

ACT Ubumbano Solidarity Hub in Europe

ACT Ubumbano is convening a Solidarity Hub in Europe to provide a space for critical reflection and learning, based on the practice of social justice organisations working in Europe. The intention is to explore and analyse the seemingly intractable social, political, economic and environmental challenges facing communities globally, and to explore notions and practices of solidarity with and between marginalised communities who resist these challenges in Europe and in the global south that are transformational and healing.

1. Background to the Solidarity Hub

The Southern Africa Solidarity Hubs, anchored in a process of listening, dialogue and reflection, have allowed activists and development practitioners to share insights into their work, critically reflect on their practice, generate new knowledge and learning, and identify opportunities for collaborative social justice action. It is a space where experience and voice shaped by our lived reality is heard, providing a counterpoint to institutionalized and technocratic knowledge, meanings, and practices. This has often helped to raise questions about if and how development agendas and NGO ways of working are sufficiently in touch with the on-the-ground realities, needs, and exigencies of people who are directly affected by economic, gender, and climate injustice.

The participation of faith-based organisations has added to this critical analysis. The majority of people in the region have a strong faith base, and this too impacts how they engage the struggle against injustice.

ACT Ubumbano hopes to facilitate a similar space for deep reflection on practice in Europe, and to do this in collaboration with organisations who are based in Europe.

2. Why?

A challenge has emerged out of our conversations on decolonising development practice and financial aid. Whether we look to the climate crisis, or widespread dissatisfaction with the status quo as it manifests in protest, or the unpredictable and oppressive nature of politics, current philanthropic and development practice is inadequate for an increasingly unpredictable and unstable environment. The false certainty and linearity of the donor-provided frameworks within which organisations are forced to operate if they want to access funding has resulted in a development / philanthropic sector that appropriates and silences voice of those asserting their dignity, masking the depth of the inhumanity being experienced. To quote from a recent ACT Ubumbano dialogue:

The heart of our conversations has been reflecting on how dominant approaches, structures and relationships in philanthropy have either severely limited the advancement of a more just society and, in other cases, deeply exacerbated injustice - and what needs to be done for this to change. ...Looking only at the discourse in the philanthropic sector, one can easily assume that there has been a momentous shift. The reality, we know, does not bear that out. [Halima Mahomed]

The relationships between organisations within the development sector are invariably structured around resources and power, limiting the possibilities for the emergence of innovative knowledge and practices shaped by mutuality, solidarity, and dignity. Our busy organisational schedules often do not allow the space, time, or resources to critically engage the dynamics and structuring of these relationships.

ACT Ubumbano facilitates the deepening of reflection, and through that sharing a deepening of relationships that are transformational. Communities in Southern Africa have a strong connection with their faith, and the contradictions and injustices that manifest in broader society are often reinforced in

churches and faith institutions in the region. Through their participation in the Hubs, leaders and members of the faith community are challenged to interrogate their own practice, and to bring their perspectives into the conversation about transformation.

The **See-Judge-Act method** brings an added dimension. With links to the rich traditions of liberation theology, the method supports participants in the Hubs to:

- a) unmask the biases and complicities that cloud their (our) perspective, enabling them (us) to see and know the realities of injustice and dehumanisation that shape our society,
- b) analyse these realities in relation to global structures of violence and inequality, and affirm values of solidarity and dignity and,
- c) with this insight and awareness, take steps towards transformative solidarity action.

This is a chance for practitioners to go beyond the slogans and jargon that dominate the narrative – decolonisation, localisation, ‘shifting power’ - and to honestly interrogate our own complicity in maintaining systems of domination and exclusion. From this deep insight, we can shape new relationships and explore practices of dignity. As the early vision of what ACT Ubumbano could do reflects:

“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. The Solidarity Hub 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.”

3. Who will attend?

- Members of European social justice and solidarity organisations and movements, and philanthropic organisations committed to interrogating their practice and about influencing practically their organisation’s expressions of decolonisation and solidarity
- Members of social justice organisations and movements active in Southern Africa and elsewhere who can bring their perspective and experiences of global solidarity to the conversation
- Members and leaders of faith based institutions active in solidarity with marginalised communities

4. Framing the conversation:

SEE

- What are the drivers of the current situation? – a reflection on the globalised and interconnected / intersecting economic, political, social, and environmental factors that cause and deepen the crisis
- What are our organisations doing in response to increased marginalisation and impoverishment of vulnerable groups, in Europe and the global South?
- What about our practice has challenged the structural drivers of these problems?
- What has contributed to a deepening of these crises?
- Have we paid lip service to enabling local agency and voice, or do our practices genuinely build power in and cede control to communities who are resisting their own oppression?

JUDGE

How do we understand solidarity? What insights can we gain from models of solidarity among marginalised communities? [possible input from groups like Abahlali Basemjondolo / Ndifuna Ukwazi / others that are a practice of solidarity & accompaniment between resourced organisations and community groups / social movements]

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- What can we do to give real expression to solidarity with communities at the coalface of the struggle?
- What will new understandings and expressions of solidarity and dignity mean for the practices and systems of European and international organisations?
- What strategies could be explored to act in solidarity with struggles of marginalised communities in the global north?