

Christian Aid South Africa: solidarity and global action against apartheid and inequality

An exit learning review

February 2021



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Acknowledgements:

This research report was written by Kate Newman, head of the Research, Evidence and Learning team at Christian Aid. There are many people that contributed to the writing of the report. Gerhard Buttner, South Africa programme manager, provided guidance in developing the terms of reference, facilitated the review through selecting partners and engaging them in the review, and provided excellent feedback and suggestions on the first draft. Karen Brock and Suzanne Fisher-Murray, research communications advisors, edited the report and greatly contributed to the writing and structuring of the report. But most importantly, thanks goes to all the review participants, from Christian Aid, our South African partner organisations, and the members of the ACT Ubumbano who generously shared their experiences, reflections and insights. I have tried to capture and share the very important work that they have been part of, and to celebrate it in this report.

Christian Aid exists to create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. We are a global movement of people, churches and local organisations who passionately champion dignity, equality and justice worldwide. We are the changemakers, the peacemakers, the mighty of heart.

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Cover: Two activists embrace in KwaMashu, an informal settlement north of Durban, South Africa. Christian Aid's partner, Church Land Programme, works closely with the shackdweller movement (Abahlali baseMjondolo) so that people in KwaMashu can live without fear of being evicted from their shack homes, which many have lived in for more than ten years. Photo Credit: Simon Hutchinson, Irish Methodist World Development & Relief

List of abbreviations, acronyms and partner organisations cited in the report

ACT Alliance	A coalition of Protestant and Orthodox churches and church-related organisations engaged in humanitarian, development and advocacy work. Christian Aid is a member of ACT Alliance.
ACT Ubumbano	A network of European ACT members and civil society organisations from Southern Africa (Christian Aid Partner)
BMF	Bench Marks Foundation (Christian Aid partner)
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CLP	Church Land Programme (Christian Aid Partner)
E8	European Eight (European members of the ACT Alliance)
EJN	Economic Justice Network (Christian Aid partner)
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SPII	Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (Christian Aid partner)

Executive summary

Christian Aid first began working in South Africa in the 1950s with 'clandestine' grants, given to Black community programmes to signal support and solidarity. Over the next 60-70 years the programme evolved in different ways, responding both to shifts within South Africa and within the organisation.

The final stage of this journey was for Christian Aid, along with other European members of the ACT Alliance, and Southern African civil society organisations to establish ACT Ubumbano, a solidarity hub fighting for economic, environmental and gender justice. Throughout its long history solidarity was a key value in the programme, but what this meant in practice shifted as needs changed.

This review explores key themes in Christian Aid's engagement in South Africa, noting in particular the depth of political analysis and strength of national partners in South Africa, and how this shaped the type of relationships and contribution that Christian Aid was able to make in this context. This was not a one-way process as our partners also influenced Christian Aid's thinking and practice. Examples of how partners influenced Christian Aid include:

- **Theological approach and development theology:** through work of the Theology and Development Programme at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Church Land Programme, which was still a partner at the time of programme closure.
 - **Policy analysis and positioning:** initially in the climate change 'space' and more recently in relation to issues of economic justice, particularly around framing and researching illicit financial flows to ensure solutions benefited communities, for example through the work of Economic Justice Network, Bench Marks Foundation, and Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII).
 - **Solidarity relationships and action:** beginning during the apartheid era, but sustained across the entire programme. Actions included petitioning and campaigning in the UK to amplify the voices of those living under apartheid in South Africa, joint contextual theology to build bridges between communities facing the challenge of mining/fracking in the UK and in South Africa, exchange visits and learning between church leaders to inspire church action for social justice and strengthening relationships between civil society organisations in Southern Africa and the other five major emerging national economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), referred to by the acronym BRICS.
- Christian Aid partners in South Africa often shaped the analysis that underpinned its international policy and advocacy work. The review explores why and in what ways the experience in South Africa turned the traditional partnership relationship on its head – enabling an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) to truly be led by its national development partners. It suggests that key to this was:
- **The national context and type of partner.** South Africa has an active and intellectual civil society, with many civil society organisations emerging post-1994 to support the building of a new democratic South Africa, led by individuals with strong links to the anti-apartheid movement. These organisations analysed poverty as having a political, structural and global dimension, and 'spoke the same language' as policy and advocacy staff in Christian Aid. What's more, they had national and regional connections and profile that made developing linkages to global narratives and spaces more straightforward.
 - **The direct engagement with theology.** Many church leaders had been active and outspoken against apartheid and understood the role of the church as a social justice actor. The ideas of contextual and liberation theology, and the strength of faith motivated action was a rallying call for Christian Aid which, although a faith-based organisation, had limited debate on their own theology. This meant that there was interest and openness to learn from the theological analysis and action from South Africa.
 - **The initial framing and politics of the programme.** The South Africa programme was immediately located in the global arena due to the horrific realities of the apartheid regime. Christian Aid engaged with its supporters in the UK, asking them to take action against apartheid. These global connections were maintained throughout the history of the programme, establishing a very different relationship from most other Christian Aid programmes; and leading to different types of engagement and action from the UK supporters. Although the context shifted, the idea of global solidarity and different types of north-south relationship remained strong throughout the programme.

Across the history of the programme, racial inequality has been a crucial problem to address. The programme started by campaign against apartheid, a government system that formalised racism. It evolved to engage with different forms of structural inequality, which were not explicitly cast

as racist, but were clearly unjust. The review concludes by reflecting on how learning from this experience could be relevant to Christian Aid today as INGOs grapple with how to better respond to racism and racial inequality in the sector.

Introduction

Black lives matter. As I sit and write this review, the world has been shaken by the casual racism and systemic injustice that led to the killing of George Floyd. Ongoing police brutality across the USA and the presidential commentary have been shocking. Yet the worldwide response and momentum created has been powerful, with calls of 'If not now, when?' as different people in different places grapple with both historic and present-day racism, prejudice and injustice.

It is hard not to see similarities between this context and the one that shaped Christian Aid's initial engagement in South Africa, and its consistent focus on solidarity action. It appears somehow paradoxical that Christian Aid is closing its doors on, or at least shifting its relationship with South Africa, whose history is dominated by racial inequality, while simultaneously trying to make sense of its wider approach to race and racial inequality.

Jack Arthey¹, who joined Christian Aid in 1972, reflected on how, on his first day of work, he was contacted by Christian Aid's first director (Janet Lacey) who demanded he meet her for dinner. Prior to joining Christian Aid, Janet had travelled to the USA to demonstrate solidarity with the civil rights movement there; and on meeting Martin Luther King, had offered Christian Aid communication and public relations support to King when he travelled to the UK. Her vision was very influential on Christian Aid's early approach and practice:

It became increasingly clear that the evening was intended as the induction to CA that its first Director feared I wouldn't receive unless she took charge... She explained that when she became director of Inter Church Aid [Christian Aid], she needed to recruit more staff; a 'cadre of political awareness workers' rather than aid specialists, because if people in the UK churches didn't understand the causes of poverty and injustice in the world, they would never take any action to change the world....She referred to British Council of Churches reports on international issues, such as *The Future of South Africa* (1965) and felt that CA should associate itself with them even if more conservative people in the churches were unhappy with that.²

Such positioning influenced Christian Aid's initial engagement with South Africa and its ongoing solidarity action throughout the 1970s, 80s and 90s. Arthey's experience of how he and another staff member (Kenith David, a Black South African priest) drank tea with Desmond Tutu and discussed the role

of the churches in the struggle against apartheid, and actions they could take, conveys a flavour of the Christian Aid of the 1970s. He describes how this led to a clandestine visit to South Africa (to express solidarity and experience structural injustice himself):

[On my visit] I would meet Methodist friends in Durban, worship with Anglicans in Pietermaritzburg and meet an ecumenical group supporting migrant labourers in Cape Town. I would also visit Black community programmes in King Williams Town and meet some of the women's lawyers of the Black Sash movement. My visit.... [was seen as] solidarity action in the light of apartheid being incompatible with the Gospel. It was evident that the British churches/CA contributed to helping with the living costs of the dependants of activists in detention because of their political beliefs, providing lawyers to ensure poor people arrested under the Pass Law could be represented in court, providing seed capital to enable people who had been forcibly removed to the middle of nowhere to farm small plots of land or set up small sewing enterprises, to provide scholarships for Black students to acquire the leadership skills needed for a free South Africa and covering the costs of night schools for workers living in Soweto and Kliptown... The whole visit was life-changing and I understood the need for solidarity more than ever. Experiencing the injustice of a society organised on the basis of skin colour was overwhelming. I came back angry and frustrated and determined to reflect the experience in my work in CA's education department. An important learning point for me was that development is about power and liberation. What power could I muster to challenge such appalling injustice?

These recollections of the way work was pursued under apartheid in South Africa make me wonder how Christian Aid can rediscover and reconnect to its past as it constructs its response to ongoing racial injustice. There is also much to learn from the later work and ongoing challenges of working in a context of extreme inequality including racial injustice. Although apartheid formally ended in the early 1990s, racial inequality remains pervasive in today's South Africa.

In 1994, South Africa held its first free and fair elections, heralding the presidency of Nelson Mandela and the start of a new era for South Africa. Hope and opportunity abounded. And yet:

It was like a waterfall. Apartheid had ended, but so many issues remained, so many injustices were suddenly apparent across the country. (Gerhard Buttner, South Africa programme manager)

Civil society organisations (CSOs) that had formed as part of the struggle against apartheid now needed to respond to this different context, and decide where to focus their attention. Many members of civil society moved into government, and the CSOs themselves often focused on supporting the new government to govern and collaborate with policymakers at every level. However, over time, as the challenges of governance became more apparent and economic inequalities continued to increase, these same organisations became increasingly critical in their engagement.

Thirty years later, these same CSOs are facing a new challenge; their ageing leaders are wondering how to pass on the baton to the next generation. As the next generation came of age after apartheid ended, their activism and struggles are sometimes shaped by other issues apart from the struggle for racial justice. The older generations question whether they have the same activism 'in their bones', and ask, 'Are they looking for a job rather than taking on a life's mission?'

Speaking to Christian Aid staff and partners and hearing their rich histories brought home how entangled people's own lives are with their country's history, and the passionate commitments people made to fight for justice. While Christian Aid has transformed over the past 50 years, with increasing professionalisation and management approaches, the roots and the politics of much of the work have stayed the same.

Likewise the legislative frameworks and political structures of South Africa have shifted, but many of the entrenched relations, social norms and structural and racial inequalities remain. And although the

modes, form and focus of Christian Aid South Africa have shifted, the sentiment and vision, of solidarity, faith-based action and struggle for a just fair world where all can live a life of dignity, has continued.

This review focuses on two areas:

1. How the work of Christian Aid South Africa was influential in wider thinking and practice across Christian Aid.
2. The evolution of Christian Aid South Africa's organisational model, particularly the emergence of ACT Ubumbano (a network of European ACT members and civil society organisations from Southern Africa). It also outlines Christian Aid's collaboration as part of ACT Ubumbano while continuing in bilateral partnerships with certain South African civil society partners, referred to as the 'hybrid model'.

The review does not consider South Africa's programme of work or the impact of its work in-depth.³ Rather it focuses on the nature of the partnerships developed, and the mutual learning and exchange that was possible because of the types of organisation Christian Aid partnered with.

The report is structured in four parts:

1. An overview of Christian Aid in South Africa and its different phases of work.
2. An analysis of five key partnerships and what they have contributed to understanding and practice across Christian Aid.
3. The emergence of ACT Ubumbano and what we refer to as the 'hybrid model', which is defined below in Section 5. This explores why and how ACT Ubumbano emerged, and with what vision and values.
4. A reflection on four key themes that emerged during the review, to find what we can learn from these experiences to inform our practice going forward.

Methodology

This learning review is based on a series of online (mainly video) interviews with Christian Aid staff, partners, and ACT Alliance members. The scope of the review is quite limited and is mainly focused on the last five years of Christian Aid's work in South Africa. However, many of the partners had worked with Christian Aid for longer, and therefore were able to share insights from previous eras. I also spoke with Jack Arthey who held multiple roles in Christian Aid over a 40-year period and shared his memories of the programme in the 1970s; Beverley Haddad, a previous director of the 'Theology and Development' programme, University of KwaZulu-Natal, which was a Christian Aid partner between 1995 and 2010; and Robert Hayward who gave funding and project management support to the programme extensively between 2003 and 2006, and again more recently.⁴

The interviews took place in April 2020, just as the COVID-19 crisis was unfolding in the UK and evolving rapidly in South Africa. While the interviews were semi-structured and focused on a series of questions agreed in the terms of reference, the COVID-19 context influenced our discussion, framing and analysis. It has also shaped the process of writing and reflecting on the interviews and impacted directly on the timeframe of the review, making both the process of reflection and analysis, and the possibility of engaging directly with staff and partners in this, much more challenging.

Alongside the interviews I also reviewed a range of documentation, including programme reviews and documentation concerning the set-up of ACT Ubumbano.

1. The evolution of Christian Aid in South Africa

Christian Aid's early engagement in South Africa was framed by the possibilities and needs of the apartheid era. The programme was initially shaped by a sharp focus on global solidarity, and Christian Aid was firmly located in the politics of the struggle. This was characterised by 'solidarity grants', which were grants to local Black community projects to support their work to organise activism. Such grants were initially clandestine (from the 1950s to 1970s), but became more public during the 1980s, when Christian Aid began to organise and speak out in the UK in solidarity with South Africa.

There were five phases of engagement in South Africa, and while the practice looked different in each, common themes emerged that are relevant to understanding the final iteration of the South Africa programme.

The first common theme across these phases is that the programme has always been located in a space of global connections and solidarity. This overall framing meant that the South Africa programme has been particularly influential in Christian Aid's thinking beyond national borders. For example, Christian Aid directly criticised national policy in South Africa and rallied UK-based supporters on this issue. As an organisation that has generally avoided direct critical engagement on issues of national governance, this was a very rare occurrence.

In 1987 CA ran a public education programme with the stark headline 'Apartheid makes people poor'. CA was accused of acting politically and the Charity Commissioners wrote to us. It had the effect of positioning CA in the anti-apartheid debate.... . Michael Taylor wrote to Margaret Thatcher on a number of occasions about the need for Her Majesty's Government to impose sanctions on South Africa In February 1989 CA and the British Council of Churches organised the Britain and Southern Africa – The Way Forward out of which the Southern Africa

Coalition grew... [A year later] CA staff played a major part in organising the Coalition's Mass Lobby of Parliament... [which] called for the UK government to no longer stand out against the rest of the world in opposing measures to bring an end to apartheid. More than 4,000 people lobbied their MPs. It had the feel of a great celebration. (Jack Arthey¹)

Secondly, the analysis that underpinned the programme since it began was political and structural. Partner organisations were able to analyse the causes of poverty and power and structural inequalities, and could mobilise communities to speak out with agency and secure their rights.⁵ This political expertise and analysis has influenced Christian Aid at the regional and global level, with many global policy staff looking to South African partners to help inform analysis and guide global positioning.

Thirdly, the role of church leadership, church solidarity, theology and action motivated by faith can be seen strongly both during and after apartheid. As well as generating impact in South Africa, this also contributed to Christian Aid's global thinking and practice around church engagement and prophetic voice.

Finally, the strength of these partner organisations – in both national and regional arenas – shaped the relationships these organisations established with Christian Aid. Their strength led to partners speaking openly and honestly, challenging and co-creating with Christian Aid. Partners were also influential in the emergence of ACT Ubumbano and the organisational form, values and vision that developed (see Section 5 below).

It is these themes that I explore in detail to reflect on the contribution that Christian Aid South Africa has made to the wider organisation, to understand the nature of the programme, which closed in 2020, and also to understand the ongoing opportunities for ACT Ubumbano.

The five phases of Christian Aid in South Africa

- 1. The early days.**⁶ Partnership working and collaboration in this period was limited because it was largely hidden. The main focus of the partnership was on financial support to Black community programmes. Because the partnership was hidden, there was little engagement with the detail of activity, or opportunity for strategic review. Christian Aid supported action in South Africa and invested in church solidarity links, hosting the occasional visitor. The organisation did not speak out publicly on apartheid, but stuck to the role of the 'Good Samaritan'.
- 2. The 1980s and early 90s.** Christian Aid became increasingly bold in its work supporting political education, in speaking out on apartheid, and in rallying supporters to show their solidarity against apartheid. Alongside these UK-based activities, Christian Aid continued to support partners in South Africa with small grants.
- 3. The end of apartheid to 2010.** Towards the end of apartheid and in the early years of the new democratic nation, partnerships became more systemic and established, and were no longer clandestine. Christian Aid could collaborate with and support churches and other CSOs to prepare new leaders, engage with the (new) institutions of democratic governance, and build the new nation. Partnerships became closer – both physically, with the programme manager spending more time in South Africa, and practically, as direct engagement and discussion on strategy and action was possible. Over time, partners became more critical of government as the realities of structural inequality remained, and the extent of governance challenges emerged. Christian Aid provided significant support on HIV/AIDS during this phase and into the early 2010s, which was a contentious area nationally.
- 4. A moment of crisis for the South Africa programme.** Partnership during this period remained strong and close. However in the early 2010s, it was becoming increasingly clear that funders were reducing funding to South Africa, as its national wealth increased and the 'BRICS' emerged as a substantial new grouping. The programme was also impacted by the reduction of HIV-specific funding, which had been central to its operation. At the same time, due to shifts in organisational dynamics and increasing focus on alignment with global processes, the South Africa programme manager became distanced from Christian Aid internationally.
- 5. 2015 onwards.** The past five years have seen the rebirth and emergence of a hybrid, multi-donor programming model. Christian Aid reviewed its programme and invested alongside ACT Alliance to support the development of ACT Ubumbano, whilst retaining a direct link with key strategic partners to support work on economic justice and rights. In 2020, although the South Africa programme itself closed, the relationship that remains with ACT Ubumbano is perhaps more similar to the early days of the programme, with a strong emphasis on solidarity and a more distant partnership.

2. Faith-based action and theological analysis

We wanted to strengthen political democracy and improve community impact. One way to do this was to encourage Christian leadership with an ideology of development. We could offer this to South Africa and strengthen the liberation trajectory of the country.

Beverley Haddad, academic partner and previous Director of the Theology and Development programme, KwaZulu-Natal University

Throughout the anti-apartheid struggles, Christian Aid acted in solidarity with church leaders, and faith and theology remained an important part of the programme after apartheid. Two particularly influential partnerships were with the Church Land Programme (CLP), and the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal. While the former came into being in 1997, with a focus on supporting the redistribution of church land, the Theology and Development programme emerged in 1994, with a specific focus on encouraging development thinking among church leadership to 'strengthen the liberation trajectory of the country'.

[U]nder apartheid the Church was called upon to resist injustice and oppression. Today we are called upon to play a role in the reconstruction and development of our society. There are similar challenges in other countries in Africa, where the impact of neo-colonialism, globalisation and structural-adjustment policies have left many people unemployed, poor and lacking basic health and educational facilities...

We believe that the Church has a crucial role to play in this situation. That role includes a critique of the dominant models of development along with a commitment to people-centred, sustainable livelihoods. (Theology and Leadership Programme vision and rationale as quoted in the 2005 evaluation document, based on the webpage text introducing the programme)

The Church Land Programme and the Theology and Development programme both began in a period of hope for South Africa, but the partners involved noted that once the initial euphoria related to ending apartheid had passed, it became clear that much

work remained to be done. Weak institutions were open to corruption, the system that had perpetuated inequality under apartheid could not be dismantled overnight, and while many of the policies developed by the first post-apartheid government were redistributive and progressive, state capture by neo-liberal forces was clear. Implementation of policies was shaped by ongoing power dynamics that were privileging a new elite. There were also concerns that the church was becoming more aligned to the government and less outspoken about economic inequalities and injustice.

The challenge in South Africa is that, post-apartheid, there was an adoption of neo-liberal policies, which led to increased inequality. There is a nexus between state capital and the ruling powers to maintain inequality; the leadership is extractive, and there are structural imbalances. The role of the church was important for national liberation, but after the struggle the institution of the church acted with the government, and the economic paradigm meant that it lost its critical engagement. (Alvin Anthony, activist, external consultant and evaluation facilitator of ACT Ubumbano)

Such reflections led to many civil society organisations repositioning their practice. For CLP this included a more critical engagement with the concepts of development, pushing for a more people-centred, transformative approach, focused on empowerment and agency at the grassroots. Working in very different ways, these partnerships enabled Christian Aid to support faith-based social action in South Africa, and to learn from and deepen its understanding of critical and progressive theology, and what this brings to development.

Contextual, liberation and relational theology

At different moments in Christian Aid's history, it has paid varying attention to theology, and the theological basis for its organisational values, strategy and practice. Three approaches have been particularly relevant:

Liberation theology, which evolved in Latin America, focuses on a 'preferential option for the poor'⁷ which entails working with them to make the oppression and injustices that people face more explicit in order to enable liberation.

Contextual theology emphasises making meaning of biblical teachings based on analysis of political and social context, and focuses attention on the process called 'see, judge, act'.⁸

Relational theology takes as its starting point the relation between God and human beings and puts primacy on building strong, just relationships between people, and between people and the Earth.

Christian Aid publications on organisational theology (2010 and 2012)⁹ foreground learning and thinking from the South Africa programme, and explore how the three different approaches to theology interact and together provide the basis for Christian Aid's development thinking.

For example, Christian Aid drew heavily on the teachings of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Theology and Development programme, which provided the theoretical and practical foundations to students to 'do theology' with communities. The course was grounded in an analysis, reflection and action cycle against injustice and introduced the concepts and practice of contextual and liberation theology. While the students of KwaZulu-Natal were exposed to theoretical foundations, staff members of the Church Land Programme were able to put these teachings into practice through their work. By exploring scripture in relation to the issues of the day, CLP activists aimed to make sense of how the church should respond to the political and social context and take action, based on the principle that if you do not act against something, you are for it.

At first glance these approaches to theology appear distinct from Christian Aid's own emphasis on relational theology (defined above), which argues that poverty and injustice exist because of flawed structures and broken relationships, and if these are exposed and healed, this can bring about a more just and equal world. It is strongly expressed in its theological publications and strategy documents and explains why and how partnership is the foundation of Christian Aid's work. However, further reflection on the relationship between the different approaches suggests that while Christian Aid's relational theology analysis provides a framework in which to view a healed world, where every person is able to live a life of dignity, the processes of reflection, analysis and action within liberation and contextual theology offer a means of moving towards this ideal.

The Theology and Development Programme

In 1994, the same year as the first democratic South African elections, academics in the School of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal developed and piloted a Leadership and Development Programme, which later became a postgraduate Theology and Development Programme. The programme aimed to develop Christian leaders who were interested in social justice, and Christian development actors who wanted to draw on theology to understand their development practice. The students were invited to study topics such as 'the church and development', 'people, power and faith', 'current issues in theology and development', and 'critical perspectives on development praxis'. Course leaders were:

activist-inclined intellectuals ... [with an] ideological homogeneity founded on a common commitment to 'the struggle', to emancipatory engagement with the experiential context/s of the poor, and to working out theology 'in the field' ... meaning a decisive commitment to popular resistance against apartheid and its deprivations.... [and] to the political, ecclesial and theological connections with other contexts and other struggles of the poor and oppressed. (Programme Evaluation 2005: 20)

The Theology and Development Programme was influential on the practice of theology in development in South Africa. By drawing in students from across Africa, and through its links to Christian Aid, its impact was also felt much further afield.

Christian Aid began partnering with the Theology and Development Programme in 1995, and supported it until 2010-11, through funding bursaries for students from across Africa, including providing small grants to students in order to complete their studies. Beverley Haddad, one of the early co-ordinators of the programme, noted that the only similar programme in the world was at the University of Edinburgh.

Christian Aid's bursaries were targeted at:

- people who had 'good potential to provide leadership for faith-based development work amongst the poor in Africa'
- were financially in need
- showed academic potential, and
- 'express[ed] a commitment to the broad project of the programme, including to work with the poor' (2005 evaluation).

Although the bursaries benefited their recipients as individuals, Christian Aid's interest was also in strengthening the capacity of the church to reach, work with and strengthen the poor.

In essence, Christian Aid would be considering this not so much as financial aid for scholarships, but a project to train leaders/activists from churches and NGOs to improve/increase the involvement of the church/NGOs with grassroots communities with the aim being a people-centred development approach to improve the economic and social well-being, including sustainable livelihoods, of communities and individuals within those communities. (1998 letter from Christian Aid to the School of Religion and Theology)

Reflecting on the partnership, Beverley Haddad noted that:

Christian Aid was a significant partner for the programme. It was a real relationship, not just a bureaucratic one; we were working with people who shared the same values as us, and valued the work we were doing. It was a good relationship, a valuable partnership and sometimes also a strategic one. I am deeply grateful to Christian Aid for the vision they had ...[and] now I bump into key graduates across the continent who are in high-profile positions in the Church.

A 2005 evaluation of the programme explored the extent to which the programme had an impact – understood in relation to the learning and transformation of individual students and on wider development outcomes. Reflections from students evidenced their deep learning on the role of faith in development and how to integrate theology into the

realities of everyday life, but also suggested that the programme was having an impact on development through students integrating their learning into their work, taking on new roles and translating the 'see, judge, act' approach into practice.

Throughout the programme there were tensions about the balance between theological and development ambitions, which had an impact on where the student body should be drawn from. However, while the balance between these two aspects shifted at different points in the programme, there are good examples of how it created synergies between the two.

Christian Aid's funding role ended quite suddenly in 2010. Christian Aid South Africa was experiencing challenges at this time, and they coincided with the tragic death of the programme's initiator. Although there has been minimal contact since then, the programme's initial thinking on theology has remained influential for Christian Aid. Despite the loss of Christian Aid funding, the programme continues today, although unfortunately the withdrawal of the bursary funds meant that the course has struggled to retain its initial ground-breaking social engagement and vibrancy.

Church Land Programme (CLP)

Partnership is to make a crack, it opens up a space to connect differently, to explore with integrity. It offers hope for a new practice, a new presence. And at times it is like a snail, it is slow, but it leaves a mark – this is not about implementation, but about critical engagement, thinking, trying something different.

CLP, focus group discussion

While the connection with the Theology and Development Programme enabled Christian Aid to deepen its thinking and understanding of the relationship between the two, a second partnership in South Africa helped ground this thinking in practice.

The long-term partnership with the CLP, founded in 1997, has gone through different phases, including periods when Christian Aid funded the work, and moments that have been about solidarity, exchanging ideas and learning together. Although the CLP was founded after the end of apartheid, it knew Christian Aid because of its active solidarity during apartheid. In common with other partnerships, this early, radical solidarity work was central to framing the partnership once apartheid had ended.

We knew about Christian Aid before we partnered with them. They were known as an organisation that would act for justice, take a risky position and be present... Christian Aid wasn't primarily a funder, rather a solidarity partner in the struggle against apartheid, standing by those who were detained, supporting activities in townships, participating in boycotts. (Graham Philpott, director of CLP)

Initially CLP focused on supporting wider government land reforms through the redistribution of church-owned land to Black people who had been dispossessed of their rights to land during the colonial and apartheid eras. This land had been transferred into the hands of the church through racist policies and practices, which had removed Black people from their land and given the private title to churches instead.

In a post-apartheid South Africa, this posed critical challenges to churches regarding Black people's access to land and restorative justice. CLP initially engaged Christian Aid as an ally to work on redistribution of land with the Protestant Church leadership, and during its first five years, CLP was quite successful in supporting the reallocation of land, but increasingly the organisation realised that 'educated business men were benefiting from the transfer, and our work was just reinforcing power dynamics' (CLP focus group participant).

This led the CLP to shift away from supporting the government land reform programme and to begin working with the poor and dispossessed, focusing on how the poor were being excluded from land ownership (not only of church land, but also commercial farms and urban land). This work aimed to support poor peoples' agency, 'to enable, spark and support their action' (Focus group discussion, CLP) while also working with church leaders to encourage them to stand in solidarity with the poor and dispossessed. Trying to understand what was happening by exploring and making sense of poor peoples' experiences, and drawing on this analysis to take action, was a process of putting contextual theology into practice, and making 'see, judge, act' a reality.

This shift in focus had both theoretical underpinnings and concrete actions. As the CLP considered how to position itself, now that the people that it had acted alongside during the anti-apartheid struggle were in power, the organisation became more actively engaged in social movements and social action: 'We had learnt that advocacy at a high level does not always lead to change; it is with people on the ground where change happens' (focus group discussion, CLP).

At the same time (around 2006-2007), Christian Aid was becoming more interested in African regional advocacy, wanting to engage with South African partners who had a regional presence. CLP was focused locally and therefore was deemed less aligned to this wider ambition, and Christian Aid withdrew its financial support. However, CLP continued engaging with Christian Aid, for example participating in strategic discussions and events to explore what the South Africa programme should be doing and funding; and later (around 2011-2012), Christian Aid started funding CLP again.

The idea of 'being present' was central to CLPs work, and is reflected in this comment about Rob Cunningham, Christian Aid's South Africa Programme manager from around 2002 to 2015,¹⁰ who maintained close ties to CLP's work, even when it was not funding the organisation:

When I think about Christian Aid and partnership, I think about proximity. Rob was a good listener, he used to make a point to interact with communities, visit the settlements and understand the dynamics – he went to where people were, he didn't want us to bring them to urban centres. He participated in protest marches, for example in 2014 with Abahlali baseMjondolo he didn't step out of the situation, even though he was a funder. With him Christian Aid was an organisation that was prepared to sit in the middle of the mess. Questions of power, solidarity, presence, proximity, justice and struggle, the politics of development: these were all at the heart of our partnership. (Graham Philpott, director of CLP)

This deep philosophical connection has helped strengthen and sustain the partnership in its different forms over the years. There have also been many practical connections and space for exchange of views and learning, including with different parts of Christian Aid beyond the country team, based on a recognition that:

The church is a global organisation, and we can make these relations explicit, through making sense of our role and the political context in which we find ourselves, through 'just scripture' and solidarity. (John Plant, Church Relations, Christian Aid)

In recent years the connection with CLP has enabled two important initiatives to take place, which link communities in the UK and South Africa. The first uses online spaces to enable campaign groups to do real-time bible study together and has enabled communities campaigning against fracking in the UK

to link to communities in South Africa campaigning against mining.

We facilitated these spaces to make global connections, bringing communities in the global north and global south together around shared interests, so that they could see what is going on and translate their knowledge into joint actions, standing together. Often the partnership between communities in the global north and global south is asymmetric, but through this approach we build solidarity. It helps in animating the church in the UK, and to strengthen their relationship with the church in South Africa. (John Plant, Church Relations, Christian Aid)

The second initiative involved Christian Aid bringing a group of senior church leaders from the UK to South Africa to participate in a leadership programme and learn about CLP's work and practice. CLP encouraged participants to think through the roles they play as church leaders, the role of the church nationally and globally, and how to create links between the UK and South Africa.

Exchanges such as these encourage stronger links between the two countries and ongoing solidarity

action, as well as enabling learning and personal transformation, and creating possibilities for faith leaders in the UK to put just scripture and contextual theology into practice. This suggests that the partnership with CLP will have an impact long after the closure of Christian Aid South Africa. For the CLP, this global solidarity and space for learning reinforces their reflection that:

Critical thinking, engaging, trying something different all takes time. Our relationship was about global solidarity, not economic indicators; it was about injustice. We think about how our global systems are destroying humanity and having Christian Aid as a partner in that discussion is important. Christian Aid doesn't have the mandate or authority to unilaterally end our partnership here, we will find ways to re-negotiate and reformulate the relationship of solidarity. (Graham Philpott, director of CLP)

While the two partnerships with the CLP and the University of KwaZulu-Natal have been influential on Christian Aid's engagement with social justice in South Africa and the practice of theology, other partnerships have been equally influential on Christian Aid's policy, campaigning and advocacy.

3. National analysis and global influence

Within Christian Aid, as with many other international NGOs, the work of country teams and international policy and advocacy functions can be quite disjointed. There are many well-documented¹¹ reasons for this, including how, and by whom, issues are framed; the personal and professional employment trajectories of those working in different roles and places; the immediate needs, scope and potential of national development contexts; and alignment between local, national and global changes. An issue perhaps less discussed is the nature, form and focus of the national partners and partnerships, and how this impacts on global policy and advocacy.

My interviews with Christian Aid's partners in South Africa immediately indicated that they were familiar with the global development arena and confident in sharing their analysis and views within it. Not only were they articulate, but they also quickly drew links between experiences and realities in South Africa and the global politics and practice that shaped and constrained these realities. This included critiques of the capitalist economic paradigm influencing the day-to-day experiences of South Africans, as translated in South Africa through the practice of the ruling elite. They also shared how South Africa was influential across the continent because of its relative wealth and power. This meant partners were interested in engaging in action beyond national borders. They saw this work as complementary to the work that they were doing nationally, and their political analysis framed local and national issues as linked to global challenges.

This clarity of analysis encouraged Christian Aid's global policy and advocacy teams to connect to the South Africa programme and its partners. Thus, South African partners achieved impact in the country and beyond, influencing the way Christian Aid sought out thought leadership in the global south, in addition to strengthening engagement in regional and global forums through the bilateral (south-south) partnership relationships established, and global advocacy and campaign actions.

While partnerships with Christian Aid involved funding, partners found other key benefits, including:

- Access to global fora, debates and discourses – particularly through the G20
- Exchange on advocacy techniques, including how to make the moral and faith-based case for tax justice to encourage church action
- Exchanges with partners in different contexts (particularly India and Brazil as BRICS members)

who were working on similar issues, both to share strategies for their own action and to develop collective approaches to influence the G20

- Solidarity action to amplify national campaigns
- Support to engage with other networks that could help with funding – whether through active fundraising support to individual partners, or through supporting people on visits to the UK by arranging meetings and discussion events.

For example, Mandla Mbongeni Hadebe, interim director of the Economic Justice Network (EJN), discussed how Christian Aid's partnership had enabled EJN's analysis and action to become more visible. This included support to high-level framing – for example, to make the theological case for tax justice, but also to raise the issue of foreign investment and financial flows. It also provided access to the ACT Alliance: 'the exposure we received allowed us to take local issues to the global level, this opened global doors.' He reflected:

The value of the relationship with Christian Aid is not the funding, but through the different threads of friendship and partnership... Christian Aid introduced [our organisation] to the G20. As South Africa is the only African member of the G20, so it is impossible for us to put African views into the G20, but Christian Aid helped us think about the moral weight of the church. If church leaders talk about tax justice, political leaders will listen.

Our partnership with Christian Aid has been enriching and we will mourn it for some time. It has been so warm, consisting of mutual hand-holding. Does this mean one person is leading? No! It is mutually beneficial, we are leading each other as comrades, with the joy of friendship.

Moses Cloete, deputy director of Bench Marks Foundation (BMF), shared how Christian Aid's support had enabled BMF to conduct in-depth qualitative and quantitative research, especially into the health impacts of mining on the local community in Soweto,¹² but equally significant was how Christian Aid had also enabled BMF to make global links in support of their work:

Christian Aid assisted us to build links with the landless people's movement in Brazil, to enable international solidarity. We hope that ACT Ubumbano will continue to help us make these international connections.

Isobel Frye from SPII commented how the (early) partnership was: 'a brilliant relationship... It was more than just a conduit for funding, there was strategic conversation with other parts of Christian Aid, a partnership in the true sense of the word.'

Alongside links to fundraisers and support on visits to the UK, Frye also appreciated how Christian Aid involved SPII in its organisational strategy development processes, and facilitated exchanges with partners in different countries:

Christian Aid has always supported initiatives rather than knocking at the front door. I was conscientised to the idea of solidarity through Christian Aid, and through meeting partners from Brazil and Zimbabwe I could learn that we were on a common march. This helps against fatigue; it is interesting and encouraging. Facilitated conversation and critical thinking space are good leverage for greater reach and an extended gaze.

However, all partners also identified some limitations to the partnership, including the impact of internal changes in Christian Aid:

There was more standardisation of partnership, more internal change in Christian Aid. It was no longer consultation, just communication, and the distance between the different parts of Christian Aid became further apart, more bureaucratised and impersonal. While the South Africa

representatives still batted for us, they seemed to have less voice, less power and were more anxious. (Civil society partner)

There were also limitations to solidarity action among UK supporters:

We are like a plant that has been given some water. We could grow into a tree, but the work is never done, we always need alliance and solidarity. With Christian Aid, the relationship has been good, honestly. But maybe we didn't transcend the barrier to get a proper exchange. We didn't get to know the people who sustain Christian Aid, who give sustenance to the organisation. We connected with Christian Aid on business and human rights, but not with their supporters. This limited the potential in the British contexts. (Civil society partner)

All three partners suggested a strong sense of shared purpose and vision, rooted in struggle, along with an expression of solidarity. The frustrations about process and the limitations of certain actions did not undermine the overall value of becoming a partner with Christian Aid. These partnerships, in turn, influenced the emergence of ACT Ubumbano, which I explore below. But, prior to that, it is also important to understand Christian Aid's view of these partnerships, and their benefits for the organisation.

Overview of partners

When Christian Aid South Africa closed, it had four funded partnerships with: the Church Land Programme (CLP), the Economic Justice Network (EJN) of FOCCISA, Bench Marks Foundation (BMF), and Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII). In common with the CLP, the other three partners also felt connected to Christian Aid because of their shared history of engagement in the anti-apartheid movement.

Christian Aid was the first partner of Bench Marks. We began in 2003, but we knew Christian Aid as a loyal partner in the struggle. They nurtured us from the start. Christian Aid was a funder, and then it introduced us to other funders. We had a flexible arrangement; they gave us core funding and took a risk on us. (Moses Cloete, Deputy Director, Bench Marks Foundation)

The Economic Justice Network (EJN) of FOCCISA (the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa) was established in 1997 and works with 12 National Councils of Churches in Southern Africa. It encourages churches to speak out on issues of economic injustice, and to act as a catalyst to engage people in promoting just economic and social structures, paying particular attention to the experiences and concerns of poor and marginalised people. It works on issues including the extractives industry, tax justice, debt, trade, food security and climate change.

Bench Marks Foundation (BMF) focuses on monitoring the actions of multinational corporations in South Africa (and Southern Africa) to promote a critical and ethical voice on what corporate social responsibility should look like in practice. Alongside monitoring corporate practice, BMF also builds the capacity of local communities to advocate and speak for themselves. It is faith-influenced, working with the church to promote a culture of ethical investment, but the focus is largely on value-based rather than faith-based

action. BMF also acts as an interlocutor, speaking directly to people in power, recognising that advocacy at different levels can be mutually reinforcing.

Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII) is a research think tank set up in 2006. It has a cross-sectoral approach, bringing together policymakers, academics and CSOs to identify gaps in knowledge and to carry out research on poverty and inequality to inform policy in Southern Africa. SPII is well positioned to be both nationally influential and internationally relevant, and is involved at the highest level of policymaking.



A woman who was supported by the Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute (SPII) to strengthen her own business within a shackdwelling community in Evaton, near Johannesburg, South Africa. SPII, a think tank set up in 2006, provided trainings to small enterprises such as hers, including financial literacy and business management skills, and mentoring, which also served as evidence for local government policy recommendations. Photo Credit: Gui Carvalho/Christian Aid.

4. Learning from and working with partners: the global perspective

South African partners were influential in part because of the nature and shape of the South Africa programme, but also because of their specific backgrounds, skills, analysis, strength and positioning, and their ability to assert their views.

South African partners have shaped Christian Aid's advocacy on issues such as climate change. An important moment for this process was the COP17, the 2009 international climate change conference, when South Africa was very active in the climate justice movement. More recently, partners have also influenced the organisations' thinking on the theme of economic justice.

South Africa has been a key country in terms of advocacy. The partners are articulate and vocal, and have joined us in different advocacy spaces at different points in time. And the partnership has been different from some other places. The partners already have a presence in a number of regional and international spaces. We were more on an equal footing, strategising together, reinforcing each other's messages. (Mariana Paoli, Global Advocacy Manager, Christian Aid)

South African partners have been key in forming our positions, for example on business and human rights. Bench Marks has been doing national advocacy and trying to hold mining companies to account nationally, but their effectiveness nationally is limited. They joined us to call for the UN Business and Human Rights Treaty, and we used their evidence to back up our evidence. (Matti Kohonen, Principal advisor, private sector, Christian Aid)

Partners' activities as part of South African civil society have also enabled Christian Aid to find a different route into international influencing through the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the G20 (in partnership with the Brazil and India country programmes). Having strong South African national partners has therefore extended Christian Aid's capacity to influence international policies.

But this was not just about access to new spaces, it was also about new and different ways of thinking. For example, partners have helped international policy and advocacy staff connect their advocacy activities to local-level realities and issues:

We are not just a think tank, we do not do principle-based advocacy. We do advocacy based on partner interests and evidence. We need to be in synch with partners. For example, EJA has been central in how we conceived of illicit financial flows, including tax. They have also been influential in making us think through how such flows are relevant to communities. We cannot just talk about ensuring money gets back into the national budget, but we also need to think [about] community asset recovery based on the local impact of mining, and how this links to social and economic rights. (Matti Kohonen, principal advisor on the private sector, Christian Aid)

Such discussions remind those working globally that it is not enough to change policy at a global level, because national structures and power relationships influence whether or not these global changes have any real impact on poverty. This is important in ensuring policy has the potential to lead to change. It also leads to richer policymaking, as partners rooted in different contexts bring their different manifestations of poverty and inequality into global debates.

Links to partners such as EJA and BMF have helped Christian Aid connect to civil society in a way that goes beyond national programming:

If we only have programmes then we will not eradicate poverty. Policy partners keep us rooted, they teach us and they can act as capacity builders for other partners in other countries, peer teachers or advocates. (Matti Kohonen, Christian Aid)

These partners have also enabled Christian Aid to think more deeply about the role of the church in advocacy, as distinct from the church in development programming:

The Church has a unique presence in places where tax injustice takes place and can play a role in shifting the moral compass on tax, making the moral case for tax for public services. (Matti Kohonen, Christian Aid)

Finally, many of the South African partners are more politically radical than Christian Aid, which has encouraged the organisation to be more outspoken in its analysis and positioning. For policy and advocacy staff, the closure of the South Africa programme raised real concerns for their work and what this might mean for the way that Christian Aid, for example, engages on economic justice in the future.

Staff noted that the nature of civil society impacts on the types of partner that exist, their perspectives and experiences, and therefore the types of analysis and evidence that is produced.

As part of the wider change process Christian Aid has closed its programmes in many (lower) middle-income countries. The remaining programmes are generally in countries that have higher extreme poverty, at times with less developed civil society movements and or local organisations that have less opportunity to engage on the global stage. This has led some Christian Aid staff members to be concerned that partners in these countries may have less influence on Christian Aid's thinking and positioning than the South African partners had. Looking forward, it will be important for staff across Christian Aid to think through whether this concern is an assumption or reality, to clarify in what ways the links to South African partners will be sustained, and to identify where other potentially influential partnerships could be developed.

Partners in South Africa were also influential because of South Africa's role and influence in the continent:

South Africa reinforces structural inequality on the continent because it is a powerful economy, so solidarity is so important between civil society actors in different African countries. (Alvin Antony, ACT Ubumbano evaluator)

The challenge for Christian Aid's policy and advocacy staff will be to establish relationships with new partners in different countries, to understand the space and position these partners have regionally and globally, and to bring the best of their learning from partners in South Africa.¹³

Looking ahead, the global policy and advocacy staff interviewed felt that Christian Aid would benefit from a more formalised way of engaging with such partners. This could include a range of mechanisms and processes to elicit their views, opinions and experiences on specific policy issues and questions Christian Aid might be grappling with, or as resource organisations, which could act as peer support or mentors to CSOs working in other contexts.

Creating such spaces could enable partners and country programmes to influence wider thinking in Christian Aid, but how these spaces work depends on the values that underpin them, the extent to which the policy analysis and positioning responds to a shared agenda with joint priorities, whether and how power is shared, and how accountability works within them. There are valuable lessons from the set-up of ACT Ubumbano that could inform these ideas of internal operation.

5. ACT Ubumbano: To build one another, and to be in solidarity

Between 2015 and 2018 Christian Aid in South Africa went through a period of review, introspection, and rebuilding; the new organisational form of ACT Ubumbano is what emerged. This change was driven both by internal organisational priorities, and the external context. The change and the resulting form of ACT Ubumbano were rooted in a global political analysis, and in the needs and interests of civil society partners in South Africa and their counterparts – historic funders – based in Europe.

This section briefly outlines the evolution of ACT Ubumbano as an organisation, the challenges it faces, what it brings to South Africa and potential future connection points to Christian Aid. It concludes by outlining Christian Aid's key contribution to ACT Ubumbano.

ACT Ubumbano is a network of Southern African and European organisations working for economic, gender and environmental justice. Ubumbano is an Nguni word that means solidarity or unity. It brings together around 30 Southern African and three European organisations and supports innovative and collaborative solidarity initiatives that address unjust power relations to develop new forms of action for social justice. It is supported by a small secretariat (initially hosted by Norwegian Church Aid, now by the South African-based Church Land Programme) with a coordinator and a gender programme advisor.

As part of the interview process I asked respondents to describe ACT Ubumbano through the use of a symbol or metaphor.

ACT Ubumbano is like a tree with a strong stem; branching out into the work that is happening in the community, producing fruit that people can pick from the tree, and developing roots – feeding from and gaining supply from the partnerships we have. (Dudu Radebe, practice development manager of Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action and founding member of ACT Ubumbano)

ACT Ubumbano is an initiative to keep up our friendship. There has been a shift, your government might not fund us anymore, but we will still be in solidarity with each other, we will build one another, and our relationship will move beyond grantee and granter to solidarity. (Mandla Mbongeni Hadebe, (interim director of the EJN)

It is an octopus, moving things from one place to another, with many legs and many roots. The octopus can have strong legs, but it can still be hard to pass things from one leg to another. Some coordination is complicated, the links between faith and non-faith actors; making connections between the SDGs and real people and their stories. But even with this, the sense of the octopus is strong and power aware. One of the strengths is exactly the diversity which can link and overcome thematic silos and link community organisations with those working at higher level advocacy. (Gerhard Buttner, South Africa programme manager)

2015: Review of the South Africa programme

In 2015 the South Africa programme manager left Christian Aid. Although South African partner organisations were very appreciative of his work with them, and the close relationship they had, a lack of clear communication between South Africa and the UK about the nature of the programme and the partnership agreements had caused organisational difficulties.

There were also concerns about the sustainability of the programme and the availability of funding for work in South Africa. For example, in 2015 DFID ended its bilateral aid programme to South Africa;¹⁴ many other donors were following suit. Despite it frequently being ranked as the most unequal country in the world,¹⁵ South Africa was Africa's largest economy, an upper middle-income country, and an important development actor in its own right. This meant that although there was extreme inequality and continuing poverty, it was becoming challenging for Christian Aid to justify further programme funding.

At the same time, Christian Aid valued ongoing engagement with South Africa, particularly given its status as a BRICS country and its influence in SADC, and because it was the voice of Africa on the world stage, as the only African country with a seat at the G20. This, alongside work on theology and church social action, meant that there was interest within Christian Aid in continuing connections in South Africa.

Christian Aid therefore seconded a member of staff (Julie Mehigan) from 2015-16 to review the programme with the expectation that Christian Aid would withdraw from South Africa but retain some connections to partners.

I found a programme where partners were strong, influential and could make waves. SPII had profile and was consulted in the national media; EJM was getting mentioned left, right and centre in parliament; CLP was pushing the boundaries of how civil society operates. They all had 'struggles' credentials, with links to the union and churches, and they challenged the power dynamics between INGOs and national NGOs. They critiqued us for leaving South Africa. (Julie Mehigan, Christian Aid South Africa programme reviewer in 2015-16)

At the time Mehigan was having conversations with the South African partners, she and Christian Aid senior leadership were also talking with other ACT Alliance members, particularly the major European members of the ACT Alliance, referred to as the E8, who had recently launched the GOAT (Getting Our ACT Together) initiative, which was focused on establishing joint programmes in different national contexts.¹⁶

These other organisations were facing a similar dilemma to Christian Aid: funding pressures, national public opinion questioning the value of aid, the increasing role of the private sector, and organisational emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness. These challenges existed alongside ideological questions of how to engage in middle-income countries. Along with the wider E8 commitments to moving towards a joint programming approach, this meant that there was space at the senior level to consider future programme models in South Africa.

However, what started as a process to enable E8 members to refine and rationalise their programme and develop a more 'efficient' programme model in South Africa quickly met with opposition from their partners who did not want to legitimise a 're-colonisation' process.

There was deep cynicism of INGOs that had to be overturned. (Julie Mehigan, South Africa programme reviewer 2015-2016)

The initiative was not met with great happiness from the South Africa partners. It seemed to us that it was a way for the European agencies to depart but hold a moral high ground. They were offering charity rather than thinking about the long-standing debt. We were supposed to feel fortunate to receive largesse. But structural inequality in our country has its roots in colonialism, the power imbalance is its legacy; and this creates a donor-recipient relationship. (Civil society partner)

Partners were wary of a consultation process where the decision had already been made, believing that the consultation was really a smoke screen for an exit strategy. However, two factors encouraged their participation. First was their long-standing, trusted relationship with Christian Aid, which enabled them to participate openly and honestly, sharing their thoughts and concerns. Second, as the process evolved, and a national change manager was appointed (see below), it became clearer that there was genuine buy-in from the European agencies for a different type of operational model, a jointly-owned organisation rooted in Southern Africa.

I like ACT Ubumbano because we created it ourselves. It is our vision and strategy, we built it together. It took a long time, but it belongs to us. It is not just a satellite office, it is our space and we can allow the animal to grow. (Civil society partner)

The review recommended an evolution of the South Africa programme, to become a joint programme. It was to focus explicitly on inequalities and build on the previous strengths of the programme:

CA has a strong reputation in South Africa as a networker, and broker of relationships. By building on our approach of working politically and engaging dynamic and different stakeholders within the church we can build our understanding of global inequality....We can breathe new dynamism into the tired and patronising term 'capacity development' by linking communities, social movements and CA with universities, think tanks, UN agencies and innovators across middle-income countries, to develop a shared solution to a shared problem. (Internal Document, South Africa Programme Review 2015: 17)

Building a vision

In a marathon there is always a point when you want to give up. But if you stay, if you overcome the difficulties and sustain the course, the rewards are worth it. It is not about winning, it is about the little space you occupy and the impact you have in it; getting to the end is fundamental and life-changing.

Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano coordinator

Building the programme was like piecing together a large, detailed jigsaw puzzle where different people who you don't know have the pieces. You have to get to know them, understand what makes them tick, and persuade them that the picture is worth their while. Then you have to convince them to get involved in completing the picture by adding their piece. At the start it's a whole load of tiny indistinguishable fragments, and in the end you get a clear picture and everyone has a part invested.

Julie Mehigan (Christian Aid South Africa programme reviewer)

We said: this is your programme, what do you want from it? The partners in South Africa were very sophisticated. They wanted funding, linkages and advocacy. They didn't want us to be hands-on.

Robert Hayward (Christian Aid volunteer, formerly South Sudan country manager and programme funding officer for Christian Aid)

While the programme review gave a sense of direction to Christian Aid, much work had to be done to make the idea a reality. Once a change manager, Ashley Green-Thompson, was appointed in 2016, a year of discussion began:

It felt like familiar territory, I knew people from the anti-apartheid struggle, but while there was an intention to build a new model there was a lack of consensus. The Europeans had assumed one thing, but I needed to build consensus and win back the trust of the local partners. (Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano coordinator)

Green-Thompson was asked to look at the Guatemalan¹⁷ and Zambian¹⁸ joint programme models. The thrust of both these models was a collaborative organisational approach by the European agencies to enable a single set of systems. But this was not what the South African partners wanted; they felt it would just cement unbalanced power dynamics and shape a certain type of north-south relationship. Green-

Thompson fostered a space 'where nothing was off the table in terms of challenging donors', and through discussions those involved concluded that solidarity and continued support for those working towards social justice in Southern Africa must be the basis for any new model.

Discussions in South Africa fed into a two-day meeting in early 2017 which brought together five European ecumenical agencies (Christian Aid, Church of Sweden, Norwegian Church Aid, Bread for the World and Interchurch Coordination Committee Development Aid), and faith-based organisations, NGOs and community movements from South Africa and Zimbabwe. The participants reflected on alternatives to the mainstream agenda of international development and historical international solidarity movements, and analysed current struggles for justice in Southern Africa. Through this process a set of principles emerged (see box below) to guide the vision and relationships for ACT Ubumbano.

Kopanong principles

- We commit to promoting a strategic and transformative relationship with Southern African partners, which goes beyond transactional funding.
- We will build our future partnership on solidarity, with a strong commitment to change the power dynamics and be more accountable to partners.
- Our new model will be jointly owned, but driven by southern partners, and we do not subscribe to the top-down models driven by many INGOs.
- Our new model has a regional advocacy focus beyond national borders and includes both South African and Southern African partners with a regional focus and/or national programmes that link to regional priorities.

These principles would guide relationships between the members of ACT Ubumbano. They also underpinned the theory of change it developed, which put community struggles at the heart of practice, focused on supporting communities and women, in particular to organise, with NGOs and faith-based organisations accompanying and supporting their struggles. ACT Ubumbano aimed to connect these communities and their organisations so that they could learn from each other and amplify their action and impact. Central throughout was the idea of:

Turning the model on its head. ACT Ubumbano was to be partner-led and partner-run. Its basis is framed by the localisation agenda which enabled a new way of relating and working. (Gerhard Buttner, South Africa programme manager)

What had started as a response to a lack of funding shifted dramatically through the input of partners. This shift was exciting for Christian Aid and welcomed by partners:

We thought it was an opportunity to expand our funding base, but also we thought it was an obligation, that we had to attend. But when I got there I saw people I knew from my youth. We were activists together. And I realised that participation wasn't just an obligation, it was a space for solidarity, to share lessons, to do advocacy together. The (solidarity) hubs provided a deep reflection space. We debated, we didn't always agree, we looked at what we could do differently – both individually and collectively. (Dudu Rabade, practice development manager of Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action and founding member of ACT Ubumbano)

What is ACT Ubumbano?

The basic principles hold it together, it is not a project, you are dealing with a struggle in a complex context, its identity, principles and values are clear and it walks on a path because of its principles, values and praxis.

Alvin Anthony, activist, external consultant, and evaluation facilitator of ACT Ubumbano

By March 2020 ACT Ubumbano had registered officially. The advisory group of eight Southern African partners and three E8 partners had evolved to become the ACT Ubumbano board, with the Southern African partners in the positions of chair, vice chair and secretary. Work is still under way to further clarify the distribution of power between staff, board members and ordinary members. For example, discussions are ongoing as to how the board is selected and who the representatives should be. The model is jointly owned by northern and southern members, but its agenda is driven by the Southern representatives.



Community activists at a 2018 ACT Ubumbano community learning exchange event in Johannesburg, South Africa sharing experiences, knowledge and tactics with other activists. Credit: ACT Ubumbano.

ACT Ubumbano provides spaces to enable members to critically reflect on their social justice practice, listen to the voices of those most affected by injustice, and then support 'innovative and collaborative solidarity initiatives that address unjust power relations globally'¹⁹. A key part of the organisation is the Solidarity Hub described in the box below.

When asked to describe ACT Ubumbano, respondents focused on the feeling it enabled rather than the form it took:

It is an activist space that allows for the rediscovery of that spirit. People participate and think about what is possible, not just what is legally required. We dream and reflect beyond what is. (Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano coordinator)

Civil society has been weakened, there is inadequate contextual analysis. ACT Ubumbano is there to enable critical consciousness; to reflect, learn and share stories; and to build movements from the ground. (Alvin Anthony, activist, external consultant and evaluation facilitator of ACT Ubumbano)

ACT Ubumbano gives us a sense of belonging, a joining of the hands to lift each other and speak as one voice. We are a broad-based church, offering shelter to many. We come together and speak for the poor and marginalised, and together we get heard. (Mandla Mbongeni Hadebe, interim director of the EJNI)

ACT Ubumbano is guided through issues identified by grassroots and national organisations and activists, who feed into programme plans and activities through the Solidarity Hub (see box below), but it also helps to raise the profile of these issues and organisations beyond South Africa. While the Solidarity Hub determines the workplan of ACT Ubumbano, and ensures the work is rooted in community priorities and experiences, Christian Aid and the other European agencies are responsible for supporting partners to access spaces that would otherwise be closed to them, including international advocacy spaces, other donors, and international networks of partners. This access to international partnership and solidarity was an important reason

that Southern African partners actively engaged in the first Solidarity Hub.

Work on gender has so far been the most active area for ACT Ubumbano. This is likely due to the presence of a gender coordinator in the secretariat, but also because gender issues provide a clear means for linking organisational culture, reflection and practice with engagement on gender injustice in society more broadly.

This link between internal practice and external engagement underpinned ACT Ubumbano's work on sexual harassment. The approach involved members considering their own policies and practice to develop a toolkit that could be taken back to member organisations. Other areas of focus in this workstream include work on gender-based violence, gender and faith communities, teenage pregnancy, and the role of men and boys in gender justice. The work has also enabled strong connections between partners in South Africa and other SADC countries, including Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and has resulted in funding for gender justice work, called Faith 2 Action.

It has been important to identify gaps in current practice and to reflect on how a cross-organisational collaboration can add value across the different initiatives. For example, the Solidarity Hub encouraged faith leaders and faith-based organisations to interact with non-faith-based organisations and to debate about gender and women's rights in a trusting environment where nothing said was taboo. Further, the cross-sectoral membership of ACT Ubumbano makes it possible to connect issues through dialogue.

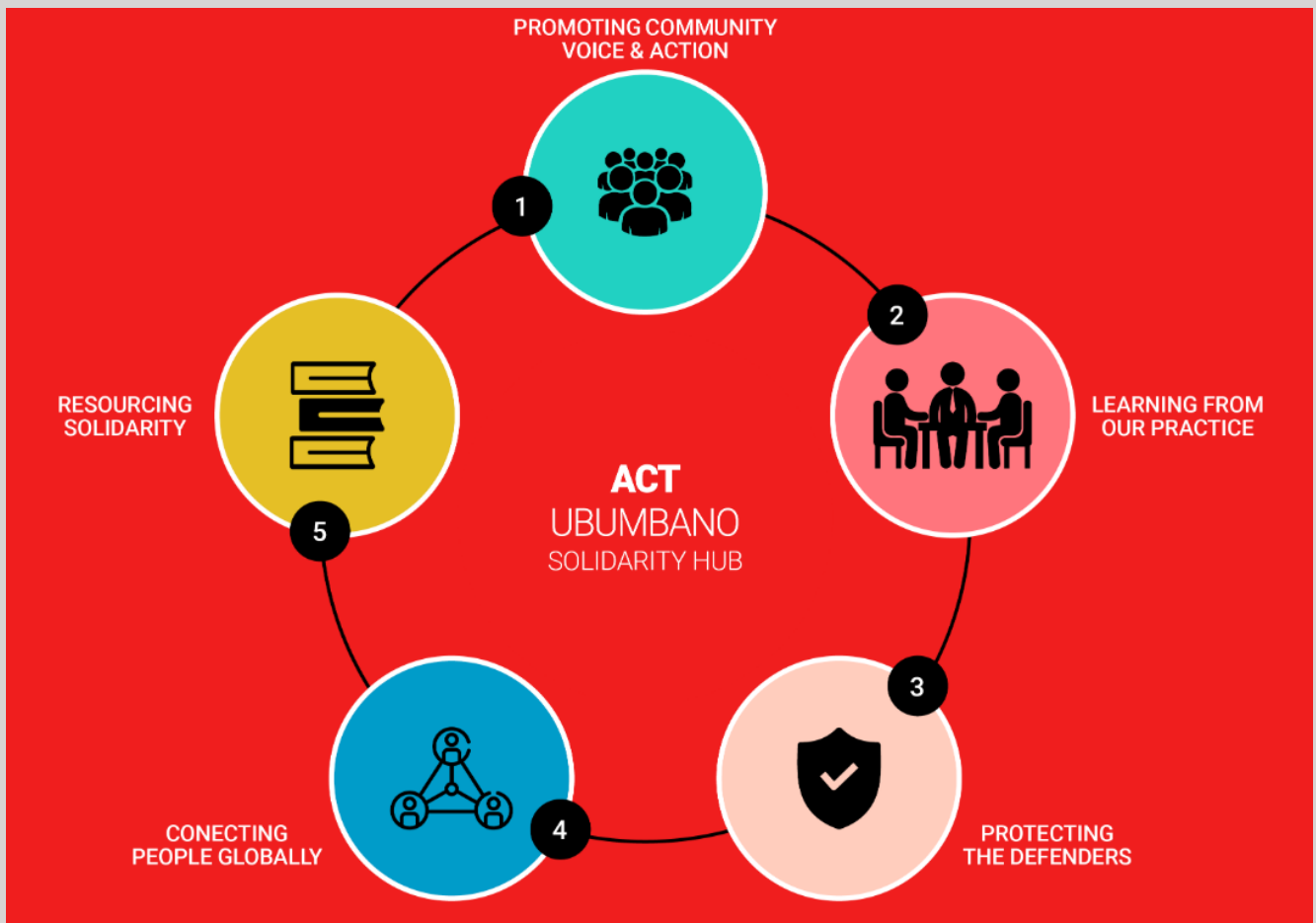
It is a melting pot – we go in together, bringing our own ideas and issues into the pot, and we don't know what will come out. But learning together, mutating together, it animates, it is emancipatory. (David Ntseng, deputy director of CLP)

However, despite these positive examples, there are also tensions within ACT Ubumbano. While the theory and vision of ACT Ubumbano was clearly articulated, the development of the organisation has been complicated. It is to the dynamics and challenges of building the organisation that I now turn.

The Solidarity Hub

At the heart of ACT Ubumbano is the Solidarity Hub. This annual meeting brings together the member organisations and other activists from across Southern Africa. They reflect on their work together, considering both community experiences and structural causes of injustice, and how they might challenge and transform these. The Solidarity Hub enables two days of deep conversation on different aspects of justice, and participants draw on the see-judge-act cycle: 'seeing' community struggles by critically reflecting on them; 'judging' by locating these struggles within global structures of inequality; and 'acting' by identifying principles to connect struggles and to collaborate with others waging similar struggles elsewhere. It is an opportunity for participants to hold up a mirror and critique their own practice.

Insights and reflections from the Solidarity Hub are further explored by the Advisory Group,²⁰ in collaboration with the two ACT Ubumbano staff, who take the key points of discussion and translate them into programmes and activities for workstreams on economic, climate and gender justice. These actions are clustered around five areas set out below in this graphic.



Key dynamics and challenges facing ACT Ubumbano

ACT Ubumbano is still a very new organisation, which one respondent described as a toddler. All respondents could describe what Act Ubumbano had brought to them as individuals (and to their organisations) but found it more challenging to identify what had been achieved in practice. Despite their commitment, they identified a range of questions and challenges for the fledgling organisation.

What is ACT Ubumbano: an organisation, a movement or a space for 'solidarity'?

The national registration, development of constitution, establishment of a board, and a plan to develop finance and human resource policies all suggest that ACT Ubumbano is an organisation. The registration brought benefits, including the possibility that ACT Ubumbano could respond to new funding calls as a Southern African NGO rather than as an INGO. However, participants were concerned about the implications of this move.

Is it going to lead to the NGOisation of justice struggles? Will these struggles get usurped by INGOs? (Gerhard Buttner, South Africa programme manager)

Can we remain true to the 'why?' or will we start fighting for a 'share of the market'? (Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano coordinator)

How can we formalise into a real organisation, without undermining what we have been doing? Will it shift its focus from solidarity issues to technical issues? Can we keep the vision alive, rather than worrying about keeping an organisation afloat? (Dudu Rabede, practice development manager of Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action and founding member of ACT Ubumbano)

Partners were particularly concerned about how to ensure that ACT Ubumbano would remain a space for reflection, which, for them, was key to its existence. The sharing, discussion and debate that characterised interactions of ACT Ubumbano were a catalyst that encouraged them as individuals to take action back to their own spaces of work and activism. They also feared that as ACT Ubumbano became a more formal organisation, the solidarity it offered might be replaced by a wish to act in its own name, occupying the space of national or local organisations.

Applying the Kopanang principles to both northern and southern partners

The initial vision for ACT Ubumbano was of a space that enabled new forms of relationships, moving beyond (northern) funder and (southern) grantee. The intention was that all organisations involved would reflect on their own power, position and actions. While this had been transformational for the thinking and practice of South African partners, they were frustrated by the slow pace of change and perceived lack of application of the principles by the Northern partners. This concern was raised in the 2019 evaluation of ACT Ubumbano and repeated by some of the interviewees during this review, with the suggestion that it was limiting the success of the new model:

If you speak as someone interested in social justice and you want to explore how it is after nearly 30 years post-apartheid, we have such large inequalities in South Africa you have to interrogate your own practice and analyse what is your own culpability... You have to think about what solidarity means in a neo-liberal world, and commit to creating a new model, with the voice of those most affected by injustice at its core. (Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano coordinator)

Differentiated contributions, equal power

Although the European members have continued funding ACT Ubumbano, all those involved are clear that this does not buy them a privileged position in terms of influence over agenda-setting or decision-making. While this appears to work well in the Solidarity Hub, which is conceived of as an equalising space, it does not necessarily work well beyond that space. Norwegian Church Aid's withdrawal from ACT Ubumbano in early 2018, and Christian Aid's closure of its national programme (which will continue engaging with ACT Ubumbano via its Zimbabwe country team), have given rise to concerns about the long-term sustainability of ACT Ubumbano. These actions have also raised questions about whether the vision is really owned by the senior management of the E8 agencies. But there is also a recognition that such agencies need to manage the expectations of their funders. For example, one E8 respondent noted a need to see greater social change as a result of ACT Ubumbano's actions:

We have struggled with some of the reflective part of Act Ubumbano, as we want to be able to see results. Our back donors are asking for results, and it is difficult to give these. (Jacqueline Ernerot, ACT Church of Sweden, Southern Africa programme manager)

These pressures have made it challenging for ACT Ubumbano to achieve the type of equality it strives for.

Understanding impact

Another challenge lies in understanding the value that ACT Ubumbano adds to an already strong and active civil society. While much has been achieved at the level of creating the organisation, it has been more difficult to identify changes that have resulted from its activities. Although partners believe that engagement in ACT Ubumbano has added to their practice, it has been challenging to articulate this clearly and to identify ACT Ubumbano's specific contribution to change:

There are many strengths of ACT Ubumbano, it has a strong identity ... but it would have more resonance if there was more local work, more impact on the ground, impact on the struggle. (Alvin Anthony, activist, external consultant, and evaluation facilitator of ACT Ubumbano)

Despite this concern, three outcomes were identified:

1. Meeting together for a common purpose: to challenge inequality in its many guises.

The dismantling of the system of apartheid had brought together a wide cross-section of activists with a clear focus for their work, but in the post-apartheid system, the target was more diffuse. ACT Ubumbano offered a space for activists to unite again and work together to challenge inequality.

2. Revitalisation of faith actors.

Faith-based organisations have welcomed the opportunity to link back to the energy and activism of the church and faith leaders established during apartheid, and to reconnect and reflect on issues of the day.

Although we have no final definition on our faith identity, ACT is in our name, we are faith influenced and our methodology is rooted in church activism, in 'see, judge, act'. We have a commitment to dialogue on theology and faith, and we engage with faith leaders, on issues of gender-based violence, of sexual and reproductive health, on teenage pregnancy – for progressive action in a world of patriarchy and racism. (Ashley Green-Thompson, ACT Ubumbano coordinator)

3. Shared learning and solidarity action.

The space provided opportunities for analysis, shared learning and collective action (nationally and at a sub-regional level), as well as being:

...an activist platform that goes beyond north-south partnership – it is a place where we can critique, what we are doing, how we think about each other. (Civil society partner)

ACT Ubumbano encourages us to connect, with each other and to the ground, to share what is happening and to exchange tactics that we have been using. (Civil society partner)

However, there was also a note of caution: ACT Ubumbano provided 'a good space for reflection for those already converted, a positive, progressive and ethical meeting space to catch up with people in the sector' (civil society partner), but such an approach does not enable you to change minds. This, along with concerns about ACT Ubumbano's ability to articulate its contribution and achieve actual change on the ground will need to be considered going forward.

The challenge of fundraising

Fundraising concerns were raised in different ways throughout the interviews. The continued role of the European agencies as funders was recognised as important, and it was noted that 'strong and financially resilient individual members' were essential to the network. Global funding cuts undermining the financial resilience of many of the member organisations was a frequently voiced concern, which forced many into just getting by, referred to by one as 'survival mode'. Interviewees cited concerns that this would divert their attention from joint actions.

Another concern was what would happen if the European agencies began channelling their resources through ACT Ubumbano? For example, would it become a funding gatekeeper to channel funds to grassroots organisations, or worse might it start to compete with its member organisations for funds. While the former presented concerns about an extra layer of bureaucracy, the latter foresaw a scenario in which members increasingly scramble to compete for ever-reduced funding.

It was perhaps in response to this that ACT Ubumbano has focused its activity on solidarity and networking, avoiding getting drawn into programme delivery, but this leaves it with the ongoing challenge of illustrating impact from intangible activities.²¹ Nonetheless, ACT Ubumbano has claimed a recent funding success, with the Ford Foundation supporting the development of a 'community voice' app, which will provide a platform to share community stories and experiences. In addition to helping ACT Ubumbano deliver an important project, this will also enable the organisation to reflect on the pros and cons of this type of funding.

Christian Aid and ACT Ubumbano

Christian Aid's departure from South Africa presents a challenge for ACT Ubumbano. Members welcomed Christian Aid's ongoing commitment to the organisation via Christian Aid Zimbabwe, but questioned how this relationship might work in practice, emphasising the importance of the close involvement of the South Africa programme manager in supporting the organisation to emerge and develop.

In understanding why and how ACT Ubumbano emerged as it did, it is important to remember the nature of Christian Aid's partners in South Africa:

The partners are hard-headed. They had their heads screwed on and wouldn't have wasted their time with ACT Ubumbano, or even Christian Aid if they weren't getting something out of it. It was the core support, solidarity, respect, and our commitment to their work that they valued. And I learnt from them, I was in awe of them – they are so brainy! They had the intellect and knew advocacy. But even if you are clever and high-powered you still need money, and this is what I could bring, practical help for funding. (Robert Hayward, (Christian Aid volunteer, formerly South Sudan country manager and programme funding officer for Christian Aid).

Christian Aid engagement enabled partners to extend the impact of their own mission and approach through core organisational and fundraising support, and through brokering global relationships, including solidarity links and regional and global advocacy connections.

Partners were clear as to what the relationship with Christian Aid could bring. Equally, Christian Aid understood how the organisation could be strengthened through developing an ongoing relationship with the emergent ACT Ubumbano. The model fitted very well with strategic organisational objectives. It also had the practical benefit of enabling Christian Aid to continue its work and the relationships it had fostered, enabling Christian Aid to continue supporting many of the ways of working that had characterised previous relationships.

Although Christian Aid invested in ACT Ubumbano, it simultaneously continued its bilateral relationships with South African partners. If Christian Aid had channelled funding through ACT Ubumbano directly this could have altered the course of the organisation; creating a situation where the secretariat became a gatekeeper, and members of ACT Ubumbano competed for diminishing funds rather than collaborating to develop the network. It would also

have directly impacted on power relations, placing ACT Ubumbano as the decision-maker for funding allocations, rather than a solidarity space.

This enabled Christian Aid to sustain partners' work while ACT Ubumbano found its feet, and to encourage South African partners to engage with ACT Ubumbano. It also meant that ACT Ubumbano was able to retain its vision as a solidarity space and allowed ACT Ubumbano to evolve as a regional entity, something South African partners desired, but that did not naturally fit with Christian Aid's programme logic. By continuing to invest in the South African programme and partnerships, Christian Aid could also ensure that its own organisational structure did not prevent ACT Ubumbano taking on its Southern African regional remit.

During this period, Christian Aid reduced its partnerships from nine to four partners, all of whom were working on economic justice, thus complementing the other ACT Alliance E8 participants, which had other stronger priority areas. This meant Christian Aid could continue learning from partners in South Africa, while helping to support ACT Ubumbano, both as a northern partner, and by supporting South African partners who could devote time and energy to the fledgling organisation.

Partners said Christian Aid had been instrumental in the evolution of ACT Ubumbano due to Christian Aid's role as a supportive partner, championing power analysis and reflection on power dynamics, and by creating the space for discussion and development:

Christian Aid asks us, 'So what? What is the aim? What is it part of?' and this makes us more thoughtful. As ideas came up, Christian Aid offered flexibility, which let us try new things. Then we had the lessons from those things, and that informed our other engagements. (Zanele Makombe, gender advisor, ACT Ubumbano)

Christian Aid provided human and financial resources and technical expertise to ACT Ubumbano, but also worked to ensure that E8 members remained engaged with and supportive of the project:

Christian Aid were a key pillar. If there was broken glass, Christian Aid filled in the cracks because they could see the beauty and value of the glass. They fuse the visioning and thinking so that it all holds together. (Zanele Makombe, ACT Ubumbano)

Christian Aid was also valued for its donor networks and active fundraising, and for its willingness to lend its reputational support to ACT Ubumbano during fundraising efforts.

Final reflections

The question of whether Christian Aid is really exiting South Africa remains a live one. Ongoing relationships with ACT Ubumbano mean that it will remain close to partners in South Africa. Furthermore, these partners will likely retain links with parts of the organisation ensuring that work on policy, advocacy and solidarity that were previously established will be sustained. Christian Aid also intends to remain close to the programme through its programme in Christian Aid Zimbabwe. This shift of relationship could help strengthen ACT Ubumbano's relationships across the SADC region, which was always a key aspiration for the organisation. Through these relationships, the strong history of collaboration should live on.

Exits can be like a punishment, but it depends how they are negotiated, and what accountability means. How are we learning together, how are we relating and engaging? The nature of the exit tells us something about the nature of the partnership. (Dudu Radebe, practice development manager of Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action and founding member of ACT Ubumbano)

This section reflects on three issues that have emerged during the review:

- The nature of partnership and the value of working with strong partners
- The meaning of solidarity and the process of 'doing solidarity'
- Links between movements, new and old.

It concludes by revisiting the concept of racial injustice, which was so strong in the initial framing of the programme, and so actively discussed within Christian Aid, the wider sector, and as part of public discourse during the write up of this review.

Partners and partnership

INGOs often determine the agenda in terms of planning and programming, and choose their partner based on that agenda. However, listening to partners in South Africa, it sounded as if they deliberately chose to work with Christian Aid after assessing what it could offer their organisation, how the relationship should work, and where the limitations lay. In many ways this experience and these relationships flipped traditional INGO–national civil society partnerships on their head.

Christian Aid is not a silent or disinterested partner, they are there. You see and feel the passion, the value of partnership and the commitment. There is a real sense of partnership, and of solidarity. (Civil society partner)

Christian Aid's history, nature, approach to partnerships and solidarity was central to why partners wanted to work with it, while understanding both what an INGO could bring, and the value of their own contribution:

The INGO can do a lot of research, and can engage directly with power holders, but they do not do the community engagement piece, they cannot get the communities to speak for themselves. We have to balance what they bring, while acting as interlocutors, building people's confidence and raising awareness. All this takes time. (Civil society partner)

However, there was also clarity about the limitations of such partnerships:

There is a legacy of structural inequality in our country which has its roots in colonialism. This power imbalance frames the donor-recipient relationship and there is a danger that engagement is seen as charity and a way to build wealth and empire, rather than recognising colonial indebtedness, this can impact on the partnership relationship. (Civil society partner)

To a large extent these dynamics shaped the way that Christian Aid engaged with partners. It also affected what partners looked for in Christian Aid, how the programme evolved and how ACT Ubumbano emerged. The precise dynamics of partnership have varied according to the phase of the programme (see box on page 11), but in this final phase of partnership, a new form of solidarity emerged, which was less about individual partners, and more about collective collaboration and connection.

And beyond the partnership relationship the political analysis that framed the partnership was key: questioning the global development system, the role of actors in the global north and their contribution to the global south. This analysis and positioning inspired deep conversations on power and privilege and formed the foundations of a new relational contract between north and south, and expression of localisation in practice. Such conversations also built directly on learning from different experiences of solidarity.

Reflections on solidarity²²

Solidarity has been a key element of Christian Aid's relationship with civil society organisations in South Africa, which has both enabled and shaped the programme. The initial programme during the apartheid period focused on the role of the British government and the extent to which action in the UK could create additional pressure for change in South Africa. It had solidarity action at its heart.

In the period immediately following apartheid, solidarity focused on supporting and enabling civil society by contributing to the development of South Africa as a democratic nation and, over time, by challenging the state-led development project, which was seen to reinforce and deepen inequality.

More recently, solidarity has enabled and encouraged connections between partners with a shared vision for change. The contextual theology approach enabled strong connections between local realities (in the UK and South Africa) and shared experiences, while exchanges with different BRICS partners consolidated south-south linkages. Partnerships have developed through economic and political analysis (as seen in the work of BMF, SPII and EJNI). ACT Ubumbano was the next step and represented an institutionalised solidarity.

Throughout my discussions the term was used in different ways and meant different things to different people. For some, primacy is given to the process of solidarity while others focus on the connections that solidarity enables:

Solidarity is not about taking the lead as an NGO, but enabling connection between communities. It is about proximity, presence, shared agenda, learning, compassion. (Civil society partner)

For others, solidarity is grounded in faith:

Solidarity is a mutuality of interest and beliefs, and in the Christian sense includes compassion. We need to recover solidarity, in healing our still broken society, and confront inequality and poverty. (Civil society partner)

Solidarity is being alongside, even if we are physically separated. We read the signs of the time, and are alongside another, to do God's will in their place. We might recognise that things are difficult and we stay, we do not pull out. (Christian Aid staff member)

Across all these dimensions, the question of power came through very strongly in different ways:

Solidarity is not charity: it is about recognising your own power, that you are able to give, and

give up things to be in real solidarity, to confront systems that disempower. (Civil society partner)

North-south relationships always have power in the centre – how can we move beyond that? Can we define these partnerships on the basis of a shared cause and agenda, rather than in terms of north-south? (Civil society partner)

Solidarity is to look after the weakest first, but it is about the way you do this – to support and learn from the weakest. An injury to one is an injury to all, and solidarity is born out of this. The weakest is a source of strength, if you ignore the weak voice you are in trouble. (Civil society partner)

But also central to the concept of solidarity was the idea of standing together – whether for shared struggles, or to support the struggles of others:

The issues that affect us, the injustices, are not confined to borders. These issues can cross national space – gender-based violence, for example, is similar in different places – so we raise our voices together. In other ways, injustice is different – we have mining communities in South Africa and people in the UK are benefiting from injustice in those communities in South Africa – then in UK, people need to raise their voice and call out our injustice. So, we need to stand together and hold people accountable. (Civil society partner)

These understandings raise interesting questions about who decides what solidarity looks like in practice, and how. Is solidarity, for example, about framing issues at the global level and facilitating local contextual analysis and engagement to enable shared struggles, as seen with the online mining community in South Africa and the fracking community in the UK? Or is it about speaking out in different locations to support the struggles of others – as with anti-apartheid solidarity? Further reflection on this point will be important in guiding Christian Aid's work and future relationships with partners in South Africa.

Organisations, struggle and movements

Christian Aid South Africa connected to individuals (and organisations) who were passionate activists with deep political engagement who had spent their lives fighting injustice. This was not a job, but a vocation. But in recent years, movements and struggles have changed. Interviewees reflected on the shift from political struggle to identity- and issue-based movements, rooted and driven by young people. It was also noted that there is a growing

antipathy towards INGOs. One partner characterised South African civil society as:

Survivalist at the community level; with elite national NGOs pursuing public interest litigation, and a faith-based sector that has been very silent in the past 25 years but has an active history, and a labour movement that has imploded. However, new social movements are more direct, vibrant and radical, rooted in issues, not politics, and bringing together a young articulate middle class. (Civil society partner)

They wondered how they could take their passion and feeling and pass the baton onto the next generation. How could young people be supported to make links between issue and identity, and the larger macro-economic issues and politics? One person interviewed was concerned that young people were not adequately represented in ACT Ubumbano and wondered how this space could be made more inclusive. Another asked what she, as an older activist, should be doing to encourage younger people to get more involved in wider justice issues. She wondered how the framing and delivery of campaigns and social actions would need to change to enable this, acknowledging that young people have little history of political organisation or mobilisation, and had no personal experience of the apartheid regime having been born after it was dismantled.

Yet the South African student-led protest movement to stop increases in university student fees, which began in 2015 and used the social media hashtag #FeesMustFall, shows they can effectively raise their voices on certain issues.

Such analysis contains insight for both ACT Ubumbano and Christian Aid, as each organisation considers their relationship with respect to different types of movements, and how best to make the links between a political analysis rooted in historic and structural injustices and key issues that emerge in different moments in different contexts.

Learning from the past to look forward

As noted in the introduction, this review took place within the context of COVID-19, and the global outrage following the murder of George Floyd (an African American man who was killed by a police officer in Minneapolis, USA in May 2020). While the public space opened up to act in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movements, many INGOs – including Christian Aid – were challenged to consider

how their anti-poverty and development work paid attention to issues of race, ethnicity and colour.

It is therefore fitting to close this review with a reflection on race in the context of Christian Aid's programme in South Africa. The programme was initially framed by challenging the realities of apartheid, and evolved over the subsequent 30 years to focus on the social and economic injustices that were framed by and rooted in the previous era of apartheid.

It would be simplistic to define the South Africa programme only by its early role speaking out against the apartheid regime. Yet so many of the partners said that it was precisely this role that made Christian Aid an attractive partner. The legacy of apartheid influenced how the partner organisations themselves developed and shaped the partnership relationship with Christian Aid.

Christian Aid's response to apartheid was important globally. Speaking out publicly in criticism of a national government and rallying the UK public to take action in relation to a governance relationship in the global South was unusual for Christian Aid. The legacy of this action remains a proud part of its organisational history, and is one that many staff feel could help guide the organisation when considering how to respond boldly to racism in the sector today.

The debates taking place in the INGO sector today suggest that we have failed to pay sufficient attention to racial inequalities. This has impacted our internal processes, culture and practice. As we decide how best to respond to these challenges what can we learn from our experiences in South Africa? How might we draw on lessons from the apartheid era – particularly in relation to how we framed and spoke out against apartheid, and rallied the British public against the regime?

I did not ask explicitly about colour, race or racism in my interviews, and aside from the reference to the apartheid era and its immediate aftermath, those I spoke to did not mention race, or racial inequality explicitly. However, the political activism developed during apartheid was evident. The destructive nature of neo-liberalism and elite wealth capture was presented in economic and political language, but behind this language was anger concerning the fact that the impact of apartheid has not been dismantled and lives on in new forms today.

The role and nature of historic and ongoing racial injustice is complex. New issues of inequality and injustice cannot be explained merely through reference to the past. As I reflected on the interviews, key questions emerged about the relationship

between past and present. In the years following the end of apartheid Christian Aid focused its work, in collaboration with its partners, largely on challenging different forms of injustice: economic, social and environmental. Was racial injustice still being addressed by challenging these different inequalities, or did the shift in focus mean issues of racism remained less visible and unchallenged? Would a more overt reference to race enable a stronger continuation between past and present struggles? How should we be reflecting on and understanding ongoing racial injustice in contexts of less overt or more implicit racism? Understanding more about how South African civil society is grappling with these complex questions could also be useful in helping

Christian Aid explore how to respond to the challenges presented today.

It is clear that partners in South Africa have added a lot of value to Christian Aid globally – in terms of helping us to understand what solidarity means in practice, encouraging us to deepen our engagement with theology, and through influencing our policy analysis and advocacy efforts. Central to this was Christian Aid's own ability to listen and learn, to hold the space for honest, open and, at times, challenging exchanges. Looking forward, this will be equally important if Christian Aid is to draw inspiration and develop influencing strategies and actions based on earlier analysis, politics and partnerships that helped in the struggle to end apartheid.

End notes

- ¹ Jack Arthey joined Christian Aid in 1972 and worked in a variety of roles, including youth, education and brand-related work until his retirement in 2016. He has since volunteered for Christian Aid on a range of projects to capture organisational history.
- ² Janet Lacey also encouraged Christian Aid to support community and race relations work in the UK – through funding local community project work and race relations work of the British Council of Churches, and hosting a project worker in its regional office in Birmingham.
- ³ This is captured in various case studies (written by Gerhard Buttner, South Africa programme manager) and previous documentation from the programme.
- ⁴ Robert Hayward joined Christian Aid in 1992 as a programme funding officer. He was the Christian Aid South Sudan country manager from 2008 to 2011, when he retired. Since then he has worked for Christian Aid as a volunteer.
- ⁵ In many ways the South Africa programme and partners aligned with Christian Aid's current strategy of Poverty, Power and Prophetic voice before it even existed, and thus were potentially influential in its formation.
- ⁶ It is not entirely clear when the programme started, as a lot of the initial funding relationship was via the World Council of Churches, but one source suggested this could have been in the late 1950s via 'solidarity grants', with direct links between Christian Aid and South Africa taking place from the 1970s.
- ⁷ This phrase was first used in 1968 by Fr. Pedro Arrupe in a letter to the Jesuits of Latin America.
- ⁸ The 'see, judge, act' approach: 'Seeing' community struggles and critically reflecting on them; 'judging' by locating these struggles within global structures of inequality; and 'acting' by identifying principles of connecting struggles, to collaborate with others waging similar struggles elsewhere.
- ⁹ See two publications by Paula Clifford which explore Christian Aid's relational theology and how we have learnt from partners in the global south
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/theology-global-south-perspectives-christian-aid-work-april-2012.pdf> and
<https://www.christianaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2017-08/theology-international-development-april-2010.pdf>
- ¹⁰ For most of this period Robert Cunningham, country manager of the Christian Aid South Africa programme from 2002 to 2015, was based in the UK, but from 2011 he was based in Pretoria, enabling even closer partnership relationships.
- ¹¹ See for example, Newman, K (2012) Challenges and dilemmas in integrating rights-based approaches and participatory approaches to development: an exploration of the experiences of ActionAid International. PhD Thesis: Goldsmiths College: London
- ¹² See Policy Gap 12 report: A survey of household health in four mine-affected communities in Soweto, South Africa
https://www.benchmarkmarks.org.za/research/policy_gap_12.pdf
- ¹³ The extent to which relationships with current South African partners will be maintained after the country programme itself closes will also need to be decided.
- ¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/dfid-south-africa>
- ¹⁵ For inequality data related to South Africa, see <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/income-inequality.htm> and <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SI.POV.GINI/rankings>, for example.
- ¹⁶ In 2014 the ACT Alliance held its second assembly in Haiti, Punta Cana, and signed off its global strategy. As part of these discussions the European (E8) Agencies signed up to the 'Getting Our ACT Together' (GOAT) initiative. This committed the E8 agencies to strengthening their collaboration for the benefit of poor and marginalised people: noting that strategy alignment and closer collaboration in country, via joint bids to institutional donors, sharing resources and reduction of duplication (including reporting expectations) would lead them to be better partners to other ACT members in-country. The statement specifically detailed the intention to develop national collaboration pilots and to learn from different contexts regarding the opportunities and limitations presented, while also ensuring that stronger collaboration between the E8 members was not at the expense of the global ACT Alliance or the national partners. (Internal memorandum)
- ¹⁷ In Guatemala Jotay came into being in 2017 following two years of extensive discussions and collaboration between five of ACT Alliance's European members (known collectively as the 'E8') – Bread for the World, Christian Aid, Act Church of Sweden, ICCO Cooperation, Norwegian Church Aid – and Lutheran World Foundation, it aimed to achieve efficiency savings, enhance impact and enable joint fundraising/resource mobilisation.
- ¹⁸ In 2011 three European ACT members (Christian Aid, Norwegian Church Aid and DanChurchAid) agreed to open a joint programme in Zambia, in part as a response to the fact that two of the three were considering closing their operations in the country. It was the first time the organisations had worked together to deliver a fully merged programme.
- ¹⁹ Quote from the website: actubumbano.org
- ²⁰ The current Solidarity Hub advisory group is transitioning to become a board. This will make way for a new advisory group to be formed, which will advise rather than have formal accountability.
- ²¹ The coordinator mentioned that using outcome harvesting approaches had been helpful, but that this was still causing reporting challenges with some partners.
- ²² This section draws on quotes from my interviews and also quotes captured during the closing ceremony of Christian Aid South Africa, documented on an internal communications Yammer post by the South Africa programme manager.

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