

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



ACT UBUMBANO

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1. Introduction

ACT Ubumbano is a voluntary association and a registered Non-Profit Organisation. Its core business is convening spaces where people can reflect, connect, analyse and plan how to take forward issues that affect their communities, and their ability to engage the struggle for justice. These spaces are called Solidarity Hubs or Learning Hubs, and are attractive to activists because they get to meet others who face similar challenges and help them in their own reflections. Organisations benefit from new connections and new insights into their work too as they participate in the deep analysis that happens. Relationships are established between people that transcends the programmatic focus of the conversations. Learning is facilitated in a very organic way – there are no classes or lectures, but people have expressed appreciation for the learning by doing approach.

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached Southern Africa, and full or partial lockdown measures were implemented in countries in the region. This limited ACT Ubumbano's ability to convene Hubs as public transport systems were impacted, and public gatherings were prohibited.

ACT Ubumbano had to find new ways of supporting partner actions that were responsive to community experiences, and met the challenges of standing with activists in this time of crisis. The digital space became a new terrain for community organising, and the structural challenges of access to bandwidth and telephony had to be addressed in a changed reality.

This report presents an outline of activities and actions facilitated during the COVID-19 pandemic and covers the period January to December 2020.

2. ACT Ubumbano

ACT Ubumbano is an open network working jointly to confront economic, gender and environmental injustice by facilitating critical joint reflection and collaboration and supporting innovative solidarity initiatives/actions.

ACT Ubumbano convenes spaces for interaction, learning and dialogue amongst local and international partners and allies seeking to engage in deepening solidarity, knowledge and practice in the field. These reflections inform new and existing programmatic action that is rooted in the communities we work with, and that builds solidarity across the global south and north.

It seeks to *develop new forms of action for social justice targeting structures of injustice and inequality by accompanying and supporting communities in their struggles.*

To this end, partners have agreed to collaborate around:

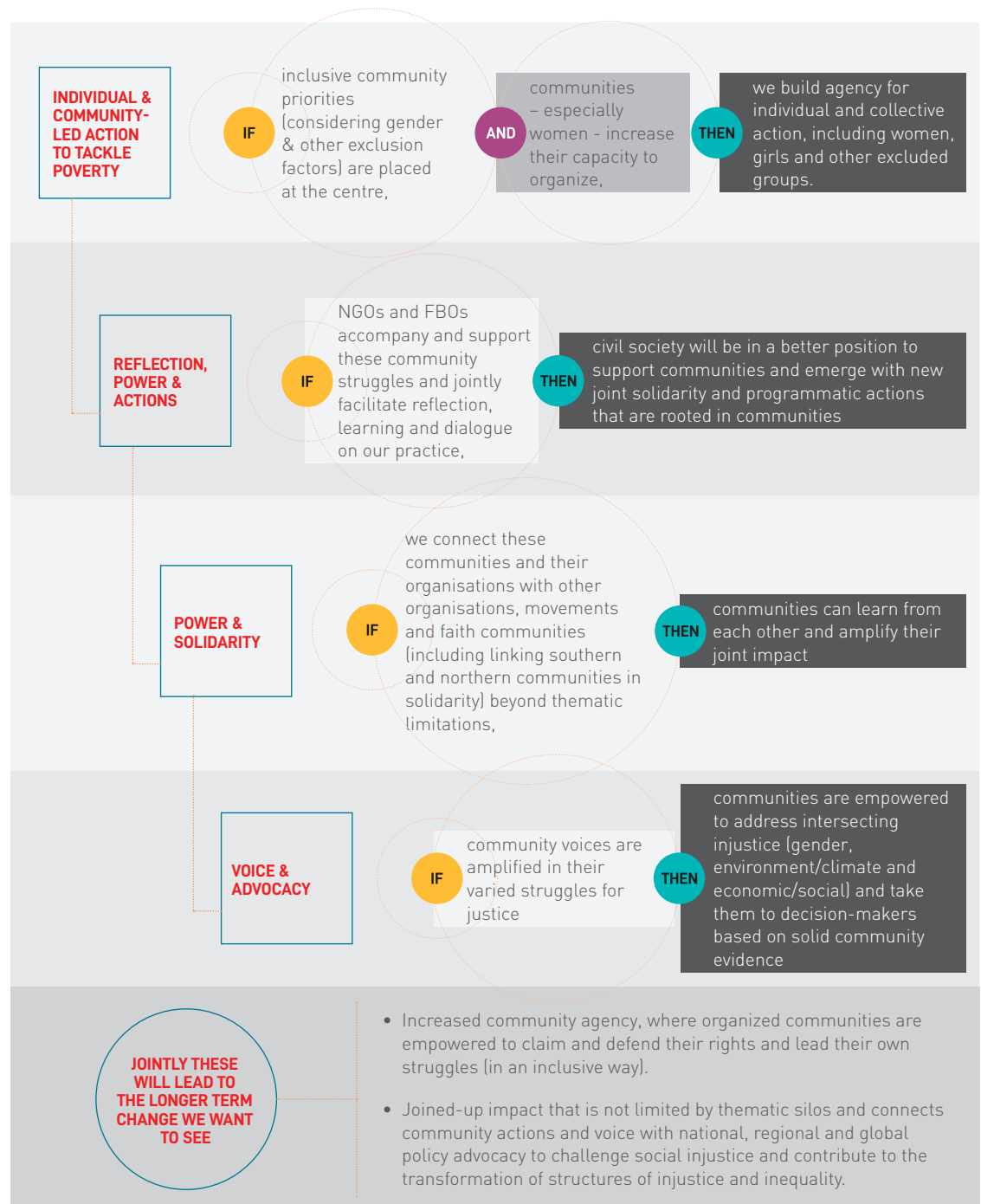
- Implementing a south-driven and south-led development agenda that is shaped by the reality of communities' struggles,
- Finding new development financing sources to support civil society and community struggles in South Africa and other middle-income countries, and
- Building stronger alliances for greater global solidarity - south-south and north-south.

There is connectedness and intersectionality between Gender, Economic and Environmental Justice in community struggles for humanity, and this is reflected in the work of ACT Ubumbano. To quote Audre Lorde: "There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives."

These connected struggles have shaped the conversations and reflections in the Solidarity Hubs over the years, and have informed the programme focus of ACT Ubumbano. It seeks to support community activism and struggle by:

- i. Promoting community voice and action
- ii. Learning from our practice (including local and thematic learning events and exchange visits)
- iii. Protecting human rights including women's rights defenders
- iv. Connecting people globally (south-south and north-south)
- v. Resourcing solidarity (in which we also jointly explore new southern and northern philanthropy options)

Through regular reflection and analysis, ACT Ubumbano continually reviews how we see change happening in our world.



3. Promoting Community Voice & Action

The objective of this work area is to support communities as they lead and execute their struggles for change and resistance against injustice, and to explore new forms of action to contribute to transforming structures of injustice and inequality. At the core is a belief that social change requires increased community agency, mobilisation and voice.

3.1. Ubumbano Voice

Activists in various communities have continued to post stories of what is happening in their areas. During the COVID lockdowns, the number of posts increased significantly, most likely as this was one of the few platforms for stories to be told. In sharing these stories, a picture was built of how the pandemic is impacting local communities. A post by Rapule Moilola from Tembisa captures the COVID experience:

“

People have been through so many challenges during the lockdown. Retrenchment, unemployment, loss of income, water crisis, no schooling, Gender Based Violence, hunger etc and this has caused lot of people to stand up and start businesses by selling products and services. I was at Jane Furse Plaza, and I realized that there are more people who are selling products. People have struggled during the past months and no one likes to live in poverty or go to bed with an empty stomach. I also listened to a guy who was selling bananas and avocados, his advertising skills were so good that I realized that people have skills but need a good Samaritan to help them to be great business people. Taxis are also back in taxi rank in the shopping centre, but the problem is, the shopping centre is over-crowded. Villages should be developed for a better life - **RAPULE MOILOLA, TEMBISA**

3.2. Young Women Speak Out

A publication was produced that chronicled the challenges faced by women in the region. Entitled “Young Women Speak Out”, the content is the result of conversations and interviews by activists with young women in their communities, and how they cope with the ever-present onslaught on them. It was launched in one of our earliest attempts at virtual hosting, where participants could share some of their own experiences. The publication has generated interest within the gender justice advocacy sector, and has also served as a motivation for those who write for the Voice platform.

3.3. Activists’ Training

The strong interest in telling stories prompted the development of a training course aimed at deepening the ability of activists to tell their stories through encouraging an analytical approach. The methodology was experiential – participants identified issues within their lived reality, and with accompaniment from the facilitators and group work, were able to learn research and analysis skills. The first group involved 9 activists from South Africa and Zimbabwe, and they graduated in September. A second course was held for 9 activists working with the Christian Council of Mozambique, where they were able to physically convene in four workshop sessions to develop the same skills set. The team will evaluate the course and tweak it for future use, and has also continued engagement with the graduates to continue their involvement in ACT Ubumbano processes.

3.4. Solidarity with Women in the Informal Economy during COVID- 19

The Fruit Basket, SANERELA and Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET) – with support from ACT Ubumbano – are working with women in the informal economy in Gauteng to explore alternative routes to self-reliance. They have shared their experiences of coping with COVID, dealing with food security in their communities, and generating solidarity among informal traders through WhatsApp conversations. These platforms have involved women from Lehae in Lenasia, and the CBD of Johannesburg in food distribution and setting up of community food gardens.

3.5. Solidarity with Communities – PACSA & CREATE

We supported PACSA and CREATE in reaching out to households in the Pietermaritzburg area. They were able to engage with community members to discuss the impact of the first COVID lockdown, and provide food parcels as relief against the immediate threat of hunger. This is part of ongoing solidarity work, and the people-centred approach informed one of the Learning Hubs held later on.

3.6. Faith in Dialogue

This stream of work is about creating spaces and platforms to engage with faith communities. The Faith in Dialogue (FID) series is about a journey with members of different faith groups, starting from their lived reality and challenging their understanding of pastoral care, human dignity and justice.

'Keeping the Faith'

In partnership with the Heinrich Boll Foundation's 'Keeping the Faith' initiative, we have been collaborating with Inclusive and Affirming Ministries (IAM) in bringing together more than 50 faith leaders from Eswatini, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The focus of these dialogues is Human Sexuality and Gender Diversity, again using a methodology called 'People, Process, Content, Context' that starts from the lived reality of participants. The first and second virtual conversations focused on values, characteristics of community, importance of storytelling and who are the other bodies that enter our worship spaces. The third and fourth focused on the lived realities of LGBTIA+ communities shared their stories and connections and linkages with their faith.

Upon review of both the facilitation and the content, we noted the need to constantly challenge power that excludes bodies and power that seek to control narratives that lead to comparing between self and the other. A more comprehensive review will generate further learnings about our practice within faith institutions around human sexuality, identity and dignity.

Interfaith Advocacy on SRHR, Teenage Pregnancy and GBV

The theological interfaith briefs developed through our collaboration with the Faith 2 Action Network (F2A) are being used as an advocacy resource on SRHR, Teenage pregnancy and GBV in the region. We have supported partners in the regional ACT Alliance network in deepening engagement and advocacy within their faith institutions and congregations, in so doing expanding the consciousness of a critical approach to our work.

In Zimbabwe, we have supported the **Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust (AWET)** in their engagement with

prophets and prophetesses within their congregations in a bid to address child marriage. There has been discussions and sessions with the Apostolic community to draft policies within their various churches that address issues that cause violence against women and girls.

Fatima Zahra Women's Organisation has been conducting SRHR workshops with Muslim women in Zimbabwe. A national workshop was held with key stakeholders from each province, with follow-up provincial level workshops conducted in Manicaland and Midlands provinces. Fatima Zahra and Ahlul-Bayt Islamic Guidance Council, with the aid of Kenyan Muslim Youth Organization, is working at adapting an SRHR tool kit for the Muslim community.

The **Blantyre Synod** and **ACT Alliance Malawi** have engaged in a SRHR Policy review process that has involved dialogue and open conversations within the congregations on SRHR. This has also led to identification of gaps and concrete measures to address these.

In South Africa, the Gender Ministry in the **Anglican Diocese of Natal** has been leading work to address gender-based violence. They have facilitated two GBV processes based on the SEE-JUDGE-ACT methodology. This has led to notable groundswell of member-driven activities which include developing contextual bible studies for women (clergy and members of the Mothers' Union and Anglican Women's Fellowship), for men (members of Bernard Mizeki Men's organisation), and virtual clergy and men's march. Work has begun on the proposed core Diocesan Position Paper (based on the Provincial Safe Church Commission's core document and applying the Interfaith Theological Briefs). A video is in process that shares the Diocese's position on GBV through a narrative story is being created by youth.

We have worked with **SANERELA** in hosting *Interfaith Dialogue sessions on Human*

Sexuality and Gender Diversity sessions with faith leaders in the provinces of North West, Northern Cape and Mpumalanga, and culminating in a National Interfaith Dialogue. Silence around Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in faith communities have not only been centred around women and children's bodies, but also and especially around Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer (LGBTIQ+) bodies. These dialogues are part of our Faith in Dialogue series aimed at accompanying faith communities on a journey of awareness and consciousness.

3.7. Gender & Economic Justice: Realising a more gendered approach to rebuilding the economy

This was the theme for a four-part series of webinars hosted by the **Economic Justice Network (EJN)** and the **Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation (ESSET)**, and supported by ACT Ubumbano.

The webinar series was based on a critical analysis of the disproportionate economic impact of the

Covid-19 pandemic on women and girls. Women bear the brunt of holding society together and then rebuilding society as frontline workers and caregivers, professionally and in their personal capacity. Women continue to face structural barriers such as lower wages, discrimination, and unequal opportunities in the workplace.

Gendered Impacts of COVID-19

Webinar 1 unpacked the social and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on women and girls. The panel outlined the shifts in analysis and approach that are necessary to reimagine an economy, society, political system and faith community that is more responsive to the needs of women and girls.

Informal Economy

Webinar 2 focused on the informal economy and delved into the experiences of waste reclaimers, domestic workers, gig economy workers and cross-border traders. Speakers provided key insights on what solidarity looks like for marginalized communities, and raised the structural challenges to accessing state support measures.

Care Economy

Webinar 3 examined the broad economic issues related to the care economy, and delved into the experiences of girl

children and essential care workers before examining what opportunities there are for faith communities to support those in need of solidarity.

Food Security

Webinar 4 examined food security issues from the perspective of the girl-child, smallholder farmers, academics and civil society formations. The panellists unpacked experience and shared different responses and relief efforts, before making concrete suggestions for policy changes and interventions by the church.

4. Learning from our Practice

The objective of this work area is to deepen knowledge of change through sharing experiences of activists and communities. By critically reflecting on our own practice, and by listening to and learning from the experiences of those at the coalface of struggle, we deepen our practice of solidarity, and perhaps make a bigger impact for change.

4.1. Virtual Solidarity

COVID made it impossible to convene our Solidarity Hubs, and after reflection on the best way to navigate online conversations, we convened 6 online Learning Hubs with activists, organisations and faith leaders. These were designed to be intimate discussions about forms of resistance and struggle and what insights they offer for how we work with communities. The lessons learnt and insights gained are published as brief Learning Notes that are easy to access to trigger and facilitate further reflection.

Learning Hub #1: Solidarity in the time of COVID-19: A case study of PACSA & CREATE-CBR

The session was based on PACSA and Create-CBR efforts to be in solidarity with communities in the time of COVID-19. These organisations realised that they simply could not stand by while people were facing the crisis on their own. And so, they embarked on an intentional programme to provide households at risk with food, in a manner that reinforced their common values of building community and solidarity, and that defended the dignity of those households.

Learning Hub #2: Solidarity-The wind beneath activists' wings: Abahlali baseMjondolo & Church Land Programme

The Hub reflected on the solidarity activities undertaken by the Church Land Programme in support of the resistance by Abahlali baseMjondolo against evictions by the eThekweni Municipality. The session generated key insights for our practice of social justice and challenged us all to reflect on our own role.

Learning Hub #3: Solidarity as facilitation – Giving voice to people's struggles! Development Action Group and the Pine Road Community

Development Action Group (DAG)'s example of how they worked with displaced people who were relocated to the margins of the city. Working closely with the Pine Road community and city officials, DAG facilitated relocation to a new communal housing site, using the opportunity to demonstrate that with a bit of imagination and political buy-in, there are new possibilities to respond to the country's housing crisis.

Learning Hub #4: Care and connection in the time of COVID: Working slower and deeper

As we are isolated in our homes and unable to meet and work together, we have had to connect in new and different ways – to support each other, to exchange information and to simply check in and see how our friends and colleagues are doing. In this conversation, Thuli Mjwara of (IAM) led a most positive reflection on the question: Has the reality of COVID resulted in a more people centred way of working? Have we returned to a deeper practice of centring our humanity, as we are less focused on activities and events?

Learning Hub #5: Community voice, human dignity, and the demand for a Basic Income Grant

Led by Isobel Frye from SPII and Skhumbuzo Zuma from CLP, the session was convened to reflect on how community voice is amplified in calling for a universal Basic Income Grant (BIG). The campaign has gained traction in recent months, and the Hub explored what strategies

and coalitions will be needed to ensure community experiences and concerns are reflected in and inform policy conversations.

Learning Hub #6: Resistance, Voice and Mass Action: Campaign Work in COVID and beyond

Two videos capturing examples of movement building moments were screened as conversation starters, and the facilitated conversation surfaced insights that were explored more deeply in the session. Key learnings were that a unifying political agenda and programme is lacking, and over-bureaucratisation of struggles limits people's agency and popular organising. Mass mobilisation takes time, investment and discipline, and conscientisation is not about conventional education where NGOs are seen as the holders of knowledge, but is built on people's lived experiences.

4.2. Documenting Learnings from our Practice

We convened a task team that generated a list of 'idea pathways' that will help us document the ACT Ubumbano process as a resource, that will look at how voice and lived experience of activism and resistance can be captured and profiled for wider engagement, and provide a critical reflection on our own methodology – a deep exploration of how 'See Judge Act' as a tool of inquiry can strengthen social justice work.

5. Protecting the Defenders

The objective is to protect human rights and women's rights defenders who at risk of physical harm, and to help find ways to build resilience in those communities under threat. What we learnt during the pandemic is that this protective work extends to care for activists, and the need to support people in facing the mental challenges that arise from having to deal with uncertainty and trying to wage struggles within a reality of isolation.

5.1. Supporting women community workers during the COVID-19 pandemic

We are exploring a model of psychosocial support as a possible resource to the broader network. We supported the work of **Phola**, which is the development and dissemination of home grown, culturally sensitive psychosocial interventions. As part of its response to support disadvantaged communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, Phola trained 30 women who are community workers using its Tree of Life methodology. These are women who provide diverse services to families and communities in Diepsloot, Orange Farm, Alexander, and other informal settlements.

The COVID pandemic has placed young women and girls in precarious positions, and as families have had to prioritise feeding themselves, sanitary wear gets pushed to the back of the queue.

Lioness.org facilitated a menstrual health dignity drive to reach out to marginalised young women and girls, and with support from ACT Ubumbano provided 100 dignity packs to the community. Together with distribution, psychosocial support was provided through an online community of young women and girls.

6. Connecting People Globally

The objective is to deepen solidarity between communities in the global north and south. Global connections often happen seamlessly through organisational representatives, but the challenge for a deep solidarity is to connect communities across boundaries.

6.1. Social Media and Online Communication

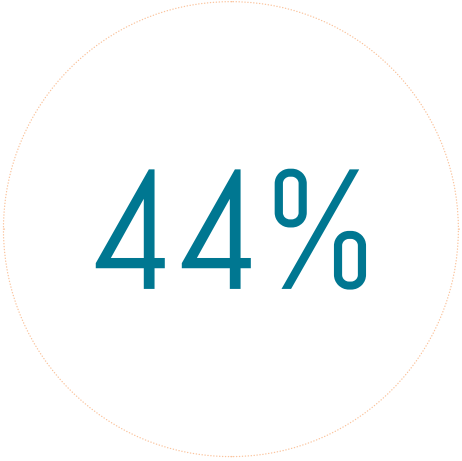
Where we would be facilitating exchange and solidarity visits between communities, COVID has forced a greater concentration on virtual connections. We have invested significant effort in online communication, and have produced a monthly newsletter that seeks to profile the social justice work of ACT Ubumbano and its partner organisations. We have used technology creatively for convenings and for training where people cannot physically meet.

- Most of the visitors were from South Africa (49%), followed by the US (13%), UK (4%), Zimbabwe (3,5%) and India (2%).
- 31% of visitors typed in our address, with a further 42% directed from search engines. It seems people have been looking for us.
- Most people (57%) used a computer to visit our website, but this is a decrease from 68% last year. Mobile phone usage has increased by 30% to 41% of all visitors.
- We now have 856 subscribers to our newsletter.
- Our Facebook page still needs some work. For 2020 our 'likes' increased by 25% from 325 to 406.

6.2. Websites

A detailed report on our online performance is available separately and on request. Key observations from the report for the period 1 January – 31 December 2020 are as follows:

- We have a 44% increase on last year's visits to our website. 6,253 people visited this year, of whom 1,832 were new visitors (increase of 73%).



44%

Percentage increase on last year's visits to our website.

6.3. Data Provision

We have invested in an efficient service that allows quick and easy data transfers to activists and participants in online activities.

6.4. Data-free COVID Information – Gateway Health Institute

We made a contribution to Gateway Health Institute for their collaboration with Denis Hurley Centre, Alliance Française in Durban, and Refugee Social Services in hosting a 'free-to-user COVID-19 learning channel in multiple languages for people without access to smartphones, airtime or data'. This partnership happened early on in the initial COVID lockdown, and was a key avenue for reaching people on the margins of telecoms and access to information.

6.5. Building Networks – ACT Alliance

The Act Alliance Gender Community of Practice (CoP) has become a space to share on strategies to strengthen and articulate national and regional. ACT Ubumbano is a member of this CoP with Zanele elected as Co-Chair. This has opened an opportunity to share on the work that ACT Ubumbano is involved in and increase solidarity work across the region.

We were able facilitate a contribution by the ACT Ubumbano Gender Task Team to a position paper by ACT Alliance Africa on Gender Justice work during the time of Covid-19. The Africa Gender CoP is currently leading a project of documenting responses to COVID-1. And we have been part of developing a roadmap to roll out the ACT Alliance Gender Justice Policy on the continent.

7. Resourcing Solidarity

The objective is to find alternative funding sources for CSOs in the region. We are particularly committed to finding support – financial and other types – for spaces where a critical reflection on practice and a critical consciousness on solidarity and social justice is facilitated.

7.1. Ford Foundation

We have secured support from Ford Foundation to explore power dynamics and relationships of solidarity as we document and interrogate learning from our social justice practice. Of greater interest is the relationship that comes with the funding arrangement. Ford have enquired about the general well-being of ACT Ubumbano and CLP staff, and have offered various spaces for individual and group support during COVID.

7.2. ACT Alliance Gender Justice concept

ACT Ubumbano, ELCSA, ESSET and WWSOSA jointly submitted a concept to ACT Alliance for funding. The concept is based on a process of accompaniment for faith leaders, and intentionally moves away from a 'training or train-the-trainer' model to one of building competencies for ongoing emergent learning through mentoring and accompanying faith leaders over 6 months. Originally conceptualised as a collaborative project by WWSOSA, this programme has become co-owned by 11 partners: ACT Ubumbano, We Will Speak Out South Africa (WWSOSA- Programme Convenor), World Vision International, Methodist Church of Southern Africa, Dutch Reformed Church, Anglican Diocese of Natal, University of KwaZulu Natal, University of Pretoria, Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Sinawe Foundation (Seventh Day Adventist), and Sonke Gender Justice.

7.3. Informing EU policy makers on faith and SRHR

A webinar with representatives from EU member states was convened to present more information about faith organisations' SRHR approaches. The aim of the webinar was to provide a better understanding of faith arguments in support of SRHR, and was an advocacy initiative to encourage prioritisation of faith institutions as key stakeholders in the SRHR space, particularly in policy processes.

7.4. EU Global Call for Proposals on SRHR

F2A, together with BfdW, ACoS and ACT Ubumbano, collaborated – unsuccessfully – to respond to an EU call for proposals that 'Promote Universal Reproductive Sexual Health and Rights of Vulnerable Adolescents in Africa.'

7.5. Support to Partner-led Initiatives

We provided financial and other support to partner-led initiatives. These collaborations are in line with our commitment to supporting struggles of local communities, and are informed by the experiences of people in those communities.

ORGANISATION	THEME
ACT Alliance Malawi	Community based Campaign Against GBV
ACT Alliance Zambia	Faith leaders GBV workshop as well review of the United Church of Zambia (UCZ) Gender Policy.
ACT Alliance Zimbabwe	Strengthen Church capacity to address gender inequality & raise gender awareness with men & boys
Anglican Church of Southern Africa	Strengthen Anglican Diocese of KwaZulu Natal's commitment to fight GBV and promote SRHR.
Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust	Transform church policies, teachings & practices on teenage pregnancy, sexual & gender-based violence (SGBV), & sexual & reproductive health & rights
Central African Presbyterian Blantyre Synod	Update SRHR policy of Central African Presbyterian Blantyre Synod.
Christian Council of Mozambique	Training activists on writing and organising skills via the Ubumbano Voice platform
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa (eSwatini)	From policy to practice: Actualize progressive Lutheran SRHR policies in 40 congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church
Fatima Zahra Women's Empowerment Project	Support to empower the Islamic community, on various SRHR issues.
The Fruit Basket	The goal of the project is to promote the solidarity concept through sharing of lived experiences amongst women in the informal economy
Lioness.org	Dignity through the Covid-19 Pandemic -Support for Women and girls – provision of Dignity kits
PACSA	Food parcels as a form of solidarity with vulnerable community members
Phola	Using the tree of life strength-based psychosocial intervention to support & empower women frontline workers during COVID
SANERELA	Inter-faith Dialogue on Human Sexuality and Gender Diversity In three provinces and a national level dialogue
ZIMCODD	Moderation of Ubumbano Voice Platform

8. Institutional Work

8.1. Board Recruitment

ACT Ubumbano registered as an NPO with the Department of Social Development. It became a voluntary association, and its constitution gave the founding Board a year to invite the public to nominate individuals to serve on the first independently constituted Board. The new board members to take up positions in the new year are Roger Domingo, Dudu Radebe, Laurel Oettle, Barbara Kalima-Phiri, Ashmeer Joseph, Helga Jansen-Daugbjerg, Janet Zhou, and Jessie Turton. The European partners will nominate their ex-officio representative for the first meeting in 2021.

8.2. Financial Management & Fiscal Hosting

After a competitive bid and interview process, Avante Advisory Services was selected to manage our financial and payroll matters. We owe a debt of gratitude to the Church Land Programme who acted as our fiscal host for the past two years. From the beginning of 2021 we will take over responsibility for all administrative and financial management with Avante, who offer a virtual service.

This is ideal for ACT Ubumbano, as we have moved to a virtual working arrangement for the three staff members. We will save significantly on rental costs, and will allow a flexible working arrangement from home.

9. The Future

ACT Ubumbano and its founder and partner organisations remain committed to exploring new ways of standing in solidarity with those who struggle to defend their dignity in the face of injustice. We do this by listening to the lived experience of those who suffer, by together reflecting on that experience and analysing the root causes of that suffering, and by finding new forms of social justice action that seeks change.

We shape our programmatic work in dialogue with activists, community members, faith leaders and institutions, NGOs and CBOs, development partners from the global north, and organisations of poor people who are committed to solidarity and collaboration. There is no pre-determined template – we make the path as we walk it. In doing this, we hope to remain in genuine solidarity with those who struggle for gender, environmental and economic justice.

ACT Ubumbano is run by a small team of three people.

- i. **Ashley Green-Thompson** ashley@actubumbano.org is the Coordinator.
- ii. **Zanele Makombe** zanele@actubumbano.org is the Programme Advisor.
- iii. **Thabo Chaba** thabo@actubumbano.org is the Admin and Logistics Officer.

The Board oversees the work of the organisation, and is chaired by Dudu Radebe. Other members are Ashmeer Joseph, Janet Zhou, Barbara Kalima-Phiri, Jessie Turton, Uta Hergenroether, Helga Jansen-Daugbjerg, and Roger Domingo.



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