

Policy on Advisory Structures for the ACT Alliance 2019

1. Purpose of this policy

This policy outlines the role of ACT groups in the alliance, clarifies distinctions between groups and provides guidance on the architecture, role, group structure, working methods and funding of groups, and the role of the secretariat.

2. Advisory Structures Architecture

The Reference Groups are made up of 6-8 committed individuals with relevant expertise and balanced geographical and gender representation to form a fixed 'strategic hub' of expertise for a 4 year period. Intentional linkages are created, facilitated by the secretariat, which enable the Reference Group hub to integrate the work of network of actors within the alliance with expertise in the thematic and programmatic area. This network includes relevant CoPs, individuals with specific expertise, sub-working groups formed for a time-bound specific piece of work, other networks of member-staff with specific interest/expertise relevant to that Reference group, interested forums, Governance etc. These elements of the network are more flexible to specific needs arising from the membership, but nevertheless integrated in the alliance structures through one of the Reference Groups.

In particular, the linkages with the ACT forums are strengthened so that the Reference Groups and Communities of Practice are able to benefit from the wealth of experience and resources in the forums, and equally that the linkages exist so that the forums are able to access what they need from the Reference Groups or Communities of Practice. This will be done through close connection to Forums' endeavors for implementing the Global Strategy via Forums' workplans, and will support forums in the setting up and/or implementation of the programmatic priority areas of the Global Strategy.

A Secretariat Focal Point engages with each Reference Group. This focal point role ensures that information is shared, that the network is actively built and that the secretariat has access to the Reference Group and the broader network for strategic advice and operational support. The secretariat focal point is a connector and enabler, facilitating the Reference Group in this role.

3. Role and criteria for group formation

4.1 Reference groups

The role of the Reference Groups is primarily to support the secretariat in implementation of the Global Strategy in these thematic and programmatic areas. The groups will strategically advise and support the setting up of operational strategies/implementation plans and policies for the thematic and programmatic areas, and support the implementation of the Global Strategy in these thematic and programmatic areas. The groups also need to ensure the nexus between humanitarian-development-advocacy, and therefore must to be composed by a variety of sectoral and technical expertise, including humanitarian, sustainable development, advocacy and communications experience.

ACT reference groups are established to work on issues that:

- are in line with and support implementation of the Alliance's global strategy
- relate to the humanitarian, development or advocacy work of forums and members, and the nexus between these areas
- are global in nature
- are of concern to a cross section of the membership
- support the work of the ACT secretariat

4.2 Communities of Practice

The purpose of the ACT Communities of Practice (CoP) is to create and support spaces within the alliance for members to work together on issues of common interest and concern to the members and to the alliance.

ACT community of practice groups are established to work on issues:

- that are in line with and support implementation of the Alliance's global strategy
- that relate to the humanitarian, development or advocacy work of forums and members, and the nexus between these areas
- where members and observers believe that they can be more effective by working together under the name of ACT
- on which members and observers are willing to commit time, energy and resources

4.3 Project Task Groups

Project Task Groups can be recruited for a time-bound project/task in the strategy implementation (short or medium-term assignment), as need arises.

ACT Project Task Groups are established to work on issues

- for which the secretariat needs support from the membership for a clearly time-bound and operational project/task
- such as Communications, Partnerships, faculty for the ACT Academy, Fundraising, Innovation, PMER, etc.

4.4 Coordination meeting

A formal coordination meeting for the advisory structures will ensure overall coordination and integration of the advisory structures, ensure coherence and cross-learning on advocacy, humanitarian, development, communications, and the nexus between them and between the thematic and programmatic priorities.

The ACT coordination meeting will

- collect status reports of each group
- discuss new ideas and recommendations how to foster and strengthen the interlinkages between the thematic priority areas
- collect information, coordinate and support the Secretariat in a holistic steering of the advisory structures

4. Group structure, working methods and funding

5.1 Reference groups

Formation: ACT Reference groups can be set up by the secretariat to provide advice and operational support on a particular issue for the implementation of the global strategy.

The secretariat shall:

- Develop a Terms of Reference for the group outlining the purpose, functions, working methods, timeframe and budget
- lead facilitation and coordination of the group
- select the membership of the group, drawing from members within the governance structures and/or alliance with particular expertise in the issue, as relevant
- have a mechanism in place for covering costs of the group before it is established. Those set up by the secretariat must be part of the core budget.
- consider regional and gender balance
- ensure a formal review process before extension or termination of the group, where appropriate.

Process: The number of groups will be limited and guided inter alia by the secretariat budget and staffing capacity. Members of reference groups will be appointed by the General Secretary after requesting nominations from the alliance. In an effort to encourage broad participation from amongst the membership, the secretariat will ensure that as many members as possible are represented across reference groups, and that any one member is not overly- represented in the groups. The General Secretary will inform the executive committee/governing board of the membership of the groups on a regular basis.

Group composition: Each group will have 6-8 members, based on criteria specific to the focus and functions of the group. Membership will reflect the diversity of the alliance, gender and technical expertise. The selection will be based primarily on sectoral and technical expertise and engagement, with regional representation being ensured as far as possible – approximately 1 person per region. Additionally, the Chairs of respective CoPs will be part of the group, where applicable. At least one of the group members should be a young person (below 30). Participation is open to all ACT members. Each member represents the whole alliance. When a member steps down, for whatever reason, the seat will be filled by the normal nomination process, outlined in the specific group’s Terms of Reference, open to all members of the alliance. While representatives of ACT governance bodies are not excluded from being members of ACT reference groups, the secretariat seeks the widest possible representation from ACT members on its groups, where possible.

Sister ecumenical organisations with expertise in thematic issues can be invited to join the group as resource persons, as needed. Additional technical expertise may be drawn from the membership for a specific task, such as through creation of sub-groups or involvement of the broader membership on specific issues through a “reference group +” model. Such experts will not be formal members of the group and their participation will be task-limited.

Gender balance is essential. Achieving gender balance (50:50) is not always easy and therefore a gender ratio of 60:40 is considered ‘reasonable’. However, a 70:30 gender ratio would not be considered reasonable and a position should be left vacant until such time as correct ratio is able to be met, following the specific groups Terms of Reference.

Members are expected to attend an annual meeting unless in exceptional circumstances. Each member is expected to be active in the group between meetings. If a member of the reference group is inactive for a period of three months, s/he will be asked to clarify the level of his/her organisational engagement. If the

level of inactivity continues for another month, the secretariat may require this member to step down from the group, according to specific groups Terms of Reference.

Minimum requirements

- in-depth knowledge, skills and proven expertise of the thematic issue
- a commitment to dedicate time to support the work of the group and to attend annual meetings (as per specific groups' ToR).
- institutional support from member organisations to the Reference Group members (especially chair) to enable them to allocate time and resources to the work
- an ability to communicate in English.

Nomination process: All ACT member organisations will be requested by the secretariat to nominate candidates for the reference groups. The organisation must prepare a statement, signed by the nominee's supervisor, committing their staff member to participate in the group and a brief bio outlining how the nominee meets the membership criteria. Members should be given the authority by their organization to dedicate the required time to the group.

Leadership: Each group will have a chair and vice chair, or co-chairs (as appropriate) who will lead the group to carry out its functions. The chair(s) and/or vice chair will be nominated by the group members and elected by the group for a period of four years. Group leadership should, where possible, be gender and regional balanced.

The roles of the chair(s) and/or vice chair will be defined in the specific groups Terms of Reference and they will include:

- supporting the planning and facilitation of group meetings with the input of group members and the secretariat focal point
- facilitating discussion within the group and encouraging all group members to participate
- ensuring that the group achieves its objectives and accomplishes the tasks set forth in the group's Terms of Reference
- communicating with the lead ACT secretariat focal person on a regular basis.

The individual member roles will be defined in the specific groups Terms of Reference.

Decision making: In its capacity, each group may want to make recommendations to the alliance around a range of topics. In such cases consensus-based decision making within the group on recommendations is preferred. If there are different views, all perspectives will be considered. If consensus is not possible, matters can be put to the vote and 50% plus one is required to carry the vote. Observers and additional technical experts will not have voting rights. The view of the minority shall be minuted.

Communication: The spoken and written language in the group is English as this is the official working language of the ACT secretariat. The main means of communication will be via email and electronic conferences. There will be a face-to-face meeting of all group members at least once a year preferably linked to a major development, humanitarian or advocacy event. Consideration will be given to using different formats and venues for the meetings if this is deemed useful to facilitate optimal participation from all regions.

Costs: Costs related to the functioning of the reference group will be kept to a minimum. All members are requested to cover all costs related to their representatives' travel for the physical meetings. Members from the global south who do not have enough funds to cover all meeting costs will be supported by ACT Alliance. It is expected that ACT members from the global north will cover all meeting-related costs of all staff regardless of their location. Costs related to reference groups will be covered through the annual core budget of the ACT secretariat.

Administration and logistics: The ACT secretariat will assist the group in administrative and logistics matters, where necessary.

Timeframe: The work of the group will be determined by its mandate and functions. The members of the group are appointed for the period in between the ACT general assemblies. In some cases member terms might be flexible depending upon the nature of the work as well as the participation and commitment of individual members.

Approval process: The ACT General Secretary approves the formation of a reference group. All Reference Groups are encouraged to work within the ACT strategic plan and ACT policies as included in the ACT Quality and Accountability Framework.

Reporting and information sharing: Regular updates on the group's activities are shared with the ACT governance in the General Secretary's report and with the wider membership via an appropriate ACT communication channel.

5.2 Communities of Practice (CoP)

Purpose: In the ACT context, a CoP is a group of staff of ACT members that agree to work together to gain knowledge, share learning, best practice and develop competence related to their field of work – whether at the global or regional level. A CoP's overall goal is to strengthen and support the work of the alliance and its members as outlined in its policies and strategic plan and develop the capabilities of participants. ACT Communities of Practice (CoP) create and support spaces within the alliance for members to work together on issues of common interest and concern to the members and to the alliance. In addition, ACT recognises knowledge and learning as a key asset to the alliance and seeks to provide ways for members to work together as learning organisations. ACT CoPs are established to nurture this process.

Function: Each ACT Community of Practice (CoP) will shape its work around the nature of the issue and the needs and interests of the members. It may or may not wish to undertake specific activities that go beyond knowledge transfer and good practice. Creativity and innovation will be at the heart of all ACT CoPs. All advocacy activities will be in line with ACT advocacy policies and done in coordination with the secretariat.

Group composition: ACT CoPs are open to all ACT members interested in working together on a given issue.

Leadership: ACT CoP's will be self-organising under the leadership of an ACT member or members from the global south and north. Broad direction will be influenced by ACT's strategic plan. It is expected that each CoP will have a high degree of autonomy, flexibility, and responsiveness to evolving situations.

Working Methods: Each CoP will determine its own working methods.

Communication: The main means of communication will be via email and electronic conferences.

Link with formal ACT structures: To ensure the credibility and institutional link within the alliance of a CoP, each CoP will be endorsed by ACT secretariat and its existence will be announced to ACT membership and reported to ACT governance. According to the new architecture, ACT CoPs will be better linked to the Reference Groups and to Forums through the Reference Groups. Each CoP will be linked to a reference group. Some of these CoPs (global or regional) would be integrated into Reference Groups more strongly (e.g. represented on the Reference Group by the CoP chair, or even fully transition their work into the Reference Group), especially where they work on issue areas close to the thematic and programmatic priorities of the global strategy. The exact modalities need to be specified in the ToR of the respective group. A staff person from the ACT secretariat will be nominated as a contact person for a CoP.

Administration: All administration and logistics related to CoPs will be undertaken by the CoP lead member organisation(s) and participants.

Timeframe: A CoP's life cycle will be determined by the value it provides to its members. It will cease to exist if members do not wish to continue and if there is no lead member organisation(s).

Approval process: An expression of interest can be submitted to the secretariat outlining the area of interest, broad objectives of the proposed CoP, name of lead organisation(s), and how it links to ACT's strategic aims. The secretariat will approve the CoP, be responsible for informing the whole alliance that a CoP is being created, invite participation and solicit interest from members, and provide information as to how ACT members can participate. All CoPs are encouraged to work within the ACT strategic plan and ACT policies as included in the ACT Quality and Accountability Framework.

Reporting and information sharing: All CoPs will have the option to share information through an appropriate ACT communication channel. In order to support sharing of information and inclusion of the work of CoPs in the historical record of the ACT Alliance, the leaders(s) of the CoP will submit a brief report to the ACT secretariat annually.

5.3 Project Task Groups

Formation: ACT project task groups can be set up by the secretariat to provide operational support for a time-bound project/task (short or medium-term assignment) in the implementation of the global strategy, as need arises.

The secretariat shall:

- Develop a Terms of Reference for the group outlining the purpose, functions, working methods, timeframe and budget
- lead facilitation and coordination of the group
- select the membership of the group, drawing from members with particular expertise in the issue, as relevant
- have a mechanism in place for covering costs of the group before it is established. Those set up by the secretariat must be part of the core budget.
- consider regional and gender balance

Group composition: Each group will have 3-6 members, based on criteria specific to the focus and functions of the group. The selection will be based primarily on sectoral and technical expertise and engagement. Gender balance is essential. A gender ratio of 60:40 would still be considered 'reasonable'. However, a 70:30 gender ratio would not.

Decision making: Consensus-based decision making within the group is preferred. If there are different views, all perspectives will be considered. If consensus is not possible, the secretariat focal point will decide.

Leadership: The group will be led by the secretariat focal point.

Minimum requirements

- in-depth knowledge, skills and proven expertise of the thematic issue
- a commitment to dedicate time to support the work of the group and to attend meetings (as per specific groups' ToR).
- institutional support from member organisations to the Project Task Group members to enable them to allocate time and resources to the work
- an ability to communicate in English.

Communication: The spoken and written language in the group is English as this is the official working language of the ACT secretariat. The means of communication will be via email and electronic conferences.

Nomination process: Members of the group will either be handpicked by the secretariat, or go through a similar nomination process as reference groups.

Costs: Costs related to the functioning of the project task group will be kept to a minimum, due to electronic means of working. Should any further costs be necessary, it is expected that ACT members from the global north will cover all meeting-related costs of all staff regardless of their location. Members from the global south who do not have enough funds to cover all meeting costs will be supported by ACT Alliance.

Timeframe: The work of the group will be determined by its mandate and functions.

Approval process: The ACT General Secretary approves the formation of a project task group.

Reporting and information sharing: an update on the group's task completion is shared with the ACT governance in the General Secretary's report and with the wider membership via an appropriate ACT communication channel.

5.4 Coordination meeting

Group composition: 6 full members, 11 members max. (6-7 Chairs of the Reference Groups; plus 1 co-opted expert each on humanitarian, development, advocacy, and communications). Gender balance is essential. A gender ratio of 60:40 would still be considered 'reasonable'. However, a 70:30 gender ratio would not.

Decision making: Consensus-based decision making within the group is preferred. If there are different views, all perspectives will be considered. If consensus is not possible, the secretariat focal point will decide.

Leadership: The group will be led by the secretariat focal point.

Meetings: The coordination meeting would take place twice per year: once at the yearly meeting of the reference groups (when all chairs would be present anyway) and once electronically.

Communication: The spoken and written language in the group is English as this is the official working language of the ACT secretariat. The means of communication will be via email and electronic conferences.

Costs: Costs related to the functioning of the coordination meeting will be kept to a minimum. All members are requested to cover all costs related to their representatives' travel for the physical meetings. Members from the global south who do not have enough funds to cover all meeting costs will be supported by ACT Alliance. It is expected that ACT members from the global north will cover all meeting-related costs of all staff regardless of their location. Costs related to the coordination meeting will be covered through the annual core budget of the ACT secretariat.

Timeframe: The members of the group are appointed for the period in between the ACT general assemblies.

Approval process: The ACT General Secretary approves the formation of the coordination meeting.

Reporting and information sharing: Regular updates on the group's activities are shared with the ACT governance in the General Secretary's report and with the wider membership via an appropriate ACT communication channel.