

Purpose and intended use

The ACT Alliance maintains the Humanitarian Operations Manual (HOM) to guide our work on humanitarian response operations. This manual, redesigned and modified in 2023, replaces the document ACT Alliance Response to an Emergency: Policy, Guidelines and Tools, and Annexes, approved by the ACT Governing Board May 2012 and amended May 2014, and other related guidance issued by the ACT Secretariat since. This manual defines the scope and responsibilities of ACT Alliance stakeholders in its humanitarian responses. It also outlines the principles, standards, and protocols that the ACT Alliance adheres to.

The HOM is reviewed and updated, at a minimum, annually by the ACT Alliance Secretariat through the Emergency Preparedness and Humanitarian Response (EPHR) staff. Online access to the HOM is offered via the ACT Alliance website. Resource links are provided throughout the HOM for easy access during response operations.

Its intended users are ACT Alliance Requesting Members, Implementing Partners and Funding Members, and their partners, ACT Forum leadership along with ACT Secretariat staff with humanitarian programming responsibilities.

Guiding Principles

As mandated by the ACT Alliance Global Strategy 2019-2026 and its implementation plan, the following Guiding Principles will be observed in ACT humanitarian work:

- **Total ACT Response.** ACT Alliance's humanitarian work will seek to harness and communicate the combined strength of its members in delivering response at scale and considerable reach through the 'Total ACT Response' approach. Most ACT members respond through the ACT humanitarian mechanism, and in many cases, members also respond using their own resources or bilateral funding to non-ACT partners. Total ACT Response includes the work of all ACT members responding to the emergency in their different capacities and contexts (e.g. implementation, funding, advocacy, and communications).
- **Quality and accountable response.** ACT Alliance will seek to consistently deliver quality and accountable humanitarian responses. This will be guided by the Humanitarian Charter, the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), Sphere Standards and companion standards, including tools for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. To ensure timeliness and efficiency, ACT response will be strengthened by the establishment of appropriate digital platforms and management systems.
- **Working with faith actors.** ACT humanitarian work will be guided by our commitment to ecumenical diakonia, and actively highlight the important role of faith actors and religious leaders in humanitarian response and advocacy, without proselytizing.
- **Forum-driven alliance.** ACT humanitarian programme goals will be enabled by strengthening the role of ACT national forums in engaging local partners and communities in delivering humanitarian response.
- **Locally led response.** ACT Alliance will support survivor and community-led approaches to humanitarian response and support the shift in power in the humanitarian system toward local actors.

- Joint programming. ACT humanitarian programmes will seek to employ joint programming approaches among its members that demonstrate strong coordination and multi-sectoral impacts and are supported by a dynamic approach to funding and fundraising.
- Capacity sharing. ACT Alliance will invest in strengthening the humanitarian capacity of forums and national members through robust capacity and learning mechanisms, sharing of technology and expertise, and establishment of an effective surge mechanism.
- Emergency preparedness and response planning. ACT humanitarian response will be defined by ACT national forums based on their own contexts through up-to-date Emergency Preparedness and Response Plans (EPRPs), which is made mandatory for all forums as part of ACT humanitarian reform.
- Humanitarian Advocacy. ACT humanitarian advocacy will be primarily guided by the ACT Advocacy Strategy, the Grand Bargain commitments, and the crisis/country-specific advocacy of ACT forums and communities
- Holistic programming. ACT Alliance will seek to employ holistic programming approaches in emergency response and exit and sustainability strategies by establishing links with other thematic priorities of the ACT Global Strategy, i.e. migration and displacement, climate justice, gender justice, and peace and human security. ACT Alliance humanitarian work will develop tools in humanitarian needs assessments and programme design to realise this vision.

The Humanitarian imperative and principles

The humanitarian imperative is a principle which states that “action should be taken to prevent or alleviate human suffering arising out of disaster or conflict, and that nothing should override this principle.” The ACT Alliance and its members affirm this principle and are expected to integrate it throughout the planning, execution, and evaluation of humanitarian response efforts.

- **Humanity:** The chief motivation of humanitarian action is to save lives and alleviate suffering in a manner that respects and restores personal dignity.
- **Independence:** The humanitarian principle of independence maintains that humanitarian objectives must remain autonomous from political, economic, or other objectives. Humanitarians must not be subject to control or subordination by such non-humanitarian interests.
- **Impartiality:** Humanitarian action should be based solely on need, with priority given to the most urgent cases irrespective of race, nationality, gender, religious belief, political opinion or class.
- **Neutrality:** Humanitarian actors must maintain neutrality by refraining from taking sides in hostilities or engaging in political, racial, religious or ideological controversies.

Critically, the ACT Alliance does not tie the promise, delivery or distribution of assistance to the embracing or acceptance of a particular political or religious creed.

Do No Harm

Humanitarian Do No Harm principles should be applied to all ACT Alliance assessments and responses. ACT Alliance assessments should:

- Avoid building unrealistic expectations in the communities of what an assessment will lead to.
- Ensure that individuals who are participating in assessments do so with their informed consent.

- Ensure referral protocols are in place in the event a beneficiary reports or discloses a violation or issue to an enumerator (enumerators should be trained on how to address and manage these situations in each specific context).
- Avoid assessment fatigue by the disaster communities through effective coordination of assessments with government units and other humanitarian actors and by using secondary data sharing to the greatest extent possible. Multiple visits without visible outcomes lead to assessment fatigue and unrealistic expectations.
- Consider the protection of all populations involved. Take all steps necessary to decrease the vulnerability of populations.
- Be sensitive to cultural norms (including gender norms that may impact the safety, dignity, access, and participation of the community members), individual privacy and the potential psychological impact of an assessment.
- Have clear processes and procedures in place for minimising and managing the collection of any Personally Identifiable Information (PII). If for some reason PII is collected (to be avoided), all PII should be securely maintained and then permanently destroyed at the earliest possible opportunity.
- If it is determined that communities cannot provide their informed consent, or that conducting or completing an assessment may create risk, the assessment should cease, and appropriate follow-up action (to address potential risk) should be taken by the assessment team.

Locally led action

The ACT Alliance commits to promote just distribution of power and resources and enabling of diverse civil society in its humanitarian responses. By ensuring that local members are at the centre of decision

making within our humanitarian mechanism, we will position ourselves to inspire other actors to follow suit. In doing so, we commit to ensure that our approaches to locally led response prioritise respect for the human rights of all. ACT wants to see listening, respect and humility at the centre of interactions with communities and local actors. Pursuing locally led response and equitable partnerships are a matter of justice, overturning post-colonial approaches.

References and Templates

[Our collective action on locally led humanitarian response](#)