



# Small WORLD

Issue 87 May 2026

## LED BY THE LAND

How Indigenous leadership  
is shaping the future

Practical  
**ACTION**

## Why Indigenous leadership is more important than ever

**Some of the most important decisions about our shared future are being shaped far from conference halls and capital cities. They are being made in forests, river basins and foothill communities, where people live closest to the impacts of climate change.**

I work alongside a passionate team of colleagues and like-minded partners where the Andes and Amazon intersect in Peru and Ecuador. We're supporting efforts to protect one of the most biodiverse regions on the planet while improving everyday life for the people who call it home. Practical Action has been working in this region for over twenty years. At a time when climate change is reshaping landscapes and livelihoods across my home country of Peru and the wider region, scaling up that work has never felt more urgent.

This year, as Peru enters an election cycle, questions about land, governance and development are at the forefront of political debate. Long-standing inequalities continue to limit who is heard and who decides what happens next. It is a moment when choices matter, and when the voices shaping those choices deserve attention.

Working with Indigenous peoples is central to how Practical Action supports lasting change in Latin America and around the world. Generations of lived experience have given Indigenous communities deep knowledge of forests, rivers and soils. As biodiversity loss, climate change and poverty intersect, that knowledge becomes vital. Supporting Indigenous leadership, especially women, helps people protect the land and build livelihoods that thrive off healthy ecosystems.

This issue of *Small World* looks more closely at what all this means in practice, particularly as part of the Biodiverse Landscapes Fund, a project working with Indigenous people in Peru and Ecuador to tackle some critical problems for people and planet. My colleague Silvia recently travelled to meet the remote communities we're working alongside. Over the next few pages, she shares what she saw and heard.

These stories show why working with Indigenous peoples matters, and why your support remains such a vital part of what comes next.



**Roxana Ramos,**  
Project Manager, Biodiverse  
Landscapes Fund

**Practical  
ACTION**

The Robbins Building  
25 Albert Street  
Rugby CV21 2SD

01926 634 400

supporter.services@practicalaction.org.uk  
**practicalaction.org**

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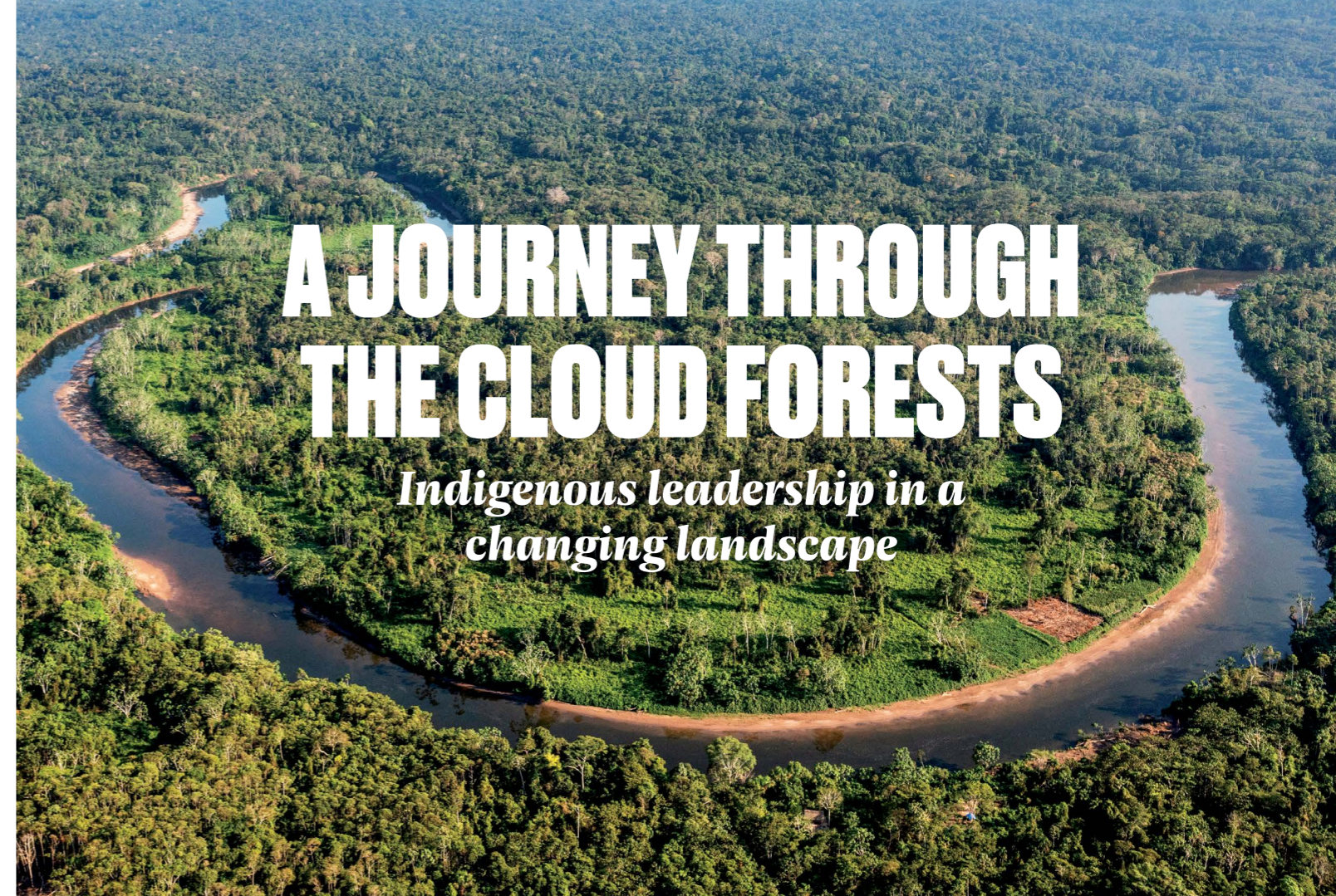
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▲ Indigenous leader Carlos in the Andoas region of the Amazon rainforest, where communities are protecting forests, defending their land and shaping what comes next.



**Silvia María  
Gonzales Gallegos,**  
Practical Action, Peru

**Being from Peru doesn't mean I find the scale of the region where the Andes give way to the Amazon rainforest any less overwhelming. This is a country of striking contrasts, and returning to the Amazon last August reminded me why. Distances are longer than they seem on a map, rivers stretch further, with far more bends and twists than you expect, and the forest feels endless.**

The journey itself tells part of the story. From Lima, my hometown, it takes just over an hour to reach Chiclayo by plane. After that, travel becomes slower and less predictable. We covered thousands of kilometres by road across mountain ranges, then spent hours driving through dense jungle, following the river deeper into this landscape. By the time we reached Santa María de Nieva, a small town on the banks of the Marañón River, it was already clear how much effort it takes simply to get there. Some of the communities we visited were still another three or four hours away by boat. In total we traveled for 20 hours.



**My journey took me from Lima to Chiclayo, then into the region where the Andes meet the Amazon, following rivers and remote roads to reach communities protecting their land.**

## A landscape under threat

That remoteness is one reason these forests have endured. It is also one reason the region has been so exposed to environmental damages and illegal economies. Stretching across Peru and Ecuador, this landscape covers the combined area of England and Wales with more than 11 million hectares. It is home to nearly a million people, including Indigenous peoples who have lived here for generations. But environmental damage from illegal logging, mining and river dredging is affecting water, forests and livelihoods. Drug traffickers and other illegal groups use the area's remoteness to evade authorities, making life more precarious for the people who call it home.

For many Indigenous communities, this pressure is reshaping daily life. Hunting and fishing that once sustained families have become far less reliable as wildlife declines and rivers are polluted, forcing people to depend on bought food, migrate for work, or give up parts of their traditional way of life. The forests and rivers here are among the most biodiverse in the world, and protecting them is not only about nature, but about sustaining the lives, knowledge and cultures that depend on them.

***“Is the land merely a means of production or is it something more, something that is an end in itself? And when I say ‘land’, I include the creatures upon it.”***

E.F. Schumacher, Practical Action's Founder

Sometimes the impact reveals itself quietly. In a community, a local leader asked us to stop and listen. There was very little birdsong. He told me there used to be much more, but illegal logging has destroyed much of the habitat wildlife relies on. That silence felt wrong to me. Something vital was being lost.

Later, I spoke with Galois, a leader from the Wampis nation. He spoke passionately, with the clarity and frustration of someone who has faced these pressures building year after year.

His words stayed with me because they made the imbalance impossible to ignore. Indigenous communities are expected to protect territories that others harm, yet they are too often left without the recognition, resources or support needed to do so on fair terms. That is what makes their leadership all the more striking. Across the region, people are defending forests, protecting water and keeping alive knowledge shaped over generations. They are not waiting for solutions from outside. They are already leading, and they deserve to be backed.



▲ Illegal mining and logging are happening in plain sight across the area.

“

***We love our landscape. It is part of our culture and our values. Your nations have destroyed our land for wealth and now you are looking to us to help you survive.”***

Galois, Wampis nation



## Communities standing their ground

One example of when a community steps in is Charip, meaning “thunder”, a Wampis volunteer group protecting the river routes. Led by René, its members watch for suspicious movement, raise the alarm and respond when illegal activity threatens the river and surrounding forest. It is incredibly dangerous work, but they take it on to defend the land, water and way of life their communities depend on.

Practical Action works with the Wampis nation to help strengthen their efforts, helping communities organise, respond in defence of what matters most and gather evidence that the authorities can act on.

“

***It's important to me that my children see the efforts I'm making so they have stories to hand down of how their parents protected their land”***

René, Wampis nation



## Women demanding equality

In the Amazon, it was clear that Indigenous leadership is rooted in the present as much as the past. It draws on knowledge built over generations, but it is also shaped by the realities people face every day. It means making decisions now, amid growing threats, and shaping what comes next.

That became especially clear when I met Matut, Vice President of the Awajún Autonomous Territorial Government, while she was leading the fifth Awajún Women's Forum. The gathering brought together 55 women from across Awajún territory, some of whom had travelled for up to six days to attend. For a full week, they came together to speak openly about the issues shaping their lives and communities.

They talked about food security, forced marriage, access to services, economic opportunities, and support for women and children facing abuse or abandonment. They also spoke about the intense pressures Awajún women face. Access to basic services such as healthcare, education and internet is limited and unreliable here. Discrimination and language barriers increase the risk of exclusion and violence, making it harder to access support or justice. These challenges are compounded by poverty, food insecurity and the presence of illegal economies, reinforcing deep structural inequality.

Matut told me that the forum matters because it gives women a space not only to speak, but to make decisions on the issues that affect them most. Listening to her, it was clear that this change is being built with courage, persistence and collective effort.

Practical Action supports spaces like this so that women's priorities do not stop at discussion. Through long-term partnership, women are strengthening their voice, shaping proposals and pushing for change in their communities and beyond.



▲ Cayo has been a cooperative coffee farmer since 2001. Many farmers have worked in this region for generations, tending the environment with the hope it will provide for their children and grandchildren.



“

***I want future Awajún Indigenous women to be whatever they want to be: entrepreneurs, self-sufficient, participating in decision-making”***

Matut, Awajún nation



▲ Matut speaks at an indigenous women meeting in Peru.

## Farming that evolves

Agriculture is another place where change is visible. Climate pressures quickly affect crops. Forest cover is being removed so even when the forest looks rich, it is not that rich for crops. When it is clearer, then the nutrients are lost with erosion.

Here, we are introducing soil restoration techniques, climate-resilient crop varieties and improved irrigation systems. We train farmers in pruning, composting and shade management to increase their yields of coffee, bananas and cacao without clearing more forest. We also support producer cooperatives to improve processing

quality and negotiate better prices, so families earn more from the same land.

I met Christian, a member of the Awajún community who made significant personal sacrifices to study at university and specialise in agriculture. He spoke about the pain of seeing environmental damage in the place he grew up, and about his belief that farmers can adapt to climate change with the right support.

In coffee-growing areas closer to the Andes, our years of work to support sustainable production are already paying off. Families are earning more stable incomes. Children are going to university for the first time. Some are returning with new skills and ideas to manage and monitor forests using technology. Deeper in the Amazon, the challenge is to do the same, despite the region's remoteness. The people I met convinced me that this kind of progress is possible.

“

***I had feelings of horror when I returned from university and saw the damage that has been done to the environment I love and grew up in”***

***Christian, Awajún nation***



### What stayed with me

Throughout this trip, I was aware that none of this happens in isolation. Practical Action works alongside Indigenous organisations, community leaders, farmers and women's groups, building on their knowledge and priorities. It means funding agricultural technicians who travel by boat to remote villages. It means training women leaders to negotiate directly with government. It means equipping river patrol groups with the tools and knowledge to protect their land.

As I travelled back home, I kept thinking about the people I had met and the pride they take in protecting their land and shaping their future. I also thought about Practical Action's supporters, people like you, who make this work possible. Being part of this story means standing with people as they navigate complex challenges and build their own solutions. It is something to feel proud of, because it is grounded in respect, partnership and the belief that lasting change comes from within communities themselves.

◀ Above left: Husband and wife Noé and Andrea are able to build a better life by growing more climate-hardy coffee.

◀ Left: Solar panels provide reliable, affordable energy to people in the most remote places.

### Project overview:

## Protecting ecosystems and supporting communities in Biodiverse landscapes

December 2023 - November 2029



### Where this work is happening

In the forest region where the Andes meet the Amazon, spanning parts of Peru and Ecuador and home to Indigenous communities who have long cared for this land.

### What the project is doing

Working with Indigenous organisations to protect forests, support sustainable farming, strengthen local leadership and create opportunities that don't rely on clearing more land.

### Why this matters

This is one of the most biodiverse places on earth. When forests and rivers are damaged, it affects wildlife, food, water and the livelihoods of people who depend on them.

### What's changing

- Forest areas are being better protected and restored
- Habitats are being connected so wildlife can move freely and survive
- Farmers are improving harvests of crops like coffee and cacao without expanding into forest

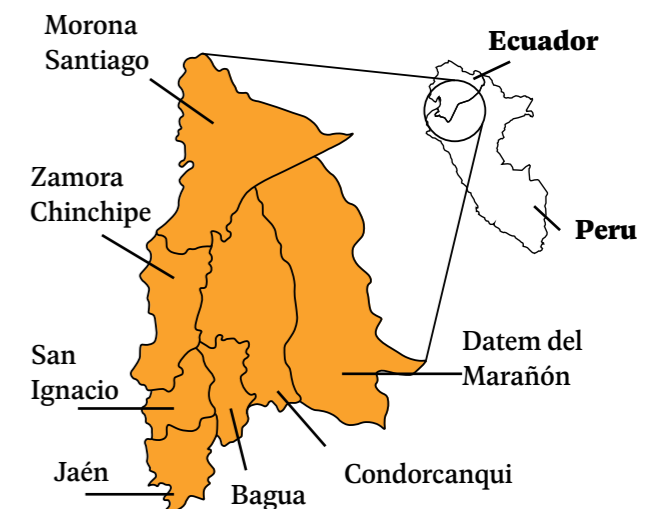
### A closer example

In Ecuador, a national park has been expanded to connect cloud forests and highland ecosystems, giving species like the spectacled bear more space to survive.

### People leading the work

Indigenous communities are driving this change - protecting their land, strengthening their organisations and building a stronger voice in decisions that affect their future.

## THE ANDES AND AMAZON LANDSCAPE



**8 million+ hectares of tropical rainforest**

### Your gifts help drive resilience

Ensuring people can protect themselves against climate shocks and build a secure income is just one of the many ways your gift today will help make a better future possible:  
[practicalaction.org/smallworld](https://practicalaction.org/smallworld).

## Your support makes change possible

When people have the tools and know-how to improve their lives, whole families can lift themselves out of poverty. With your gift today, more people can work together for a more resilient future. Visit [practicalaction.org/smallworld](https://practicalaction.org/smallworld) to give today.

# Natural Connection and Indigenous Wisdom

by Joycelyn Longdon



Joycelyn Longdon, an environmental justice technologist and writer, reflects on Indigenous wisdom, frontline leadership, and the ideas behind her book *Natural Connection*, inspired in part by Schumacher's classic *Small Is Beautiful*.

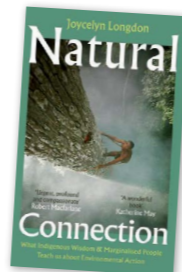
Our roots – the cultural, historical, physical and spiritual connections we have with each other and the rest of the living world – have the potential to lead us to pain and suffering, but can also transport us to the thriving futures we envisage. What we must unearth and tend to then, are the roots that can hold us steadfast through the chaos – ideas and ways of living preserved by communities intimately connected to the land and the effects of environmental destruction: ancient, creative, caring and innovative roots that are waiting to be remembered and nurtured. Roots that remind us of our place in and relationship with the living world.

These are words from my first book, *Natural Connection*, a love letter to the living world and to the Indigenous and frontline communities who have, and continue to, pave the way for today's environmental movement. In the book, I present six key alternative roots necessary to cultivate a natural connection between ourselves and the living world: RAGE, IMAGINATION, INNOVATION, THEORY, HEALING and CARE.

These roots represent practices, teachings and considerations for environmental action inspired by the legacies and ongoing resistance of Indigenous and marginalised communities, without which the future of environmentalism and ecological flourishing cannot be built.

One of the books that inspired my own, was *Small Is Beautiful: Economics As If People Mattered*, by the late economist E. F. Schumacher. In it, he wrote that 'wisdom demands a new orientation of science and technology toward the organic, the gentle, the elegant and beautiful'. Similarly, we must reorient environmental action, toward the more rooted, both ecologically and culturally. Towards the collaborative, the decolonial, and Indigenous-led.

*Natural Connection* is a lyrical exploration of how Indigenous wisdom and the actions of marginalised communities around the world reveal new ways to understand and act on the climate and biodiversity crisis – inviting readers to see environmentalism as a shared, rooted connection with the living world. Order from your local, independent bookshop.



“We must reorient environmental action, toward the more rooted, both ecologically and culturally. Towards the collaborative, the decolonial, and Indigenous-led.”

## Project update

# BUILDING RESILIENCE IN EASTERN SUDAN



Since fighting in eastern Sudan escalated in 2023, hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. Markets have been disrupted. Prices for food, fuel and livestock feed have risen sharply. For the pastoralists and smallholder farmers we work alongside in Kassala and Red Sea states, daily life has become even more precarious.

As prices increased, our work in Sudan was threatened, but because of the incredible support of people like you, we were able to direct our “unrestricted” funds to support our work in Sudan and keep this work moving forward.

We are rehabilitating and constructing hafirs and water yards so communities can store and manage scarce rainwater safely. This protects livestock, reduces conflict over water and cuts the time women spend walking long distances to collect it.

Farmers are being supported to use improved, drought-tolerant seeds and practical soil and water conservation techniques. Demonstration plots are showing what works in local conditions, so successful approaches can be adopted more widely.



More than 20,000 families in 23 communities in Kassala and Gedarif states are now able to drink safe water after the following work:

- Repair of 16 solar-powered water yards.
- Construction of 10 new solar-powered water yards.
- Five solar irrigation systems installed to boost farm productivity.
- Creation of water committees (consisting of 10 people trained in maintaining these water yards, who are now linked with the local drinking water corporation).

These achievements are strengthening food security, protecting incomes and building confidence for the future.

▲ El Rayah's farm is flourishing thanks to new solar irrigation.

## Thank you to players of the Postcode Lottery.

We are hugely grateful to players of the Postcode Lottery for helping make this work possible.

Through funds raised by players, communities in eastern Sudan are strengthening water systems, improving food production and building resilience in the face of conflict and climate change.

Your generosity is helping people protect their lives and livelihoods today and build a more secure future for tomorrow.

◀ Ghaliya, a community leader in Al-Mazraa, makes use of the a new local water station.



## News in Brief

### New office strengthens work in Ecuador

We're preparing to celebrate the one-year anniversary of opening our new office in Quito, Ecuador, strengthening our long-term commitment to Indigenous peoples in the Andes and Amazon.

We're bringing together Indigenous leaders, partners and staff to protect forests, supporting sustainable livelihoods and defending territorial rights.

Ecuador is one of the most biodiverse countries in the world. It is also under increasing pressure from deforestation, mining and oil extraction. A stronger presence in the capital is improving coordination with national partners, while work continues alongside Indigenous organisations across the country.



▲ Some Practical Action team members meet for an event in Ecuador

### BBC Radio 4 Appeal: From airwaves to action

Our BBC Radio 4 Appeal, which aired in the first week of January, presented by Krishnan Guru-Murthy, sparked an extraordinary response. Thanks to you, we reached the full £50,000 match funding target, doubling every pound given. In total, you helped raise more than £140,000 to support people affected by poverty and climate shocks.

Thank you to everyone who gave, shared the appeal, and to the donors who made match funding possible. You turned national attention into practical action that protects lives and livelihoods.

**SPARK  
BIG CHANGE**

### Thank you for sparking big change

This winter we asked for your help to Spark Big Change by helping us reach our goal of raising £500,000 so that we can continue working with communities around the world to deliver life changing impact. We're delighted to announce that we surpassed our target, raising £503,332. Thank you for supporting the kind of change that the world urgently needs.



### Jaky's voice goes further

We first met Jaky by the river near her home, where she was working to protect women and children of the Wampis nation. She was helping open up conversations about sexual violence and pushing for women's safety to be taken seriously in her community.

*"When people talk about territory, it is almost always men.*

*We said, we have to change this."*

Being recently appointed the first ever woman lead for the Wampis nation, this was her first interview. Naturally, some nerves kicked in. But her determination was clear. Months later, we saw her again at the COP climate talks in Belém. The setting had changed, but her message hadn't. She spoke with confidence about climate change, Indigenous rights and leadership.

Jaky is part of a growing movement of Indigenous women stepping forward. With the right support, their voices travel far beyond their communities.

▲ Jaky speaks to us on the banks of the river near her home.



▲ Farmers in Sudan harvesting peanuts.

## Supporter stories

Across this issue, you've seen how communities are responding to complex challenges in practical ways. This page brings together a few simple actions you can take—whether that's supporting this work directly, making small changes in your everyday choices, or finding ways to stay connected.



### Choosing coffee that works for farmers

You've read about coffee-growing families in Peru and the pressures they face, from climate shocks to unstable prices. Buying coffee is one small way to respond. A few practical steps:

- Look for clear information on where the coffee is grown and who buys it
- Choose brands that publish how they work with farmers long term
- Ask your local café or shop about sourcing and pricing
- Try independent roasters who build direct relationships with growers
- Be willing to pay a little more for traceable supply chains

Stable demand and fair returns help farming families plan, invest and protect the land their livelihoods depend on.

### Marking International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples

Each year, 9 August marks the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. You've read about Indigenous organisations protecting forests, strengthening local food systems and defending their rights in the face of climate pressure and extractive industries. The day is a moment to reflect on that work and consider your own response.

You might share what you've learned with friends or family. You could follow and support Indigenous-led organisations directly, or choose products with transparent supply chains that work with Indigenous people to protect vital ecosystems.

Informed, steady support helps ensure Indigenous communities can continue leading the work you've seen throughout this magazine.



## SUPPORTER SPOTLIGHT



### Sam runs for Practical Action

New supporter Sam is lacing up his trainers this spring and taking on two half marathons and a full marathon to raise money for our work!

Sam chose to support us because he values practical solutions to climate and poverty challenges. Through sponsorship and donations, his runs have raised vital funds for work with farming families, small businesses and communities facing climate shocks.

We are grateful to Sam and everyone who backed him. If you are planning a personal challenge this year, we'd love to hear about it.

Find inspiration for your fundraising journey at: [practicalaction.org.uk/smallworld](https://practicalaction.org.uk/smallworld)

# YOUR LEGACY, THEIR FUTURE



*A gift in your Will could support people like Maria to protect their way of life and build a brighter future for their children and grandchildren.*

My name is Nicola Craddock. I'm proud to say that sixty years ago, my father, E.F. "Fritz" Schumacher, founded Practical Action.

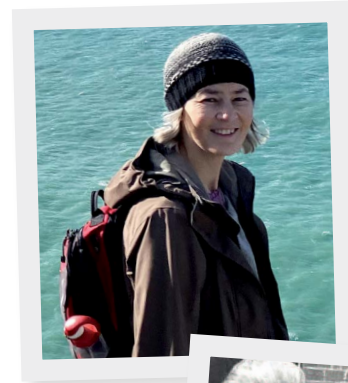
He believed progress should be measured by quality of life, not economic growth. He believed in practical solutions shaped by the people who use them. What he could not know was whether enough people would believe in that idea to sustain it. They did.

Because supporters chose to back his conviction, that simple idea has grown into decades of real-world change. My father's legacy lives on because people believed in him.

## **Your legacy can live on too.**

**After you have taken care of the people you love, leaving a gift in your Will to Practical Action is a straightforward way to ensure practical solutions continue for generations to come.**

If you have any questions about leaving Practical Action a gift in your Will, including amending an existing Will, our Legacy Officer Liz will be very happy to chat with you in confidence. You can email her on [Liz.Webb@practicalaction.org.uk](mailto:Liz.Webb@practicalaction.org.uk) or call **01926 634484**.



Me and my father in 1977

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