bigger part in shaping a world which works better for everyone.

“

As a member of the Big Change Network, I'm able to get up close to Practical Action's projects, hear from key stakeholders and ask questions. It's always a powerful reminder of the difference that can be made by strategic, thoughtful and often low-cost solutions to problems. The resilience and creativity of individuals is so inspiring.”

Rosie Bichard

Big Change Network Member

To find out more, contact the Philanthropy Team:

✉ philanthropy@practicalaction.org.uk

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