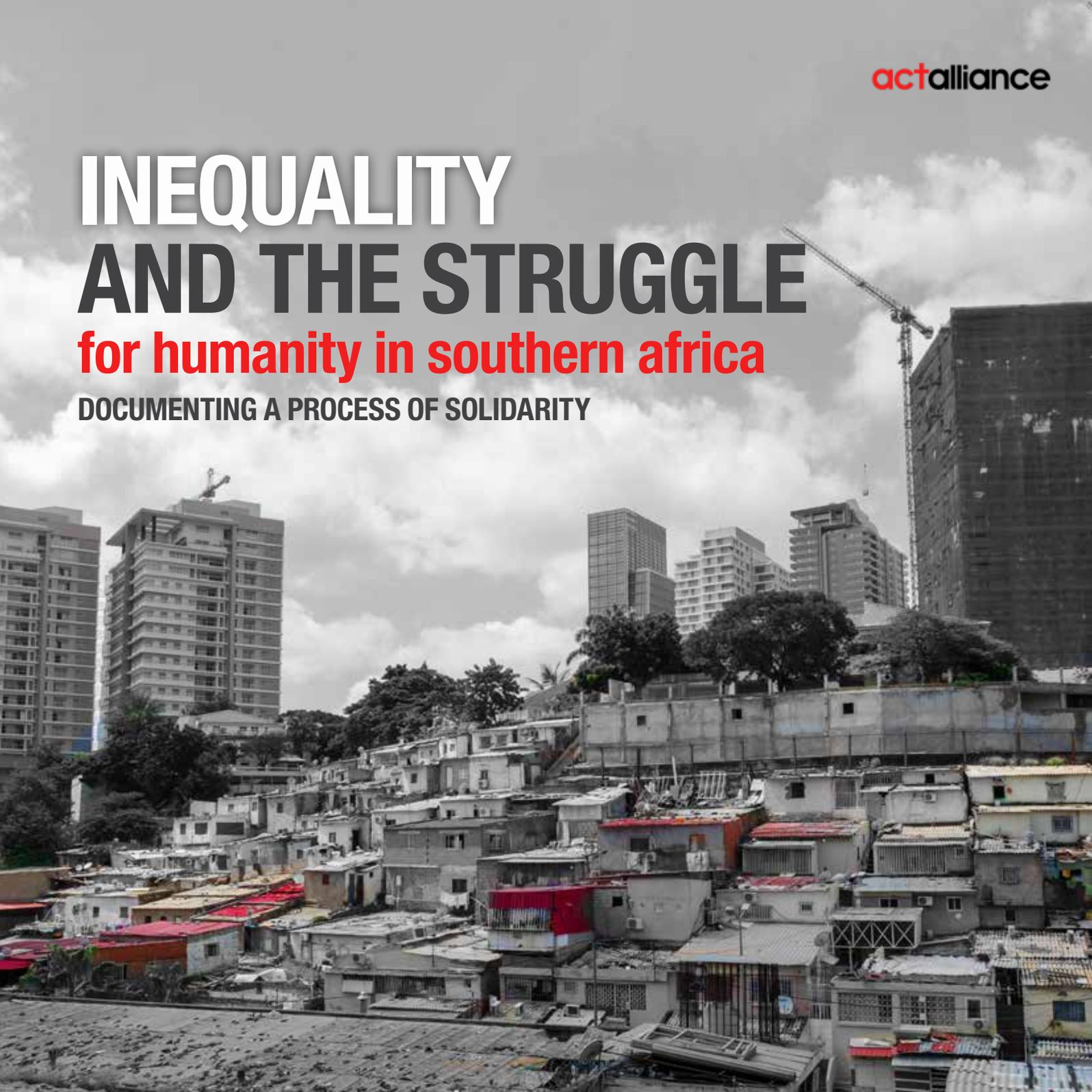


# INEQUALITY AND THE STRUGGLE for humanity in southern africa

DOCUMENTING A PROCESS OF SOLIDARITY



**INEQUALITY  
AND THE STRUGGLE  
for humanity in southern africa  
DOCUMENTING A PROCESS OF SOLIDARITY BUILDING**



The ACT Alliance is a coalition of 146 churches and faith-based organisations working together in over 100 countries. Under the ACT Alliance banner, Brot für die Welt, Christian Aid, Church of Sweden and Norwegian Church Aid are working with their Southern African partners to find new ways to continue expressing solidarity with those who struggle for justice.

This publication is a contribution to those struggles, and may be used, with the necessary acknowledgement, for purposes that advance solidarity.

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# 1 A SOLIDARITY PLATFORM

## A BASIS FOR CHANGE

“This is a process of change, initiated by European funding and development agencies who have partners in South and Southern Africa. It is looking to find new ways of managing partnerships and development, and of doing social justice work within the region... It is a response to global political shifts and to shifts in funding within European agencies, to see how they can continue to work in solidarity with organisations and people in the South.”

“If we are going to develop new relationships of solidarity, there needs to be a safe space in which we can come together and talk as comrades – as equals, as people who are committed to the same ultimate objective, which is transformation and a more just world. As part of the design, this platform becomes a key space in which European and Southern African partners, and partners from other places around the globe where struggle is happening, come together to talk about a practice of social justice.”

“This is a uniquely Southern African approach as it is very deliberately trying to create a process that has all the partners on board... The discussions come out of a deep commitment to continuing, deepening, strengthening and innovating, around solidarity”.

### ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource showcases the content, process and concrete outcomes of the Solidarity Platform meeting. Its purpose is to document the critical learnings that emerged, and to offer a framework for the thinking and doing of solidarity in transformative ways. It is hoped the resource will support the ongoing reflective practice of ACT Alliance partner organisations, as well as contribute to knowledge generation and action on solidarity building for social justice more broadly.

“This is a uniquely Southern African approach as it is very deliberately trying to create a process that has all the partners on board... The discussions come out of a deep commitment to continuing, deepening, strengthening and innovating, around solidarity”.

## BACKGROUND

Four European Protestant development agencies<sup>1</sup>, through the ACT Alliance<sup>2</sup>, and in consultation with their Southern African partners, are exploring new ways of tackling inequality and poverty in the region and globally. This work is centred on the pillars of social and economic justice, environmental justice and climate change, and gender justice, and is being piloted in 2016/2018. The project seeks to give expression to the principle of deepened solidarity through African-led dialogue and learning processes, and a more strategic and tactical approach to development challenges. Broadly referred to as building a Solidarity Platform, the initiative is intended to serve as a focal point for interaction, learning and dialogue amongst local and international partners and allies seeking to engage in deepening solidarity, knowledge and practice in the field.

In February 2017, a two-day convening was held in Johannesburg under the theme 'Inequality and the Struggle for Humanity in Southern Africa:'. Participants included faith-based organisations (FBOs), non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community movements from South Africa, Zimbabwe and

Mozambique, European agencies, and a guest speaker from Brazil. The overall purpose was to pursue the establishment of a nodal point for interrogating the current development agenda, as well as to explore alternative approaches to strengthen solidarity between organisations in the global North and South, as well as amongst organisations in the South. The intention is that such solidarity will find expression through concrete actions. The process sought to draw on the historical values that underpinned the successful solidarity of frontline states in opposition to apartheid, and of the international anti-apartheid movement more broadly.

**The project seeks to give expression to the principle of deepened solidarity through African led dialogue and learning processes.**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE SOLIDARITY PLATFORM<sup>3</sup>

Prior to the Solidarity Platform convening, a small steering committee was tasked with developing the agenda for engagement based on the following principles:

- The process is to be driven by the lived experience of those in the region and thus by organisations in the South. Any new agenda or model for collaboration is to be defined together with local partners, as their ownership is key.
- The bilateral relationships between European agencies and organisations operating in Southern Africa are to be maintained and deepened.
- The struggle to assert our humanity is global, and there should be solidarity arrangements that work in both directions such that local partners should not be responsible for finding solutions to European crises, nor should such crises take away from the historical duty of solidarity owed to the people of Africa.
- The principle of the 'common good' is to be applied in order to challenge the rise of self-interest in European aid policy.
- Transparency is needed in regard to the different interests the various partners hold, and to build greater trust and mutual respect.
- There is a need for a diversity of approaches to social change, and a commitment to support very specific and issue-based initiatives.
- Competition for resources amongst various communities of the poor, globally, is to be avoided.
- Space is to be created to learn from struggles in other Global South contexts; for European partners to inform the struggles in their home countries; and for local knowledge generation.
- Any new arrangements should be built on international solidarity as the primary basis. Other considerations, such as changed dynamics in European funding realities, should be secondary.
- Dialogue, over time, is central to the approach such that "we develop the path by walking it together".

**"We develop the path by walking it together".**

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**The See-Judge-Act method is a simple tool to guide reflection and action for social justice.**

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## METHOD OF ENGAGEMENT

The two-day convening followed the See-Judge-Act method of social analysis and enquiry developed by Josef Cardijn of the Young Christian Workers/Students movement. The three stages of this reflection-action approach to analysis and decision-making are:

### See

The See phase is about exploring the lived experience of those who struggle for their humanity. It concerns how current social, economic and political structures continue to deprive people of their humanity and dignity, and how inequality persists despite varied efforts. At the See stage, space is created for participants to reflect on their realities, and to draw on a collective wealth of experience in exploring the challenges they face - as development practitioners, activists and communities - within changing contexts. By holding a mirror to what organisations do,

they are able to critically review practices of solidarity with struggling communities. This enables one to identify and name the limitations that prevent the achievement of genuine solidarity and change.

### Judge

The Judge stage is focused on critical reflection and analysis. Participants locate their own struggles within the context of global structures of inequality, and collectively analyse and critique those structures. Judging explores theoretical approaches that explain the persistence of global inequality and challenge econometric definitions of human progress. This begins to reveal new ways of tackling the limitations identified in the Seeing phase, and enables participants to learn from their practices of struggle against injustice, and from those waging similar struggles elsewhere around the world.

### Act

The Act phase allows participants to translate their reflections on the world, and their practice within it, into actions that are transformative. It asks, and answers, the questions: What implications do these learnings and experiences hold for the praxis of solidarity? What principles will underpin the actions of those who seek to collaborate against inequality, and how can struggles against the denial of humanity and dignity be elevated and enhanced?

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**THE See-Judge-Act method is a way of reading and responding to the signs of the time**

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# 2 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON PRACTICE



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 The potential to See, as a reflective practice, provides new insights into how struggles may be waged more effectively. Through sharing experiences, participants self-critiqued their own social justice activism as the basis for engaging on how to grow solidarity in global efforts for justice.<sup>7</sup>

“As we challenge and question each other, what new practice emerges, given the reality we are facing in the Southern African region and globally? What does the nature of a struggle for humanity look like at this time in our global context?... How might these questions enable us to think anew, and deepen solidarity, and what new theologies and ideologies might emerge in the process that then feed us going forward?”

## INSIGHTS FROM NGOS AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

### Knowledge for change

“It was about coming to terms with the fact that it’s not always about knowledge. If you look at poverty and unemployment, discovering and sharing with leaders the fact of poverty and of levels of unemployment were not sufficient for change. That started our journey to identifying areas of power that needed to be approached to generate change”.

“Fancy academic sounding terms are not going to assist people to become their own change agents... A key learning is that how you process and package information can either act to empower people, or it can act against people and then you basically become a gatekeeper.”

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“We are not only looking for solidarity in terms of finances, we are also looking in terms of support and being there whenever we are arrested and attacked”.

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**“Solidarity has become increasingly alien where people are more polarised and individualistic. Our practices should aim to break this down”.**

### Working alongside others

“It’s probably easier to effect change if you have the ability to engage in processes that immediately and directly make policy, but unless one has links with collegial organisations that have membership, it’s very difficult to safeguard that change.... We’ve learned about the real need to work alongside membership organisations”.

“We are not only looking for solidarity in terms of finances, we are also looking in terms of support and being there whenever we are arrested and attacked, as that’s what we lack”.

### Leadership to organise

“One of the things we lack in our own practice is the capacitating of leadership – how to organise, because organising and coordinating are two different things. Organising is convincing people to be part of our ideology, which is to see human dignity in this country realised for the poor.” The difficulty of mobilising is exacerbated in movements that face high levels of hostility and violence, including the arrest and killing of their leaders.

### Imposing solidarity

“Academics and some NGOs are a problem because they speak on our behalf, they don’t speak to us. They represent us without having consulted the poor. Academics, sometimes when they come, they want to change our struggle. They want to do away with what we are doing - so the ideology of change is sometimes imposed by some of the NGOs we work with.”

“NGOs should support organisations in their struggles without altering their ideology, values and practices.”

### Cross-sector movement building

“Our movements have been pulled apart and become inward-looking and issue-focused ... We are struggling to find the issues and institutions that bring together the collective force and agency of different movements. If we are going to constitute a solidarity movement against oppression then issues of socio-economic justice seem to cut across all the movements”.

“Solidarity has become increasingly alien where people are more polarised and individualistic. Our practices should aim to break this down”.

### Occupying space and accompaniment

“Part of our theory of change is how do we occupy space and not rely on policy interventions for change but identify pressure points in order to achieve some kind of change, and to accompany communities and listen carefully to what they have to say”.

### Identity and ownership of struggles

“There is a dichotomy that emerges between NGOs and movements, where NGOs are professional with a board not rooted in the poor, and movements are democratic – in theory, ideally – and popular organisations led and governed by the poor. Yet resources sit in NGOs and movements are poor.... Can you combine the NGO and movement elements and put the resources under democratic control of the people? Because, before the fight over per diems and transport money comes the question of identity – do people see this as their organisation, or are they the passive beneficiaries of someone else’s programme? So, how do we invite agency? There has to be some ownership of the organisation itself”.

### Survivalist strategies

“Because of the impact of neo-liberalism, what we are having to deal with as a social justice organisation is the daily struggle for people to survive... How do we do this in a way that we don’t become a charity, but that remains a core part of mobilising people to become purposeful actors in their own lives?”

This is linked to the diversion of funds towards the legitimate survivalist needs of activists as well as to the dangers of fostering a culture of dependency.

**“Because of the impact of neo-liberalism, what we are having to deal with as a social justice organisation is the daily struggle for people to survive ...”**

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**NGOs in Europe are finding their roots back in the solidarity movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the political vision that underpinned their origins.**

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## **INSIGHTS FROM NORTHERN DONORS**

### **Elitism**

“We have the same agenda for social justice but how do we connect with people and not have these elite ways of working?... Europe has become a polarised society with many young people engaging more in movements, and also resisting xenophobia. We must have a less elitist way of working, reach out more, and use a progressive theology in a re-energised way”.

### **Defining our role**

“Our church partners are neither NGOs nor movements, they are churches. We must ensure that we don’t become NGOs because the churches will lose their credibility. But our back donors tend to push us to show results, so we are under pressure. We must comply in ways that are not always compatible with our church partners. The challenge then is to reconcile the push from the donors and the push from the partners.”

### **NGO reinventions**

NGOs in Europe are in the process of reinvention, pushed by political forces, aid cutbacks, and competing demands. This reinvention takes different forms. Some become conglomerates - bigger and more professionalised, with closer links to business. Yet others are finding their roots back in the solidarity movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and the political vision that underpinned their origins. But back-donors don’t fund solidarity. There are also new movements emerging based on greater public awareness, understanding and resistance, and this has the potential to sustain a more political and visionary NGO sector/movement, which can then be supported.

## **EMERGING ISSUES**

In reflecting on their respective practice, the dialogue between local and international partners surfaced a number of key issues, outlined below.

### **Dis/connected organising and common ground**

Organising is increasingly taking place in contexts where people feel they are under threat. One response is people wanting to protect their own socio-economic interests. Another response is the use of self-sustaining complex and organic forms of organising (such as Fees Must Fall, taxi unions or farmers’ unions), as well as forms that target policy-making and implementation.

There is frequently a disconnection with mass-based organising, and so a central challenge is organising itself, and how to do this effectively and in ways that integrate different approaches. Enhancing connections across different forms of organising requires the development of common ground - rooted in political education on how the poor are under threat, and in pursuit of the common good.

### **Increasing inclusiveness**

There are many examples of good practice and experience to be built on to grow inclusivity. Inclusiveness can be strengthened through issue-based initiatives and by identifying common agendas.

There is also a need to recognise that one doesn’t have to be homogeneous to act, and that with a common vision, difference in approaches can be accepted. This includes recognition of different roles, as well as diverse levels and forms of solidarity.

In rethinking how organisations are presently structured there can be an over-emphasis on self-preservation as the primary driver of strategic choices. Rather, it is critical for NGOs to follow the lead, and meet the need, as defined by poor people themselves. Key to addressing this limitation is visionary leadership, namely leaders who “think bigger than their own organisations and think bigger than the single struggles they are leading”.

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**“What is needed is visionary leadership, namely leaders who “think bigger than their own organisations and think bigger than the single struggles they are leading.”**

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**Reimagining NGOs requires re-thinking power, influence and narratives. This affects ownership, agency and the democratic control of budgets.**

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### Global funding shifts

Honest discussions are required around what implementing partners are working on and what their goals are. An understanding of struggles and their context is required before developing proposals. Money should not be the driving force of change. Rather, joint collaboration with organisations in the South is critical. Competition, in the context of reduced funding, is to be avoided. Moreover, resource mobilisation together with organisations in the South is key, and available funding is to be utilised more carefully, drawing on an inclusive stakeholder approach.

### The rising Right

“Xenophobia is appealing... To suggest to the poor that you are poor because of a bunch of foreigners who have come to Europe, or to South Africa, is a very appealing thing because immediate difference – the one next door – is more meaningful than abstract difference. So how do we counter this appeal?”. There is an increasing polarisation through right-wing fundamentalisms with mass, populist appeal. What can be done to support those voices that oppose

right wing agendas? There is a need for a counter narrative. Social media is an important space, but can also be used for political manipulations that seek to reverse gains. The Right piggybacks on the language of the Left.

A critical issue here is the perception of Right vs. Left and the need to clearly define these positions. Of importance in this regard is going back to the basics “to ensure civic education is the cornerstone of all we do to drive social change”. The rise of the Right is a reminder that we are in the age of ideology, and this raises the question, what is the ideology of a social justice movement? We need to tell our stories more effectively as a form of counter-narrative to fight rising inequality.

### NGO structures and ways of working

There is a need to rethink how we are structured and governed, as there is a rigid commitment to one way of NGO structuring rather than asking the question: What structures provide the best fit to do solidarity work in the new moment? Reimagining NGOs requires re-thinking power, influence and narratives. This affects ownership,

agency and the democratic control of budgets. There are questions of trust, power and gatekeeping in the field. For example, doing research brings you close to policy but makes you a gatekeeper for both movements and the State. These are new forms of power and intermediation that raise the question of how to actively change elite ways of working.

### Accountability and interdependence

Reconciling the push from donors and from partners for different forms of accountability that are also sensitive to working with particular types of partners, requires a reimagining of accountability itself. In dealing with the corporatisation of struggles and organisations, it is essential to recognise interdependence and return to solidarity as a centrepiece of the work. Of importance, is how European partners can influence the priorities of their back donors, engage in social justice work within Europe, as well as advocate for continued and increased international solidarity with developing countries.

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**It is essential to recognise interdependence and a return to solidarity as the centrepiece of this work.**

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# 3 FRAMING STRUGGLES FOR HUMANITY



 In the Judge stage of the process, the focus shifted to an analysis and critique of the underpinning structures that cause and perpetuate inequality in the region and globally. This includes global political shifts to the Right and what that means for the South, and for civil society more broadly. It also considers how to move beyond transactional relationships with Northern partners; what the fundamental underpinnings of struggles are; the implications of threats to funding; and the tools that movement building requires. The section that follows starts with an overview of two perspectives. The first concerns key characteristics of the present time, and the second focuses on matters of funding and relational theology.

These are followed by some emerging issues concerning this global political context and its implications for social justice solidarities.

## A PERSPECTIVE ON OUR TIMES<sup>4</sup>

- The clamour for justice has never been as loud as it is now. Reasons for this include the expanding rates of inequality in every country such that social inequalities are a real security problem worldwide. **The paradox is that the structural conditions to respond to that clamour have never been as difficult.** On the one hand there is a huge demand for justice, and on the other, a diminishing level of possibilities for responding to that demand.
- The period our world is going through is a kind of planetary entanglement. It is difficult today for any local problem to not have global consequences. All problems are now trans-national.

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**The clamour for justice has never been as loud as it is now. The paradox is that the structural conditions to respond to that clamour have never been as difficult.**

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**“This is the disease of the Left worldwide - we keep repeating the same things and putting out the same political propositions while everything around us is changing, so the obligation is to have some intelligence of our times which is critical for the politics of transformation and the politics of funding”.**

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**There is no proper name for our time.** Other periods had a name e.g. the struggle against colonialism or imperialism. Naming is a very important step for any process of social transformation in that it allows for the articulation of the problem and of ways to address it.

- The universalisation of the market principle, in the figure of finance capitalism, is characterised by its velocity. In the mid 19th to mid 20th centuries, the emancipation project was to find a way in which capital exploitation would lessen. **The issue today is that people are superfluous in relation to capital.** Entire populations are redundant, resulting in massive unemployment. There is a huge scale of need but no jobs, and people are redundant in relation to the needs of the capital market. This is the escalatory nature of capitalism that creates casualties and has no interest in meeting social needs.
- People are frightened because of high poverty and suffering that could worsen. But instead of forming community to address this sense of dread, they are separating themselves from

the overall environment and from others through militarising borders, erecting walls, and in the will to kill rather than to care. Many people are no longer interested in repairing what has been broken, or in forming community, but would rather retreat and repel. This leads to a form of global apartheid as the driving force of contemporary politics. The idea is to expel people rather than to build solidarity. **This is negative messianism – it is not about salvation, but about survivalism,** premised on the eradication of what is perceived as a threat.

- The distinction between fiction and reality is under pressure. **There is no consensus on what constitutes reality or truth** and this complicates questions of accountability. Democracy is not possible in contexts where there is no accountability or the ability to distinguish between truth or fiction, wrong or right, and good or bad. Without this consensus, there is no democracy. These current conditions are conducive to the search for pure violence, as the only way to settle matters. This plays out in terrorism, wars, and market fundamentalism.

A yearning for pure violence is emerging in a context in which there is a relentless impoverishment of the real.

- There is a **bifurcation of democracy and global capital,** which are now no longer compatible. Historic tensions after 1945 and the welfare state allowed for compromise to coexist with capital, but now we see a parting of ways between financial capitalism and liberal democracy. Global capitalism is the biggest threat to liberal democracy. Manifestations like state capture are not just a South African phenomenon, but rather the result of this bifurcation between the democratic order and unregulated market forces.
- **Distinctions between the Left and the Right are blurred.** In the emergence of pure violence and increasing inequality, we need to redevelop discourse that restores the ideas of the common/public good, and so the treatment of the ‘Other’ becomes crucial.
- A key challenge to most social movements today is **how to build coalition politics as opposed to segmented**

**mobilisations.** This requires investment in knowledge and intelligence and the acquisition of analytical capacity and expertise. Having a voice is not enough: we need expert voices, and to democratise expertise and intelligence as preconditions to having a voice in a public sphere that is extremely fragmented. It is also about ethics and a radical recommitment to the weak among us. The major figures of the weak and vulnerable include women, youth, migrants, the stranger, and the refugee.

- We cannot transform society or the world at large if we do not produce new knowledge about our times, our cultures, our economies and our politics. There is a clear relationship between **knowledge and transformation.** Transformation requires the production and utilisation of new knowledge. Otherwise, we will repeat the same things while the world around us will be changing. This requires investing in critical intellect. We must revise these intellectual faculties otherwise democracy has no future.

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**We cannot transform society or the world at large if we do not produce new knowledge about our times, our cultures, our economies and our politics.**

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“Where we have deep relationships with fellow human beings and profound respect for our environment, beautiful things can happen”.

## A PERSPECTIVE ON RELATIONAL THEOLOGY AND FUNDING<sup>5</sup>

- **Relational theology** states that poverty and injustice are symptoms of broken relations amongst people, and between people and their environment. Not everybody believes in a supreme being, a God, but we might all recognise that, “where we have deep relationships with fellow human beings and profound respect for our environment, beautiful things can happen”. This is ultimately about a belief that, as human beings, we are bound together and, therefore, that we have a responsibility for each other’s well-being. We are called to help restore relations, and, “at the heart of our existence, is the call to solidarity”.
- Against the backdrop of the World War II aftermath, the root of Christian Aid and some other European organisations was “the recognition that if we have an image of the Other as an enemy, and we perpetuate that, we will be doomed to fight the same fight all over again... It is a bitter irony that Christian Aid is back operating within Europe

because of the European crisis of refugees”. People voted to leave the post-War consensus of European unity, and we now also have a Trump presidency. These are dramatic changes that require a review of our history for understanding and for responding. This is not limited to Europe and America in that the world is changing, and not in our favour, and these developments have given permission to **forces that have always been around, but that have now gained currency**. The support for fascist politicians with simple answers to complex problems is growing.

- There was a **secularisation of society**, yet European Christian developmental organisations were seen as counter-cultural and so they grew in past decades because governments viewed them as doing useful things. That has now ended as funding has contracted in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, and so the context has changed dramatically.

- What keeps these organisations going is people who support the right thing – namely, “to give, act and pray”. This links to **increased demands for accountability** in regard to spending and measurable impact. There is a significant trust deficit, so we need to be far more accountable for what we do. This is not all negative in that with a shared purpose, we can hold one another to account.
- **Transactional funding must evolve into transformational funding**. If you look at the growth of inequality and its impact – funding itself doesn’t change that. There is a need for advocacy and campaign work to change structures rather than subsidies that keep people poor. What is central is to recognise our interdependencies such that aid can never be a one-directional process – then it’s transactional. The process of exchanging the wealth and knowledge we share can never be one-directional, as we are bound by our common interdependence, which allows us to move from transactional to transformational engagements.
- There is a need to look at what we can offer in terms of funding, ideas, practice, legitimacy, being rooted in local communities – which is a huge asset, and the ability to connect. We are to define, amongst ourselves, what it is we each bring to the table using principles of leverage to maximise impact, and using our power to work together in ways that are appropriate to the present times, noting that **funding itself will not shift the system**.

## EMERGING ISSUES

### Defeats and betrayals

In terms of class struggles, there have been decades of defeat and betrayal by those who claim to represent the mass constituents we are interested in. Greece is an example, where most of the population voted against the EU package but a coalition of the Left defied that mandate despite a mass political movement. This betrayal and despondency, as political phenomena, take years to recover from.

“How can you express solidarity through funding?”. There is a tendency for strings to be attached and for dependencies to be created... Purely transactional funding suggests that poverty can be overcome through shifting money from A to B, but we don’t believe in that theory of change”.

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**“The stuff of our future is unpredictable and uncertain, and consequently, there are further risks... How do we remain ethical in uncertain times? Because times of uncertainty usually pave the way for unethical actions”.**

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### Local-global connections

Whilst there is a strong connection between local and global, it is often difficult for an individual to understand their own contribution to, and role in, that bigger picture. Abstract language can be a barrier in communicating with the very communities we are trying to empower.

### State capture

Across the region, if the State is captured then leadership cannot deliver. So how best do we engage captured leadership across Africa? We are led to think our governments are corrupt and hopeless and cannot bring development to their people, but the North underplays the corruption of global capitalism. We don't look sufficiently at the substance and materiality of illicit financial losses through corporations.

### Knowing the times

Not being able to define our times, and our place in these times, is reflected in how difficult it is to name our practice. What is needed is new knowledge on how to live and function with uncertainty. “A principle about practice then, is ‘not knowing’, and to own that as our reality”. That allows for new forms of knowing to emerge, rather than just the

application of old knowledge that is damaging.

### Critical faculties

In relation to the Left, and in the context of neoliberalism, the question is, where is the intelligentsia? Is there any connection between our praxis as NGOs and the negative perceptions surrounding intellectuals in grassroots movements, or do we think that grassroots struggles actually produce their own intellectuals? There is a need to revive critical faculties from, and on, the ground. “We need a radical recommitment to the weak and vulnerable - not just as victims or recipients of aid, but as agents of hope within our society”.

### Counter-culture and concepts

There must be a counter culture that draws on the humanity of the past, and a counter-narrative of transformational change. This requires a redefinition of the concepts of solidarity, justice, progress and forgiveness.

### Messianic tendencies

Even educated people are succumbing to new religious phenomena that promote religious demagogues. How then do we

ensure that religion is a resource for and not an enemy of development? There is a market for messiahs in undemocratic contexts, located within a patronage system that is now the default setting for most societies. It is necessary to unravel the system of patronage and its distribution of power and resources. There are critical traditions that allow us to stop the process in which religion is turning into yet another superstition driven by charismatic individuals.

### Survival modes

Having a voice is not enough: we now need expertise to achieve social change. But because of survival modes there are dependency issues – we invite people to workshops and poor people must then decide between events and their food needs. We must also meet immediate needs, without creating dependency.

### Short-termism and impermanence

The dominant hegemonic system is characterised by accelerated time, short-termism, and the erasure of the past - as though societies don't have a history. How do we build permanence, which is essential to giving back power to those from

whom it has been taken. How do we change the terms of measurement in regard to funding?

If funding privileges short-term interests, then we need a different kind of intelligence around long-term strategies.

### Transformational funding

Transactional and transformational funding are not mutually exclusive. We must look at the nature of income, the reduction in income from supporters, and the need to spend in a transformational way. The transactional approach is well recognised, but even in humanitarian work, there must be a transformational dimension. Can we enhance the agency of people in the process? The best funding is highly political. Politics is not only the domain of political parties; it is also about citizens asserting their rights.

“The challenge is how to offer a reading of our times that is not pessimistic but also realistic: a realism and pragmatism that opens avenues for hope. How do we recapture the serious category of hope which is also a theological category and sociological and political one, and recapture it to understand our times beyond pessimism?”

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**“The worst thing is to just throw things at people with no questions asked... We need to be thinking transformational, even within transactional arrangements”.**

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# 4 LEARNING FROM OTHER STRUGGLES



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## A VIEW FROM BRAZIL<sup>6</sup>

 What follows is a summary of a presentation by a Brazilian activist reflecting critically on the politics and practice of the Brazilian Landless Workers Movement, **Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra (MST)**.

### History and political approach

MST emerged after the military regime and is the inheritor of the fight of black peoples and indigenous communities. The movement is not static but in permanent transformational mode and benefits greatly from international solidarity. It arose with indigenous leaders, many of them linked to the Catholic Church in Brazil. It also has solidarity with the land occupations of 1981 and was properly constituted in 1984 as a mass movement.

MST fights for land and for rights, and has no political affiliations and is thus completely independent. There are organisational principles that shape collective directorship, collaborative decision-making, and a shared and democratically elected leadership, for which consensus is key. Direct occupation is a method of struggle and there have been

3 500 occupations in 24 of Brazil's 27 states. It's biggest legacy is a militant culture that brings dignity to human beings and both belief and strength, through the power of knowledge, so that people can build solidarity.

### Solidarities and collaborations at/for the margins

No organisation will survive unless there is solidarity with others, whether regionally or internationally. Solidarity happens among equals, and is more intra-working class, so it is focused on the struggle of the working class. Alliances beyond our own interests include with farmers, indigenous people, farm unions, favelas and factory workers, and must be fostered among those who follow the same course.

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**Our biggest legacy is a militant culture that brings dignity to human beings and both belief and strength, through the power of knowledge, so that people can build solidarity.**

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We want solidarity because we understand what it is to be on the margins. With our first occupation we understood we would not survive if we were on the margins. Today we would not be where we are if we didn't go international. We went to the African continent and built a network of solidarity amongst rural people. Through our cultural identification with the African continent, we learnt a lot about struggles and shared with African compañeros.

### Autonomy, political education and direct action

We have a solidarity principle that we never interfere in the process of the organisations with which we develop solidarity so that their autonomy is preserved. We understand that alliances happen in diversity, and that there is equality in diversity, so we look for commonalities. We must carefully understand problems that may arise in the relationships with comrades and we must construct relationships without interfering in our respective autonomy. We must get to know, in depth, their situation. We learned from the Cuban experience about the brigades that move to other countries to give direct solidarity.

Our solidarity is with most people but, above all, with landless people, as we must address landlessness. But solidarity must have reciprocity. Mutual solidarity in the struggle provides a unique platform for action and for political education. It is impossible to maintain community projects if we don't invest in political education at the grassroots. Solidarity can only be direct, practical action. There is no possibility for change without a struggle of the masses - people organised in movements with immense networks of solidarity.

### Strength and gender equality in numbers

We must occupy, march and mobilise, otherwise we cannot reach our objectives. The power of numbers is what brings us victories. Even now, there are 20 000 farmers in Brazil marching for 20 days to the capital. This is a huge undertaking and so decision-making is complicated. There is task division and political leadership at all levels. Both genders are in leadership so that in the 20 organised states, each state chooses one male and one female to the national leadership and those structures take the decisions. We must keep discussions

democratic in these structures, and from the grassroots upwards, as this is most effective for us.

### The State

We don't function as a stand-in for the government but augment what they do with our own structures. Self-sustainability is our way, including through rural production and not through dependence on international aid or any State. The State doesn't agree with our struggle, so we must rely on autonomy. One principle is that we do not put energy into institutions. Our militants don't have to be part of governments. Elections don't solve people's problems. We have clarity that what resolves problems is people organising, mobilising and making specific claims.

### Adaptation

We have evolved through the demands that have arisen from within rural movements, especially farmer's movements, and through adaptation because the enemy changes its face and ways. Ten years ago we knew who owned the land we were occupying, but now it is difficult because transnational agro-business has changed the face

of things. That forced us to change the form of struggle, and so we must assume new ways to deal with these emerging issues.

### Networks

Our networks of solidarity protect us and the many people who occupy land. There must be at least 1 000 people otherwise the oppression is too strong to resist. We have resisted for 15 years on specific land. The biggest challenge is to maintain organised networks. Our networks must create more networks, to amplify the occupations every year. It is a continuous and permanent challenge to convince a whole society that it is necessary to change the social model.

### Relationship with NGOs

We don't have formal relationships with NGOs. The principle for relating to them is through international cooperation. Firstly, this involves a political relationship where transformation is the aim - if that is not a common factor then there is no relationship. Autonomy is key for us, with whomever we work. We preserve the autonomy of church parties and NGOs, and these relationships terminate the moment they tell us what to do.

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**“What you're showing us, which is quite brilliant, is how a new world is possible and you're rebuilding it right now, within the context of major difficulties, and it's also being built from below. It's really inspiring for where we are in South Africa and in Africa as a whole”.**

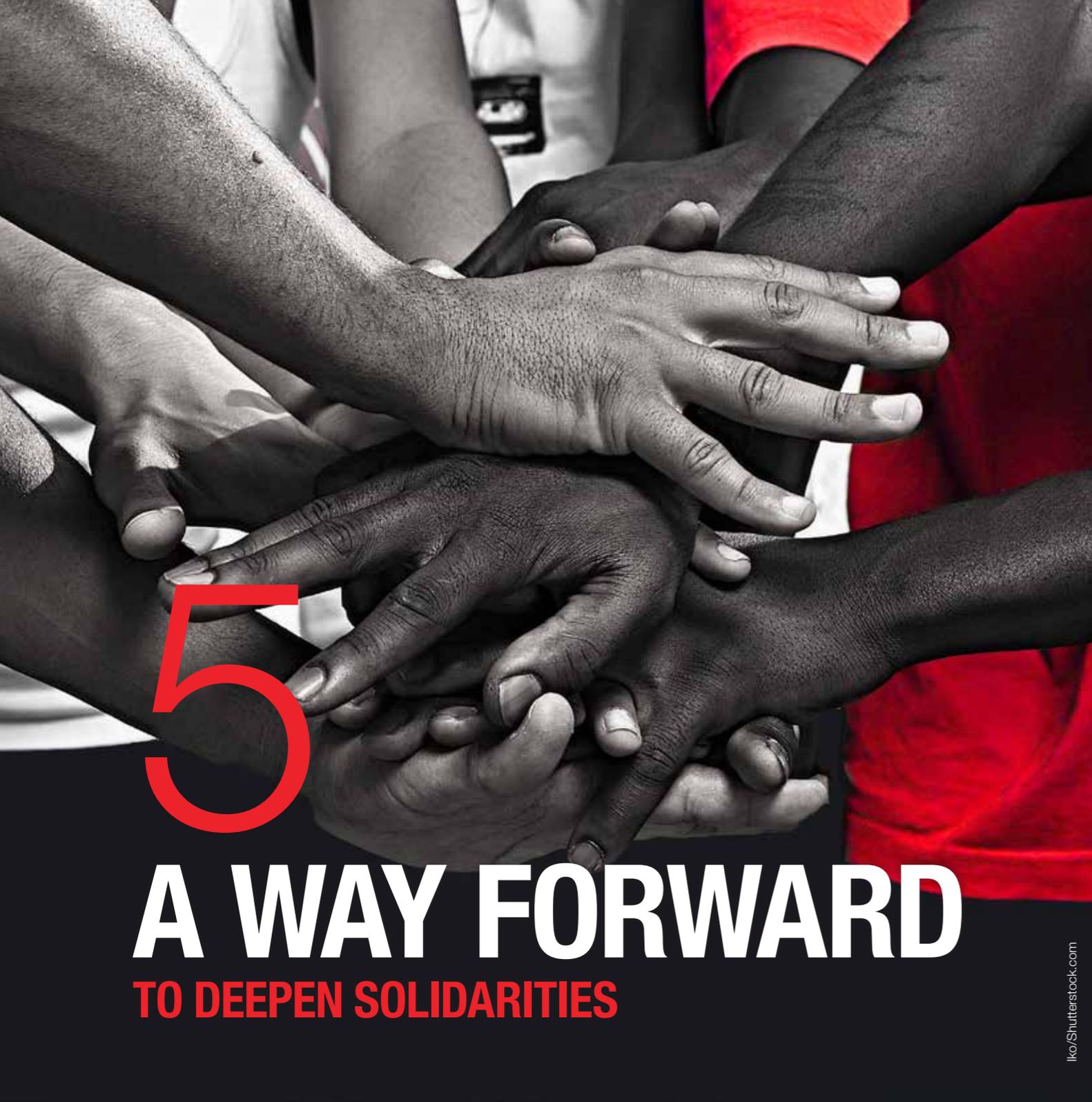
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**Elections don't solve people's problems. We have clarity that what resolves problems, is people organising, mobilising and making specific claims.**

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# A WAY FORWARD

TO DEEPEN SOLIDARITIES

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At this final stage, the attention turned to how the dialogue could be taken forward - both as a learning space and in the form of political and social action. What follows are the views from NGOs and movements in Southern Africa, and from Northern donors, on charting a future for the Solidarity Platform.

### VIEWS FROM NGOS AND MOVEMENTS

There is broad consensus that solidarity is needed. However, its precise form, function and desired impact - as a value proposition - requires further clarification. Such clarification should be grounded in a shared commitment to solidarity building that is:

- Based on core values and principles
- Shaped from the bottom up
- Informed by realities in the region
- A work-in-progress.

#### Transformative solidarity in action

- Solidarity is fluid not flat, and sometimes spontaneous. Through solidarities of interest, new constructions that are

both individual and collective can start, but these are to take shape from where one is situated.

- Multiple and diverse forms of solidarity are to be encouraged and embraced.
- “There is interest and commitment to finding a new way to explore how we work together... To put in place a different kind of space where it’s not bilateral discussions about funding contracts, it’s about a commitment, as equals, to a mission of social justice and to change our world”.
- “For any form of solidarity to work, it will require stripping the usual tendencies of the self and of power”.

“Solidarity is a principle that permeates everything: even the relationships in our organisations, are they relationships of solidarity or are they transactional?”

- “Solidarity is a principle that permeates everything: even the relationships in our organisations, are they relationships of solidarity or are they transactional?”
- “Solidarity is that an injury to one is an injury to all” - it is a commitment to organise towards the common goal of addressing capitalism as a global system.

### Building on existing formations

- There is no shortage of solidarity forums and opportunities. Rather, there is a big shortage of solidarity action through relationships that are built from below. “Getting a large number of organisations with little in common into the same room and hoping for real solidarity action is not an efficient approach”.
- One should move towards a sustainable, needs-driven and responsive solidarity practice. There are ample platforms already and there is need now for a more deliberate programme of action to strengthen institutional capabilities for solidarity building,

and to develop a knowledge base to inform praxis.

### Structuring solidarities

- The structure is to be informed by issues faced in Southern African countries.
- Solidarity begins with common actions and programmes, not abstract discussions. This involves concrete programmes of direct collaboration from below and linked to social movements.
- By building on existing programmes, the new entity will strengthen what is already in place.
- New forms of solidarity, movement building and accompaniment are to be supported by European agencies. This requires an entity and a model to create a non-competitive structure and programme for funding support.
- The independence of solidarity from issues of funding is critical, and the movement is to come from below, driven by a shared political will.
- Exchange programmes could be the basis for identifying common issues and points of synergy.

## VIEWS FROM NORTHERN PARTNERS

### Transformative solidarity in action

- The ACT Alliance Northern partners are promoting a bottom-up approach, steered from the ground, such that a hybrid model, relevant to contextual dynamics and with regional accountability mechanisms, might emerge.
- There is a need for common ownership around a strong proposition. Annual gatherings of stakeholders towards resourcing strategies around a proposition that donors will find attractive, is to be encouraged. This could generate collective resources to support popular struggles for justice in Southern Africa.
- This is a somewhat unique model in that it is not predetermined, and the vision is to build on existing programmes and add a strengthened solidarity component.
- Funders want a structure and lines of accountability with regional partners. Regional

accountability cannot happen in a dispersed group or a mass movement, and requires organisations that assume responsibility.

- What emerges should add value to what is already being done with each local partner, and not create duplication or centralisation.

### Diverse solidarities in action

- Action can take the form of operationalising thematic programmes for “different kinds of solidarities around different issues”.
- Identify synergies in Southern Africa and work alongside them to add value to what is already being done, and to increase impact and collective work.
- Social activists in the North could be invited to solidarity platforms in the South where principles and values for collaboration are key.
- “We should be open about the challenges we face as Northern donors”.

**Solidarity begins not with abstract discussions, but with concrete programmes of direct collaboration, from below and linked to social movements.**

**“We are asking you what makes sense in this context, and what model is enabling you to strengthen the work that is already going on”.**

“The approach at the outset was to build sufficient consensus, noting that consensus is built over time”.

### Transformational engagements

- Many are already involved in transformational work that could be the basis for future programming and funding.
- Programmes should not only be transactional but also have a strong relational component.
- The intention is to deepen existing programme work and also to challenge the powers that traditionally govern funder relationships.
- Transparency is a core foundation of solidarity and a key principle.

“We have to not confuse ourselves with popular movements which have their own logic and struggles, and see where we can be supportive, but recognise that if we are seen to appropriate that struggle, or if our relationship becomes too entangled, then it might be seen as capture – and we’re not after the capture of popular struggles”.

### Funding and beyond

- Funding and solidarity commitments were made by Northern partners to support the programming for solidarity that emerges.
- The scaling down of funds is an important consideration, as well as how the process might engage with issues of longer-term funding.

“We recognise that our destinies are intertwined and our struggles are multi-generational... We don’t want to come to the table empty-handed, but it may not be in the form of a cheque. We have relations, organisational capacity, policy influence, political skills and capacity. We have development practice and experience, and the relationship with all our supporters”.

“Let’s try not to have that age-old NGO crisis of funding being the driving force of how we think about the future of this process”.

“There is great potential in a Solidarity Platform proposal that goes beyond funding, to work on a political vision where us in Europe deliver on that vision and make our governments responsible and committed”.

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**“There is great potential in a Solidarity Platform proposal that goes beyond funding, to work on a political vision where us in Europe deliver on that vision and make our governments responsible and committed”.**

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# 6

# FUTURE STEPS

**DEVELOPING THE PATH BY WALKING IT TOGETHER**



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At the close of the process, a working group was constituted by Studies in Poverty and Inequality Institute, Benchmarks Foundation, Ecumenical Service for Socio-Economic Transformation, Economic Justice Network of the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development, Church Land Programme, Ecumenical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa, and Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers Association. The group's mandate is to translate the emerging reflections and analysis into concrete action and programme plans that will give effect to the new forms of solidarity that are the focus of this change process. A follow up Solidarity Platform to work on the way forward was convened in June 2017. In addition, a Solidarity Platform on Gender Justice and SRHR was convened in May 2017. From these, the following was agreed as the basis for future action:

### Higher level goal

To develop new forms of action for social justice that contribute to the transformation of structures of injustice and inequality by accompanying and supporting communities in their struggles. This is based on the joint conclusion that social change requires increased community agency, mobilisation and voice.

### Specific activities

The activities seek to support communities in the assertion of their agency and voice. To do this, three interconnected areas of action are recommended, each with specific objectives that contribute to the overall goal of exploring new ways of doing solidarity action. The activities will contribute towards the development of new forms of collaboration among European and Southern African organisations. The actions are located within the framing of a solidarity 'hub' (formerly 'Platform'), which remains a key space for reflection, learning, analysis and action.

To develop new forms of action for social justice that contribute to the transformation of structures of injustice and inequality by accompanying and supporting communities in their struggles.

Action	Objective	Key points
<p>Formation event on community organising</p>	<p>Through the sharing of experiences across the country, region and parts of the globe, to strengthen skills of activists, community members and NGO/FBO workers in strategies for community organising.</p>	<p>This intervention will be a facilitated learning session that draws from the lived experiences of others. It will entail the development of a curriculum, identification of community struggles that offer lessons, and facilitated discussions on how these learnings can be translated into concrete interventions and actions. This event can be a catalyst for practical actions in communities to adapt/improve political or community organising practice, building on varied and actual experience, taking this to a new level (or scale up to more communities) and further learning exchanges.</p>
<p>Use of technology to elevate community voice and experience.</p>	<p>To equip activists and community members with media and communication technology to allow them to speak directly to the general public, without the need for intermediaries, in order to bring their experiences into the public domain. This will influence decision-makers and strengthen calls for accountability from authorities.</p>	<p>This intervention will involve the sharing of good practice already taking place, and will draw on existing applications in the field and on IT specialists/designers.</p>

Action	Objective	Key points
<p>Scoping of initiatives on community organising, mobilising and support.</p>	<p>More than a directory of activities, this will provide an in-depth picture of the practice of the participating organisations. With a detailed picture of what everyone is doing and where, targeted collaboration and sharing at a local level can be supported. This could inform national (and international) solidarity actions such as advocacy, campaigning, policy influencing and movement building.</p>	<p>This will go beyond scoping activities, and include a detailed, in-depth analysis of the sector and its different methodologies and practices in relation to community mobilisation. It will contribute to building a profile of those participating in the change process, adding value to processes such as fundraising. This is the activity that will hold the first two together as part of a coordinated approach to collaboration. It is also in line with the proposed action that emerged from the Gender Justice Solidarity Platform, and provides a useful space to integrate the different stakeholder groups.</p>
<p>New and continued joint activities emerging from Solidarity Hubs.</p>	<p>The methodology for reflection and analysis in the Solidarity Hubs must result in action that advances the cause of justice, and provides the basis for increased collaboration between Northern and Southern organisations around the themes of economic justice, gender justice and SRHR, and climate change and environmental justice.</p>	<p>There has been support for action around the 16 Days of Activism Against Violence Against Women, a commitment to action made at the Gender Justice Hub. This process will continue to use the Solidarity Hubs to reflect on the lived experience of communities bearing the brunt of social injustice and the organisations that support them, to analyse the structural causes of injustice and our limitations in challenging these, and to plan and implement collaborative action that seeks to transform society.</p>

**The change process is not driven by the availability of funding. In fact, the process of supporting communities in their struggles is often difficult to fund, as this form of solidarity is frequently a long process with limited immediate and apparent impact stories.**

**How the approach differs**

- The action points above create a basis upon which the change process can be further discussed and developed. Such actions take the discussion beyond the theoretical, and ground whatever new model might emerge - for practical collaborative action that seeks to have a social justice impact and that is responsive to those communities that bear the brunt of injustice.
- Many INGOs (international NGOs) and northern development agencies are looking to take advantage of the shift in focus of back donors towards more direct funding of initiatives in the global South. The change process currently underway – and the oft-stated commitment to new power relations – provides the possibility for a genuinely transformed model of solidarity between the global North and South. It is an opportunity to increase southern NGO/ FBO power, and to bring to the forefront community voice and agency in this solidarity relationship.
- The joint analysis that informs the identified actions has emerged through a process of self-reflection and analysis, enabled by the solidarity hubs, on the part of organisations working directly with communities. The activities that will emerge from the formation event will be determined by the participants rather than by donors or NGOs, thus seeking to challenge the power dynamics within traditional funding practices and between NGOs and local communities.
- The change process is not driven by the availability of funding. In fact, the process of supporting communities in their struggles is often difficult to fund, as this form of solidarity is frequently a long process with limited immediate and apparent impact stories. Most notably, the primary input is led by organisations of the global South. The emphasis is thus on supporting mass movements and organisations in their efforts to mobilise and organise for change, and ensuring that their autonomy and self-determination remain at the centre.

**CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

In pursuing new forms of solidarity in practice, the following emerge as critical considerations for the change process:

**DISRUPTING POWER**

How expressions of solidarity - both in material and symbolic forms – by Northern partners can challenge and change dominant funding relationships.

**FROM PRINCIPLES TO PROGRAMMES**

How to move from core principles of solidarity building to concrete programming in a way that affirms and supports the local leadership and ownership of social justice struggles.

**COMMUNITY AGENCY AND ACCOMPANIMENT**

How to best support and accompany community movements for justice by recognising and committing to the centrality of their agency and voice.

**ACTION VERSUS PROCESS**

How to ensure that the need for concrete action doesn't come at the expense of a process of change - over time - that advances transparency, mutual accountability and transformed power relations.

**CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION AND A NEW LANGUAGE FOR OUR TIMES**

How to analyse and plan action from a different starting point - both as a critique of NGO complacency, and of the Left's failure to fulfil and sustain its visions in the face of a rising Right.

**1** Brot für die Welt, Christian Aid, Church of Sweden, and Norwegian Church Aid.

**2** ACT Alliance is a coalition of 146 churches and faith-based organisations working together in over 100 countries.

**3** These were agreed to in October 2016 by Southern African organisations participating in the change process.

**4** From the presentation by Professor Achille Mbembe, University of the Witwatersrand.

**5** Presentation by Paul Valentin, Christian Aid.

**6** Keynote presentation by Joba Alves Correia, Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra.

**7** Discussion following presentations by Isobel Frye from Studies in Poverty & Inequality Institute and Thapelo Mohapi from Abahlali baseMjondolo (MST).

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