

ACT Ubumbano Annual Report 2021

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1 Introduction

2021, like the previous year, is characterised by COVID-19 and continued lockdowns and restrictions, forcing many to adapt or fail. ACT Ubumbano has learnt how to adjust its plans to continue being responsive to community voice and struggle.

This report presents an outline of activities facilitated and implemented by ACT Ubumbano over the reporting period of January to December 2021. It will give a sense of how the organisation has managed to support partners through solidarity grants, continued critical reflection on our practice through different documentation exercises, to amplify community voice through the Ubumbano Voice App, and to connect with different organisations and actors through networking and stakeholder engagement.

2 ACT Ubumbano

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

The higher-level goal for ACT Ubumbano is 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. ACT Ubumbano activities seek to support communities in the assertion of their agency and voice.

3 Promoting Community Voice & Action

3.1 *Ubumbano Community Voice App*

The Ubumbano voice App has continued to provide a platform for communities to tell their stories of struggle and to cross-pollinate ideas on various issues. The challenge remains as ever finding ways of maintaining contributions from activists as writing is not a priority activity for many, and how to amplify these stories beyond their appearance in the newsletter, app and website.

Together with ACT Alliance Malawi, ACT Alliance Zambia, and the Zimbabwe Coalition on Debt and Development(ZIMCODD), 170 local activists in those countries were part of a training programme that helped them write stories about struggles in their communities. The outcome has been a significant increase in the number of stories being shared in WhatsApp groups and on the Voice App. This work has laid the basis for plans to expand the training of activists in new sites in the region, and to explore new platforms for amplifying the reach and volume of those voices.

3.2 *Faith in Dialogue*

In the last two years, ACT Ubumbano has collaborated with twelve faith-based organisations in a series of interfaith dialogues using the three *interfaith briefs* on gender-based violence, sexual and reproductive health rights, and teenage pregnancy as a basis to undertake advocacy activities within their congregations, institutions and communities.

This year, seven in-country dialogues enabled space for these faith organisations to reflect on their advocacy initiatives and the lessons learnt. The output of these sessions was the production of seven short videos capturing the learnings, and twelve written case studies showcasing the work.

3.3 #FaithActors4Justice: Women’s Rights in Africa

In early 2021, ACT Ubumbano, Brot für die Welt, Faith to Action Network (F2A), ACT Alliance, and World Council of Churches—embarked on a pan-African consultative process entitled “Consultations on Women’s Rights in Christian Communities.” The objective of this collaboration was to advance the rights and human dignity of women and girls within the challenging context of COVID-19 and the resultant restrictions on social interaction.

A steering group was established that helped guide the work of reflecting and taking action to challenge gender discriminatory norms and practices within faith organisations. The consultation meetings used online platforms to convene 14 faith organisations from eSwatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. It is planned to continue into 2022 with the last few meetings.

3.4 Solidarity Support Facility and the Accompaniment Project

The Solidarity Support Facility (SSF) initiative began in February 2021 with an invitation to organisations and activists to seek support for community ‘responses to the impact of COVID, climate change, gender or economic injustice’, and to engage in ‘campaigns to change particular situations that communities are struggling with’.

ACT Ubumbano provided small grants of up to ZAR 30,000 to community-based organisations for projects that ‘take action for change or [are delivered] in solidarity with those who are under stress’.

In the 2021 financial year, ACT Ubumbano provided R 1 248 992 financial support to 58 organisations taking action on issues such as GBV, Social Cohesion/Justice in Political Unrest, Covid19 responses, Climate Change, SRHR/Menstrual Health , Education, Food Gardens, City Clean up, Housing, and the Rights of Farm Workers, among others.

Table 1. List of Partners Supported by Country

Country	No of grantees	Total Value of Grants ZAR
Eswatini	2	R47 832
Malawi	8	R180 000
Mozambique	1	R30 000
South Africa	33	R716 160
Zambia	1	R20 000
Zimbabwe	13	R255 000
Total	58	R1 248 992

Accompaniment

In addition to the funding, this initiative also provides non-financial support in the form of networking opportunities, creating space for reflection, and documenting and publicising the work of the organisations. A small team has been engaging in a documenting and learning exercise *‘to deepen the relationship with*

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organisations and activists to continue the practice of reflecting on our work and our solidarity with communities’. The outputs of the documenting and learning project primarily are intended to serve as easy-to-use resources for community-based organisers and others in the social justice space. Where possible, the resources should serve as ‘conversation starters’, stimulating and creating opportunity for dialogue, further engagement and the ‘enrichment’ of the content.

In the year, the team visited partners in the South African provinces of Eastern Cape, Western Cape, Limpopo, and KwaZulu Natal (KZN), and various locations across Zimbabwe and Malawi. Stories of partner struggles and actions were captured, and will be developed into resources for use by the partners.

3.5 Claiming our Stories, Raising our Voices

ACT Ubumbano supported and participated in the ‘Claiming Our Stories, Raising our Voices’ Global Conference that targeted young women and gender non-conforming people in journalism, advocacy, communications, social media, and leadership. The conference looked at communications challenges that hamper women’s leadership, how to elevate marginalised voices; how women can overcome harmful engagement on social media to raise their voices. It also sought to introduce women in the Global south to their counterparts across the globe and encourage learning and sharing in 2021. Over 40 women from 34 countries spoke to the almost 500 registrants. Act Ubumbano profiled the Ubumbano Voice App.

3.6 A Time Like No Other – Covid-19 in Women’s Voices

ACT Ubumbano supported The Circle of Concerned African Theologians to produce and launch the book *A Time like No Other - COVID-19 in Women’s Voices*. The publication is a collection of women’s stories about their lived experiences.

3.7 Solidarity with South Africa

In response to frustrated attempts to understand the causes of the massive social unrest that led to riots in South Africa, ACT Ubumbano convened a Solidarity Hub to to hear directly from activists living in the affected areas, and to provide a different analysis to the mainstream narrative that was dominating the conversation.

ACT Ubumbano supported the printing and distribution of a pamphlet with important phone numbers to access help and support through the crisis. A total of 18,000 bookmarks were distributed using food relief processes by the KZN Joint Churches Respond to COVID-19, Local Ecumenical Action Networks, the KZN Network on Violence Against Women, the Anglican Diocese of Natal, and local initiatives like the Westville Joint Churches Food Hamper project in the aftermath of the riots in July.

3.8 Solidarity with Eswatini

Following meetings with activists and faith leaders in the country, ACT Ubumbano has made funding available for the Council of Swaziland Churches to engage young people in dialogue on the political upheaval against the monarchy. This is a first step in what is likely to be an ongoing partnership with the Churches in that country.

In addition, small capacity support has been facilitated to help with the process of documenting rights violations during the community protests and riots in June. Affidavits on abuses by the security forces are being collected that will then inform what legal action may be appropriate.

3.9 ACT Alliance Gender Policy

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The ACT Alliance community is an important part of the identity of ACT Ubumbano. Zanele Makombe serves as Co-Chair of the Gender Community of Practice for the Alliance in Africa, and so it was quite appropriate that ACT Ubumbano would be asked to coordinate the rollout of the ACT Alliance Gender Policy with partners on the continent. The initiative seeks to create safe faith spaces by supporting processes of developing congregational or institution specific gender justice policies.

4 Documenting the Learning from our Practice

The team is regularly engaged in conversations about the ACT Ubumbano model of solidarity and partnership.

- Christian Aid invited ACT Ubumbano to share its model in a panel discussion hosted by Bond UK on its review of learnings gained from its work in various countries.
- ACT Ubumbano recently presented its work at a World Council of Churches global conference looking at Digital Justice.
- CARE International are in a process of exploring how to re-establish a presence in South Africa, and are in conversation with ACT Ubumbano to explore possible collaboration.

4.1 Outcomes Harvesting

As part of capturing impact and developing an approach to Monitoring and Evaluation systems, an Outcomes Harvesting report has been published and can be accessed [on the website](#). The document captures the voice of partners in the region and different fields of work, and provides a valuable insight into the impact of the work done.

4.2 External Evaluation

An External Evaluation was, as agreed at the establishment of ACT Ubumbano, commissioned by ACT Church of Sweden and Bread for the World. This report is available on request and affirms the work being done and the processes being undertaken.

4.3 Documenting the Process

Still to be finalised, this report is intended to document the process of ACT Ubumbano's evolution, and is based on conversations with a wide variety of stakeholders over the years. It will help develop insight into some of the difficult issues that have occurred along the way, and will make meaning of efforts to challenge prevailing practice and power dynamics in the sector.

5 Resourcing Solidarity

5.1 BMZ/GIZ Proposals on SRHR

ACT Ubumbano, Faith to Action Network and Brot für die Welt successfully secured funding from BMZ/ GIZ for an inter-generational and interfaith partnership to advance adolescents and youth sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Southern Africa region. The total grant is EURO150,000 of which EURO113,861 is to be managed by ACT Ubumbano.

5.2 Amplify Change Proposal on SRHR

ACT Ubumbano and Faith Action Network were invited by Amplify Change to submit a full proposal after the initial concept note was approved. The proposal involves significant sub-granting to partners, and is part of the continuation of the Faith in Dialogue work around gender justice and SRHR. This is a three-year project with a proposed amount of £1,302,206.

6 Institutional Work

6.1 New Board

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Following a public nomination process, the new Board of ACT Ubumbano held its inaugural meeting in Johannesburg and online on 25 March 2021. Dudu Radebe was chosen as the Chair. Ashmeer Joseph is the Acting General Secretary of ELCSA and was selected as Deputy Chair. Janet Zhou, the Director of ZIMCODD, completes the Exco as Secretary. Other members are Laurel Oettle (Director of AFRA), Jessie Turton (Lecturer at University of Johannesburg), Barbara Kalima-Phiri (Executive Director of IMAGINE Global Initiative, EI), Roger Domingo (CEO of SPP), and Helga Jansen-Djaugberg (Independent Consultant). Uta Hergenröther from BfdW is an ex-officio member representing the European partners.

The Board is committed to going beyond traditional understandings of what governance means and how it will work. Already it has supported the team in strategic reflections that will be a key feature of its business of guiding the mission of ACT Ubumbano.

6.2 Finance Committee

A Fincom has been established and has been reviewing financial reports and financial management systems of the organization.

6.3 Annual General Meeting

The first AGM was held in June where the Annual Report for 2020 was adopted, and the organisational audit financial statements for 2019 and 2020 were approved.

7 The Future.

7.1 Connecting to the World

The affiliation to ACT Alliance and continued relations in this regard will be a focus of work going forward. ACT Ubumbano will consider how it relates to a number of global processes such as Side by Side, Shine International, and the overtures by groups such as CARE International.