

Solidarity as Practice

DOCUMENTING ACT
UBUMBANO'S CONTRIBUTION
TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ACT UBUMBANO

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Surplus People Project
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Tshwane Global Shapers Hub
Ulemu NGO
Womandla Foundation
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ABBREVIATIONS

AMMM	Associação de Mentoria da Mulher dos Medias
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
EGAN	Evangelização Geral de Ajuda aos Necessitados
F2A	Faith to Action Network
FBO	Faith-based Organisation
GBV	Gender-based Violence
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
KASA	Kerk in Aksie
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer
OH	Outcomes Harvesting
PFF	Prisoners' Future Foundation
STEP-IN	Skills Training Empowerment Project for Inmates
SSF	Solidarity Support Facility
SPP	Surplus People Project



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Outcomes Harvesting (OH) report documents the impact of ACT Ubumbano's work from 2021 to 2025, drawing on reflections from 38 social actors across 10 countries in Southern Africa and Europe. Through interviews conducted between July and October 2025, participants shared how their engagement with ACT Ubumbano's platforms – including Solidarity Hubs, the Solidarity Support Facility, and the Voice App – influenced their knowledge, behaviours, practices, and broader social justice efforts.

The findings are organised into six key change areas: (1) deepened knowledge and mindset shifts towards decolonial and solidarity-based approaches; (2) individual and institutional behaviour changes; (3) improved organisational practices; (4) strengthened community agency and voice; (5) enhanced solidarity partnerships across borders and sectors; and (6) policy influence leading to systemic changes at local and regional levels.

Guided by the Kopanong Principles, which emphasise transformative relationships beyond transactional funding and a commitment to shifting power dynamics, ACT Ubumbano has fostered spaces that are described as “safe”, “honest”, and “energising”.

The Solidarity Hubs emerge as the cornerstone of this impact, enabling reflective dialogue that translates into

concrete actions amplified through grants and digital storytelling. While structural challenges such as donor dependency and political constraints have limited some outcomes, the report highlights ACT Ubumbano's unique contribution in building trust within its networks that produce lasting ripple effects.

Across all three clusters, several consistent patterns were identified: strengthened trust and collaboration, expanded voice and agency, learning as practice, care and gender justice, and sustainability as shared responsibility. Seven recommendations are provided to sustain this work, including protecting the Hubs, investing in sustainability funds, and deepening grassroots storytelling.

This document serves as both a reflection tool for ACT Ubumbano and a resource for the broader philanthropic and social justice community. The Outcome Harvest confirmed that ACT Ubumbano has matured into a credible regional actor whose influence is relational and values based. Through its consistent emphasis on solidarity, reflection, and co-creation, the organisation has helped reframe how social justice work is practised in Southern Africa. The lessons drawn from this process offer guidance for the next phase of ACT Ubumbano's strategy, including the need to deepen learning spaces within Southern Africa, strengthen institutional memory, and continue building networks that link community action to regional advocacy.

“The Learning Hubs, Solidarity Hubs, and in-country hubs remain important spaces for connection and reflection — spaces that sustain solidarity even when project funding ends.

— Collaborator

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INTRODUCTION



ACT Ubumbano operates in a context of profound uncertainty and inequality across Southern Africa. Born from a commitment to solidarity among Southern African and European partners, the organisation has evolved since its inception to address economic, gender, and environmental justice through exploratory and adaptive approaches. This 2025 Outcomes Harvesting exercise builds on the 2021 Stories of Change Report, providing an updated perspective and evidence-based lens on the organisation's impact over the subsequent four years. The period from 2021 to 2025 has been marked by significant global and regional challenges, including the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, escalating climate and economic shocks driven by government austerity measures, and increasing authoritarianism that shrinks civic space. Across Southern Africa, 2024 saw ruling parties face significant electoral defeats in Botswana, South Africa, and declining support in Namibia, reflecting growing voter discontent with liberation-era parties. Economic challenges, youth unemployment, and demands for democratic accountability are reshaping the political landscape. In South Africa, issues such as load shedding, water shortages, and gender-based violence (GBV) have intensified, while in Zimbabwe and Zambia, economic hardships and political repression have constrained community mobilisation.

Malawi and Eswatini have faced similar pressures, with environmental degradation exacerbating poverty and inequality. European partners, meanwhile, have grappled with shifting funding priorities amid global geopolitical tensions. Despite these headwinds, ACT Ubumbano's partners report stories of resilience and transformation. This report captures those narratives, focusing on how the organisation's facilitative role has enabled shifts in thinking, action, and relationships.

The core question guiding the harvest is: What has changed for you, your organisation, or your community as a result of engaging with ACT Ubumbano's platforms, and how has ACT Ubumbano contributed to those changes?

The Outcomes Harvesting process revealed an organisation grounded in humility and collaborative practice, deliberately inverting traditional power structures in line with its foundational principles of political independence and decolonial practice that centres the experiences and lived realities of civil society partners. By convening diverse voices from faith-based, secular, grassroots, and institutional actors, ACT Ubumbano has created spaces where change emerges organically rather than through prescribed outcomes. The Solidarity Hub exemplifies this approach—an intentionally unconventional space where participants co-create the agenda, grapple with

“The most special thing is that they give people freedom to express what they think and how they see their own lives and communities. Everyone is treated with respect and encouraged to speak from personal experience.

— *Community Partner*



What was special for me is that ACT Ubumbano listens. Their application and reporting processes are simple, so we were able to focus on the real work and not spend too much time on forms and reports. They also followed up and communicated well, which kept us motivated.

— *Grassroots Partner*

uncomfortable questions about power and resources, and leave with deeper understandings rather than neat action plans. This approach not only amplifies marginalised voices but also challenges the extractive nature of conventional development work. This report presents the findings of ACT Ubumbano's four-year Outcomes Harvesting process (2021–2025), carried out between August and October 2025. The review documents evidence-based changes in practice, relationships, and expressions of shared aims among partners, collaborators, and networks that have engaged or collaborated with ACT Ubumbano since 2021.

It explores not only what has changed, but how voice and agency have shifted, why these changes matter, and in what ways ACT Ubumbano might have contributed – if at all – to enabling that change. Using a participatory, qualitative learning approach, the Outcomes Harvest process included engagement with 38 social actors from South Africa, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Europe (Berlin Hub). Participants included community-based organisations, funders, regional partners, thought leaders, and internal collaborators.

Guided by the Outcome Harvesting methodology, the process explored shifts in behaviour, power, collaboration, and learning within ACT Ubumbano's solidarity ecosystem. Participants were organised into three analytical clusters: Cluster 1: Community and grassroots partners. Cluster 2: Collaborators and implementing partners. Cluster 3: Strategic and institutional partners.

The analysis draws on in-depth interviews, and secondary materials, triangulated not to claim certainty, but to trace plausible contribution pathways and identify emergent patterns.

The report is not an evaluation of performance but a collective reflection on meaning, significance, and lessons learned. In doing so, it aims to strengthen ACT Ubumbano's future strategy and its ongoing role as a connector, catalyst, and ally for social justice across Southern Africa and beyond. As the report unfolds, it becomes clear that ACT Ubumbano's impact lies in its ability to foster genuine solidarity, where European partners learn from African experiences, and community actors lead the narrative. The following sections detail the strategy, process, methodology, and findings, culminating in recommendations for the future.

“The report is not an evaluation of performance but a collective reflection on meaning, significance, and lessons learned.

A SPACE TO LISTEN, SHARE KNOWLEDGE, and, CONNECT

SEE
JUDGE
ACT

ACTION THAT IS TRANSFORMATIVE

Method of
social analysis

Starts with the lived
experience of the PEOPLE who
experience injustice!

Listen...
Engage...
Understand...

ow?
ow?

wa

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BACKGROUND

- ① Speak freely.
- ② Listen with intent.
- ③ Take responsibility of your power.

ACT Ubumbano's practice is rooted in reflection, listening and the belief that social change emerges from relationships rather than predetermined interventions. The organisation creates intentional spaces – most notably the annual Solidarity Hubs and the in-country learning hubs – where partners can pause, share experiences, and learn from one another in context. These spaces provide opportunities to engage in honest dialogue about the everyday struggles of marginalised communities, and the strategies they employ to resist and transform the structural drivers of inequality. The Solidarity Hubs, convened annually, have become a cornerstone of ACT Ubumbano's approach. Designed as interactive spaces for dialogue and collective reflection, the Hubs cultivate and strengthen North-South and South-South solidarities across ACT Ubumbano's three social-justice pillars. It brings together community activists, movements, allies, and those associated with ACT Ubumbano. Rather than setting predetermined agendas, the Hubs create space to critically reflect on our social justice practice and interrogate when our organised action hinders community agency or perpetuates harmful power dynamics.

Complementing the Hubs, the Learning Hubs provide dedicated spaces for critical reflection on social justice practice across the region. These hubs connect individuals and organisations who share a commitment to dignity, accountability, and transformative action, allowing them to reflect on practice in situ and deepen their collaboration.

ACT Ubumbano also supports community voice through the Ubumbano Voice App, which offers a platform for community members to express local experiences, document injustices, and amplify grassroots perspectives. In 2021, ACT Ubumbano established the Solidarity Support Facility (SSF) to resource smaller-scale, community-led social justice actions across the region. Rather than implementing projects directly, SSF grants enable partners—particularly community-based organisations—to take forward actions rooted in their lived realities, strengthening solidarity practices within and across borders.

The organisation's model emphasises facilitation over direction. It seeks to build connections, nurture agency, and create conditions where communities, activists, and organisations can articulate their

“Even though there was a delay in receiving our funding, I felt heard and supported. Everything was resolved.

— *Community Partner*

own priorities and shift power relations in the process. The first Outcome Harvest (2021) began documenting how this solidarity-oriented approach was influencing mindsets and practices across the network.

This second cycle of Outcome Harvesting deepens that understanding. It examines how ACT Ubumbano's model has

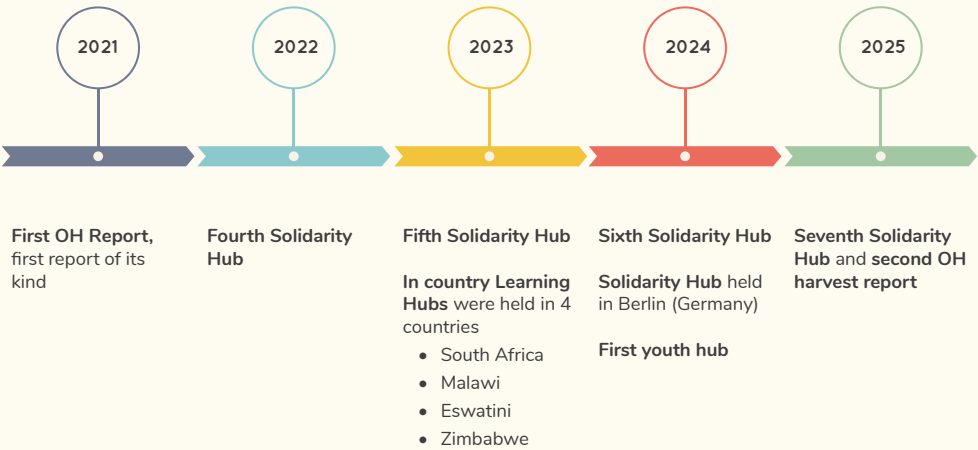
evolved, what it has enabled, and how it is shaping relationships, behaviours, and systems within its solidarity ecosystem. Conducting a follow-up harvest reflects ACT Ubumbano's ongoing commitment to learning from experience—"making the path as we walk it"—and ensuring that its future strategy remains grounded in the realities, agency, and aspirations of its partners.



ACT Ubumbano gave us funding and, more importantly, they trusted us to lead. They believed in what we were doing. That trust made a big difference.

— *Grassroots Partner*

Figure 1 Key Milestones (2021-2025)



“ACT Ubumbano gave us that chance to speak, to lead, and to believe in ourselves.

— Community Partner



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ACT UBUMBANO'S STRATEGY AND PRACTICE

ACT Ubumbano is not a conventional programmatic organisation; it operates as a network and facilitator that supports social justice struggles without imposing pre-defined agendas. Its approach is informed by the Kopanong Principles – developed in 2017-2018 – which provide a values-based framework for solidarity, shared ownership, and accountability to Southern partners. While not prescriptive, the principles emphasise jointly owned models driven by local actors, regional advocacy, and engagement with diverse organisations, including those without church affiliations. They also advocate for a regional focus, strategic partnerships with ACT Alliance members and beyond, and the establishment of a local independent advisory committee. Over time, the principles envision evolution from a hosting model to a localised organisation, with sustained funding during transitions.

ACT Ubumbano's practice is expressed through three interconnected platforms:

1. Solidarity Hubs

The Solidarity Hubs are intentionally co-created spaces held in person where activists, practitioners, and partners from the Global South and North engage in dialogue and reflection. These non-hierarchical gatherings encourage vulnerability, mutual learning, and honest grappling with the complexities of justice work. Hubs have explored themes such as decolonising philanthropy, intersectional justice, and regional solidarity, often catalysing collaboration and new ways of thinking.

“Rather than setting predetermined agendas, the Hubs create space to critically reflect on our social justice practice and interrogate when our organised action hinders community agency or perpetuates harmful power dynamics.

2. Solidarity Support Facility (SSF)

The solidarity grants provide flexible, unrestricted funding (typically ZAR 15,000–20,000) to support locally defined initiatives within a short period of time. With minimal bureaucracy and high trust, partners are able to respond to emergent needs—from community mobilisation in Zambia to environmental justice actions in Malawi. The grants reinforce ACT Ubumbano's catalytic role rather than directing action. In what follows, the findings section will

elaborate on stories of change that grew from modest solidarity support and demonstrate how small actions can be amplified to attract more opportunities.

3. Ubumbano Voice App

The Voice App serves as a digital platform for amplifying grassroots narratives. Community actors can document local experiences, share stories in their own words, and connect with others across the region. It strengthens visibility for community-based movements and creates a

space for sharing stories that extends the learning emerging from the Hubs into broader public conversation.

Guided by its foundational principles, ACT Ubumbano continues to position itself as a disruptor in the

philanthropic space and social justice landscape. Its strategy prioritises connection, reflection, and community-led action, challenging traditional top-down development models and strengthening solidarity across the region.

DEEP INDIVIDUAL/PAIR REFLECTION

- How has my way of working been challenged by this experience?
- Three things I will do/start to do differently from today!
- Commitment to the struggle?

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THE OUTCOMES HARVESTING PROCESS

Outcomes Harvesting is a participatory evaluation method designed for complex, adaptive work – making it well suited to ACT Ubumbano's relational and emergent practice. It collects evidence of change and then works backwards to understand how ACT Ubumbano may have contributed to those shifts. This approach fits ACT Ubumbano's commitment to “making the path as we walk it,” where change often arises from relationships, dialogue and collective action rather than linear project logic.

For the 2025 harvest, the focus was on behavioural, relational, and practice-based changes emerging from engagement with the Solidarity Hubs, the Solidarity Support Facility, and the Ubumbano Voice App. Outcomes were defined as observable changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, or practices, with ACT Ubumbano's contribution traced through partner testimonies, reflections and relevant evidence.

Storytelling played a significant role in the process, reflecting ACT Ubumbano's long-standing practice of using narrative to surface lived realities, deepen understanding, and make visible the often intangible forms of solidarity and agency within the network.

The method was chosen for this exercise because it allows for contextual, partner-led accounts of change, capturing both expected and emergent outcomes that conventional monitoring tools often overlook.

The framing questions used in this harvest structured the interviews into seven sections:

- **Section A:** Starting the conversation (background and initial engagement).
- **Section B:** Reflections on change (what changed in knowledge, behaviour, practice).
- **Section C:** Whose voice or agency grew.
- **Section D:** Why it matters (significance for justice and power shifts).
- **Section E:** ACT Ubumbano's contribution (roles of specific platforms).
- **Section F:** Challenges and honest reflections (barriers, tensions and lessons).
- **Section G:** Looking ahead (future visions and recommendations).

This structure enabled a comprehensive and layered understanding of participants experiences, supporting a nuanced analysis of impact. The process also incorporated decolonial elements, such as centering community definitions of change and partners' interpretations of significance.

This 2025 OH process took place between August and October and sought to understand how ACT Ubumbano's work has influenced changes in thinking, practice, relationships, and solidarity across its network – and what these changes reveal about ACT Ubumbano's own evolving practice of solidarity.

“The methodology on how they facilitate and how they listen makes a difference. It is not about producing outcomes, but about how people relate to one another in one room.

— *Collaborator*

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4. Stems from the exercise on how we can share or make do with what is available for the work to continue.

4. How Creative are we with the resources that are given or allocated to us?

5. Not being allowed to move from the groups. 2

2. Our leader went to find resources for us, and ended up helping other tables. However our table was left out with no support. Our table was not touched.

● ?

How Do We build
Communities In a world
Solidarity is not an Event
but Exist in our daily

3. Our leaders want to find resources, to feed us, and ended up helping other people. However

2. Not allowed to grow from groups.

sw watt.2
abate no vom
knappe broque
to mortuary
mortuary van

2/4

Overview

The Outcome Harvest (OH) followed a participatory, qualitative methodology designed to reflect ACT Ubumbano's relational approach to learning. It unfolded across ten phases, spanning document review, data collection, analysis, and validation.

Design and Sampling

The design prioritised learning over compliance, asking what changed, whose voice grew, why it mattered, and how ACT Ubumbano contributed. Participant sampling ensured geographic diversity (50% South Africa; balance from Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Eswatini, Namibia, Mozambique, and Europe) and sectoral diversity (faith-based, grassroots, and consultants). Participants were grouped into three clusters: **Community Partners** (25), **Collaborators** (10), and **Strategic Partners** (3).

Data Collection

Thirty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted between August and October 2025, lasting 45–90 minutes each, held via Zoom. WhatsApp reflections were used to include remote participants. Planned focus groups were cancelled due to scheduling constraints, with depth maintained through longer individual interviews. The interview guide followed a narrative structure — *Starting the Conversation* — covering six sections: What Changed, Whose Voice or Agency Grew, Why It Matters, ACT Ubumbano's Contribution, Challenges and Honest Reflections, and Looking Ahead.

Analysis

Interview notes were captured in an Excel sheet, with each outcome documented across five fields: what changed, who changed, why it mattered, ACT Ubumbano's contribution, and lessons learned. Responses were coded inductively by cluster and theme (trust, collaboration, reflection, sustainability, power shifts), then compared across countries, sectors, and clusters. A matrix of **42 outcomes** was compiled. Findings were triangulated against key documents — including the 2021 OH, Stories of Change report, Voice App stories, and grant reports — to validate patterns and strengthen credibility.

“They are very intentional about process.

— Partner

Ethical Standards

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Confidentiality was maintained throughout, with attention to cultural sensitivity and power dynamics. The process created space for participants to define significance in their own terms, keeping partner voices central rather than applying external judgement.

Validation

The final report was reviewed internally with the ACT Ubumbano team to ensure findings reflected shared understanding and mutual ownership. The analysis emphasised contribution rather than attribution, acknowledging that many changes were enabled rather than directly caused by ACT Ubumbano.

Participating Countries

Sweden
England
Netherlands
Germany



Participant Countries



Total Participants



CLUSTER 1
Community & Grassroots Partners



CLUSTER 2
Collaborators & Implementing Partners



CLUSTER 3
Strategic Partners

Zimbabwe
Namibia
Zambia
Mozambique
Malawi
Eswatini
South Africa

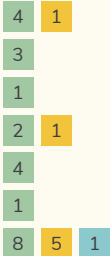


Figure 2 Participating Countries

A person is holding up three name tags in front of a blurred background of a conference room. The person is wearing glasses and a black wristband. The name tags are white with red borders and text. The first tag on the left reads "Sivuyisiwe Magama" and "Ilam Igugu Leb". The middle tag reads "Volanda Duma" and "Black Centenary Diamond NPC". The third tag on the right is partially visible and reads "BUMBANO".

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FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Cluster 1 – Community and Grassroots Partners

Overview

The Outcome Harvesting process surfaced a rich picture of how ACT Ubumbano's solidarity approach has influenced people, organisations, and systems between 2021 and 2025. Across the 26 community and grassroots partners in Cluster 1, six key patterns of change emerged:

4. Building Trust and Collaboration

Partners repeatedly described ACT Ubumbano's spaces as safe, open, and grounded in mutual respect. Through the Solidarity Hubs, activists, faith groups, and advice centres found space to speak honestly about challenges and learn from each other's experiences. This relational trust allowed collaboration to replace competition, especially among small community organisations that had previously worked in isolation.

Across South Africa, Malawi, and Zimbabwe, local groups reported that peer exchanges through the Hubs helped them form new alliances and strengthen advocacy at municipal and regional levels.

One participant saw potential to deepen these connections further. One noted "also mention opportunities for collaboration with church leaders, which could strengthen the link between solidarity and faith-based action". Another mentioned: "They should continue creating spaces where people can meet, share experiences, and learn from each other. It helps when organisations doing similar work can talk and reflect together. Solidarity is not just about funding, it is also about building relationships and standing together. That is one of the biggest lessons for me". Another respondent shared: "even though there was a delay in receiving our funding, I felt heard and supported. Everything was resolved".

5. Amplifying Voice and Visibility

Grassroots actors gained confidence to speak and act in their own name. Women, youth, and persons with disabilities became more visible in public dialogue, advocacy, and media spaces. Partners highlighted that ACT Ubumbano's approach centred

“They make everything easy and uncomplicated. I ACT Ubumbanoally applied for the grant while lying in bed, on my phone, and it went through. The same happened with the Solidarity Hub application. Within a few months, I had my flight ticket.”

— Community Partner

on listening rather than directing, amplified the legitimacy of voices often excluded from formal platforms.

In Eswatini and Mozambique, for example, women's networks and journalists noted how cross-border convenings and peer reflection created recognition for their work despite restrictive civic conditions.

A participant from Malawi indicated that, "when people are trusted to speak in their own words, they feel seen and respected. It gives them confidence and ownership over their own narratives" and continued; "for me, that is the essence of solidarity, creating a space where everyone's voice matters and where communities lead the conversation about their own change".

6. Shifts in Leadership and Agency

Many participants described a move from dependency on external guidance toward local leadership. Youth-led groups in Malawi and Zambia reported greater ownership of campaigns and community initiatives. Female leaders spoke about shifting from service delivery to facilitation mentoring others and leading through care rather than control.

Partners linked these behavioural shifts to small grants and mentorship under the SSF, which encouraged experimentation and self-driven action.

"ACT Ubumbano gave us funding and, more importantly, they trusted us to lead. They believed in what we were doing. That trust made a big difference". One participant emphasised that grassroots organisations are "where real change starts". "They should continue supporting grassroots organisations", reflecting a broader sentiment about the power of local leadership.

The nature of ACT Ubumbano's engagement mattered as much as the funding itself. As one partner explained: "What was special for me is that ACT Ubumbano listens". This listening translated into practical support—"their application and reporting processes are simple, so we were able to focus on the real work and not spend too much time on forms and reports. They also followed up and communicated well, which kept us motivated".

For groups working on disability inclusion, this approach created ripple effects. One leader noted that "women with disabilities are often left out of conversations," but ACT Ubumbano's support helped shift that reality. The experience connected them with other disability organisations and community groups: "Before, we were working mostly on our own, but now people reach out and invite us to their events".

This visibility catalysed broader change. "Other organisations began paying attention to disability inclusion,

reaching out to ask how they could make their activities more accessible. Some women from different regions formed their own support groups", demonstrating how "what started as one project is now spreading, and people are taking the idea forward in their own way".

As one participant reflected, ACT Ubumbano "gave us that chance to speak, to lead, and to believe in ourselves"—a shift from dependency to agency that defined much of the leadership transformation across Cluster 1

7. Learning and reflection as practice

Reflection was not an afterthought; it became part of how partners worked. The Learning Hubs and dialogue sessions allowed communities to analyse their experiences, document lessons, and re-design activities based on what they learned. This reflective culture deepened collective understanding of solidarity itself seeing it not as charity, but as shared responsibility.

Several partners credited this approach with helping them link local issues such as land rights, climate resilience, and gender justice to broader systemic conversations. One participant shared: "ACT Ubumbano is a true space for solidarity where everyone has the freedom to speak, think, and be themselves. It stands

out because it creates trust among people from different backgrounds and countries, allowing them to learn from one another and grow together". Another participant said: "They should continue promoting spaces for learning and exchange, and also help grassroots organisations strengthen their internal systems".

By treating reflection and connection as tangible outcomes, ACT Ubumbano deliberately resists the narrow logic of monitoring systems that reduce impact to numbers alone, asserting that the capacity to think critically together and reflect on one's practice is itself a form of power and a prerequisite for transformation.

8. Gender justice and care-based practice

Gender transformation was a recurring theme. Through trauma-informed workshops and survivor-led initiatives, organisations reframed power, accountability, and care. ACT Ubumbano's support created space for men and women to engage as equals in addressing violence and inequality, often challenging long-held norms within communities and organisations. Central to this work was ACT Ubumbano's approach to facilitation itself. As one participant observed: "The most special thing is that they give people freedom to express what they think and how they see their own lives and communities. Everyone is treated with respect and

“These spaces encourage us to ask critical questions about localisation and money — what it means to receive funding, what it reinforces, and how it shapes relationships. ACT Ubumbano's openness to critique and reflection has been valuable for me. It keeps me questioning what performance and accountability mean in development work, and how we can approach both with more honesty and humility.”

— Collaborator

“ACT Ubumbano's approach to decolonising philanthropy has been inspiring. They are operating within the development and philanthropy landscape, seeking to disrupt traditional power dynamics and call for accountability not only from grant recipients, but from donors as well.”

— *Collaborator*

encouraged to speak from personal experience”. This freedom to self-define created conditions for women's leadership to emerge authentically, rather than being imposed through external frameworks.

For organisations working in contexts of deep exclusion, ACT Ubumbano's support opened doors that have previously been missed. One leader explained: “Many of our members were women living in rural areas, some with no access to basic services. There were still a lot of barriers, especially around inclusion and access to opportunities. So, when the support from ACT Ubumbano came through, it helped us reach women who had never before been part of such projects”. By resourcing work at the margins, ACT Ubumbano enabled partners to extend gender justice beyond urban centres and existing networks, reaching those most systematically excluded.

Partners highlighted how this work-built empathy and reshaped leadership models around collective wellbeing and community focused.

9. Sustainability and continuation

Although most partners operate with limited funding, many found ways to sustain their work by applying the principles learned through ACT Ubumbano's spaces mutual support, sharing resources, and documenting

progress. For some, the SSF acted as a stepping stone to attract further funding; for others, the networks built through the Hubs became the main source of continuity.

Participants viewed sustainability not only as financial survival, but as protecting the values and relationships that make their work possible. As one participant emphasised: “The Learning Hubs, Solidarity Hubs, and in-country hubs remain important spaces for connection and reflection”—spaces that sustain solidarity even when project funding ends. However, relational networks alone cannot pay salaries or cover operational costs.

Partners identified practical gaps that, if left unaddressed, could undermine long-term viability. One noted: “Many small organisations know how to mobilise people but lack capacity in governance, policies, and audits. Supporting them in these areas will make the work more sustainable and help them access more funding in the future.” This tension between values-driven work and institutional requirements points to sustainability as requiring both relational continuity and administrative capacity—areas where ACT Ubumbano's small team has limited bandwidth to support.

ACT Ubumbano's accessible approach did lower barriers to participation, allowing under-resourced organisations to engage without administrative burden. One participant described the ease of the process:

"They make everything easy and uncomplicated. I ACT Ubumbanoally applied for the grant while lying in bed, on my phone, and it went through. The same happened with the Solidarity Hub application. Within a few months, I had my flight ticket".

The model's effectiveness sparked calls for replication. As one partner urged: "Their model of operation should be shared and taught to as many NGOs as possible. If that can happen, the impact will be amplified." The desire for regional expansion—including some suggestions to "open a branch in Namibia because the work they manage across so many countries is a lot, and I am not sure how they handle it all. —reflected both appreciation for the model and implicit recognition that ACT Ubumbano's small team may already be overstretched managing work across multiple countries.

Cluster 2 – Collaborators and Implementing Partners

Overview

Cluster 2 brings together ACT Ubumbano's collaborators, facilitators, and learning partners who have walked alongside the organisation in designing dialogues, documenting lessons, and holding reflective spaces. They work at the bridge between community practice

and institutional learning, helping to translate experience into insight.

Across their reflections, five patterns of change emerged:

1.

1. The Evolution of Facilitation and Practice

Collaborators described a shift from transactional project support to genuine co-creation. Working with ACT Ubumbano blurred the line between consultant and partner. They became facilitators of reflection rather than outside experts. Many noted that sessions once designed to train now function as spaces to think together, where everyone learns in real time. As one partner shared: "the Learning Hubs, Solidarity Hubs, and in-country hubs remain important spaces for connection and reflection".

2. Deepening documentation and learning practice

Partners described documentation as more than record-keeping. It became a process of listening and learning, a way to capture partners' experiences in their own words and preserve the spirit of reflection that defines ACT Ubumbano's work. The Voice App, Solidarity Hub reflections, and outcome stories have helped normalise storytelling as a valued part of evidence.

For facilitators and documenters,



this approach transformed their professional practice. One collaborator explained how documenting others' experiences through the Voice App created reciprocal learning: "My engagement with ACT Ubumbano has always been mutually reinforcing. It strengthens my motivation and deepens my reflection on the issues we all grapple with, such as unequal power, the tension between the old and the new, and what decolonisation really means in practice". This reciprocity extended beyond technical documentation to engage fundamental questions about the nature of development work itself: "These spaces encourage us to ask critical questions about localisation and money—what it means to receive funding, what it reinforces, and how it shapes relationships. ACT Ubumbano's openness to critique and reflection has been valuable for me. It keeps me questioning what performance and accountability mean in development work, and how we can approach both with more honesty and humility".

The documentation process also offered professional fulfilment for those seeking to centre partner voices. As one respondent noted: "By working with ACT Ubumbano in its accompaniment (documentation) process, I saw an opportunity to use my research, writing and facilitation skills to highlight the achievements, challenges and lessons of partners in a way that established their legacy." This reframing of documentation—

from extraction to legacy-building—aligned with ACT Ubumbano's broader ethos of amplification, with collaborators recognising that "ACT Ubumbano can help raise the voices of small community-based groups and bring them into regional and global discussions".

Yet ACT Ubumbano's commitment to open, reflective processes created tensions with more structured organisational cultures. One collaborator observed: "For those used to working in very structured settings, with agendas, workplans, and clear frameworks, the openness of ACT Ubumbano's approach can be difficult to adapt to. It might help if ACT Ubumbano could establish clearer next steps after such events or provide some kind of reflective takeaway for participants to use in their own contexts".

This feedback points to a challenge in cross-cultural partnership, "ACT Ubumbano is a strong member of the ACT Alliance, particularly in how they document their learning. But there is still room to strengthen relationships with European organisations, especially given the differences in structure and guideline"

3. Reimagining partnership and power

Collaborators reflected that ACT Ubumbano models a different way of working, one grounded in trust, openness, and shared

purpose. Instead of supervision, the organisation practices dialogue. This approach encouraged collaborators to bring curiosity, honesty, and their full professional selves into the work.

One respondent expressed: "ACT Ubumbano's approach to decolonising philanthropy has been inspiring. They are operating within the development and philanthropy landscape, seeking to disrupt traditional power dynamics and call for accountability not only from grant recipients, but from donors as well".

Yet ACT Ubumbano's small team size—four core staff—raised questions about both capacity and decision-making concentration. One consultant observed: "I do wonder if there should be more room for new and diverse voices to come on board. If the same people are always in the room, will you hear anything new?" This tension between organisational intimacy and the risk of insularity points to a challenge to ACT Ubumbano's model: the relational depth that enables trust-based work may also limit the diversity of perspectives shaping strategic direction. As the organisation enters "a period of transition, with slightly more capacity as the work grows", how power and voice are balanced within ACT Ubumbano's core team and advisory structures becomes increasingly critical—particularly for an organisation that champions inclusive voice externally.

4. Sustainability and systems learning

Technical partners, especially those engaged in governance and accountability, pointed to sustainability as a shared priority. They recognised ACT Ubumbano's lean, value-driven model and suggested extending similar principles to partners through joint learning and planning. Sustainability was understood not as a financial target, but as the collective strength of relationships, systems, and values that sustain the work.

Collaborators encouraged ACT Ubumbano to extend its influence beyond grant-making, urging the organisation to "keep influencing donors, formally and informally, to practice "brave philanthropy". This suggests ACT Ubumbano's sustainability lies not only in its own operational continuity, but in its capacity to model and advocate for systemic shifts in how power and resources flow within the broader philanthropic ecosystem.

5. Balancing reflection and delivery

Collaborators appreciated ACT Ubumbano's commitment to slow, thoughtful work but also acknowledged the challenge of communicating its impact to external audiences. The opportunity ahead lies in turning reflection itself into a form of evidence, showing that

“The Berlin Hub was striking — ACT Ubumbano, as a southern actor, hosted European iNGOs 'in their own backyard'. It reversed the usual dynamic and showed how the agenda can be set from the South.

— *Strategic Partner*

“It matters that European partners learn to listen first-hand to local activists, not only through reports.

— *Strategic Partner*

learning, connection, and solidarity are measurable outcomes in their own right.

Cluster 3 – Strategic and Institutional Partners

Overview

Brings together ACT Ubumbano's funders, advisors, and long-term institutional allies. Their reflections highlight a relationship that has deepened over time from a funding partnership into a community of shared values. Through open dialogue and critical reflection, these partners have become co-learners in shaping what solidarity looks like in practice.

They spoke less about outputs and more about ethics: power, trust, and the moral centre of the work.

The Berlin Hub gatherings and regular advisory conversations became symbols of a shift in direction, solidarity now moving from South to North, carried by the lived experience of ACT Ubumbano's partners.

1. Reframing the North-South dynamic

Strategic partners observed that ACT Ubumbano's practice has inverted the traditional development relationship – an ambition rooted in the organisation's founding question: “How can we do development differently? How can Nordic

organisations and partners from the Global South collaborate in a way that isn't only about funding and donor relationships? This question emerged at a pivotal moment in the past when “many donors, especially in the UK, were withdrawing from South Africa”, prompting a pause – to reflect on what solidarity could mean – beyond transactional aid.

The Berlin Hub became a symbolic experiment in this reframing. Multiple partners noted its significance: “The Berlin Hub was striking—ACT Ubumbano, as a Southern actor, hosted European INGOs ‘in their own backyard’. It reversed the usual dynamic and showed how the agenda can be set from the South”. By positioning ACT Ubumbano as convener rather than beneficiary, the Hub demonstrated the possibility of Southern-led global learning. As one partner emphasised: “It matters that European partners learn to listen first-hand to local activists, not only through reports”.

While partners valued the methodology— “it's important to keep diverse cultures and facilitators in the room”—and appreciated the attempt to practice solidarity rather than merely speak about it, they also acknowledged unresolved tensions. One participant reflected: “In Berlin, we felt we had good reflections, but the question remains: what's next? How do we measure what follows?” Another wondered about continuity: “It would also be great to see more visibly how these reflections have

indeed been connected with other spaces, and how any follow-up might happen”.

These reflections reveal a shift in process—Northern partners increasingly listening and responding to Southern priorities—but the structural dynamics that define funder-grantee relationships remain intact. One partner’s observation that “the dynamics between Northern Europe and Southern Africa is different” serves as both recognition of progress and acknowledgment of persistent asymmetries. The question of whether Northern agencies can truly follow rather than lead remains open, contingent on ACT Ubumbano and its partners continuing to navigate the contradictions of operating within systems they seek to transform.

Strategic partners expressed commitment to this unfinished journey: “Since supporting ACT Ubumbano from its inception, I keep thinking about how we can do development differently and find new ways of collaborating so that relationships are not always defined by funder and donor roles”. The desire to “strengthen the bridge between Southern and Northern partners—especially in how solidarity is practiced, not only spoken about”—positions ACT Ubumbano as an active space for testing ideas rather than a resolved model.

2. Maturing Governance and

Accountability

Strategic partners reflected on steady growth in internal systems of financial oversight documentation, and that the Kopanong principles remain the moral compass ensuring accountability is understood as shared responsibility rather than external control. One respondent shared: “Governance and accountability are strong. ACT Ubumbano has a structured Board and all the right policies in place, but building and maintaining this structure takes time. The strength and challenge of the organisation lie in it being both South African and European a mix that requires ongoing balance and clarity”.

3. Balancing Structure and Flexibility

As ACT Ubumbano’s portfolio widened, it learned to formalise operations while keeping space for experimentation. Partners valued the ability to hold both: to comply where needed yet adapt to context. This balance reinforced trust and allowed small grants and convenings to stay people-centred and responsive.

4. Sustainability as Institutional Care

For many strategic partners, sustainability now means more than financial continuity. It is about safeguarding the people and relationships that give ACT Ubumbano its character. Advisory

reflections pointed to the team's emotional intelligence and culture of care as central assets that should be protected as the organisation grows. As one respondent expressed: "It may be easier to work with short-term consultants, but sustainability depends on building long-term capacity and relevance in a constantly changing environment".

5. Connecting Reflection with evidence

Donor partners acknowledged a healthy tension between reflection and measurement. ACT Ubumbano's approach privileges stories and meaning over metrics, yet partners recognise the need to translate that learning into visible evidence of impact. The opportunity ahead lies in demonstrating that reflection itself is a form of evidence – that change to connecting and reflective practice are measurable outcomes in solidarity work.

6. Amplifying regional influence

Beyond individual programmes, ACT Ubumbano's way of working is influencing broader conversations on ethical partnership in Southern Africa and Europe. Funders and networks increasingly cite it as a reference for equitable collaboration and grounded practice. Its quiet consistency has become its most persuasive form of advocacy.

“

Its quiet consistency has become its most persuasive form of advocacy.

BENEFIT THE COMMUNITY

Power:

it is about each
one of us

HOW DO WE build Solid
COMMunities In a way that
Solidarity is not an EVENT
but Exist in daily lives?

?5. People did not all work in the
same way with information given.

?5. How DO WE ENSURE
INFORMATION WE ACCESS AND
PROVIDE IS USED CONSISTENTLY
SO THAT SOLIDARITY CAN BE
BUILT?

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CROSS-CLUSTER
SYNTHESIS

Common Threads across Clusters

Across all three clusters, a shared set of themes emerged about how ACT Ubumbano's solidarity model shapes change. While the experiences differed by context and role, the underlying patterns reveal a network that is learning to act with greater awareness, reciprocity, and purpose.

Solidarity as Practice, Not Concept

Partners and collaborators consistently described solidarity as something lived, not defined. Whether through small-grant actions, shared learning spaces, or cross-border reflection, participants experienced solidarity as a way of relating—built on trust, openness, and mutual accountability. This was especially evident where communities and funders engaged in dialogue as equals rather than through project hierarchies.

The Solidarity Hub emerged as the central mechanism enabling this shift. One partner observed that it “created inclusive platforms that gave equal footing to grassroots and institutional voices”—a rare space where power dynamics were acknowledged rather than ignored, and where both community activists and institutional donors could speak without predetermined outcomes. This leveling of voice represented solidarity in practice: not a statement of values, but an enacted commitment to shared presence and mutual learning.

Reflection as a Source of Power

Across the network, reflection became both method and mindset. The space to pause, question, and learn together shifted how people understood their work. Reflection turned experience into strategy, allowing partners to recognise patterns of power and possibility within their contexts.

What distinguished ACT Ubumbano's approach was intentionality about practice. As one participant noted: “The methodology on how they facilitate and how they listen makes a difference. It is not about producing outcomes, but about how people relate to one another in one room”. Another emphasised: “They are very intentional about process”. This deliberate slowing down—privileging the quality of engagement over the speed of delivery—allowed reflection to become generative rather than extractive. Partners did not simply report what happened; they analysed why it happened, what it meant, and how it connected to broader struggles for justice. This culture of learning now stands out as one of ACT Ubumbano's strongest contributions, facilitating a network capable of adaptive strategy.

Voice, Visibility, and Connection

Each cluster showed growth in confidence and voice, though expressed differently. For community partners, it meant speaking publicly or organizing collectively. For collaborators, it meant

“The Solidarity Hub has shown me that trust and curiosity are more powerful than structure.”

— *Collaborator*

“As a small team, they invest deeply in key relationships. ACT Ubumbano is accountable to its practice, not external mechanisms.”

— Partner

asserting their learning and facilitation roles. For strategic partners, it meant articulating ACT Ubumbano's purpose more clearly in regional and global solidarity landscapes.

The Voice App, Solidarity Hubs, and Support Facility together provided channels that linked these voices across levels—creating feedback loops where grassroots experiences informed institutional strategy, and institutional resources amplified community action. This vertical integration of voice was not automatic but required deliberate design: platforms accessible enough for a person to apply “while lying in bed, or on my phone”, yet substantive enough to reshape how Northern funders understood Southern realities.

Care and Accountability

A thread running through interviews was the importance of care—for people, relationships, and the integrity of the work. Partners spoke of leading with empathy, slowing down to listen, and holding each other accountable without judgment. This emphasis on care deepened trust and grounded accountability in relationship.

One partner captured this ethos succinctly: “As a small team, they invest deeply in key relationships. ACT Ubumbano is accountable to its practice, not external mechanisms”. This distinction matters. ACT Ubumbano resists the growing normativity to performing accountability through donor-mandated reporting templates, instead it strives to practice accountability through sustained presence, honest conversation, and responsiveness to partner needs. When funding delays occurred, partners felt “heard and supported” even amid frustration—because accountability was relational, not transactional. Care became a political stance, resisting the extractive logics that reduce partnerships to compliance exercises.

Learning Ecosystem and Continuity

Rather than operating as disconnected projects, ACT Ubumbano's platforms function as parts of a learning ecosystem. Ideas generated in one space often flow into another: lessons from the Hubs inform small-grant projects, and outcomes from those projects feed back into reflection spaces. This cyclical learning process has kept the network alive and responsive despite the uncertainty.

The ecosystem functions through multiple entry points and feedback mechanisms. A community organisation might first encounter ACT Ubumbano at a Solidarity Hub, receive a small grant through the SSF, document their experience via the Voice App, and return to a Hub to share lessons—each interaction deepening their integration into the network. This design resists linear project logic.

Shifts in Power and Partnership

Perhaps the most notable change was a quiet rebalancing of power. Community organisations felt more ownership, collaborators more freedom to innovate, and funders more openness to listen. This does not mean power imbalances disappeared—funding still flows North to South, decisions still concentrate in small teams, and structural inequalities persist. But the network has learned to name and navigate these dynamics more honestly.

The shift is less about redistribution of formal authority than about changed relational norms: a willingness among Northern partners to be hosted “in their own backyard” and listen rather than instruct; a confidence among Southern partners to set agendas and speak truth without fear of funding repercussions; a recognition among all actors that power operates subtly and requires ongoing interrogation.



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LESSONS FOR FUTURE PRACTICE

The Outcome Harvest surfaced several lessons that can strengthen ACT Ubumbano's ongoing work and inform how solidarity is practised across the network. These lessons build on the changes observed and point to where reflection, coordination, and strategy can deepen in the coming years.

1. Keep Reflection Central: The spaces for reflection and exchange are what make ACT Ubumbano distinctive. Partners consistently pointed to the value of being seen and heard without the pressure of outputs or donor expectations. "One participant mentioned that the newsletter and other communication tools are valuable for sharing updates and creating visibility". Maintaining and expanding these reflective spaces is essential to preserving the integrity of the network's learning culture.

2. Strengthen Local Anchors: Many partners expressed a need for more in-country presence, not in the form of offices but through regular convenings or focal points that keep momentum alive between annual Hubs. Strengthening local anchors can deepen ownership, improve coordination, and ensure that solidarity feels close to home, not only centred in South Africa.

3. Link Small Grants to Longer

Pathways: The SSF remains a critical entry point for emerging organisations, but partners highlighted the challenge of sustaining work once funding ends. Linking small grants to mentorship, peer networks, or future funding opportunities could help turn short-term actions into lasting practice.

4. Nurture Cross-Border

Collaboration: Participants valued the regional connections made through ACT Ubumbano. There is appetite for more joint campaigns, learning exchanges, and cross-country storytelling. Building structured pathways for collaboration can multiply impact and reinforce a shared regional identity rooted in solidarity.

5. Clarify and Communicate

the Solidarity Model: Several collaborators and funders noted that while ACT Ubumbano's ethos is clear internally, it can be difficult for new partners to grasp quickly. A simple narrative or visual model showing how the Hubs, Support Facility, and Voice App interact could help external audiences understand the approach and strengthen visibility.

“ACT Ubumbano partners challenge the status quo, challenge the strong consensus that 'there is no alternative'. Supporting and defending people who take this risk will be increasingly important in the years ahead.

— *Strategic Partner*

6. Balance Flexibility with Focus: ACT

Ubumbano's openness to emerging needs is one of its strengths, yet it also risks spreading energy too thin. Future strategy could benefit from defining a few anchor themes such as gender justice, environmental resilience, and accountable governance, while keeping flexibility for partners to interpret these locally.

7. Embed Monitoring in Learning

Outcome: Harvesting has proven effective for reflection, but integrating light-touch monitoring methods can help track progress between harvests. Encouraging partners to document changes as they happen can make the next collective reflection more grounded and less retrospective.

8. Care as a Strategic Principle:

Care emerged not only as a value but as a way of organising work. From trauma-informed practice to mutual support among teams, ACT Ubumbano's future strategy could frame care as a deliberate political stance, a counterbalance to the extractive and competitive tendencies of the broader development sector.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION	RATIONALE
Keep Reflection Central	The spaces for reflection and exchange are what make ACT Ubumbano distinctive. Partners consistently pointed to the value of being seen and heard without the pressure of outputs or donor expectations. Maintaining and expanding these reflective spaces is essential to preserving the integrity of the network's learning culture.
Strengthen Local Anchors	Many partners expressed a need for more in-country presence, not in the form of offices but through regular convenings or focal points that keep momentum alive between annual Hubs. Partners requested: "Support more storytelling and communication training, so we can document and share community impact better". This suggests ACT Ubumbano could expand its accompaniment model to include skills development—not as traditional "capacity building" but as peer-led knowledge exchange that strengthens partners' ability to document, advocate, and attract future resources.
Link Small Grants to Longer Pathways	The SSF remains a critical entry point for emerging organisations, but partners highlighted the challenge of sustaining work once funding ends.
Nurture Cross-Border Collaboration	Participants valued the regional connections made through ACT Ubumbano. There is appetite for more joint campaigns, learning exchanges, and cross-country storytelling.
Clarify and Communicate the Solidarity Model	Several collaborators and funders noted that while ACT Ubumbano's ethos is clear internally, it can be difficult for new partners to grasp quickly.
Balance Flexibility with Focus	ACT Ubumbano's openness to emerging needs is one of its strengths, yet it also risks spreading energy too thin.
Embed Monitoring in Learning	Outcome Harvesting has proven effective for reflection, but integrating light-touch monitoring methods can help track progress between harvests.
Care as a Strategic Principle	Care emerged not only as a value but as a way of organising work.

“ACT Ubumbano can help bridge that gap by connecting local struggles with regional solidarity and by taking those stories into global advocacy spaces.”

— Partner

Enhance Transparency and Network Visibility	One partner suggested: “ACT Ubumbano could improve transparency by showcasing all the projects they have funded. Civil society is a connected space. If we know which other organisations are funded...we can share lessons and build partnerships. This would also make monitoring and evaluation more collaborative”. This points to a missed opportunity: making the network visible to itself could strengthen peer learning and collaboration without requiring new programming.
Clarify Organisational Identity and Role	One collaborator noted confusion: “This depends on how ACT Ubumbano sees itself...Are they operating as a grant maker within the space of solidarity and philanthropy, and what parameters do they set for themselves within that role? They operate at different levels and in different areas. For someone without that context, it could be confusing”. Beyond clarifying the model, ACT Ubumbano needs to articulate its identity: Is it primarily a convenor, a grant-maker, a learning network, or all three? This clarity would help partners understand how to engage and what to expect.

**Document the Hubs
Differently**

One partner offered a critique: "ACT Ubumbano should consider documenting what happens in the Solidarity Hubs in a way that reflects their nature as free and open spaces, not spaces looking for outcomes or set trajectories. It would be useful to capture how the Hub continues to shape itself and the different ways people interact". This suggests current documentation may inadvertently impose linear narratives onto emergent processes. Developing documentation methods that reflect emergence—perhaps through ethnographic observation, photo essays, or participant-generated reflections—could better represent the Hubs' distinctive character.



A group of people are gathered in a large room, likely a conference or meeting. In the foreground, a woman with long braids, wearing a pink shirt and green pants, is clapping. To her right, a man in a white shirt and dark pants is also clapping. In the background, several other people are visible, some wearing blue shirts and others in casual attire. A large screen is visible in the background, and there are tables with water bottles and papers in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is celebratory and positive.

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CONCLUSION AND
LOOKING AHEAD

This Outcome Harvest exercise has demonstrated the profound and multifaceted impact of ACT Ubumbano's solidarity model over the period from 2021 to 2025. Through the voices of 38 social actors across Southern Africa and Europe, the review reveals an organisation that has navigated uncertainty while fostering changes in knowledge, behaviours, practices, agency, and partnerships. The Solidarity Hubs stand out as the pivotal mechanism—creating brave spaces for honest dialogue that challenge colonial legacies and power imbalances, in alignment with the Kopanong Principles' call for transformative, Southern-driven partnerships.

The 42 harvested outcomes underscore ACT Ubumbano's maturity as a facilitative network. From mindset shifts that question North-South learning dynamics to community-led initiatives that shift narratives around marginalised groups, the evidence affirms the power of prioritising relationships over rigid metrics. Faith-based actors have shared about feeling reconnected to justice-oriented theology, youth and LGBTIQ communities have found spaces for non-tokenised inclusion, and policy wins—such as sanitation pilots in Malawi and rehabilitation models in Zambia show systemic ripple effects. Yet the review does not shy away from absences of change, where structural barriers like donor dependency and capacity constraints have limited scale. These honest reflections highlight the ongoing tension between agility and

sustainability, reminding us that solidarity work is iterative and imperfect.

Strategic Insights for the Path Ahead

ACT Ubumbano's impact lies not in scale but in depth. As one collaborator observed: "The Solidarity Hub has shown me that trust and curiosity are more powerful than structure". This principle—that the quality of relational engagement produces more transformative outcomes than the volume of activities—must remain central as the organisation grows.

The challenge ahead is one of amplification. Partners repeatedly emphasised that while ACT Ubumbano excels at creating reflective spaces, "there must be a next step beyond reflection" to influence broader civil society and philanthropic practice. The learning generated in Hubs needs pathways to shape regional and global conversations. As one partner envisioned: "ACT Ubumbano can help bridge that gap by connecting local struggles with regional solidarity and by taking those stories into global advocacy spaces".

A second tension concerns sustainability. Partners valued ACT Ubumbano's trust-based approach but noted practical constraints: "The grants are small and short term...It is like planting a seed without long-term fertiliser". Moving toward longer-term accompaniment (for example, as was suggested up to three years) with increased grant amounts

“The grants are small and short term — it is like planting a seed without long-term fertiliser.

— Partner (an honest reflection pointing to the need for longer-term accompaniment)

would better align resources with ACT Ubumbano's values of partnership and continuity.

Third, ACT Ubumbano must clarify its evolving identity. Operating simultaneously as convenor, grant-maker, and learning network is a strength, but can create confusion for new partners. As the organisation transitions with "slightly more capacity as the work grows", how power and voice are balanced within ACT Ubumbano's core team and advisory structures becomes increasingly critical. The question is not whether to choose one identity over another, but how to articulate their integration.

Finally, ACT Ubumbano's quiet insistence on relational solidarity offers a counter-narrative in a sector often driven by scale and metrics. As one partner noted: "ACT Ubumbano partners challenge the status quo, challenge the strong consensus that 'there is no alternative'. Supporting and defending people who take this risk... will be increasingly important in the years ahead". In contexts where civic space continues to shrink and inequality widens, ACT Ubumbano's commitment to slowing down, listening deeply, and holding space for emergence represents more than methodology—it is a political stance resisting extractive development logics.

Final Reflection

Looking ahead, the work is not about adding new programmes but deepening what already works: reflection, care, connection, and the courage to keep experimenting. The Kopanong Principles have been lived through ACT Ubumbano's evolution, yet their vision of localised, accountable models is an ongoing process. As one collaborator reflected: "For me, it is the story of learning to manage my own power". This honest reckoning—with power, contradiction, and complicity—is perhaps ACT Ubumbano's most vital contribution: modelling that transformation begins not with perfect solutions, but with the courage to stay in difficult conversations.

ACT Ubumbano's approach proves that in a region grappling with inequality and impunity, solidarity-centred accompaniment can empower marginalised actors to lead, heal relationships, and influence broader systems. The stories gathered here serve as both affirmation and compass, reminding us that solidarity is strongest when it is practiced, not declared, and that listening is itself an act of power.

**We make the path by walking it—
together.**

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