



# ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL PROTECTION POLICY

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# I. INTRODUCTION

We go the last mile. Acted's mission is to save lives and support people in meeting their needs in hard-to-reach areas. Founded in Afghanistan in 1993, against the backdrop of a forgotten crisis, Acted pursues a triple mandate as a humanitarian, environmental and development aid actor. Millions of vulnerable people around the world need humanitarian assistance today. At the same time, millions of people today - and hundreds of millions tomorrow - are and will be heavily impacted by climate change. We therefore believe that humanitarian and development assistance for crisis-affected populations can no longer be thought of independently from the environment on which they depend.

With this belief at our foundation, all Acted programming and operations globally has the shared objective of working towards a 3Zero world: a world with Zero Exclusion, Zero Carbon, and Zero Poverty. This vision is guided by the motto "Think Local – Act Global" - reflecting the need to rely on a deep understanding of local territories and contexts to develop and implement actions based on local knowledge. This local thinking contributes to a global response, through which we promote the relief, stabilisation, and recovery of crisis-affected people in fragile areas. We are committed to both supporting and being guided by local knowledge, structures and capacities.

Independent, private and non-profit, Acted respects a strict political and religious impartiality, and operates following principles of neutrality, non-discrimination, transparency, according to its core values:

- **Responsibility:** We ensure the efficient and responsible delivery of humanitarian aid with the means and resources that have been entrusted to us.
- **Impact:** We are committed to having the most sustainable impact for the communities and the people with whom we engage.
- **Enterprising spirit:** We are enterprising and engage in our work with a spirit that creates value and overcomes challenges.
- **Inspiration:** We strive to inspire all those around us through our vision, values, approaches, choices, practice, actions and advocacy.

We aim to enact these values through our commitment to environmental and social protection throughout every aspect of our work.



## II. POLICY STATEMENT

Acted strives to ensure that environmental and social protection is at the core of its organizational, operational and programmatic approach.

Acted commits to act for environmental protection by promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies including reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, regenerative natural resource management, management of waste and pollution, and conservation of biodiversity. We believe that all human activities should be conducted in a way that preserve and enhance the health and vitality of our planet for present and future generations. Consequently, Acted aims to reduce its carbon footprint by at least 30% by 2025, 50% by 2030 in line with IPCC recommendations and ultimately achieve carbon neutrality for its operations. In addition, Acted aims to upscale its work on climate change and environmental protection to account for a minimum of 25% of our programming portfolio by 2025.

Further, Acted commits to act for social justice and human rights, notably through promotion of social protection and respect for local populations and heritage. We understand our responsibility to ensure that our work is carried out in a way that respects the dignity, rights, and capacity of all individuals and communities with whom we engage.

This Environmental and Social Protection Policy (ESPP) provides a framework for Acted's efforts to protect the environments of the people it serves while working towards a 3Zero world. The policy enhances the focus on accountability, aiming to fill gaps in existing management systems to ensure that ACTED programmes and operations are designed in an environmentally sound manner that avoids harming the environment and maximizes environmental benefits wherever possible.

This policy actively contributes to the goals outlined within the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, namely:

- **SDG 1:** End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
- **SDG 5:** Achieve gender equality and empower women and girls.
- **SDG 7:** Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
- **SDG 10:** Reduced inequality within and among countries.
- **SDG 11:** Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
- **SDG 12:** Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
- **SDG 13:** Take urgent action to combat change and its impacts.
- **SDG 15:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
- **SDG 16:** Promote peaceful societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Acted's commitments to environmental and social protection function against the backdrop of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognizes fundamental human rights, the dignity, worth and equal rights of all people, as well as the international frameworks and conventions established to guide coordinated action towards environmental protection and the response to climate change, namely the UN Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the related Paris Agreement, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), as well as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the UN Secretariat Climate Action Plan 2020-2030 (UNSCAP) and the European Green Deal.



This policy forms part of and complements Acted's Code of Conduct and its related policies, namely:

- Acted's Grievance Policy;
- Acted's Policy against Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment;
- Acted's Child Protection Policy;
- Acted's Anti-Terrorism and Anti-Money Laundering Policy;
- Acted's Anti-Fraud Policy;
- Acted's Conflict of Interest Prevention Policy;
- Acted's Data Protection Policy;
- Acted's Gender Policy.

Moreover, it also must be considered with:

- Acted's greening strategy, which outlines the operationalization of its environmental commitments outlined within the present document;
- Acted's procedures, manuals (e.g. Finance, Logistics, Administration & Human Resources, Security & Safety), handbooks (e.g. Transparency & Compliance, Appraisal, Monitoring & Evaluation, Project Management, Project Development) and charters (e.g. Use of Information Systems);
- Code of Conduct for The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, of which ACTED is a signatory;
- The Climate and Environment Charter for International Organizations, of which ACTED is a signatory;
- The UN Global Compact, of which ACTED is a participant.

## III. ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL PROTECTION COMMITMENTS

Acted's commitments to Environmental and Social Protection can be articulated by the following principles and commitments within our approach to programming, organizational management, public engagement and partnerships.

### Article 1 – Environmental Protection Commitments

#### Programming

1. Actively pursue programming dedicated to achieving environmental protection in line with our global 3Zero programming strategy. This includes developing programming which promotes local environmental preservation as well as adaptation to the effects of global climate change, including disaster risk management and early warning/early action systems. In principle, we aim to target communities most exposed to climate change and environmental hazards as a priority in our programming as this vulnerability is a deepening factor for poverty.
2. Ensure environmental risks are systematically factored into Acted programming and environmental impact is systematically measured so that all our activities are based on an integrated risk analysis and planning in order to avoid aggravating risks, harmful impact or vulnerabilities and to work towards reducing them to the extent possible.
3. Ensure a mutual learning process between Acted and affected populations to better understand respective perceptions of the environment, climate change and the link to livelihoods and identify common ground from which more relevant programming and awareness raising on environmental



impact mitigation and climate change adaptation across trainings, campaigns and stakeholder meetings and messaging can be developed.

4. Ensure our feedback mechanism allows affected communities to directly and continuously communicate on any issue related to our programming, thus building trust and establishing a positive and accountable relationship between our organization and the communities we serve.

#### **Organizational Management**

5. Establish organizational GHG reduction targets regularly with the aim to ultimately achieve carbon neutrality, and annually measure and track our progress towards these targets, in line with the context specific commitments established by each country mission within its Green Reduction and Adaptation Support Plan (GRASP). This rigorous process of tracking quantifiable progress towards our GHG reduction goals ensures accountability to these commitments.
6. Within these goals and as part of the commitments established by each country mission within the GRASP, continually seek to prioritize the actions we take to reduce the environmental impact of our operations in line with the mitigation hierarchy, focusing in priority on avoiding, then minimizing, and finally managing environmental impact.
7. Integrate environmental considerations into all our organizational procedures, notably by greening our supply chains and integrating environmental criteria into our procurements, recognizing our procurement practices have a direct impact on the environment, as the goods and services we purchase can contribute to climate change, deforestation, and pollution.
8. Ensure continual education and awareness amongst our personnel, partners, suppliers and affiliated entities to ensure a common understanding of and commitment to these principles. By providing regular training and updates to our personnel, partners, and affiliated entities, we can ensure that everyone involved in our projects and operations understands the importance of environmental sustainability and is equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to uphold our principles.
9. Comply with existing national government environmental regulations to ensure our operations contribute to any governmental plans and approaches to ensuring environmental protection.

#### **Investments**

10. Invest in innovative actions and approaches contributing to reduce, avoid, or remove greenhouse gas emissions from the atmosphere and to the mitigation of climate change, either through funding Acted programs, as an impact investor in third parties or by collaborating with partners.
11. Ensure that Acted's financial investments target third parties aligned with its environmental protection policy and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### **Partnerships**

12. Foster new partnerships with relevant experts, actors and authorities which can lead to greater impact in terms of ensuring environmental protection, notably building on existing initiatives and local knowledge to enhance the impact of our interventions and influence the system as a whole.
13. Ensure that our partner selection process results in a mutual understanding of and common commitments towards upholding environmental and social protection principles, including through appropriate due diligence processes and monitoring mechanisms.



14. Encourage two-way learning with partners to increase knowledge and capacities in relation to adhering to and promoting environmental protection principles, through promoting access to training, technical knowledge, as well as coaching and mentoring support on climate change mitigation and response.

#### **Public Engagement**

15. Promote collective action and a sector-wide transition of the international aid system towards placing environmental considerations at the heart of our ways of working. This includes advocating towards and mobilizing our partners, donors, stakeholders, and the aid system to also take actions to reduce GHG emissions and act for environmental protection within the full scope of aid responses, from humanitarian to development action.
16. Leverage Acted's active engagement as a leader within local, national, regional and global coordination fora to consistently and coherently promote environmental protection amongst the aid community.
17. Effectively communicate our principles and commitments to all stakeholders and the general public to build trust, enhance accountability, and promote awareness of the importance of environmental sustainability, leveraging our online and social media communication platforms to share information.

## **Article 2 – Social Protection Commitments**

#### **Programming**

1. Actively develop programming in pursuit of the elimination of poverty and exclusion and restoring rights and protections to local populations and populations in displacement in line with Acted's 3Zero objectives and global program strategy.
2. Maximize opportunities to mainstream respect for cultural heritage and local populations throughout the program cycle and into our relevant project activities to enhance our effectiveness in upholding these principles.
3. Ensure that all research, program design and project implementation involve consultation, consideration and preservation of local knowledge, in recognition of the unique and valuable contributions that these knowledge systems can bring to our work. By local knowledge, we can create more relevant, effective, and sustainable solutions that reflect the perspectives and needs of the communities we serve.
4. Ensure that we have Free Prior and Informed Consent from the communities in which we are acting, as it is essential to recognize and respect the rights and autonomy of these communities and to demonstrate our commitment to respecting and upholding the rights and cultures of local populations. Obtaining their consent ensures that they are fully informed of the potential impacts of our actions, and that their input and perspectives are taken into account.
5. Ensure our feedback mechanism allows affected communities to directly and continuously communicate on any issue related to our programming, thus building trust and establishing a positive and accountable relationship between our organization and the communities we serve.

#### **Organizational Management**

6. Ensure local populations are respected in our operations, notably by ensuring that we are not doing harm (physical, economic or social) in our operations, through respectful and meaningful engagement, and by respecting local laws and customs.



7. Ensure continual education and awareness amongst our personnel, partners and affiliated entities to ensure a common understanding of and commitment to these principles. By providing regular training and updates to our personnel, partners, and affiliated entities, we can ensure that everyone involved in our projects and operations understands the importance of social protection and is equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to uphold our principles.
8. Integrate social protection into our organizational approaches including principles of non-discrimination and prevention of harassment and exploitation, including appropriate whistleblowing mechanisms.

#### **Investments**

9. Ensure that Acted's financial investments target third parties aligned with its social protection policy and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

#### **Partnerships**

10. Foster new partnerships with relevant experts, actors and authorities which can support us in our work and influence towards ensuring social justice, notably by building on existing initiatives and local knowledge to enhance the impact of our interventions.
11. Ensure that our partner selection process results in a common understanding of and common commitments towards upholding these principles.
12. Provide opportunities for partners to increase their knowledge and capacities in relation to adhering to and promoting these principles, through access to training, coaching and mentoring support on these topics.

#### **Public Engagement**

13. Promote collective action and a sector-wide transition of the international aid system to ground programming in local territories and act as an amplifier of local voices, knowledge and innovations. This includes advocacy towards and mobilizing our partners, donors, and stakeholders to proactively engage with the communities we aim to serve across humanitarian to development responses.
14. Leverage Acted's active engagement in local, national, regional and global coordination fora to consistently and coherently advocate for the participation of local actors in response design and implementation amongst the aid community.
15. Effectively communicate our principles and commitments to all stakeholders and the general public to build trust, enhance accountability, and promote awareness of the importance of enabling the agency of local actors, leveraging our online and social media communication platforms to share information.

## **IV. INTERPRETATION AND IMPLEMENTATION**

### **Article 3 – Application of the Policy**

1. This policy applies to all Acted staff and governance members. The provisions of this policy may also be applied to any person employed by an entity that carries out missions for Acted. This policy applies to, but is not limited to, implementing partners - depending on the specific terms and conditions of the grant agreement - consultants, suppliers, sub-grantees, beneficiaries, stakeholders, and other associated entities.





2. This policy is published under the authority of Acted. Acted staff as well as affiliated entities are required to conduct themselves in accordance with this policy and must therefore be aware and have understood of its provisions and of any changes. When they are unsure of how to proceed, they should seek the advice of a competent person, notably from Acted management.
3. This policy shall form part of the working conditions of Acted staff and the conditions for the performance of the missions of affiliated entities from the moment they certify that they have read it.
4. This Environmental and Social Protection Policy comes into effect after approval by the Board of Acted on March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
5. Acted will review the provisions of this policy at regular intervals.

## Article 4 – Roles and Responsibilities in the Implementation of the Policy

1. All board members, full time and part time staff, consultants and volunteers, as well as the previously mentioned affiliated entities, are responsible for acting in accordance with the policy and its associated principles and commitments.
2. Acted staff and affiliated entities who are responsible for negotiating the terms and conditions of employment of any Acted staff, must ensure that staff are aware of and commit to the full respect of this policy.
3. It is the responsibility of Acted staff with managerial responsibilities as well as affiliated entities to ensure that staff under their supervision comply with this policy; and to take or propose appropriate disciplinary measures as sanction against any violations of its provisions.
4. At the operational management level, the Country Director is responsible for dissemination of the policy amongst all staff and affiliated entities as well as designating key staff to lead environmental action (the “green squad”) within each country office who will follow up on the elaboration and implementation of the Global Reduction and Adaptation Support Plan (GRASP). The Country Director is responsible for ensuring that the green squad performs this function and that the mission makes progress against its GRASP.
5. Country Coordination, supported by the Project Development Department, are responsible for ensuring these commitments are enacted within our programs, external relations and partnerships.
6. The Logistics Department is responsible for ensuring that Acted’s Carbon Footprint Report is completed on an annual basis.
7. The MEAL unit is responsible for measuring adherence to these commitments within the framework of our programming in order to improve accountability and ensure we learn from our actions.

## Article 5 – Definitions

1. **Acted staff:** Under the terms of this policy, the term “Acted staff” refers to any person employed by Acted and/or one of its sister organisations and/or one of the member organisations of the Acted network. The interns of Acted and/or one of its sister organisations and/or one of the member organisations of the Acted network are considered to fall within this category, for the purposes of this policy.



2. **Governance:** Under the terms of this policy, the term “governance” refers to any person elected by decision making bodies to participate in the managerial and administrative bodies of Acted and/or one of its sister organisations and/or one of the member organisations of the Acted network. In particular, the members of boards of directors and supervisory boards are Governance members.
3. **Environmental impact:** The effect that human activities and natural events have on the environment. This can include pollution, habitat destruction, and resource depletion.
4. **Environmental sustainability:** The practice of ensuring that natural resources are used in a way that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
5. **Carbon footprint:** The total amount of greenhouse gas emissions caused by an individual, organization, event, or product. It is usually measured in tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e).
6. **Climate change:** a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods (UNFCCC, 1992).
7. **Heritage:** The cultural, historical, and natural assets that define a community's identity and character. Heritage can include landmarks, traditions, artifacts, and natural resources.
8. **Local community:** Communities that have a unique connection to a particular geographic area and its natural resources. These communities often have distinct cultural traditions and practices that are tied to their locality.
9. **Social protection:** Policies and programs designed to support individuals and families who face economic and social risks, such as poverty, unemployment, and illness.
10. **Supply chain:** The network of individuals, organizations, and activities involved in the production, distribution, and delivery of a product or service from the supplier to the end customer.

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