

ACT Alliance – Action by Churches Together

FOUNDING DOCUMENT

Approved by Joint Executive Committee meeting, February 27, 2009

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Vision, Mission, Commitments, Objectives and Activities

Action by Churches Together - ACT Alliance is a global alliance of World Council of Churches (WCC) and Lutheran World Federation (LWF) member churches and related organizations committed to working ecumenically.

Vision Statement

United in the common task of all Christians to manifest God's unconditional love for all people, the ACT Alliance works towards a world community where all God's creation lives with dignity, justice, peace and full respect for human rights and the environment.

Mission Statement

As churches and church-related organisations, we work together for positive and sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice through coordinated and effective humanitarian, development and advocacy work.

Statement of Commitment

ACT Alliance members are bound together by several core values that are grounded in our Christian faith and which guide our humanitarian, development and advocacy work.

We believe that all persons are created in the image of God. Therefore,

- we act in ways that respect dignity, uniqueness, and the intrinsic worth and human rights of every woman, man, girl and boy
- we respond to human suffering irrespective of race, gender, belief, nationality, ethnicity or political persuasion
- we will promote an integrated approach to our work, which includes development, humanitarian assistance, disaster risk reduction, rehabilitation and advocacy
- we promote a participative, open, enabling style in working relationships where communities are central to identifying their own needs and assets and in determining priorities, approaches and mechanisms for response
- we support women's participation and right to make decisions in all aspects of their own lives and that of their family and community
- we will reflect in communication and fundraising materials the dignity and initiative of affected communities and people will not be portrayed as helpless victims
- we will guard against the abuse of power by those responsible for protection and assistance to vulnerable communities

We believe that God the Father as known through his Son Jesus Christ and revealed through the Holy Spirit and Scriptures, is the God of love who stands beside the poor and oppressed. Therefore,

- we will speak out and act against those conditions, structures and systems which increase vulnerability and perpetuate poverty, injustice and the destruction of the environment
- we will stand alongside women, men, girls and boys suffering from oppression by supporting effective development, humanitarian and advocacy programmes
- we will integrate peace-building, reconciliation and psychosocial aspects into our work with communities affected by conflict, violence and trauma
- we will not act as an instrument of any particular government's policy nor accept conditions on funding that would compromise our capacity to speak or act independently

We believe the church is called to manifest God's gracious love for all people and work towards a reconciled human community. This witness is more clearly communicated to the world when we work together as members of one body of Christ. Therefore,

- we commit ourselves to listening to, learning from, and sharing experiences with other members in order to improve the quality of our work and draw on the rich diversity of our alliance
- we will build relationships, strengthen effectiveness and avoid duplication through our cooperation
- we will recognise and value the unique gifts that each of us has been given
- we give priority to the role of local churches and their ministries in responding to the humanitarian and development needs of their local community
- we will contribute to that vision through the inclusion of advocacy, capacity development of members, spiritual accompaniment, peace-building and psycho-social assistance in our humanitarian and development work.

We believe that the earth and all it contains are God's gifts, given out of love and care for all created beings. Therefore,

- we commit ourselves to act in ways that will protect and restore the environment
- we will work to change systems and structures that degrade the environment and thereby increase the vulnerability of poor and marginalised communities

We believe that the resources available to us are not our own, but are a gift from God, and our vocation to service calls us to be faithful to principles of good stewardship. Therefore,

- we will uphold principles of mutuality and transparency in relating to each other, including the provision of accurate and timely programmatic and financial information to each other
- we will meet the highest standards of truthfulness and integrity in all of our work
- we will uphold high ethical and program standards of accountability, recognising our accountability to those we seek to serve, to those who support us, to each other, and ultimately to God
- we will prioritise the use of available local resources in our efforts and use approaches which strengthen existing community capacity

ACT Objectives

To this end, the ACT Alliance will:

1. be engaged in high quality and effective transformational development programmes that contribute towards positive change in people's lives
2. respond quickly and effectively to humanitarian emergencies to save lives, ease suffering and support communities
3. work together on disaster risk reduction programmes, emergency preparedness and post-emergency rehabilitation and reconstruction
4. analyse, prioritise, plan and respond together at the national, regional and global level
5. work and advocate together for changes in the structures and systems which impoverish and marginalise people, with particular attention to the needs of women and other vulnerable groups
6. actively engage in national, regional and international debates advocating for positive change for poor and marginalised people
7. promote, under a shared family name, the visibility of the development work, humanitarian assistance and advocacy initiatives being undertaken by the ACT Alliance
8. continually increase its effectiveness through capacity development and the sharing of knowledge, learning and experiences
9. work closely with other national, regional and international ecumenical, inter-faith and civil society organisations that share similar objectives

Membership of the ACT Alliance

Criteria for Membership

Churches and church-related organisations that meet all of the following criteria are eligible to apply for membership in the ACT Alliance.

1. Churches and church-related organisations seeking membership in the ACT Alliance shall be either:
 - (a) a member church of the World Council of Churches (WCC) or Lutheran World Federation (LWF), or
 - (b) a specialised ministry for humanitarian assistance and/or development of a member church if it is constituted as a separate legal entity, or
 - (c) an organisation affiliated with at least one member church of the WCC through governance¹

An exception may be made for:

- (d) an organisation which was previously part of a member organisation but has become independent (such applications must come with the endorsement of the member organization)

¹ 'through governance' is understood as having one or more WCC member churches on their governance body; i.e. a person delegated by that member church as their representative and not an individual member of a church who is serving in a personal capacity

- (e) a church or an ecumenical organization that has had a long historical programmatic working relationship with the WCC and/or a regional ecumenical organisation, referring to the All Africa Conference of Churches, the Christian Conference of Asia, Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias (CLAI), the Conference of European Churches, the Conference of Caribbean Churches, the Middle East Conference of Churches, the Pacific Conference of Churches
 - (f) an ecumenical organisations from a country where there are no member churches of either the WCC or LWF
2. The primary mandate of church-related organisations must be to work in the area of humanitarian assistance and/or development.
 3. The church or church-related organisation must have a commitment to high quality² development and/or humanitarian assistance activities.
 4. The church or church-related organisation should be either a national, regional or international organisation.

A Membership and Nominations Committee will consider all applications and make recommendations to the Governing Board for approval. The Governing Board has the right to reject any application.

Obligations of Members

Members of the ACT Alliance must commit themselves to:

1. adhere to the vision, mission and commitments of the ACT Alliance, as summarised in the Founding Document
2. adhere to the policies of the ACT Alliance
3. adhere to the Code of Good Practice for the ACT Alliance (including the Code of Conduct for the Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse) and other codes which may be adopted by the Governing Board in the future. For organisations involved in humanitarian assistance, this includes adherence to The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, and the Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response (Sphere Standards)
4. co-brand with the name ACT according to the co-branding policy
5. actively participate in national and regional forums where they exist and work with and strengthen other ACT members
6. pay the annual membership fee and any other financial obligation as set by the Governing Board

² A definition of “high quality” is provided in the ANNEX.

7. agree to submit annual audited financial and narrative reports upon request
8. meet the ACT criteria as set by the Governing Board for accessing appeal funds for humanitarian assistance and related activities

Observer Status

The following types of organisations may also apply for Observer Status within the ACT Alliance:

- regional ecumenical organisations and national councils of churches which do not have their own development or humanitarian assistance programmes (and who therefore do not qualify to be members), but who wish to work closely with the alliance
- mission organisations belonging to member churches of the WCC and LWF who are engaged in development and/ or humanitarian assistance work (and who commit to adhering to the Code of Good Practice for the ACT Alliance)
- global ecumenical bodies who wish to work closely with the ACT alliance

Observers will be regularly updated on ACT's work and will be able to participate in the appropriate ACT Alliance national and regional forums. They will pay an annual observer fee. Observers may not participate in the governance of the ACT Alliance and cannot co-brand their organisations with the ACT Alliance's name or use the logo.

Note for Guidance

1. Where a church has its own department or specialised ministry for humanitarian assistance and/or development, it is preferred that the department or ministry will represent the Church in the ACT Alliance.
2. If an organisation meets the membership criteria, they must apply for membership status and cannot apply for observer status. The observer status is restricted to those organisations outlined above.

Applications for Membership or Observer Status

An application form will be provided for churches and church related organisations seeking membership or observer status in the ACT Alliance. All applications will be reviewed by the Membership and Nominations Committee which will evaluate whether applicants fulfil the membership criteria, and will make a recommendation to the Governing Board as to whether the organisation should be accepted as a member or observer. The Governing Board has the right to reject any applicant applying for membership or observer status.

Suspension or Termination of Membership

Membership can be suspended or terminated according to the procedures decided by the Governing Board. Membership may be terminated through:

- a. a member informing the Secretariat that they wish to terminate their membership
- b. an organisation not meeting their obligation of membership
- c. a member no longer fulfilling the criteria for membership

Funding the ACT Secretariat

For the ACT Alliance to reach its potential of working together in development, humanitarian assistance and advocacy, it is important that the Secretariat is well resourced and has an adequate and stable income.

Four elements, as set by the Governing Board, comprise the funding base for the ACT Secretariat:

1. Membership fee that is paid by all members and organisations
2. Income Related Fee. This is an additional contribution for all organisations with an income of over US\$1 million. The income related fee would be based on a percentage of the total income of the organisation
3. Appeal fee, which is levied on all appeals that the ACT Secretariat issues
4. Programme Support for Specific Initiatives. This is a voluntary contribution for specific global initiatives from which the Secretariat will take an agreed administrative charge

ACT Governance Structure

A. Objectives and Guiding Principles of the Governance Structure

1. Objectives of the Governance Structure

The governance and management structure has been developed to enable the ACT Alliance to meet its overall objectives.

In addition, this structure will:

- enable the ACT Alliance and the staff to adequately address the specific requirements and needs of development and humanitarian assistance work according to their nature and at the same time ensure coherence and professionalism
- be equally owned by the “Global South” and “Global North”.
- take account of our obligation to ensure good stewardship of funds by minimizing the costs of the governance and management structure
- promote the
 - participation of all regions
 - participation of women
 - ownership of the ACT Alliance
 - commitment to the ACT Alliance
 - coherence and inter-relationship of humanitarian and development work

2. Guiding Principles for all Nominations and Elections within the ACT Alliance:

- Opportunities for participation of as many as possible ACT Alliance members should be sought for by the Membership and Nominations Committee.
- A person has to be nominated by his/her organisation and approved / endorsed by the applicable national and/ or regional forum. Once elected, the person represents the region as a whole.

- All nominations and elections should be based on the necessary competencies of anyone being nominated.
- Re-election of a person for one additional term is possible for a maximum of two terms on the Board (8 years maximum).
- Membership in the Governing Board, Executive Committee or Advisory Group will terminate if a person terminates their employment/association with that member organisation.
- If a person resigns from his/her position on the Governing Board, the region from which the person comes will be asked to nominate a replacement. A procedure will be established to nominate the replacement, taking into account the needs of governance.
- Nomination of women is especially encouraged in order to promote gender balance.
- The Membership and Nominations Committee when proposing a slate of candidates will ensure balance based on gender, church/specialized ministry, geography and professional competencies and will take into account Orthodox participation.
- Nominees must have sufficient English language skills to communicate with their respective Board/Committee/Advisory Board in and in between meetings without the support of interpreters and to read English documents.

B. ACT Governance Structure

1. General Assembly

Functions

- To elect the members of the Governing Board on the basis of a slate of nominations presented by the Membership and Nominations Committee
- To elect the Moderator and Vice-Moderator of the Governing Board from the Board members on the basis of a proposal presented by the Membership and Nominations Committee
- To affirm the future strategic direction of the ACT Alliance until the next General Assembly
- To receive and adopt a report from the Governing Board, including finances, audit, progress as it relates to the Strategic Plan and the budget framework
- To approve changes in the Statutes and Mission Statement and By-laws of the ACT Alliance
- To approve the dissolution of the ACT Alliance
- To appoint the Membership and Nominations Committee
- To deal with other constitutional matters as required

Composition

All members of the ACT Alliance constitute the General Assembly. Each member is entitled to attend with two representatives; one as the official delegate and the other as an invitee. Each member has one vote. Observers may attend the Assembly.

Frequency

The General Assembly will normally be held every four years.

Chairperson

The World Council of Churches (WCC) will chair the General Assembly.

2. The Governing Board

Functions

The Governing Board has the overall responsibility for the governance of the ACT Alliance between General Assemblies. It approves policies that affect the alliance.

The Board has the following responsibilities:

- a) To appoint and to dismiss the General Secretary for the ACT Alliance
- b) To approve a strategic plan for the ACT Alliance.
- c) To ensure the ACT Alliance is meeting its objectives as outlined in the Strategic Plan
- d) To ratify overall policy decisions which affect the ACT Alliance as a whole.
- e) To approve the annual budget of the Secretariat
- f) f . To approve the annual audited accounts
- g) To annually approve the auditors
- h) To appoint Advisory Groups to advise the Governing Board or Executive Committee
- i) To receive and approve reports from the ACT Alliance General Secretary and the Executive Committee, and Advisory Groups as appropriate
- j) To receive reports from the Membership and Nominations Committee and approve applications for membership
- k) To receive complaints and decide on appropriate sanctions
- l) To decide on appropriate procedures for nominations from the national and regional forums for elections to the Governing Board and Executive Committee
- m) To fill any vacancies on the Membership and Nominations Committee
- n) To revise the ACT Alliance Mission Statement and By-Laws (with a two thirds vote of the members present).

Composition

The Governing Board is composed of 23 members. It should consist of members from churches and specialized ministries. The World Council of Churches (WCC), as well as the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) due to its historical relationship as a parent organisation of ACT International, have a permanent seat. 21 people from different regions with the necessary expertise/competency in the field of humanitarian assistance, development, human rights and advocacy work, communication, finances, political analysis and experience in ecumenical cooperation will be elected, taking into account gender balance. The composition should include at least:

Global bodies:

- 1 WCC Representative
- 1 LWF Representative, due to its historical relationship as a parent organization of ACT International

Regional Representation

- 3 from Africa
- 3 from Asia
- 3 from Western Europe
- 3 from Meso America, South America and the Caribbean

- 2 from North America (USA and Canada)
- 1 from Eastern and Central Europe
- 1 from the Pacific nations, Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand
- 1 from the Middle East

Others

- 4 other members elected from the membership to ensure balance and professional expertise on the board.

Election to the Governing Board

The Governing Board is elected by the General Assembly on the basis of a slate of nominations presented by the Membership and Nominations Committee.

This slate will be based on nominations endorsed by their National Forum. Where there is a Regional Forum it should also endorse the nomination. Where no forums exist in a region, a person(s) nominated by a member should have the endorsement of other members in the region.

The regional representatives must come from member organisations which have their headquarters in a country in that region.

The final slate will be proposed by the Membership and Nominations Committee.

Moderator

The Governing Board is chaired by the Moderator or Vice Moderator elected by the General Assembly. Support is provided by the Secretariat.

Frequency

The Governing Board meets once a year.

Term

The term of the Governing Board will be four years, and ends with the next General Assembly if there is a shorter or longer period of time between Assemblies. No member may serve for more than two consecutive terms.

3. Executive Committee

The Executive Committee acts in between meetings of the Governing Board according to its mandate.

The Executive Committee has the following functions

- a. To supervise the implementation of policy and exercises responsibility for membership and financial decisions between meetings of the Governing Board.
- b. To grant interim approval of policies and procedures for the ACT Alliance for the eventual ratification by the Governing Board.
- c. On behalf of the Governing Board, to provide support and advice to the General Secretary on all issues.
- d. To receive progress reports from the Secretariat on all activities undertaken according to the Strategic Plan.

- e. To monitor adherence to The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief, the ACT Code of Good Practice and any other quality standards in the fields of humanitarian, development and advocacy work.
- f. To ensure that the learning from evaluations and other assessments is incorporated into policies and guidance for project implementation.
- g. To receive reports regarding infringement by ACT members of the Code of Good Practice, Code of Conduct, policies and other elements of the ACT mission, vision and values and recommends to the Governing Board on actions, sanctions and disciplinary measures as appropriate to the Governing Board.
- h. To approve any advocacy position between Governing Board meetings.
- i. To receive periodic financial reports from the Secretariat, and provide advice/guidance as needed.
- j. To ensure that activities of the Secretariat are carried out in line with the approved annual budget.

Activities of the Executive Committee are reported to the Governing Board as part of the annual report to the Board and through the sharing of minutes of its meetings to all members of the Governing Board.

Composition

The Executive Committee comprises:

- a. The Moderator and Vice-Moderator of the Governing Board who also act in this capacity on the Executive Committee
- b. 7 members elected by the Governing Board from its own membership (including the Moderator and Vice Moderator)
- c. Up to 6 additional people drawn from the membership and based on professional expertise including humanitarian, development, advocacy and communications experience.
- d. The General Secretary will be an ex-officio member of the Executive Committee without voting rights.

An Executive Committee cannot include more than one person from a member organisation. Decisions of the Executive Committee should be reached where possible through consensus

Election to the Executive Committee

The Executive Committee is elected by the Governing Board on the basis of a slate of nominations presented by the Membership and Nominations committee. Balance between global North and South will be striven for.

Frequency

The Executive Committee will meet not less than two times a year.

Term

The Executive Committee members are elected for a four-year term. No member may serve for more than two consecutive terms.

4. The Membership and Nominations Committee

Functions

The Membership and Nominations Committee has two broad functions, to advise and make recommendations on membership issues and to prepare slates for election to the Governing Board

Membership functions:

The Membership and Nominations Committee will advise the Governing Board regarding membership. In particular, they will undertake the following functions:

- develop appropriate procedures for membership applications, complaints and sanctions and inform the Governing Board of issues arising out of these mechanisms
- screen all applications for membership and make recommendations to the Governing Board as to whether organizations applying for membership should be accepted
- receive and respond to complaints about members, following procedures agreed by the Governing Board
- make recommendations to the Governing Board on any specific sanction which needs to be taken against a member, according to the agreed procedure.

Nomination functions:

To prepare nomination slates for all elections to the Governing Board and Executive Committee. The basis for the slate shall be the balances outlined under composition for both the Governing Board and Executive Committee. The balance between continuity and change will also be considered when preparing slates.

Composition

The Membership and Nominations Committee is appointed by the General Assembly.

The Membership and Nominations Committee has 5 members based on:

- a balance between the 'Global South and Global North'
- nominees having an excellent understanding of membership criteria
- nominees having an excellent understanding of the ecumenical movement

If a member of the Membership and Nominations Committee wishes to stand for election for a position on either the Governing Board or Executive Committee, they must temporarily resign from the Committee and be replaced by another member of the General Assembly (for elections to the Board) or Governing Board (for elections to the Executive Committee).

Frequency

The Committee will meet as required, usually by teleconference. The Committee will convene at the beginning of both General Assembly and Governing Board to prepare relevant slates for election.

The Membership and Nominations Committee is supported by the ACT Secretariat.

5. Advisory Groups

The Governing Board may appoint Advisory Groups, which are not part of the governance structure, to serve the Governing Board or Executive Committee,. Membership of the groups will be from the membership and may include members of the Governing Board or Executive Committee. Prior to establishing an Advisory Group, funding would need to be assured to cover its costs.

6. Role of National and Regional Forums

National and Regional Forums will play a crucial role in the two-way communication between members and the governance of the alliance. Members of the Governing Board and Executive Committee will be expected to bring input from members in the region they represent to meetings and then report back to the regions through the national and regional forums.

The role and functions of the national and regional forums will be guided by relevant policies set by the Governing Board.

7. The ACT Alliance Secretariat

There will be a Secretariat led by a General Secretary who is accountable to the Governing Board. The General Secretary will be the prime spokesperson for the ACT Alliance.

The ACT Alliance Secretariat will work with its members to realise the objectives and functions of the ACT Alliance including:

1. developing the capacity of its members so that they deliver high quality and effective development and advocacy programmes and can respond quickly and effectively to emergency situations
2. promoting cooperation of its members in their development, humanitarian and related advocacy work through national and/or regional forums, specific global initiatives, and other means
3. facilitating the emergency response of members through coordinated appeals and implementation of assistance through national or regional forums (wherever possible)
4. promoting strict adherence to the Code of Good Practice for the ACT³ Alliance and to other codes and standards to which the ACT Alliance is a signatory
5. promoting the visibility of the ACT Alliance through coordinated communications and ensuring adherence to the ACT Alliance branding policy
6. actively engaging in international debates and initiatives on development and humanitarian issues

³ This will draw on the existing codes currently used by ACT International and ACT Development

ANNEX

High Quality

High quality is one of the pillars for the ACT Alliance to achieve its vision, mission, aims and goals. Key elements of high quality include how the member organizations deal with issues related to management, work approaches, program, reporting, and relationships in an accountable and transparent manner. ACT understands high quality as a learning and peer process, which allows its members to learn from each other and to make them accountable to each other and to affected populations. High quality means ACT members effectively implementing ACT Code of Good Practice, ACT policies, guidelines, and procedures, and key related principles (e.g. Code of Conduct, Principles of Partnership), and the minimum standards required of such policies.

High quality embraces the following dimensions:

Accountability and transparency: Accountability and transparency are the acknowledgment, communication and assumption of responsibility for actions, decisions, and policies including administration, governance, implementation and consequences of the implementation of all activities the member is involved in. Accountability and transparency refers to our stakeholders who are those we serve, those supporting us and to other members in the alliance

Governance: ACT members ensure their governing bodies set and safeguard a long-term direction for their organizations (leadership + stewardship) and ensure everything is in place to pursue this direction, as a framework for effective work. The members of the governing bodies set boundaries, approve budgets, receives annually audited accounts and check the agreed direction is followed to ensure that actions comply with the organization's constitution, policies, the law, key stakeholder requirements.

Management: Leaders and managers function as strategic thinkers and are able to look at all dimensions of program design, planning and implementation, promote diverse experience, demonstrate leadership attributes, and be committed to continuous learning. They should also have a common vision of the future, be good team players who are committed to creating added value for all stakeholders – affected population, staff, and local partners – by getting the best from their people and leading continuous innovation.

Work Approach: ACT member adopt a multi-pronged approach to emergency, rehabilitation and development, which takes into account the reality that different needs and phases of emergency response and development can co-exist simultaneously. Awareness of and conscious reference to the human rights of poor and marginalized women and men, boys and girls, ensures root causes of poverty , exclusion and environmental degradation are addressed. Participatory approach is crucial for engaging local people in a joint learning exercise and for ensuring ownership and sustainability on common actions.

Programme: ACT members work for building people's capacity and competence, both as individuals and as communities, to achieve results for themselves. Thematic areas are not addressed separately but are considered integral parts of all lines of action; in particular

this implies an intrinsic linkage between relief, rehabilitation, development and related advocacy issues. Programmes should have clear exit strategies for their projects.

Reporting: ACT members provide timely and accurate reports, ensuring coherence between finance and program. They ensure transparent and accountable control environment, starting by recruiting the right people and constant staff training, putting emphasis not only on competence but also on integrity, ethical values, management's operating philosophy and the way authority and responsibility are delegated. ACT members are constantly monitoring and improving their standards and control instruments to meet the programmatic and administrative requirements necessary to achieve their priorities.