



2023 Impact report

Transforming Lives, Advancing Equality

ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme

actalliance



ACT Alliance and Its Mission

ACT Alliance is a network of 150 churches and faith-based organisations working together in over 125 countries. Our mission is to promote positive and sustainable change in the lives of poor and marginalised people regardless of their faith, through a commitment to gender justice and human rights.

Explore our Faith in Gender Justice LinkedIn Page for more highlights and join us on **#theRoad2Equality**.

Gender Justice Programme Team

Elaine Neuenfeldt, Programme Manager
Francesca Traglia, Programme Coordinator
Rachel Tavernor, Gender Strategist

Definitions

A Conversatorio is a participatory dialogue or discussion forum where individuals come together to exchange ideas, perspectives, and experiences on a specific topic. It typically fosters open, inclusive conversations, encouraging collaboration and collective problem-solving. ACT Alliance uses these spaces to create safe environments to address challenging topics.

A **gender justice policy** is a framework that outlines the organization's commitment to promoting gender equality, preventing gender-based discrimination, and ensuring equal rights and opportunities for all genders within its operations, programs, and partnerships. It aims to address power imbalances and harmful gender norms, fostering an inclusive and equitable environment.



Summary of Overall Impact

In 2023, the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme (GJP) continued to mobilise its membership of faith-based organisations and churches to tackle gender injustices across various countries, regions, and globally. The impact resonated deeply within the communities it served, driven by a collective commitment to fostering gender-equitable practices, defending human rights, addressing gender-based violence, and empowering women and girls.

The programme continued to have impact in global policy forums, with powerful collective and interconnected advocacy at UN Commissions. Deeper relationships with secular feminist networks, Member States and inter-faith actors were fostered, which increased the visibility and influence of the Gender Justice Programme. In times of increasing pushback, the ACT Alliance amplified the critical role of faith-based actors to counter backlashes on gender equality.

Members, ACT Forums and Communities of Practices addressed six thematic priorities critical to advancing gender justice. In transformative

masculinities, faith leaders in Zimbabwe engaged in community education to combat forced child marriage and promote gender equality. In Uganda, interfaith leaders launched joint campaigns against intimate partner violence, using religious teachings to unite communities against gender-based violence.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) were advanced in Sierra Leone, where community radio stations facilitated discussions on gender-transformative masculinities following the enactment of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill. In the Middle East, conversations about gender justice across the region were sparked by the expansion of the 'red scarf' campaign, to include 'red bags' during 16 Days of Activism.

Addressing gender-based violence (GBV) was another critical area. In Ethiopia, a transformative masculinities project promoted gender equality and reduced GBV through religious teachings and community engagements. In Peru, training sessions and the dissemination of pastoral toolkits equipped faith leaders to advocate for an end to GBV, reaching a wide audience.

Economic justice initiatives were implemented in Brazil, focusing on countering fundamentalisms and promoting economic justice by integrating gender justice into broader economic frameworks. In the Asia-Pacific region, resources were developed to guide members in creating gender justice policies, including economic justice and the transformation of social norms.

Climate and gender justice remained a priority, with joint side event, report launch and stunt at COP28, which focused on integrating gender equality in climate related development finance. The programme also facilitated members to engage in dialogues and policy spaces on the importance of gender justice within climate justice frameworks.

Finally, in migration and displacement, the LAC region hosted a workshop on Human Mobility in Bogota where members came together to strategise on the intersection of Migration with gender justice and climate justice and published a Documento politico (Political Document) on Gender in Migration and Displacement informing new training and strategies for the region.

Stories of hope and change emerged from these initiatives. In Zimbabwe, the ACT Alliance's community education program enabled adolescent girls to assert their rights and fight against gender-based violence. The

involvement of faith leaders, who raised the participation age for traditional ceremonies to 18, marked a significant cultural shift towards gender justice. In Uganda, a groundbreaking initiative saw interfaith leaders from RACOBAAO share a platform to address intimate partner violence, uniting voices across religious divides to promote peace and gender equality.

The GJP navigated numerous challenges, including anti-rights backlash and shrinking civic space. By adopting an agile, context-specific approach, the programme ensured continuity and avoided impasses caused by internal disagreements. Key strategies included strategic partnerships and capacity building. Collaborating with diverse stakeholders, including secular feminist organisations and multi-faith groups, strengthened advocacy and countered anti-rights narratives. Providing foundational gender-transformative training to staff enhanced the implementation of gender justice within organisational practices and policies.



IN 2023

5 collective submissions to the UN The Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Relation to Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity, Jan 2023:

- The Global Digital Compact, May 2023
- The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression and Opinion for the report on gendered disinformation, July 2023.
- The 68th UN Commission on the Status of Women Written Statement, October 2023, signed with multi-faith actors.
- The 57th UN Commission on Population and Development Written Statement, December 2023
- The 75th Human Rights Pledge, December 2023.

7 Diverse stakeholders reaffirming the transformative role that faith-actors can contribute to advancing gender justice, in UN Side Events during CSW and CPD, and during the Inter-Religious convention. (UNFPA, and Missions of: **Argentina, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Mexico, South Africa**)

98 individual members organisations have established gender justice policies, six members have ongoing processes to create new gender justice policies, expected to be approved in 2024.

52 male / 46 female ratio in Leadership positions in 2023, this is the internal balance of women and men in boards and organisational structures of ACT Alliance members

CONVERSATORIOS:

- Africa regional Conversatorio on Transformative Masculinities
- Asia- Pacific and Africa Conversatorio on Gender-Transformative Leadership
- Gender Justice Programme Conversatorio on Faith-based Methodologies at the Inter-Religious Convention
- Asia-Pacific Conversatorio on GBV
- Asia-Pacific Conversatorio on Gender Policies and Theology
- Gender and Security Conversatorios in Africa, MENA, LAC, and with International members focusing on UN advocacy.

Gender Justice Programme participation in CSW67, CPD55, and COP28:

- Youth: 4 / 25 = 16%
- Asia Pacific 1 / 25 = 4%
- Africa: 9 / 25 = 36%
- LAC: 5 / 25 = 20%
- MENA: 1 / 25 = 4%
- Europe and America: 9 / 25 = 36%

Voices from the ACT Alliance: Reflecting on 2023

"I appreciated being a member of the Gender Community of Practice, for the ecumenical solidarity and accompaniment, to learn from other members models and best practices. I was equipped to find a way to move people towards gender justice. I was struck that many in my community were unfamiliar with the term 'gender justice' and as part of our process, we developed and published definitions to increase understanding. We also shared drafts with youth / theologians / elders / pastors, to create ownership, and the policy was unanimously adopted by the executive committee."

Sawako Fujiwara, National Christian Council in Japan

"This convention gave me a new impetus to continue my work as a human rights activist, the presence of two different generations in religious conventions gives an original aspect to these conventions. It is also necessary for both generations to speak the same language to avoid doing work in vain. This year, we are organizing community dialogues bringing together religious leaders, youth and local authorities to reduce prevailing social norms that discriminate against women and girls."

Elvis Boala, Youth Representative and Inter-Religious Convention Delegate

"ACT Alliance brings to the UN a pluralistic and ecumenical vision from churches that affirm the expansion of rights for women and girls, advocating for institutions to be guarantors of rights for all people who are systematically violated and structurally stripped of their dignity."

Rev. Mariela Pereyra, ACT Argentina, CPD56 Delegate

"Our collaboration resonated in the minds and actions of our members, who contributed their expertise, funding and capacity, to ensure gender mainstreaming in our Safeguarding policy, and practices, to be accountable to the communities that we serve."

Rizwan Iqbal, Global Accountability & Safeguarding Coordinator, ACT Alliance

"Thanks to the incredible efforts of the ACT Alliance, as co-hosts, taking the lead in crafting the agenda, finding just the right words to resonate with diverse religious groups. The commitment to co-create a diverse programme that created space for participants to learn and unlearn, including new topics on the agenda. The ACT Alliance delegation brought not only open minds but also open hearts to the table."

Faith to Action Network, Inter-Religious Convention Co-Host, December 2023

Empowering Faith Actors as Agents of Change

Faith actors play a pivotal role in shaping social norms and influencing community behaviours. Recognising this, the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme strategically engaged religious leaders and faith-based organisations to advocate for gender justice. With 84% of the world's population identifying with a faith, faith actors are crucial in reclaiming religious narratives that affirm human rights and counter backlashes against gender equality.

The ACT Gender Justice Programme is working with faith change-makers to lead dialogues and promote gender equality within their communities, demonstrating the programme's impact in policy, institutional and community levels.

Advancing Gender Policies and Institutional Commitment

The increased commitment to gender justice policies among ACT members demonstrates how the programme's vision is now being shared and owned by ACT's members around the globe, as a strong basis for further localised action towards gender justice.

The programme supported the development and revision of gender justice policies within member organisations, ensuring these policies are context-specific and culturally relevant. By the end of 2023, 98 individual member-organisations had established gender justice policies.

Changemaking Partnerships

We made the commitment to 'break the silos' and look out for 'unlikely allies' in our 2022 Annual Report. We aimed to expand our reach, beyond the ACT Alliance membership, and partner in 2023 with those who may challenge our thinking. An example of this deeper partnership was in the co-convening of the Inter-Religious Convention: Faith Changemakers: Affirming Human Dignity, Justice, and Freedom for All. The convention was hosted in South Africa, with



200 faith-based participants from different religions, regions, and contexts. A central theme of the conference was gender justice (track 1), alongside peace and just communities (track 2); and Freedom of Religion or Belief (track 3). The Gender Justice Programme contributed a leading role in the convention planning team, which included 10 different faith-based actors, and led the work related to the conference programme, which included 18 panels/workshops and four plenary sessions, with over 72 contributors. ACT Alliance was recognised for the impact made in facilitating critical multi-faith dialogues, which push the boundaries, and tackle taboos, for example on SRHR and reproductive justice.

Regional and Local Impact

The Gender Justice Programme's regional roadmaps facilitated peer accompaniment and capacity sharing, enhancing collective efforts on gender justice issues such as gender-based violence (GBV), economic justice, and sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR). These regional initiatives were tailored to address specific local challenges and leverage the unique strengths of each community.

In Peru, amidst political turmoil and social unrest, the ACT Forum engaged religious leaders in transformative dialogues on human rights and gender justice. Training sessions and educational materials empowered communities to challenge regressive narratives and promote inclusivity. ACT members joint forces in the "Forces and Voices for Gender Justice" project, and created the Gender Justice Observatory to monitor the advances and setbacks in laws and policies on gender justice and human rights, in Peruvian legislation. The Observatory is aiming to make visible and counteract fundamentalist, conservative and anti-rights expressions, embodied in bills and legislative initiatives promoted by parliamentary initiatives and/or religious leaders. [Observatorio de Género \(institutopaz.net\)](http://institutopaz.net)

Addressing Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence



remains a critical issue globally, and the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme has made significant strides in addressing this injustice. By engaging faith leaders, community members, and local organisations, the programme has co-created a robust framework for combating GBV.

In Sierra Leone, the Gender Transformative Approaches initiative educated communities about gender justice, engaged religious leaders as advocates, and empowered local organisations. The establishment of Husbands' and Boys' Clubs, which engaged 224 male faith actors, marked a significant shift in community attitudes towards gender equality. These efforts culminated in the passing of the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) Bill, a legislative victory for gender justice.

Promoting Economic Justice and Empowerment

Economic justice is central to overcoming gender inequalities and reducing poverty. The programme's initiatives focused on creating gender-responsive systems that ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.

In the Pacific Australia & New

Zealand (PANZ) region, the 'Faith Actors Promoting Healthy, Safe & Just Communities' project exemplified this approach. The initiative empowered women-led organisations to enhance their institutional capacity to respond to gender justice. By training emerging women leaders and collaborating with traditional and faith leaders, the project fostered an inclusive dialogue on gender justice and transformed harmful gender norms.

Climate Justice = Gender Justice

COP28 demonstrated ACT Alliance's growing commitment to gender mainstreaming in the climate programme, with a collaborative Side Event, a stunt focusing on gender and climate finance, and the launch of a new report by members, focusing on 'Climate Finance and Gender: Lessons from Nordic efforts to Integrate Gender Equality in Climate-Related Development Finance'.

A Global Progressive Force for Gender Justice

In 2023, the Gender Justice Programme was committed to powerfully and collectively, stand up for gender justice and counter backlashes. Continued

investment in the capacity, convening power and credibility of ACT Alliance has increased the visibility as a transformative force for gender justice. For example, at the 67th UN Commission on the Status of Women, more than 25 members, including the ACT Alliance Moderator, Erik Lysén (Act Church of Sweden), participated in our diverse delegation, representing different regions and collectively advocating for stronger policies and implementation.

A dynamic peer-to-peer training programme enabled members to strategically advocate towards Member States on the negotiated text, and effectively participate in different policy and civil society spaces.

ACT Alliance co-hosted a series of Side Events with governments, focusing on backlashes, technology, and faith, and a networking event with feminist movements, including Equality Now. The return to in-person advocacy at the United Nations enabled the programme to foster deeper relationships with diverse partners and better refine our role and added value, to speak to the gender/faith/rights intersection, in both wider feminist movements, and faith-based networks.

Advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

ACT Alliance in 2023 was increasingly recognised for pushing boundaries and tackling taboos to advance gender justice. For example, the ACT Argentina Forum's locally led faith-based advocacy for SRHR was amplified at the UN during the 56th UN Commission on Population and Development. Church President, Rev. Mariela Pereyra, dressed in her clerical collar, delivered the ACT Alliance oral statement, which affirmed Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, including Comprehensive Sexuality Education.

The intervention received electrifying feedback from feminist movements, who for many, this was the first time they were hearing faith actors affirming SRHR, including Comprehensive Sexuality



Education, in UN spaces. Our work was further evidenced in a high-level Side Event, with Norway, Argentina and UNFPA, on Rights, Religion and Reproductive Justice. The fully booked event included UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, the ACT General Secretary, Rudelmar Bueno de Faria, and grassroots voices from South Africa, Nepal, Mexico and Ethiopia.

Safety and Security, and Countering Backlashes

Countering backlashes on gender equality remained a critical focus for 2023, which included the development of religious narratives to affirm human rights. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, an 'argumentario' was produced on SRHR, GBV and Economic Justice, bringing together theology and advocacy. The increasing visibility of the Gender Justice Programme and our members, including religious leaders, has required deeper safety and security measures to be integrated into global advocacy, with a newly designed training course, and in the regions, with contextualised training developed in collaboration with the Africa, MENA and LAC Gender Justice Communities of Practices.

Financial and Resource Mobilization

The programme's success in 2023 was also marked by effective resource mobilisation and financial management. A comprehensive external evaluation provided critical evidence to inform strategic decisions, highlighting the transformative role of faith in advancing women's rights and gender justice. This evaluation shaped the development of the second phase of the Gender Justice Programme, emphasising the importance of local action, decentralised structures, and the power to globally convene.

New and additional funding from Norwegian Church Aid, Act Church of Sweden, ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) and other members was secured, enabling the programme to continue its impactful work. The strategic fundraising efforts ensured the sustainability of the Gender Justice Programme, allowing it to adapt and innovate in response to shifting global contexts.

Success Stories from ACT Forums

Sierra Leone: Transformative Masculinities

The ACT Forum in Sierra Leone educated communities about gender justice, engaged religious leaders as advocates, and empowered local organisations. The establishment of Husbands' and Boys' Clubs significantly shifted community attitudes through training, advocacy, and community engagement. By fostering discussions on gender equality and transforming harmful norms, men became advocates for gender justice, influencing local laws and promoting positive changes in household and community dynamics.

224 Male Faith Actors Engaged: Through the formation of 7 Husbands' and Boys' Clubs engaging 224 men as change makers for gender justice.

210 Community Advocates Trained

Dominic Sara Kanu from Marampa village embraced positive masculinity, becoming a role model in his community. Through the Positive Masculinity Project, he transformed his family dynamics, promoting mutual respect and equality.

Ethiopia: Transformative Masculinities

A collaboration in the ACT Ethiopia forum between Norwegian Church Aid and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church led to enhanced understanding and advocacy for gender justice among religious leaders. This initiative empowered gender changemakers to lead dialogues and promote gender equality. **Training sessions for faith leaders engaged 44 representatives from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and 18 leaders from Evangelical Denominations,** The sustainability of the work implemented was cemented when Bread for the World confirmed support for the continuation of the work on gender justice through the ACT Ethiopia forum led by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Peru: Catalysing Change in Religious Communities

Amid political turmoil, the ACT Forum in Peru engaged religious leaders to advocate for gender justice. Training sessions and educational materials empowered communities to challenge regressive narratives and promote inclusivity. Engagement of 30 representatives in critical training sessions.

Creation and dissemination of a facilitation guide, reaching 25 leaders, and further deepening discussions with a subsequent course for 24 participants.

PANZ: Faith Actors Promoting Healthy, Safe & Just Communities

The Pacific Australia & New Zealand Forum collaborated with Anglican Overseas Aid to transform institutions and communities through faith-based initiatives to advance gender equality and dismantle harmful gender norms. The project engaged with 61 participants from Fiji, Australia, Vanuatu, New Zealand, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Tuvalu in two workshops, "Redeeming Gender Inequality in Church and Community" and "Preventing and Responding to Violence Against Women and Children," . Through leadership and data training, **18 taskforce members strengthened their roles, actively collaborating with SafeNet, a multidisciplinary network in the Solomon Islands that coordinates services and support for survivors of gender-based violence through collaboration** between government, NGOs, and faith-based organizations. This project promoted gender equality and dismantled harmful gender norms.

Initiatives and Methodologies

In 2023, the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme implemented a series of initiatives and methodologies that significantly advanced gender justice across various contexts. These strategies were designed to address deep-rooted gender inequalities and foster transformative changes at local, regional, and global levels. These included locally led faith-based actions that fostered policy advocacy and social norm transformations, such as gender audits in the Solomon Islands. Peer accompaniment and knowledge exchange, allowing regions to collaborate on gender justice through workshops, strategic learning platforms, and faith-rooted theological arguments. Additionally, it engaged in evidence-based advocacy at regional and global levels, ensuring that gender justice efforts were grounded in real-life experiences and local contexts.

Connecting the Dots

The ACT Alliance Gender Justice Programme utilised innovative methodologies to 'connect the dots' and drive forward rooted, relevant, and transformative action. This approach involved identifying and addressing the

obstacles and resistances to gender justice at multiple levels—national, regional, global, and institutional.

At the national level, the programme invested in locally led faith-based actions, such as advocating for policy changes in Uganda, transforming social norms in Sierra Leone, and conducting gender audits in the Solomon Islands. These initiatives demonstrated how faith actors could advance gender justice in their communities by contextualizing their efforts to the specific needs and realities of their environments.

For example, the programme facilitated dynamic learning platforms rooted in the diverse contexts of its members. These platforms included deep dialogues on social taboos, collaborative processes, and strategic knowledge exchanges, which were crucial in refining the methodologies used by ACT members. This ensured that the initiatives were relevant and effective in provoking changes in social norms, attitudes, and structural arrangements towards more equitable power relations.

Faith Changemakers

The programme's work in 2023 highlighted the role of faith changemakers in advancing gender justice. Faith actors were

seen as critical in transforming social norms and reclaiming religious narratives that affirm human rights and counter backlashes against gender equality.

For instance, in Zimbabwe, adolescent girls were better able to claim their human rights and dignity through a community education programme that engaged faith leaders in addressing gender inequalities, including forced child marriage. This led to a significant policy change where the minimum age for participation in the traditional Komba dance was increased to 18 years, recognising a girl's passage to womanhood.

In Uganda, interfaith leaders from the Rural Action Community Based Organisation (RACOB AO) shared a common platform to address intimate partner violence. This initiative saw faith leaders leveraging teachings from the Quran and the Bible to collectively speak out against partner violence, showcasing unity and collaboration across different faiths to promote gender justice.

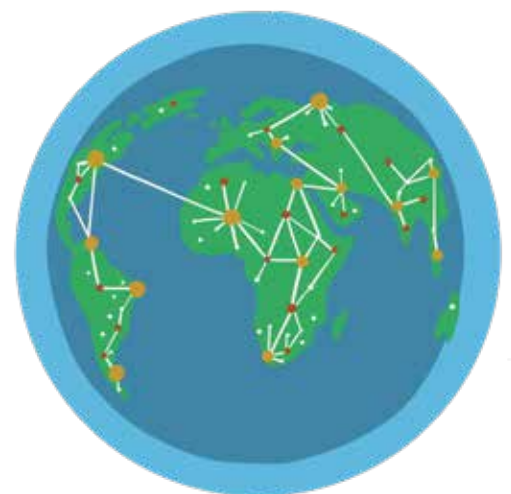
Regional Roadmaps

The Gender Justice Programme's regional roadmaps were essential in facilitating peer accompaniment and capacity

sharing. These roadmaps enhanced collective work on transformative masculinities, economic justice, GBV, and SRHR at a regional level.

In Africa, a series of virtual meetings created a learning space for members to share updates on their strategic projects and gender policy processes. These meetings also strengthened a collective voice at the regional level, fostering deeper reflections and dialogue. For instance, the Africa Regional Gender Community of Practice co-hosted joint inter-generational conversations on gender-transformative leadership and gender and security, contributing to new contextualized training for the region.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the roadmap focused on accompanying members in the development, implementation, and monitoring of gender



justice policies. This included hosting discussions on the theological foundations for gender justice policies and workshops to mark the 16 Days of Activism. The publication of resources on developing gender justice policies and addressing GBV showcased the collaborative methodologies used to ensure that new resources were relevant and impactful.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the regional roadmap included initiatives like the ongoing campaign work on the 16 Days of Activism and the development of a foundational document on theological arguments for core priorities such as SRHR, GBV, and economic justice. This document will be used for dialogues with members in 2024, shaping advocacy and policy work in the region.

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the roadmap focused on conversations related to the safety and security of faith-based actors working for gender justice. The MENA Gender Community of Practice played a crucial role in activating contextualised gender and security work and hosted conversations that informed the development of new training.

Mainstreaming Gender in Programmes and Policies

The Gender Justice Programme also focused on mainstreaming gender across ACT Alliance's programmes and policies. This included collaborations with different programmes, notably Climate and Humanitarian, and Quality and Accountability, to institutionalise commitments to gender justice.

A deep collaboration was facilitated between the ACT Quality and Accountability Reference Group, Safeguarding Community of Practice, and Gender Justice Programme, to ensure gender transformative Safeguarding. The collaboration strengthened the knowledge, expertise, and capacity, from within the ACT Alliance, to be able to deliver gender-transformative safeguarding practices, including in our accountability structures (new policy), and learning spaces (guidance and e-learning module). Through the alignment of different structures and bodies within the ACT Alliance, the process resulted in gender being mainstreamed (and not a tick box exercise), addressing root causes, including social norms, and ensuring policy coherence and ownership from both members, and the secretariat.

By integrating gender perspectives into various

thematic programmes, the Gender Justice Programme ensured that gender justice was not just a standalone issue but an integral part of the ACT Alliance's broader mission. This holistic approach fostered greater synergies, shared analysis, and targeted capacity strengthening across the alliance.

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Challenges and Solutions

Overview of Challenges Faced

- Escalating global conflicts and environmental degradation
- Backlashes against gender equality
- Cultural resistance to transforming gender norms
- Push back on gender justice instrumentalizing faith
- Reduction of funds

Solutions and Lessons Learned

- Strong commitment and engagement of local actors,

national members and forums to continue the work on gender justice

- Enhanced training and capacity-building efforts
- Developed contextualized strategies to address local challenges
- Continued to facilitate collective advocacy and engage faith leaders as allies
- Strengthened partnerships and collaborations with Humanitarian and Climate Justice programming

Financial Overview

Summary of Financial Status and Resource Allocation

Total Budget for 2023: USD 1,247,299

Key Areas of Spending: Most of the expenditure (60%) was spent on the Programme, followed by support personnel (20.1%). Administrative costs and office-related expenses accounted for smaller portions, while the external evaluation

represented 5%.

Conclusion

Gender justice is essential for sustainable development and human rights. Our work in 2023 has demonstrated the power of faith-based initiatives in promoting equality and transforming communities.

As we look ahead, we call on future funding donors to support the revolution for gender justice and counter the backlashes on gender equality. Your contributions are vital in sustaining and expanding our transformative work, ensuring that faith-inspired actions continue to drive global progress towards gender equality.

By joining us on **#TheRoad2Equality**, we can co-create a world where all individuals, regardless of gender, can live with dignity and equality.



FUND THE REVOLUTION FOR GENDER JUSTICE TO COUNTER THE BACKLASHES!

Call to Action

Join us in funding the revolution for gender justice and strategically counter the backlashes on gender equality. Your investment will contribute to the Gender Justice Programme's transformative work and empower communities locally, nationally, regionally and globally.

www.actalliance.org/gender-justice/