

Extended Gender Task-Team Report
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Facilitated by



Systems Thinking Africa
transformative conversations

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1. Introduction

ACT Ubumbano is a network of Southern African and European organisations working for economic, gender and environmental justice. It does this through facilitating critical reflection on social justice practice, listening to the voices of those who are most affected by injustice, and supporting innovative and collaborative solidarity initiatives that address unjust power relations globally.

ACT Ubumbano sought the services of a consultant to facilitate its one day extended task team meeting as part of a process it has embarked on of setting up a Gender and Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) task team. The task team is aimed at supporting the Alliance to develop a strategy and vision for gender justice for its collective work. It is also aimed at ensuring continuous support for meaningful partner and community led gender justice and SRHR initiatives with a key focus on intersectionality of gender, climate, and economic justice.

The extended task team meeting took place on the 14 February 2019 and it brought together participants from 6 different countries, namely Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Sweden, United Kingdom and Zimbabwe, including members of the Gender Task-Team and nominated individuals.

2. Background: why the need for the extended task team meeting?

At the backdrop of the extended task team meeting were a number of frustrations that led to the gathering. Some of these were surfaced at the beginning of the meeting. These include a perception that the current problems around gender justice and SRHR are huge and that the current strategies being used are not making the desired difference in the world. Similarly, it was felt that there has not been enough done to make the required connections in ways of working to make a difference on gender justice and SRHR; that sometimes lack of a reflective praxis has made it difficult to see the obvious dangers surrounding the work and what is working well to be able to know what to leverage on; and that there is not enough reflection and knowledge generation from the work that is taking place.

Against this background, the participants in the extended task team meeting sought to understand new and **innovative ways** of approaching gender and SRHR work in a real, practical manner that is easy to understand and also centralises communities; to gain knowledge and skills from one another, particularly lessons from what is working in different countries; to explore and build connections with other related social justice themes such as environmental justice and class equality; as well as across sectors including Communities, Academia, NGOs and Donors, Churches.

3. Purpose and aim of the meeting

The meeting sought to do the following:

- i. Review ACT Ubumbano's practice as a platform for gender justice and SRHR activists and advocates. The main question here was whether Ubumbano's work is advancing the cause? If not, what are the barriers preventing the alliance from achieving greater progress and impact? Are there things that need to be done differently?
- ii. To understand the current context where Ubumbano works. This includes external developments in the different countries and region as well as internally within Ubumbano

- iii. Review the current initiatives undertaken by Ubumbano on gender and SRHR, reflecting on relevance, methodology, effectiveness, and drawing out key lessons
- iv. Use the reflections to redefine Ubumbano's work, with a particular focus on Ubumbano's
 - purpose, core principles and approach
 - structural, process and communication strategies for the Gender Task team in support of the Gender and Programme Advisor.

4. Expected Outcomes from the extended task team meeting

- i. A deeper understanding of work to date, and clarity as to strengths to build on, things to do differently, and new perspectives to include into this work;
- ii. A mandate for Advisory Committee members to input into strategic discussions at the Advisory Group Retreat that would take place on 18-19 February.

5. Reflection on the context within which Ubumbano works – “The world and community we live in”

What are the enablers and challenges to our gender work at the various levels (community, CSOs, FBOs, National, global partners)?

The context analysis highlighted the following:

- **Shrinking donor funding for gender justice work:** Over the period leading up to and during the existence of Ubumbano, shifts were seen in the donor sector with a shrink in funding. This was not only for the work around gender. Participants believe that more funds were channelled towards HIV/AIDS work, SRHR and work on men.
- **The role of men in gender justice work:** There has been an increasing focus on the role of men in gender justice work. Sadly, this work at times silenced women as well as shifted funds away from traditional women's organisations.
- **Shifts in the Institutional response:** Whilst there has been an increased institutionalized response to gender justice over the years, shifts have been evident in this area. These are associated with the impatience and frustrations from institutional failures that have not been able to bring about transformation in the work around gender justice. The use of Social media campaigns such as the #TheTotalShutdown and #MeToo Campaigns were more pronounced in the recent past. Such campaigns galvanized many women to make noise against violence meted against them. The young people in particular have been very instrumental in the recent shifts seen and have been less accepting of the prevailing oppressive and unresponsive culture.
- **Increased mobilization from within the ecumenical sector:** Meanwhile, pressure has been mounting from within the ecumenical sector itself, agitating the sector to engage with gender justice issues. The sector's response was seen as a desire to remain relevant. The response by the ecumenical sector has not been without challenges. It has been seen by some as marred with hypocrisy and double-speak where it uses the narrative of gender justice when it pleases whilst at the same time acting in ways that undermine it. For one, the sector has not been able to address its own theology on gender justice, leading to theology being seen as one of the drivers of gender based violence. The hypocrisy of the

ecumenical sector is further evident in its misuse of its power where it aligns itself with political power interests as well as failing to confront harmful cultural practices that promote gender injustice. All these make the church unsafe and dangerous.

It is also true that the ecumenical sector has also seen progressive elements within its ranks. The SAFE CHURCH MOVEMENT WWSOSA is one of the examples, giving hope that the church spaces themselves can be shifted and changed.

5.1. Gaps: What is missing?

The context analysis discussion raised a number of important issues that happen in the context of gender justice which Ubumbano needs to be conscious of as it continues its work. Surfacing these is important to highlight the potential risks and opportunities that influence gender justice work. These are highlighted below:

- **Feminism:** Feminism is one of the lenses used by others to engage on gender justice work. A question was raised on whether this should be incorporated into Ubumbano's work. A challenge was also posed on the exclusive and alienating language that feminism brings into the gender justice sector.
- **Economy:** The economy is one of the key factors that have an impact on gender. Without economic power, a lot of women are vulnerable to all sorts of injustices. Meanwhile, economic sectors such as the mining sector are key influencers that promote gender injustice, HIV, and human trafficking amongst other.
- **Communities:** The voices of survivors are particularly seen as important in the context of gender justice work. Yet at times their voices are not heard enough in the response against gender injustice. To be responsive to the context, a critical look at communities also needs to include how and where men and women are positioned. This is important to influence forms of engagement going forward. An important factor in this regard is the recognition of the value of men in gender work, not only in the education of young girls but also of boys.
- **Traditional leaders:** It was acknowledged that traditional leaders are very influential when it comes to gender justice work. As in the case with religious leaders, their views and actions carry a lot of weight and thus cannot be ignored.
- **Race and decoloniality:** The intersectional impact of race and the contemporary calls for decoloniality were raised as important factors in gender justice work. Decoloniality presents an opportunity to redefine this work.
- **LGBTIQA+ communities:** The LGBTIQA+ community faces marginalisation in society that raises a number of different issues for gender justice. The increasing awareness of this community and the global trends in focusing on their issues, impact directly on all the contextual trends named in the session.
- **Migration and Regional movement:** Migration and regional movement has also generated new forms of marginalisation for non-nationals, including generating different

issues for gender justice. This takes place in a context where there are a number of regional initiatives to address gender justice.

- **Education and the Department of Basic Education:** The important role of the education for shifting gender justice work in communities was raised; recognising the opportunity for working with the department of Basic Education.
- **Class:** The intersectional impact of class was raised as a key factor in gender justice work.

6. The small interventions and the shifts or lack of shifts on Gender Justice

What have been the current responses on gender justice and how effective have these been?

- **Protests and demonstrations** were widely used as a means to engage with gender justice work. This is a particular form of engagement largely used by community formations to raise awareness on their pain and call on leaders to account. There are however mixed views on the effectiveness of this strategy. Some believe that protests have largely become an end itself without a show of results. Those who argue for this believe that more is required beyond protests to ensure change. Some of the suggestions put forward to complement this strategy entail evidenced based research and clear plans of action.
- **Convening spaces** and connecting with people. One of the examples given was in KwaZulu Natal where 300 communities, faith leaders and survivors of GBV came together. Other examples include launching of SIDE BY SIDE chapters where conversations were held on faith, gender, and culture. Such platforms enable engagements on various themes related to gender such early marriage as well as sharing of learning opportunities.
- **Engaging hierarchies.** In spite of the fact that hierarchies are often problematic when it comes to gender justice work, different organisations engaged with faith leaders and other leaders in communities who have a wide reach and carry some level of influence and power in society. Some of the strategies used to engage them consist of learning and exposure visits. Their buy-in was considered important and has worked in some instances to influence change in the work around gender justice. What was seen as important is ensuring that they are channelled in the right direction.
- **Support for community interventions** through various means such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence as well as providing paralegal support in some cases.
- **Sensitisation, capacity building and empowerment.** This took various forms including training, conferences, dialogues, and engaging decision makers albeit this has been through a small number of people.
- **Networking and synergies** were explored, through collective action amongst different organisations as well as linking themes across the different areas of work such as faith, gender and climate and the environment.
- **Employment opportunities** created for women around small scale farming in countries such as Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

- **Storytelling and media advocacy.** This includes the use of social media as a means to share stories.

7. What has been challenging in our current responses?

A number of challenges were highlighted on the current responses to gender justice issues. One of the challenges identified was around protests and demonstrations largely used by communities, with arguments that these tend to be an end in and of themselves. On the one hand, there was acknowledgement by some that these actions create great momentum from communities. However, there are also questions on the extent to which these have been able to effect policy change. Thus, the question that was highlighted was how can these protests actions and demonstrations be used as a springboard into sustainable action?

Secondly, it was argued that whilst there is recognition of the need to involve faith leaders in the discourse on gender justice, the approaches used seem to apply greater caution than what is necessary. One of the major challenges in this regard is the avoidance of critical issues such as LGBTIQ, women's leadership and violence within the Faith Community. Further, it is suggested that whilst there is need to keep the conversation open, this approach lends itself to avoidance of discomfort and amounts to being apologetic in the process.

It was also acknowledged that many times the Alliance uses terms such as intersectionality without at the same time interrogating the real meaning behind them, its understanding, and the different lenses by which the gender discourse is entered by the members and activists. The result is the disjuncture that is evident between practice and what is said.

Some argue that the current responses to gender justice work tended to focus a lot on women whilst excluding men who are in most cases perpetrators of gender based injustices. This is seen as partly due to the conflation of the meaning of gender with women. The effect is that this sidelines and discourages men who have an interest in gender justice matters.

8. What is ACT Ubumbano called to do differently?

- **New and collective ways of being and seeing Ubumbano in its context.** It was clear from the context that Ubumbano and its members are being challenged to look for **new ways of being and working** that are not merely academic in approach. To be effective, deep reflection is required, looking at things that are working that can be used as a leverage to take the struggle for gender justice forward. At the same time, this calls for the courage to surface and let go of certain ways of **being and working** in the world that have become obsolete and no longer serve the cause. This should be accompanied by a new language that draws people in and is inclusive as opposed to the one that sidelines. Moreover, Ubumbano is being called to new ways of working that are connecting struggles and move away from working in silos.
- **A call for an honest self-reflexivity about its entry points.** Ubumbano brings together diverse members and activists into a collective alliance that seeks to find impactful ways of engaging with gender justice issues. All of these enter the gender justice discourse from different entry points which are informed by their own biases. In light of this, Ubumbano as a collective and the activists in it are being called to interrogate the lenses by which they enter the discourse with a level of honesty and self-reflection.

- **Confront its own power.** Ubumbano is also being called to confront, in an honest manner, power dynamics that are inherent in its kind of work and structure. Key amongst these are power dynamics between funding partners, NGOs and community formations that are part of the Alliance. It also has to confront itself about ways of working with men.
- **Explore different ways of working with communities.** The Alliance has to find a different approach of engaging with communities that moves beyond awareness raising workshops towards strengthening resilient communities. This requires placing communities at the centre whilst also deliberately foregrounding survivors. This has to be done in a respectful manner that does not replace nor disrupt what communities are already doing. It also calls for Ubumbano's agenda to be determined from below, being conscious of the risks associated with the power dynamic of having NGOs working behind the scenes. This also requires a consciousness that communities are not homogenous and therefore Ubumbano needs to explore different entry points in its engagement with communities. If the agenda of Ubumbano is determined from below, a critical question that Ubumbano has to grapple with is who decides on the appropriate strategies that should be used by the communities to engage on gender based violence? As was highlighted earlier, one of the criticisms highlighted in the meeting was the use of protests and demonstrations which are seen as amongst the most popular forms of engagement by community formations. An overarching perception was that this is not working and that more innovative forms of engagement are required. Whilst this might be true, a difficult question that needs a balancing act is how does Ubumbano work with community formations in ways that are true to them, are respectful of their choice of strategies and enhance what is already in place without a condescending tone?
- **Reflect on who is and is not in the room?** Another important factor stemming from the context analysis is who is and is not in the room? The first part of the question focusing on ***Who is in the room*** requires the Alliance to ask questions of how it engages with itself internally in a manner that is truly inclusive. This is an important question, given the fact that the Alliance is bringing together different kinds of members with different power bases and resources. On the question of who is not in the room, it is clear from the context analysis that there are important relationships in the context that matter to the work of Ubumbano around gender justice. Some of the players in this regard have not always necessarily worked to advance the struggle around gender justice, yet their influence is high. Some of the examples highlighted include the traditional leaders and faith leaders. Critical thought is required to explore the best ways of engaging these. Other players that were mentioned are the LGBTIQ community which is amongst the most vulnerable yet always ignored.
- **Acknowledge the power of patriarchy and the links that exist between culture and religion.** There is need to acknowledge the unholy trinity of gender, religion, and culture. One of the examples to reflect on this is the mining community. This industry is not only responsible for the environmental ills evident in our economy as is the case with water pollution. It is also responsible for the dominant construction of gender injustices, informed by the coming together of gender, religion, and culture. What is more dangerous is that it does this through the mutation of patriarchy and harmful construction of gender in more

subtle and nuanced ways. Therefore, for the Alliance, it is important to foreground the gendered nature of problems and issues that affect men, women, and non-binary people in a unique way.

- **Rethink ways of measuring success in gender justice** . Given the complexity around gender justice, the Alliance is being called to rethink how it measures success for its work beyond numbers and mere representation of women in relationships and spaces that are otherwise toxic to them in nature. The greater challenge here is to see the gender agenda as political, thus advocating and working towards the transformation of the gender landscape. Seeing gender justice with this lens requires different measurements.
- **Collective power and recourses?** Expand current actions and be more intentional about knowledge production and praxis reflection to enhance and improve social justice. For this to work effectively requires the prioritization of the communal construction of new knowledge from Ubumbano's practice.

9. Re-imagining its initiatives (looking ahead)

The meeting discussed the role of ACT Ubumbano developing the following statement of purpose for consideration:

ACT Ubumbano is a platform of accompanying each other into uncomfortable, unknown ways of working that disrupt the status quo around gender justice and SRHR, including Ubumbano's ways of being and working. It does this through building a form of consciousness that cannot be counted in numbers but one that can be weighed. Its praxis begins from a place of oppression and thus returns to weigh the shifts and changes in the lives of the oppressed and the systems of oppression. Most, importantly, Ubumbano does not exist for itself but for the communities it works with.

9.1. Four key areas of focus for ACT Ubumbano's gender and SRHR justice

Further articulated in the meeting are the four key areas of focus for ACT Ubumbano's gender and SRHR justice

a) How does ACT Ubumbano support a practice on accompanying communities?

- Use of social media platforms such as Ubumbano Community Voice App: This App is already in existence and is used to amplify community voices. Where this has been used, it is argued that it ensured social presence. Going forward it is suggested that this should still be used as one of the mechanisms of sharing stories amongst communities. A way forward in this regard should seek to address challenges that exist around its use, such as lack of data.
- Exchange visits amongst communities. This should be done in a more inclusive manner that goes beyond rural communities.
- Support advocacy initiatives of communities. One of the ways of doing this may include collective support of community court cases beyond the support that is currently offered by individual NGOs participating in the Alliance.

- Build political forums to increase consciousness on patriarchy and existing oppression in society.
- Build bridges between communities and faith leaders
- Ensure alignment and build solidarity between members of ACT Ubumbano

b) How does ACT Ubumbano collectively elevate the work in communities to effect change in policies and practice?

- Create tools for mainstreaming gender in other programme areas examples include clear gender markers, manifestos, and gender score cards
- Create opportunities for exchanges between communities as a means to build voice and the confidence of communities
- Create reflection practices around the work that is done by communities on gender justice. This could link with the strategies proposed for knowledge generation strategy. At the same time, such work would help Ubumbano to surface good practices. When such practices are identified, it is important to intentionally create platforms to celebrate these.
- Processes are required to unpack and increase understanding of policy and how best to use it to advance the cause around gender justice and channel issues raised by communities
- Explore ways of using social media and conventional media for advocacy purposes

c) How do we engage with Faith Leaders and other hierarchies?

Engaging Faith leaders and other hierarchies is based on an assumption that with clear intentions and approach, due to the power they hold, these leaders and the faith space generally carry a potential for healing when it comes to matters around gender justice.

- Create platforms and spaces for faith leaders to reflect and share amongst themselves as well as engage communities. More however needs to be done to unpack and understand exactly what kind of platforms are needed and to what end. For such spaces to work, building trust and centralising the interests of communities is key.
- One of the platforms that was suggested is a Faith summit on Gender. Further work is required to unpack where such a summit would be held and on the appropriate format to follow; clarity on who is targeted; and the language that will be used for this purpose.
- Use the tools that faith leaders already have such as Bible texts to engage on gender justice issues.
- Work through existing structures. This requires identifying opportunities for potential entry points such as women's work and children's work.
- Provide training on gender justice. More is said about this under Knowledge production.
- Find champions amongst faith leaders that can be influenced to work with the Alliance on gender justice

d) Knowledge Generation and Reflection

- A core focus in this regard will be decolonizing knowledge and its starting point is embodied in contextual knowledge of people who suffer it. Similarly, this will entail reflection on best practices and learning from situations of harm or 'failure'. All of this requires the construction of knowledge production spaces using community learning events.
- The expectation is that the resources produced will reach communities and be popularized through think piece or reflection piece to enhance praxis and enhance and improve social justice.
- Create tools for mainstreaming gender in other programme areas with clear gender markers, manifestos, and gender score cards
- A solidarity hub for ACT Ubumbano: This will be used to reflect on Ubumbano practice to ensure that the Alliance plays a meaningful role in social and gender justice. These reflection processes will themselves be used as an integral form of knowledge production. To this end, it is suggested that one of the pre-requisites of being a member of Ubumbano should be openness to the praxis of reflection and the willingness to be disrupted and destabilized.
- Prioritize an intersectional methodology to its work as opposed to a single issue mobilizing. This includes cross-sectoral discussion on oppression and the importance of social justice
- Solidarity Fund: There is a need for Solidarity Funding that will be used to bring together Academics, NGOs, Churches and Communities in the process of knowledge production. The type of academics that are required as part of this process are those that are concerned about the alignment/discourse between theory and practice where reflection starts in context and embodiment.

10. Leveraging on Ubumbano's collective power and resources

One of the questions that was asked in the meeting was how does Ubumbano leverage on its collective power. Below are some thoughts:

- Seed-funding is necessary for communities. Funding partners within the Alliance need to be encouraged to give to support community initiatives. This amongst other include emergency response funds that are going to support the community actions.
- information sharing and learning from one another on the different ways of working including how to support communities around court cases and emergency responses.

11. Key Questions that were raised during the discussions

There were a number of discussions that could not be concluded on the day, the extended gender task team meeting agreed that these would be noted for future discussion.

In terms of deepening the practice of accompanying communities, the following questions were raised:

- How do we appreciate that communities are not homogeneous and that there are different entry points to access each community? This includes examining how to gain legitimacy in each community through understanding that "communities trust whom they trust".
- How do we identify and share ways of working with communities that are not disruptive?

- What do we mean when we say, “grounded accompaniment”? How do we work in respectful ways?
- How do we earn the trust of communities?

In terms of elevating community work to change practice and policy the following questions were raised:

- What actions beyond protest are necessary to ensure gender justice? What does gender justice look like for the communities we work with?

In terms of deepening engagement with hierarchies in communities the following questions were raised:

- What is our intention when we engage hierarchies?
- Which other hierarchies? In particular, the Alliance noted its bias towards faith communities and the need to acknowledge that traditional leaders are also influential in some communities.
- Where are communities in these engagements with hierarchies? And what are their interests?

In terms of knowledge generation and reflection the following questions were raised:

- How do we involve academics, students, and communities in gathering evidence?
- How do we use this evidence to guide our responses?

A related question that was highlighted is who needs whom in the struggle against gender justice?

- Is it Ubumbano that needs communities or is it communities that need the support and services from Ubumbano?
- A third and reconciling question perhaps is what would be the best ways of working together that builds on one another strengths to advance the struggle for gender?

12. Recommendations and next steps

Ubumbano needs to engage in further steps to take forward the work that was done through the extended committee meeting. More importantly, a concrete process planning is required to further develop the proposals of the meeting. Looking at the proposed strategies, it is clear that some of these are interlinked. Some key recommendations were made of work to carry forward:

- a) Develop platforms for bringing different sectors together and galvanising collective work for social change
- b) Conduct an Innovation Hub for gender in emergencies
- c) Develop programmes to build capacity for gender justice work amongst community leaders and faith leaders
- d) Ensure knowledge production permeates all the Alliance’s work and is generated interactively at all levels.
- e) Identify existing tools for mainstreaming gender justice for example scorecards or manifestos that can be utilised by members of the Alliance.

Meanwhile, it will be important for Ubumbano to develop and bring clarity on its own methodology. Already the building blocks are in place. To this end the following key steps were identified:

- a) Establishing which members of ACT Ubumbano are able to drive specific areas of the work and develop task/thematic structures for example sub-committees.
- b) Defining how other countries in the Southern Africa network participate in and engage with the Alliance.
- c) Conducting a concrete planning process to define a programme, covering the four focus areas
- d) Establishing a process to build and develop the new methodology that defines ACT Ubumbano's praxis.