

**ACT Alliance
National, Sub-Regional and National
Forums Policy**

*Approved by the ACT Alliance Governing Board
in June 2018*

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1. INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE OF ACT FORUMS POLICY

ACT Alliance's national, sub-regional and regional forums are a unique feature of the alliance. They are the meeting point where all ACT members operating in specific countries and regions come together as equals to work collaboratively on humanitarian response, sustainable development and advocacy initiatives and programmes, linking with local churches and organisations as key partners in advancing this work. In order to meet the needs of those ACT Alliance seeks to serve, ACT Forums establish mechanisms to work in a cohesive and effective way, working under the same principles and standards, and upholding accountability in all dimensions.

ACT forums are part of ACT Alliance as one of its basic structures. They foster joint planning, implementation and monitoring as a way to enhance effectiveness and impact. They invest in the capacity development of all members, taking advantage of the different skills and expertise within the alliance. ACT forums are shared platforms of Voting members and Observer members of ACT Alliance.¹ They are engaged in working together in a particular country, sub-region or region, with common interests defined broadly by their commitment to the mission, vision and values of ACT Alliance. In joining ACT Alliance², all members have committed themselves to collaborate and work closely together, leading to situation-specific responses, programmes and initiatives and through actively participating in the life and different structures of ACT Alliance where they exist.

This ACT forums policy is intended to provide direction and guidance to strengthen ACT forums³ around the world. It helps align the forums with ACT Alliance policies and guidelines within the common vision of life with dignity, justice, peace and full respect for human rights and the environment. ACT Alliance recognizes that every national and regional context is different and therefore there will be diversity from country to country and region to region in the structure and activities of the forums. However, there are minimum common principles and requirements that need to be followed by each forum while other elements are meant to encourage the forums to develop their work further towards a deepened collaboration. This policy is therefore intentionally general, and each forum is asked to develop its own contextually appropriate Memorandum of Understanding derived from this policy.

This policy covers the minimum commonalities such as guiding principles, objectives, functions, membership and Memorandum of Understanding of an ACT forum, and gives guidance on how to organize a forum including its structure and resourcing. Finally it provides an overlook of the role of the ACT Secretariat¹ in supporting and strengthening the forums.

¹ When referred to, the term "members" in the present policy should be understood as referring to the "voting members" and "observer members" as defined in the *ACT By-Laws*, amended on May 2016, unless it is specified that it be referred specifically to one or the other category. <http://actalliance.org/documents/act-alliance-bylaws/>

² As established in the *Membership Agreement between an ACT Alliance member and ACT Alliance*, under responsibilities of ACT members <http://actalliance.org/documents/act-alliance-membership-agreement/> and in the *ACT Alliance Observer Agreement signed between an ACT Alliance observer organisation and the ACT Alliance* <http://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ACT-Observer-Agreement-approved-Sept-2013.pdf>

³ For the purpose of this policy, whenever "forums" are mentioned all forums are being referred to indistinctive of level. Whenever there is a need to distinguish sub-regional or regional forums, these will be mentioned expressly.

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ACT FORUMS

Being one fundamental element of ACT Alliance, ACT forums are committed to the ACT Alliance founding document and its policies as well as to ACT Alliance adherence to international mandatory standards and principles.⁴ Based on these key documents, ACT Alliance will base its forums policy on the following principles:

- I. **Forums are ACT** – ACT forums are an inherent part of ACT Alliance and not a separate entity. Forums relate with all other ACT structures: governance, advisory structures and Secretariat.
- II. **Forum members engage and participate actively** – Membership, engagement and participation in the relevant forums are a commitment made by all ACT Voting members on joining ACT Alliance. Membership in the ACT forum is thus the responsibility of the members and they are expected to participate in the forums to the best of their ability. Observer members are able to participate in the appropriate ACT forums. All ACT forum members equally contribute to, and are included in, major discussions and activities, with consideration of differences in capacities and resources of each member. Forum members ensure that all are given equal opportunity to contribute their different perspectives, and are sensitive to address imbalances by encouraging equal participation of all.
- III. **Forums contribute to strategic direction** – All forums concretely add value to the strategic direction of the alliance by bringing relevant issues of the forums within the broader framework of the ACT Alliance Global Strategy.
- IV. **Forums strive to strengthen ecumenical and interfaith cooperation** – ACT forums actively engage in ecumenical cooperation both within the ACT membership and outside the alliance to ensure a close working relationship and to avoid duplication, and optionally with other faith organizations and networks, when such opportunities and spaces present themselves.
- V. **Forums strive for joint implementation** – ACT forums seek to ensure the relevance and effectiveness of the alliance and the forums by working together cohesively through the joint implementation of humanitarian, development and advocacy programmes, whenever possible.
- VI. **Forums support local initiative** – ACT forums take a participatory approach engaging local people and communities to enable the most appropriate and effective humanitarian, development and advocacy work. Particular priority is placed on local knowledge, local engagement, active seeking of local rootedness and local partners. The forums promote principles of localization and subsidiarity.
- VII. **Forums promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming** – An ACT forum and its members prioritise the promotion of gender equality and the mainstreaming of gender in all aspects of their work, including at forum meetings.
- VIII. **Forums are accountable and transparent** – ACT forums follow the ACT Alliance primary commitments and the different responsibilities assigned to them in the area of quality and accountability mechanisms. These guide and establish standards of quality towards which ACT forums are held to account by their stakeholders, individuals and communities they work with, and by each other⁵.
- IX. **Forums strive for high quality**⁶ – ACT forums commit to high quality management, work approaches, programmes, reporting, and relationships in an accountable and transparent manner, by effectively

⁴ The ACT Quality and Accountability Framework (QAF) states a number of overarching ACT standards and commitments to which all ACT members are obliged to adhere irrespective of their areas of work; international standards that have been formally adopted, endorsed or committed to by the ACT governance and; policy guidance on a number of sectoral and cross-cutting issues which seeks to provide guidance. All policies noted in this document refer to the most recent approved policy or policy revision and can be found on the ACT website <http://actalliance.org/about/standards-and-policies/>

⁵ The ACT Quality and Accountability Framework (QAF) states ACT's primary commitments and the different responsibilities of ACT members, ACT forums, ACT Secretariat and ACT governance in relation to ACTs accountability mechanisms.

⁶ High quality is one of the pillars for ACT Alliance to achieve its vision, mission, aims and goals. Key elements of high quality include how the member organisations deal with issues related to management, work approaches, programmes, 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 the ACT policies and key related principles and the minimum quality standards required of such policies.

- X. **Forums enhance mutuality and learning** – ACT Alliance is a learning alliance, and as such, every opportunity is taken to intentionally benefit from forums’ experiences and share these learnings across the membership, through different ways including peer processes.
- XI. **Forums communicate openly** – ACT forums share information and communicate openly and honestly about what an organisation does and does not do, how they do it and with what resources. Forum members commit themselves to share information, which can enhance the effectiveness of the alliance.
- XII. **Forums are a community of care** – The ACT forums accept the two principles of “Do No Harm” and “Duty of Care”. “Do No Harm” is outward facing and considers that we should not add to the suffering of communities through poor programming or strategy. “Duty of Care” is inward looking and guides ACT members to look after their staff as they are exposed to stressful and sometimes dangerous working environments. ACT forums are a community of care for their staff and many activities they may undertake as part of ACT Alliance.⁷

ACT forums and its members should ensure that these principles guide the implementation of their work.

3. OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS OF ACT FORUMS

ACT forums are platforms for coordination, collaboration and joint implementation of humanitarian, development and advocacy work of ACT members at national, sub-regional and regional level. ACT members in the forums share identity, and aspiration to work together and to connect to one another. They act as an alliance and relate to each other as part of an alliance, strengthening their joint capacity and abilities to uphold a common identity and to reach the communities they serve.

3.1. Main objectives of ACT forums

- I. Build trust through the establishment of a strong platform that encourages increased dialogue, strategy development, collaboration and joint implementation among ACT members towards a common vision and through strengthening linkages with other established networks, including ecumenical and other religious partners.
- II. Increase the effectiveness and impact on ACT Alliance work in the areas of humanitarian response, sustainable development and advocacy for individuals and communities, through improved coordination, collaboration and joint implementation of ACT members at all levels.
- III. Enhance ACT Alliance recognition as a global faith-based actor within the country, sub-region and region through promoting the value and visibility of humanitarian, development and advocacy work undertaken by ACT members.

3.2. Main functions of ACT forums

Related to building trust and ACT governance:

implementing the 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. More details can be found in the annex of the ACT Founding Document. <http://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/ACT-Founding-document-ENG.pdf>

⁷ See the ACT Security Risk Assessment Tool designed to guide members in a step by step security risk assessment process. The tool is available through the ACT Safety & Security Community of Practice (SSCP) website at www.act-security.org as well as other security support services.

- I. **Identification and endorsement of potential ACT members:** ACT forums have an active role in identifying potential members and supporting them through the membership process, including the provision of official forum endorsement, in coordination with the ACT Secretariat.
- II. **Endorsement of candidates to ACT governance bodies:** ACT forums endorse the candidates nominated by the ACT members to ACT governance bodies, according to relevant policies set by the Governing Board.
- III. **Two-way communication with ACT governance:** ACT forums have a crucial role in the two-way communication between members and the governance of the alliance. Forums are to ensure that the members of the Governing Board, Executive Committee, Membership and Nominations Committee, Finance Committee and any other advisory group appointed by the Governing Board for a specific purpose, coming from their respective region receive relevant input to governance issues and provide feedback on the progress.⁸
- IV. **Capacity Development:** ACT forums must constantly be striving to develop the capacity of forum members through local initiatives and practices, shared learning and resources, and through working methods that enhance the full participation of its members, including fostering relations with ACT advisory structures.
- V. **Ecumenical relations:** ACT forums and forum members are encouraged to engage with other members of the ecumenical family present/active in their area of operation, to initiate discussions and exchange knowledge/experience. These relationships can be further expanded to the level of coordination and collaboration wherever possible.

Related to the work streams of ACT Alliance:

The functions of the ACT forums related to the work streams of the alliance depend on the forum's work priorities as defined by its members.

- I. **Humanitarian response:**
- II. ACT forums dealing with emergencies are required to conduct emergency preparedness and response planning, organize and coordinate the emergency response in their areas of operation. The development and periodic updating of Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans (EPRPs) are mandatory to all forums.⁹ The objective of the EPRP is to develop a common understanding of potential disasters in the area and how the ACT forum will respond to these disasters. Members intending to access funding from ACTs humanitarian response mechanism, can only do so if the forum has an updated EPRP.
- III. **Development:** ACT forum members should engage in joint contextual analysis and share their programmatic priorities. They are encouraged to identify and implement joint development activities. All forums must coordinate the alignment of the development and advocacy work of their members with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) framework, as a condition to access funding resulting from ACT partnership agreements with the United Nations, governments and multilateral institutions.
- IV. **Advocacy:** ACT forums are encouraged to identify advocacy priorities and opportunities, take part in and support advocacy initiatives at national, sub-regional, regional and global levels, with ACT members as well as with other stakeholders.

The members of the ACT forums are encouraged to search for synergies when coordinating their work in the areas of humanitarian response, development and advocacy for major effectiveness in areas of coordination.

Related to ACT Alliance recognition and visibility:

⁸ From ACT Alliance *Founding Document*, February 2009.

⁹ See ACT EPRP template in <http://actalliance.org/documents/emergency-preparedness-and-response-plans/>

ACT forums are required to promote under a shared family name the visibility of the humanitarian, development and advocacy work being undertaken by the ACT Alliance through co-branding; internally through delivering added member value within the alliance, and externally by creating and identifying opportunities for ACT exposure.

ACT sub-regional and regional forums are the expression of the alliance at the regional level and are expected to function as a regional platform facilitating regional advocacy initiatives and emergency preparedness, joint learning and capacity development.

4. MEMBERSHIP IN ACT FORUMS

4.1. Members of ACT forums

Members of ACT national, sub-regional and regional forums are those members of ACT Alliance who are actively engaged in that country, sub-region and region. Membership in ACT forums is defined in advance, and detailed in the Memorandum of Understanding of the forum. If there is lack of clarity over membership, ACT forums should seek guidance from the ACT Secretariat.

National forums. The members of the national forums consist of ACT Voting members and ACT Observer members which:

1. Have their main office or headquarters in that country.
2. Have an office or official representative in that country or region (e.g. international or global organisations).
3. Come into a country for a temporary or time-limited period related to a specific activity. These members have to inform any existing ACT forum regarding their plans and are expected to join the forum.
4. Do not have a presence in a specific country, but support ACT members or programmes in that country need to make a self-declaration of interest to engage with the forum and to fulfil the related obligations to be full members of the forums.

Sub-regional or regional forums could have different arrangements and structures, depending on their specific contexts. Members of sub-regional or regional forums could consist of:

1. ACT Voting members and ACT Observer members which have an office or official representative in that sub-region or region; or
2. Representatives of national forums in that sub-region or region; or
3. A hybrid: ACT Voting members and ACT Observer members with a particular interest in that sub-region or region plus representatives of national forums in that sub-region or region.
4. ACT members that do not have a presence in that sub-region or region but which support ACT members or programmes in that area. These members need to make a self-declaration of interest to engage and to fulfil the related obligations to be full members of the forums.
5. ACT global organisations are represented in the sub-regional or regional forums with only one seat, through their sub-regional or regional chapter/entity, or by the global entity or by one national entity who has been entrusted by the global organisation.

The difference in participation between ACT Voting members and ACT Observer members is that the latter can participate in the debates and discussions but do not participate in decision-making on forum related issues, are

not able to co-brand under the ACT name and logo, and cannot access services provided by the Alliance (such as funding from the emergency response mechanism, or development funding).

4.2. Membership responsibilities in ACT forums

Members are required to demonstrate active engagement in the life of the alliance. One of the indicators for engagement is the active participation in the work of the forums.

Members are expected to participate regularly and actively in forum meetings during the year to ensure ongoing coordination and collaboration, and possible joint implementation; delegate relevant staff (one and an alternate) to attend the meetings and to represent the member organisation with decision-making power; respect the guiding principles of the forum; and ensure that decisions and strategic directions of the forum are incorporated into their own work plans and strategies in a given country or region.

4.3. Permanent Invitees and Guests

There are cases when ACT members may wish to invite other non-ACT member organisations to attend forum meetings to support the strategic planning and development of the ACT forums. These may include local churches, national councils of churches, other ecumenical organisations, and partners of ACT members.

National Councils of Churches (NCCs) and Regional Ecumenical Organisations (REOs) have a permanent invitation to participate in their respective national, sub-regional and regional forums.

Other organizations (for example like-minded interfaith or other faith organisations) may attend meetings as guests if invited by all ACT members of the forum. While invited to participate actively in debates and discussions, as non-ACT members, they may not participate in decision-making on forum related issues, nor co-brand under the ACT name and logo.

5. ORGANISING AN ACT FORUM

5.1 Memorandum of Understanding

Each ACT forum is obliged to develop its own contextually appropriate Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), with clear parameters with regards to scope, objectives and activities, structure, including the role of the forum convener and terms of reference for the forum coordinator, membership with clear roles and responsibilities, collaborative working methods, in a way that suits the national and regional needs and context, consistent with ACT policies. All MoUs must be sent to the ACT Secretariat, for checking compliance with the ACT policy, and, if so, will endorse them. All of the members of the respective forum must sign the MoU (see section 4). MoUs should be reviewed (and revised if necessary) on an annual basis by all of the members of the forum. The ACT Secretariat will contribute to this review with any relevant policy changes within the ACT Alliance. The MoU sets out the framework for accountability between the forum members.

5.2 Structure and leadership

ACT forums should define a structure for coordination and collaboration in order to enhance effectiveness. When defining the structure, the forums should take into account several key elements:

- It should emphasize a collaborative approach and it should be flexible, and adaptable to the country, sub-

region and region specific context;

- It should support efficiency and effectiveness of its individual member's activities;
- It should to the extent possible be supported/funded from within, or could in some cases be assisted through a staff secondment or other external resources;

Forums should fill in the roles of a **forum convener** and a **forum coordinator**. Decision on whether these roles are fulfilled by one or two individuals/organisations will be left to the forum.

Forums are also encouraged to identify people or members responsible for communications, advocacy and other relevant areas for the particular forum.

Forums can also organize amongst themselves working groups for specific issues or areas of work, for example, humanitarian or advocacy initiatives; they can also form ad hoc committees for specific time bound activities.

Sub-regional or regional forums can be organised in a regional coordination group composed by a balanced group of regional representatives of the alliance and composition of ACT members and ACT national forums in the sub-regions or regions, inviting other relevant stakeholders.

ACT forum conveners: The forum convener will oversee and facilitate implementation of the forum's strategy or work plan; call and chair regular and annual forum meetings, as well as ad hoc meetings requested by members of the forum; represent the forum externally, or ensure that a forum spokesperson is identified to engage with the media. Representatives of ACT Voting Members, who have their headquarters or have an office in that country, sub-region and region, will assume this role on a rotational basis¹⁰ with clear responsibilities determined in the MoU.

ACT forum coordinators: The forum coordinator should be the contact point with the ACT Secretariat; ensure that all information coming from the ACT Secretariat and resulting from relevant structures of ACT Alliance, such as advisory groups, is circulated to all forum members and vice versa, as well as playing a liaison role with other forums (including the sub-regional and regional forums where they exist) and with members who might wish to play a role as ACT Visiting members; ensure coordination of all activities undertaken by the forum; and support the organisation of forum meetings. This person will assume the role under the Terms of Reference defined by the forum. Members of ACT forums may pool resources to contract, hire or second staff to fulfil this role. However, it is essential that this person is appointed by, supported by and accountable to the forum.

5.3 Strategic planning

ACT forums should develop their own strategic plans, covering a year or multi-year period, and aligned to the ACT Global Strategy. The plan should address issues of long-term direction, priority areas, internal coordination, external collaboration, information sharing, lessons learned and other issues as fundraising and capacity development. As a minimum, forums should carry out a priority-setting exercise to identify thematic and technical priorities to include in annual work plans aligned with the ACT Global Strategy.

As part of their strategic planning, ACT forums are required to align their development and advocacy work with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The ACT Secretariat will provide a template for this purpose.

¹⁰ Preferably 1 year.

5.5 Co-branding

ACT forums will adhere to the ACT co-branding policy.¹¹

5.6 Resourcing and Sustainability

While each ACT forum will need to develop its own strategies for resourcing and sustainability, these should be one of the forum priorities. It is therefore essential that all members of the forum own the activities of the forum. Forums will primarily be sustained by its members and depending on what resources are available, through funds, staff-time and office space. These resources could come from a variety of sources including voluntary contributions¹² from ACT members, fundraising efforts, and coordination components in an ACT humanitarian response as well as other external sources, such as the agreements between ACT Alliance and UN agencies.

5.7 Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning

To ensure the greater effectiveness of its activities and to promote quality assurance, forums will conduct periodic monitoring (at the level of the forum annual work plan), will review and evaluate their work (at the level of the forum strategic plan). Forums will ensure further revision of the work plan or strategy based on the monitoring and evaluation findings and lessons learnt. Forums are required to submit their forum annual reports to the ACT Secretariat.

6. ROLE OF ACT SECRETARIAT

The ACT Secretariat will actively support and strengthen the ACT forums.

- Orientate and build relevant relation with forum convenors and forums coordinators, on rotational basis, as to implementation of this policy.
- Review and endorse forum's Memorandum of Understanding.
- Support forum leadership by promoting establishment of learning communities and provide accompaniment.
- Support and strengthen initiatives towards increasing accountability and relationship between the regions and their representatives in the governance.
- Facilitate the sharing of practical tools, resources and guidelines within the alliance through tools and systems such as the ACT Website, promoting joint capacity building initiatives; develop training induction packages on ACT Alliance.
- Promote increased programme quality and adherence to common standards in humanitarian, development and advocacy work.
- Encourage networking between ACT forums and external actors, advocating issues identified by ACT forums and supporting joint communications.
- Promote communication between different national forums and with the wider ACT alliance, including ACT advisory structures.
- Provide information on, and promote effective use of, any new or changing policies, guidelines and

¹¹ See ACT Co-branding policy in <http://actalliance.org/documents/co-branding-policy/>

¹² These voluntary contributions towards supporting the work of the ACT forums are to be considered in addition to the ACT membership fee and any other financial obligation as set by the Governing Board.

procedures coming from ACT Alliance.

- Ensure forums are aware of new ACT initiatives being developed and have the opportunity to engage in or give input into such initiatives.
- Assist forums and members in resolutions of disagreements or disputes, through mediation or other means, if requested and appropriate.

APPENDIX: Checklist¹³

The purpose of this checklist is to provide guidance to ACT forums in elements they might wish to take into account for their own development and strengthening.

- Strategic level. Does your forum:
 - Have shared vision and mission among its members?
 - Have developed the ACT principles and values according the local needs and challenges?
 - Discuss the role of FBOs in the specific context there are operating?
 - Have a strategic plan with goals, objective, activities?
 - Align its work with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
 - Have analysis and understanding of the local and international context?
 - Develop or are developing initiatives in humanitarian, development and advocacy work with a holistic approach?
 - Discuss the sustainability of the local members?
 - Engaged to be a relevant actor in the local civil society with a holistic proposal and high level content?
 - Have a communications plan?
 - Take responsibility in promoting the ACT brand in a strategic manner?
 - Have credibility and a forum analysis relevant for the local civil society, UN and government (where possible)?
 - Take on the role of main local reference for ACT Alliance members and have the capacity to support members' initiatives?
 - Have a capacity building plan?
 - Promote and support the regional forums?

- Organisational level. Does your forum:
 - Develop or has it developed a structure to facilitate activities and to take decisions in a horizontal manner?
 - Have a strategy to strengthen local organisations and to ensure local participation?
 - Have a MoU updated every year?
 - Have regular training/orientation on ACT policies and guidelines?
 - Have relations with local entities with relevant skills in capacity development?
 - Get involved in relevant initiatives at local or regional level?
 - Develop or has it developed key relations with local and regional organisations?
 - Have ongoing relations with the Global ACT Secretariat and facilitate the understanding of the local context?
 - Promote participation in ACT initiatives and advisory structures in order to share experiences?
 - Encourage local members to participate in the governance structures of the alliance?

- Operational level. Does your forum:
 - Has an annual work plan aligned with the ACT Strategic Plan?
 - Have defined regions of accompaniment with a holistic approach?
 - Have an emergency preparedness and response plan and mechanisms to respond to emergencies in an efficient way?
 - Have operational procedures to facilitate scale-up in big emergencies?
 - Have mechanisms to ensure the participation of the members and related organisations in the initiatives promoted by the forum?
 - Explore possible joint implementation of activities and projects with other ACT members?

¹³ This appendix is not part of the policy. It can be changed with management decisions as may be relevant.

- Have monitoring and learning mechanisms in place, to improve the performance of the forum, the understanding of the context and the quality of the initiatives?
- Have mechanisms to ensure to integrate the lessons learnt and to improve the practice of the forums and its members?
- Have a mechanism to participate in the ACT advisory structures to ensure the learning and improvement of the members and other forums?
- Have mechanisms to ensure the participation of the population and grassroots organisations?

ⁱ The term “ACT Secretariat” refers to the global ACT secretariat in six locations, namely Geneva, Amman (ME), Bangkok (Asia/Pacific), San Salvador (Latin America/Caribbean), Nairobi (Africa) and New York (North America). The primary focal points for the ACT forums are these regional offices and presences. The Europe regional forum has a focal point which will be rotational between ACT members in that region. The ACT Alliance EU office in Brussels also plays a role in this structure.