

Webwatch

António A. Martins · Teresa M. Mata

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Practical action

(<http://practicalaction.org/>)

Practical Action (PA) is a charity organization registered in the United Kingdom that works mostly in developing countries, with a focus in Latin America, East Africa, Southern Africa, and South Asia. It was created in 1965 by the economist E. F. Schumacher and some associates, as a response to an article published in a British newspaper concerning the existing limitations of knowledge and technology transfer to the developing world. Initially it was named Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), but in 2005 ITDG changed its name to PA, and since 2008 it is its legal name.

At the beginning, this organization worked mainly as an advisory center, in particular as a technical enquiry service, focused on intermediate level technology aimed for the skills and needs of people in developing countries. Since then, the focus of PA activities has evolved and currently this organization engages in a wide variety of local projects with various stakeholders, becoming an international organization in the process. PA now has seven regional offices: Bangladesh, East Africa (Kenya and Ruanda), Latin America (Peru and Bolivia), South Asia (Nepal and India), Sri Lanka, Southern Africa (Zimbabwe), and Sudan, while its headquarters are still based in the UK.

PA vision is a sustainable world where technology is used for the benefit of all. To accomplish this, PA mostly works or collaborates with local communities in specific projects or actions to develop or implement appropriate technologies,

by building their capabilities, improving their access to relevant technologies and/or knowledge, and by promoting change in the social, economic, and institutional systems. PA works mainly in four areas: energy access, food and agriculture, urban waste and waste management, and disaster risk reduction; and two interdisciplinary areas: climate change and markets. Other areas of activity may involve sustainable transportation, renewable energy, building and shelter, education and/or training activities, among others. PA tries as much as possible to develop practical solutions that can be implemented with local and/or limited resources, with impacts mainly at local level.

PA website was designed taking into account PA mission and vision. Thus, in it is possible to find the main results and practical solutions developed and implemented in the collaborative projects undertaken by PA with local communities. They can be found in the Downloads section in “Practical Answers”. This sub-section has documents, videos, and other information in a wide range of areas, all free. Only documentation in English is available in the main site, but links are given to sites where practical answers in other languages can be downloaded, as for example the Spanish language site “Soluciones Prácticas” (<http://www.solucionespracticas.org.pe/>). The document library is a complement to the “practical answers”, where case studies, technical reports, teaching and training materials, project reports, and other documents can be found and downloaded for free. The site gives a lot of attention to teaching and training, with a link presented in the top of all site pages to directly access it. Other sections of the site give an account of PA vision, mission, goals, and what and where this organization develops its activities. A more detailed description of projects and activities can be found in the Services Section. Also available is a blog, where people can present their problems or discuss-specific topics. A

A. A. Martins (✉) · T. M. Mata
Porto, Portugal
e-mail: amartins@fe.up.pt

newsletter can be subscribed for free in the site, allowing people to keep in touch with PA activities.

The website has a clear and nice presentation. Even though a large amount of information is given in several site pages, it is pleasant to navigate. Search facilities are available for different site sections to assist people finding what they are looking for. As a whole, PA site has a lot of information and materials valuable to people interested in developing and/or implementing more sustainable solutions to current problems, at local, regional, and even national levels.

Yale school of forestry and environmental studies

(<http://environment.yale.edu>)

The Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies (YSFES) is one of the graduate professional schools of Yale University, USA. It was created in 1900 as the Yale Forest school, and originally its main goal was to provide high level training, post-graduation studies and research in Forestry and related subjects. The school changed to its actual name in 1972, to reflect the changes from its original objectives and the evolution in its area of knowledge. Current director is Sir Peter Crane, English evolutionary biologist formerly director of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, London, UK.

From the original goals of offering graduate studies and performing research in forestry and related subjects, today the YSFES main goals is to train leaders and specialists and create and disseminate new knowledge to insure that the health and wellbeing of people and societies is preserved and maintained. Examples of currently offered degrees include: Master of Environmental Management, Master of Environmental Science; among other master courses, doctoral and post-doctoral programs. Even though the school still offers instruction in forestry, current activities encompass other areas with the strong participation of domestic and international partners and/or stakeholders, with a strong emphasis in fundamental and applied research. Currently the YSFES works to position itself as a leader in sustainability science, by performing world class research, by offering and continually developing the most adequate and relevant curricula, and encouraging environmental responsibility by providing leadership, disseminate and transfer knowledge, and cooperate with all relevant stakeholders.

The website is primarily designed to present YSFES, not only the courses and training opportunities available, but also other relevant activities. In the “Academics” and “Admissions” it is possible to find all relevant information concerning courses, training, faculty, academic year, and

other bureaucratic information. The list of faculty is particularly interesting, as it is possible to access each faculty personal page, where contacts and a full description of their research interests and activities can be found. In the “Research” section one can find information about the main areas of research. They encompass the most significant areas of sustainability, many of them involving partnerships with other organizations, both internal and external to Yale University. Examples include: the Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy (<http://envirocenter.yale.edu/>), a joint initiative with the Yale Law School (<http://www.law.yale.edu/>) and focused in developing new ideas and rigorous approaches to environmental decision making; the Center for Business and the Environment at Yale (<http://cbey.yale.edu>), a joint initiative with the Yale Management School (<http://som.yale.edu/>) and focus in developing solutions and offer training for individuals and companies that need to tackle current global environmental problems; among others. Each research center has its own website, where more information can be found on their activities. In the “Outreach” section it is possible to find the publications page. They include scientific and peer reviewed journals, such as the Journal of Industrial Ecology and others, many of them freely available, books and research reports. Two specific online publications, Environment 360 (<http://e360.yale.edu/>) and the Yale Environmental Review written by the students (<http://environment.yale.edu/yer>), are aimed to report, analyze, and debate-specific issues in sustainability science. The remaining sections are focused on academic questions, including students’ career and alumni management, news, and events directly related with the school life.

The website as a nice presentation and it is easy to navigate through. It has an academic look, and it was clearly designed to present the center and to attract new students and/or potential partners. Although each research center has its own webpage, the site can serve as revolving door to access them from a single site, and the materials available at the site may be relevant to specialists and researchers on the various areas of sustainability science.

The center for sustainable design

(<http://cfsd.org.uk>)

The Center for Sustainable Design (CfSD) is an international center of excellence created in 1995 in Farnham, Surrey, UK, and from 2005 onwards a center of the University for the Creative Arts (UCA, <http://www.ucreative.ac.uk/>). The center main goal is the creation of knowledge and expertise in the areas of sustainable innovation and product sustainability. Thus, the center performs research,

improves our understanding of present and future impacts, develops solutions that can be applied to existing or new products and services, and disseminates the results of its activities through projects, training, and network development.

The main working areas of CfSD are Sustainable Innovation and Product Sustainability. In the first area the center seeks to understand the policy and business implications of sustainable innovation, working with companies in the development of sustainable solutions. In the second area, the center look at the organizational, management and design issues directly linked with product sustainability, and works with companies to tackle them.

CfSD works closely with a wide variety of partners and stakeholders, including business, decision makers, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and local communities. Also, CfSD works with partners from both developed and developing countries, in particular Europe, North American, and Asia. Most of this work is performed via research and/or development projects, in which the center either lead or participated. Also key to the center activities are the teaching, training, and dissemination activities. In particular, the center has organized numerous conferences, workshops, and training with a focus on sustainable innovation and product sustainability.

CfSD provides services and information in six areas: Research, Projects, Training, Events, Networks, and Resources. Each one represents one main area of the CfSD website, in which specific information can be found about them. For example, in the “Research” and “Projects” area it is possible to find some projects in which the center participated, with information of the partner’s involved and deliverables, most of them freely available. The “Training” and “Events” sections list courses, conferences, and seminars organized by the CfSD in various subjects, most of them aimed to people from companies and industry. The “Networks” section have information on some networks that have a local focus on specific subjects. The “Resources” section is one of the more relevant parts of the site, as it contains a lot of information and material, and fulfills the center goal of becoming a key resource in sustainable innovation and product sustainability. The content is divided by type, and includes research and project reports, videos and presentations, tools and checklists, and the issues of CfSD journal, the “Journal of Sustainable Product Design”, already discontinued. The specific areas of Eco-Innovation, Eco-Design and Marketing and Sustainability have dedicated websites.

The site has a simple yet appellative design, and it is easy to move around. A newsletter can be subscribed at the site, where information is given about the activities and

new resources released by the CfSD, making it easier to follow the center activities. Although it looks that the site does not contain much information, there is a wealth of resources that can help people interested in sustainable product design and innovation, and makes this site one of the more relevant resources in these areas.

UN principles for responsible investment

(<http://www.unpri.org/>)

The UN principles of responsible investing (PRI) is an initiative supported by United Nations that consists in a set of voluntary guidelines for investment entities that want to include environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues on their activities and decision-making process. PRI is also an international network of investors who are committed in putting into practice the principles proposed in this initiative and to support each other in their implementation, thus contributing to implement and develop a global financial system that addresses explicitly the questions and challenges posed by sustainability. Currently PRI is mostly based in London, UK, but it has also offices in New York, Amsterdam, Tokyo, Cape Town, and Australia that are responsible for the activities at a regional level.

This initiative was established in 2005 by the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, in coordination with the UN Global Compact (<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/>) and the United Nations Environmental Program Finance Initiative (<http://www.unepfi.org/>). The guidelines were developed with the help of experts selected from a group of the world largest institutional investors. They were supported by a group of specialists representing the views of all relevant stakeholders, and coming from a variety of backgrounds, including the investment sector, governmental and international organizations, academia, and the civil society. The guidelines and principles were launched at the New York Exchange in April 2006. Currently, more than 1,000 companies have signed up to the Principles, representing a significant portion of the investment funds at a worldwide scale.

The PRI itself consists of six principles that are listed and described in the site menu “About PRI”. They were defined with a long term perspective in mind, and to insure that ESG issues are considered in all decisions and procedures dealing with the assets and/or investment portfolios management. For example, ESG issues should be incorporated in the decision-making process, in the definition of appropriate disclosure rules or practices, and the acceptance, implementation, and reporting of the guidelines will be promoted by its signatories. The guidelines were also developed to be flexible enough to be used by a

wide variety of organizations, within the current fiduciary system.

In addition to serving as a means to present the guidelines, the site also supports other purposes, in a clean and appealing way. Through the main menu, available in all pages, it is possible to access the main site sections. In the “About RI” section it is possible to find an introduction to RI main objectives, together with some notes and video interviews elucidating them. The principles themselves, their history, partners and a FAQ about them can also be found in the “About PRI” section. A description of PRI governance and activity reports can also be found there. A special section lists the signatories of PRI and gives information on how to become a signatory. Combined with the information given in the sections “Areas of Work” and “Publications”, it can be very helpful not only to organizations that want to implement the principles but also to specialists and researchers working in the area. In the news section it is possible to register to the PRI newsletter and find information about events and other events related with the guidelines.

According to the information available at the site, the PRI Initiative is currently the leading network for investors

to show its commitment to responsible investment, incorporating ESG aspects in the decision making process and management activities. The development and/or implementation of cleaner technologies and/or environmental sound policies may require significant financial investment that need to proper address the various aspects of sustainability. Thus, this site may assist people identifying which organizations can be approached, and which principles and/or guidelines are relevant.

Final words

These are the last words of Webwatch since this column will be discontinued in the following volumes of “Clean Technologies and Environmental Policies” (CTEP). Since the start of this column new and improved web search tools appeared, as well as social sites and even online general references such as Wikipedia. Thus, the original objective of providing the readers of this journal with a fresh and timely selection of websites directly related with the goals and main areas of CTEP can now be fulfilled using other more practical and efficient tools. Surf well.