

Our Understanding of Development

ACT Development - Revised May 2008

Affirmed as an **ACT Alliance** document by the Governing Board, January 2013



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Transformational Development: ACT Alliance's Understanding

ACT Alliance's understanding of transformational development draws from its theological affirmation that all persons are created in the image of God with the right and potential to live just, humane and dignified lives in sustainable communities. Profession of faith requires the rejection of those conditions, structures and systems which perpetuate poverty, injustice, the abuse of human rights and the destruction of the environment.

Transformational development is about taking action so that all peoples' human and God-given rights are upheld. In an increasingly globalised world, lives are increasingly interlinked. Transformational development therefore involves change for all those involved; those with power, wealth and influence who control and use more than their share of resources and those most adversely affected by oppressive structures and systems. Adopting a transformational development approach commits ACT members to mutual learning through joint analysis, action and reflection.

ACT recognises that both historic and current day injustices (such as slavery, colonisation, current trade agreements, discrimination, corrupt leadership and the destruction of the environment) impoverish people and deny them their human rights. In undertaking transformational development, ACT members support the empowerment of communities most affected by oppressive structures to claim their rights. ACT members also work for the transformation of values and structures that lead to over consumption and the lack of sharing of available resources.

ACT strategically utilises the knowledge, skills and resources of the alliance in working for transformation at the community, national and global level, drawing particularly on its strength as a global alliance of local churches and church-related organisations and therefore having a strong community presence.



Efforts to promote transformational development vary from the global to the local level and may range from campaigning at the global level on issues such as debt or trade to supporting communities at the local level in their efforts to obtain access to safe water, adequate food, health services and quality education.

It also includes challenging those with resources, power and influence.

The following concepts are central to our understanding of transformational development

Participation

Participation recognises the right to self-determination for all of God's children in every aspect of transformational development. Transformational development promotes participation of those people who have been marginalised and whose rights have been violated in all aspects of their own development including the joint analysis of their situations, identification of their own needs and assets, contribution of creative solutions, planning and decision making on the development endeavours to be undertaken and the subsequent implementing, monitoring and evaluation of these endeavours.

Empowerment

Empowerment embodies the ideal of individuals and communities overcoming unjust power relations to achieve their human rights. Transformational development promotes styles of relationships, strengthening of community institutions and building of technical capacity which fosters empowerment.

Capacity Development

Development which is imposed and/or remains dependent upon external support/ and/or results in unequal dependency is not sustainable. Transformational development enhances the capacity of those people and communities whose rights have been violated to overcome poverty and injustice and determine their own future by increasing their skills, knowledge and access to resources. New values and skills are also required by those with resources and power to transform the culture of over consumption and lack of sharing of available resources.



Non-Discrimination

Non-discrimination honours the God given dignity of each person and affirms international principles such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. While transformational development favours those affected by injustice and oppression, it does not discriminate on any basis including gender, ethnicity, culture, political affiliation, religion, age and sexual identity.



Gender Equity

Transformational development requires a gender analysis of the roles and relationships of, and between, men and women within the family and broader community. All development has a gender impact and affects women and men differently. Transformational development requires the participation of both men and women in the decision making and implementation of development activities to ensure that the activities enhance the situation of women enable men to participate appropriately and promote gender justice relations in the whole community. This includes action to change unequal power relationships between women and men (including ensuring equality of women and men under the law) and that women have access to and control over their share of resources.

Cultural and Spiritual Sensitivity

Development cannot be sustainable unless the cultural and spiritual dimensions and practices of persons and communities are recognised, respected, enhanced and incorporated into the development process. Transformational development recognises this and promotes a holistic understanding of human beings. Cultural and religious practices which are harmful to individuals and undermine their human rights will be challenged. ACT will not use any development assistance for the purpose of proselytizing.

Reaffirming Human Rights

Human dignity and well-being are enhanced through ensuring that governments fulfil their responsibility to reaffirm and make effective people's rights: political, social, economic, cultural and environmental. Civil society plays a key role in strengthening those rights and advocating for the accountability of governments towards human rights.

Transformational development focuses on the interests and rights of the most marginalised and discriminated rights-holders being addressed; political and legal empowerment of rights-holders; legal enforcement and access to justice and remedies; and promoting organisational policies and procedures that are non-discriminatory and respectful of rights.

Advocacy

Advocacy seeks to address the root causes and effects of poverty and injustice at the community, national and international levels. Transformational development promotes attitude change, mobilises public opinion and strengthens strategic alliances to influence those in positions of power to change oppressive policies and structures in order to promote justice. To be effective, advocacy should start at the grassroots level by facilitating people's ability to advocate for themselves. Capacity building of those in positions of influence is also important.

Promoting Peace, Reconciliation and Right Relationships

Transformational development promotes a culture of peace and right relationships at all levels, including the home, community, nation and internationally. At a local and global level, it requires an analysis of the underlying causes of conflict and violence and advocates the cessation of oppression, social deprivation and violent confrontation. Transformational development in communities which have experienced recent conflict incorporates effective prevention and reconciliation strategies pertinent to such contexts. It strengthens indigenous capacities and incentives for peace and reconciliation and empowers individuals and groups within societies affected by conflict to cope with past traumatic events.



Effective Communication

Appropriate communication in transformational development begins by listening to, respecting and uplifting the voices of those who are marginalised and whose rights have been violated. Transformational development promotes communication methodologies which are open and inclusive of gender, race and culture, including honest and transparent communication to those with resources, influence and/or power.

Environmental Sustainability

The earth and all it contains are God's gifts, and all persons are called to participate in the ongoing creation, preservation and sustaining of God's creation. Transformational development challenges policies and practises at the household, community, national and global level that threaten God's creation and demands that alliance members consider the impact that their actions have on the environment. Transformational development works to preserve, maintain and regenerate natural resources through drawing on the knowledge and practices of all people, especially indigenous peoples, and promotes the use of appropriate technologies.



Over-consumption and lack of sharing

Over-consumption and lack of sharing of available resources by some members of God's family (in both the North and the South) prevents others from achieving their human rights. Transformational development will promote sensitization, changed attitudes and actions within communities with excess resources and the ability to effect change.