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## Guidelines for the Church of Sweden humanitarian action

### 1. Introduction

These guidelines establish the overall direction of the Church of Sweden humanitarian action. They apply to humanitarian interventions carried out by the International Department of the Church of Sweden, at national level. Humanitarian action in this context refers to efforts to save lives, prevent and alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity and rights in emergency situations. The Church of Sweden humanitarian action is also guided by the Strategic plan for the Church of Sweden's International work 2018-2022 and the Church of Sweden Humanitarian Programme 2018-2020.

#### 1.1 Identity

The Church of Sweden is part of a worldwide community and is borne by the belief in a God who takes a stand for those who are marginalised or vulnerable and where faith, life, burdens and experiences are shared. Every person is created in the image of God, and human dignity cannot be violated. Human beings are rights holders, not objects in need of someone else's goodness. This challenges us to confirm and strengthen people's own capabilities, responsibilities and participation.

The Church of Sweden's international work is based on theology but, at the same time, it is implemented in accordance with accepted principles for effective development cooperation and humanitarian work, such as the humanitarian principles, the gender-integrated human-rights based approach (HRBA), the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development, and the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS). The Church of Sweden is a recognised civil society actor with long experience in supporting local civil society organisations around the world.

For the Church of Sweden's international work, the humanitarian action is an expression of God's love and care for people in crisis situations, regardless of faith, tradition and value-based distinctions. *The humanitarian imperative* – the right and duty to assist people in need – incites us to save lives, prevent and alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity, international humanitarian law and human rights in emergency situations. This applies in particular to the most vulnerable people and concerns the right to life, health and reasonable standard of living, but also dignity in situations where people are extremely vulnerable or marginalised. We work to ensure that people and societies that are affected or threatened by humanitarian crises maintain their dignity, well-being and resilience.

#### 1.2 The Church of Sweden's added value – cooperation, coordination and local rootedness

##### *Cooperation*

The Church of Sweden does not implement humanitarian interventions on its own, but works together with and through its partner organisations. Collaboration with other organisations

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and churches is at the core of both our identity as a church and as an aid organisation. By working with local organisations and churches, the Church of Sweden is able to make a better contribution to sustainable and sound development in the contexts in which our partner organisations are active, and thereby achieve our goals and vision.

The Church of Sweden has long-standing and long-term relationships with partner organisations all over the world. Our partner organisations are important actors in the communities in which they operate and often work long-term with key development issues.

The Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is not carried out in isolation from our other international activities. A humanitarian response is usually carried out by or together with a partner organisation with which the Church of Sweden also has a long-term history of cooperation. This means that the response is part of a larger context, and is implemented by a partner organisation with an in depth knowledge of the local context. Only in exceptional cases are humanitarian interventions implemented in countries and with partner organisations with which the Church of Sweden does not have previous experience. However, this possibility must exist in order to be able to respond to immediate needs in acute emergency situations.

All in all, this means that the Church of Sweden works in an integrated way with development cooperation, advocacy and humanitarian action, and that our humanitarian response is therefore part of a long-term commitment within the concerned countries. The Church of Sweden endeavours to work with a long-term and sustainable perspective, even though our humanitarian mandate opens the way at times for implementing short-term interventions or entering into temporary collaborations.

### *Coordination*

As a complement to the cooperation with our partner organisations, we view participation in international alliances – international and global partnerships – as a supplementary added value. The humanitarian interventions are always coordinated and carried out in cooperation with other organisations. The Church of Sweden is a member of the ACT Alliance<sup>1</sup> which works as a coordinating mechanism for more than 145 churches and organisations. As such, it also adheres to the ACT Alliance Humanitarian Policy (2015).

Generally, the humanitarian action is implemented through coordinated ACT appeals, where resources are coordinated in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the humanitarian response. The coordination of the implementing organisations takes place locally and regionally as well as globally among the organisations that contribute financial resources and thematic expertise. Coordination also takes place within various humanitarian clusters and sectoral coordination mechanisms, locally and globally.

The Church of Sweden, through the ACT Alliance, is thus a member of a worldwide network of locally rooted churches and organisations. The Church of Sweden, through its ACT connection, is able to help strengthen the humanitarian response at many levels, both when it comes to policy development for the Alliance at the global level, and to strengthen capacity among the local organisations. The ACT Alliance in turn is a member of several leading

<sup>1</sup> Action by Churches Together (the ACT Alliance). [www.actalliance.org](http://www.actalliance.org)

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humanitarian coordination initiatives such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)<sup>2</sup>, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), and the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Response (SCHR).

One of the Church of Sweden's humanitarian partners within the ACT Alliance is the Lutheran World Federation (LWF/DWS)<sup>3</sup> and the cooperation is based on the LWF/DWS Emergency Response Mechanism. LWF/DWS has agreements with several United Nations agencies and bodies and often works with the UN in various interventions. ACT, LWF/DWS and the Church of Sweden are all also members of the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance. The ACT Alliance Secretariat and the Church of Sweden are CHS certified.

#### *Local rootedness*

As a church collaborating with other churches and church-related organisations, there is a connection between committed volunteers in local congregations and overarching levels. This means that the Church of Sweden, with its committed volunteers and supporters, can play an important role in mobilising support for humanitarian issues through fundraising, information and advocacy. Likewise, the Church of Sweden's partners have the opportunity to involve people through their local networks. The fact that our partners are locally based organisations gives our work greater credibility and relevance, as it is based on people's needs and the reality of their situation. The Church of Sweden, as a signatory to Charter 4 Change, has the ambition to channel funding as directly as possible to local and national humanitarian partners since they often are best positioned to respond during a crisis.

### **1.3 The Church of Sweden's specific contribution – added value – in humanitarian action**

The general added values described in Section 1.2 mean that the Church of Sweden has a special role to fill within its networks and alliances. In addition, Church of Sweden is able to make specific contribution in humanitarian response through its expertise and focus on psychosocial support, becoming a leading actor in this field both within ACT and in the global arena.

The fact that the Church of Sweden's partner organisations are present even before a disaster occurs – together with the Church of Sweden's broad funding base (consisting of both own fundraising and support from institutional donors) – means that the Church of Sweden can provide rapid and flexible funding to various interventions. The Church of Sweden works across the spectrum of humanitarian, development assistance and advocacy, based on long-term relationships with partner organisations with a strong local base. This makes the Church of Sweden particularly well-positioned to programme the humanitarian-development nexus. These different aspects of our added value are described in more detail in the following text.

## **2 Basic principles**

### **2.1 The humanitarian imperative and humanitarian principles**

<sup>2</sup> Since 2008, the Church of Sweden has represented the ACT in the IASC Reference Group on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support.

<sup>3</sup> Lutheran World Federation/Department for World Service [www.lutheranworld.org](http://www.lutheranworld.org) The Church of Sweden is one of its member organisations.

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The Church of Sweden's humanitarian work is based on the humanitarian imperative, namely, the right and duty to assist people in need. Humanitarian action should be provided on the basis of needs alone. The work is based on the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence.

While the Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is to work together with development cooperation in order to, as far as possible, contribute to prevention, sustainable recovery and long-term solutions, it is important to ensure that humanitarian action remains neutral and in response to needs. A humanitarian intervention must always be preceded by an assessment of needs and available resources in accordance with pre-defined criteria.

The humanitarian action of the Church of Sweden focuses on saving lives and upholding human dignity, and also contributes to other Strategic Goals of the Church of Sweden. The humanitarian principles will take precedence as and when there are conflicting internal goals.

The Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is to be guided by the principles of Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD)<sup>4</sup>. As a member of ACT Alliance, the Principles of Partnership<sup>5</sup> of Equality, Transparency, Result-Oriented Approach, Responsibility and Complementarity also apply.

## 2.2 Legal framework

Humanitarian relief work is based on an international legal framework comprising of *International Humanitarian Law* (the *Geneva Conventions* and their additional protocols), *the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, *Human Rights* (the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights), and a number of other agreements and guidelines that regulate the right to give and receive humanitarian aid in various contexts. Humanitarian aid is thus based on people's right to have their basic needs met in accordance with the principles of international law and agreements, which differentiates humanitarian action from development cooperation.

## 2.3 Codes of Conduct for humanitarian relief work

The Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is carried out in accordance with the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief. All staff who work with the Church of Sweden's humanitarian response have also signed the Church of Sweden's own Code of Conduct and the ACT Alliance Code of Conduct for the prevention of misconduct, including corruption, fraud, exploitation and abuse, including sexual; and to ensure child safeguarding.

## 2.4 Quality and Accountability

Like the rest of our International work, humanitarian interventions are to be characterised by a high degree of accountability and quality assurance. The Church of Sweden is a member of

<sup>4</sup> [www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org](http://www.goodhumanitariandonorship.org)

<sup>5</sup> Principles of Partnership (Global Humanitarian Platform, 2007). ACT Alliance Accountability Framework <http://www.actalliance.org/resources/policies-and-guidelines/act-quality-accountability-framework>

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the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) Alliance and is CHS certified. The humanitarian response is implemented in accordance with the commitments made in the Church of Sweden's Accountability Framework<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to this, the Church of Sweden has undertaken adherence to the Sphere Minimum Standards in Disaster Relief in its humanitarian response. The Church of Sweden's partners, in accordance with its guidelines for partner cooperation, are also expected to comply with the basic humanitarian principles listed above when providing humanitarian action; they are also expected to abide by applicable Codes of Conduct and standards and agreements that are specific to humanitarian assistance. Compliance to these standards is in keeping with the stipulations for membership in the ACT Alliance and participation in ACT humanitarian appeals, as well as additional commitments as expressed in the ACT Alliance Quality and Accountability Framework<sup>7</sup>.

## 2.5 Local ownership

In its humanitarian work, the Church of Sweden wants to promote local actors' capacity and opportunities to take action for protection, survival and recovery. Although local participation and ownership in planning, governance and implementation are keys to effective humanitarian work, only a fraction of the world's humanitarian aid goes directly to local organisations. The Church of Sweden's international work seeks to increase support for local actors, support locally led efforts, and highlight local perspectives on protection, survival and recovery. In particular, the Church of Sweden wants to assure women and children's perspective and active participation.

## 2.6 Psychosocial well-being

The Church of Sweden wants to ensure that psychosocial health, in the same way as visible physical and material needs, are taken seriously and prioritised in a humanitarian crisis. Psychosocial problems and mental health issues often reduce individuals' ability to take care of themselves and their relatives, and can have far-reaching negative effects on individuals, families and society. Psychosocial well-being is restored better after a crises if people are given control over, and the opportunity to participate in, activities that concern them but also have opportunities to give something back to the community. The Church of Sweden works with a community based psychosocial approach that builds on people's own resources and ability to cope with and recover from a crisis as a way to strengthen community wellbeing and resilience. It wants to promote a psychosocial approach in humanitarian work and strengthen partners' capacity to integrate it into their humanitarian action.

## 3. Overall goal and direction

### 3.1 Overall goal and mandate

The overall goal of the Church of Sweden's relief work is to save lives, prevent and alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity and rights in emergency situations. The Church of

<sup>6</sup> This includes, among others, guidelines for cooperation with partner organisations, complaints handling, information-sharing and anti-corruption.

<sup>7</sup> See footnote 5.

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Sweden is to have the capacity to provide humanitarian action in response to natural disasters, armed conflicts or other disaster-like situations.

A humanitarian situation (emergency, disaster) is characterised by the fact that it seriously disrupts a population's or a community's functioning and causes human (including social and psychosocial), material, economic and/or environmental losses and destruction that eliminates or greatly reduces the capacities of people and communities to deal with the situation on their own.

Disasters can be acute one-off phenomena, recurrently acute or chronic situations. In the case of recurrent and chronic disasters, the humanitarian situation will have become more predictable or in fact be a constant state. Common to all of these situations is that people are dependent on external aid in order to be able to provide for their basic needs.

### **3.2 Emergency Response**

Emergency response interventions aim to save lives, alleviate suffering and contribute to maintaining dignity among the most vulnerable people in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. This means that the interventions are to assist in providing for basic physical and psychosocial needs in an initial phase. The Church of Sweden can provide disaster funding for material support, protection and also respond to psychosocial needs<sup>8</sup>.

By definition, emergency response interventions cannot be planned in advance and by their very nature are time-limited, even if they include a long-term perspective. The Church of Sweden is to have preparedness to provide assistance in emergency situations, primarily in those countries that have been identified as the Church of Sweden's programme countries. It is also to have preparedness for an emergency response in other countries in certain circumstances.

### **3.3 Early Recovery**

Early recovery interventions aim to strengthen the capacity of communities to recover from conflicts or natural disasters, to support the transition from crisis to relative stability, and to avoid recurrence of the crisis situation. Such interventions should provide for people's basic needs, create and/or support livelihood opportunities and contribute to increased human security. It is possible, through integration of an approach that supports early recovery, to help people move from emergency aid to self-sufficiency and development; this would require ensuring that the humanitarian intervention strengthens the resilience of people and their communities in the face of new disasters, and, as far as possible, begins addressing the underlying causes of the crisis. Early recovery requires local ownership and the active participation of those affected in all phases of this work – from planning and implementation to follow-up.

In principle, the Church of Sweden's humanitarian interventions are to contribute to early recovery, since this makes for more sustainable and long-term recovery. Where possible, such efforts should be directly linked to the emergency response measures and be designed in a way that builds local capacity. In the Church of Sweden's programme countries, there is

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<sup>8</sup> In line with its holistic view on people's well-being, the Church of Sweden's efforts provide support across the entire spectrum – not just the psychosocial components of humanitarian aid.

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always a long-term commitment and efforts for early recovery can be included in the initial phase and continue at a later stage. Therefore, humanitarian interventions in these countries must always have a long-term perspective, while simultaneously defining a clear exit strategy for the humanitarian response.

In other countries, the Church of Sweden can contribute to recovery efforts implemented in direct connection to the initial response, but not as separate efforts in the future.

### **3.4 Chronic or Protracted Emergencies**

There is no universal definition of chronic or protracted emergencies, but often the term refers to armed conflicts or political crises that continue over a long period of time and weaken people's survival mechanisms. Where such emergencies arise or are on-going in, or in relation to, the Church of Sweden's programme countries, humanitarian response interventions can be initiated. These will then be clearly linked to on-going, long-term efforts in the country, or in the region, and, where applicable, to advocacy efforts. However, in the event of such interventions, plans are to be made right from the start concerning how the effort is to be terminated or transferred into the on-going development work.

The Church of Sweden can also respond to sudden escalations in chronic or protracted emergencies in other countries when additional humanitarian aid is time limited, in order to avoid an immediate exacerbation of already grave humanitarian conditions.

### **3.5 Humanitarian-Development Nexus, including Disaster Risk Reduction**

The common humanitarian-development agenda has long been referred to as Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD). This represents a major aim of international assistance. The main purpose of LRRD is to ensure the continuous well-being of the people affected through the acute crisis into the recovery phase, and at the same time to work consciously on the conditions that will allow the affected population to move on to long-term rehabilitation and development.

The Church of Sweden is to promote strategies that help link disaster relief, rehabilitation and development. In practice, this is done by ensuring that the humanitarian action, where possible, has a development-promoting effect<sup>9</sup> while rehabilitation and development aid helps to address the root causes and reduce the vulnerability of populations at risk.

Where possible, the Church of Sweden's humanitarian aid is to complement and work together with on-going development efforts, even though they have different underlying principles and points of departure. This always applies in the Church of Sweden's programme countries, where the coordination with development actors in managing the transition phase and exit strategies is a precursor to humanitarian undertakings. In other countries, too, the Church of Sweden encourages better interaction between humanitarian and development actors.

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<sup>9</sup> See section 3.3 on Early Recovery.

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Recognition of the high number of protracted crises and the continuous increase in global humanitarian needs has resulted in an increased focus on longer-term or multi-year strategies in the humanitarian sector and a more holistic approach that attempts to improve the link between humanitarian and development actors. This is reflected in various global initiatives, including the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Agenda for Humanity, and the 2030 Agenda. OCHA's New Ways of Working also emphasises the importance of programming in the humanitarian development nexus. The Church of Sweden strives to operationalize the humanitarian-development nexus in fragile contexts based on collective outcomes. This is achieved through coherently strengthening the work of partners in addressing the root causes and the humanitarian needs while respecting the humanitarian principles and securing a gender integrated human rights-based approach.

The Church of Sweden is able to contribute funding beyond the emergency crisis phase in order to bridge the funding gap that can arise between emergency relief efforts and on-going development work. Given the fact that Church of Sweden works from a holistic point of view and in several areas, we are well-positioned to cover the entire span of disaster relief, recovery, rehabilitation and development; to work preventively even before a disaster occurs; and to operationalize the humanitarian-development nexus.

### *Disaster risk reduction*

In addition to saving lives and alleviating suffering, the Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is to contribute to strengthening local structures in dealing with risks and preventing future disasters. Disaster risk reduction can be seen as a systematic approach for identifying, assessing and reducing the risks of disasters. It has three main dimensions: prevention, mitigation and preparedness.

The Church of Sweden's humanitarian interventions are to include elements of disaster prevention and preparedness. Those programme countries that are particularly prone to natural disasters, will have disaster risk reduction integrated into their work throughout the whole development continuum – ranging from emergency response, early recovery, rehabilitation to development. In other countries, too, the Church of Sweden is to encourage its partner organisations to integrate disaster prevention measures into their humanitarian interventions.

## 4. Methods for implementation

The Church of Sweden's humanitarian action can be implemented through a financial grant, assignment of staff and/or thematic support.

### **4.1 Financial support**

Thanks to its relatively broad funding base and its close relationships with partner organisations, the Church of Sweden is able to provide reliable, fast and flexible funding to humanitarian interventions. The Church of Sweden can give financial support to humanitarian action implemented by ACT members within the framework of an ACT appeal or some other form of coordinated effort within our networks. In particular cases, interventions can also be implemented through a bilateral agreement with a particular partner organisation.

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Financial support may be given to one or more organisations after an assessment has been completed compiling need, content of the intervention in relation to Church of Sweden's goals and priorities, and the implementing organisation's capacity to implement a relevant effort efficiently. Thus, each year the Church of Sweden is to ensure that humanitarian aid funds are available for this purpose; our own fundraising efforts and funds from external donors make such response possible.

#### **4.2 Staff and thematic support**

The Church of Sweden works through, and together with partner organisations and does not implement efforts on its own. On the other hand, the Church of Sweden can contribute to the implementation of interventions through strengthening the capacity of staff and giving thematic support, in particular when it comes to an integrated psychosocial approach and specific psychosocial efforts.

The Church of Sweden can also contribute by assuring quality of interventions from a psychosocial perspective in cooperation with the implementing organisation. This can be done by providing technical support for designing and conducting needs assessments, planning and design of projects, monitoring of efforts in progress, and evaluation of interventions.

Staff and thematic support are provided upon request from the local partner organisation or upon the initiative of the Church of Sweden in dialogue with the partner organisation. This is to be coordinated with other capacity-building efforts implemented within the framework of the ACT Alliance. The Church of Sweden will primarily carry out staff assignments in relation to the Church of Sweden's programme countries and partner organisations, but also has a mandate to build the capacity of humanitarian work within the entire ACT Alliance, from a psychosocial perspective.

#### **4.3 Communications and information activities**

The Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is to be communicated to our members, donors and other stakeholders. The purpose of all communications work is to disseminate information about our efforts, facilitate fundraising and to increase transparency in reporting on our work.

Communications work also aims to disseminate information in Sweden about the work of the ACT Alliance. The purpose of and principles behind our humanitarian action must always be made clear in communications and information activities.

#### **4.4 Advocacy**

In many instances, the humanitarian mandate as defined in International Humanitarian Law is not respected. In such situations, it is important that the Church of Sweden supplements its humanitarian action with both information and advocacy actions in order to help place international humanitarian law, human rights and basic humanitarian principles higher up on the political agenda.

In addition, disasters are often caused or exacerbated by factors that have their origins in structural injustices or other problems that can only be resolved by political means. In such



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cases, humanitarian interventions should be supplemented with advocacy efforts and coordinated with other development efforts in the affected area. This applies primarily in or in relation to the Church of Sweden's programme countries.

#### **4.5 Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

Part of the Church of Sweden's added value, in addition to capacity-building efforts, is the quality assurance of our partner organisations' work in relation to international principles and standards. The Church of Sweden strives for reciprocal and mutual learning with our partner organisations. It is important that lessons learned from our interventions are gathered, and that these are integrated into our on-going work. Therefore, humanitarian interventions are to be monitored and evaluated and the results are to form the basis for the revision of our on-going work and the planning of new activities. Monitoring and evaluation may be undertaken as coordinated and planned efforts within the ACT, but can also be initiated bilaterally by the Church of Sweden and the partner organisation in question.

The Church of Sweden also aims to contribute to greater international dialogue and partnership, for example, within the ACT Alliance and other forums. Through this, the Church of Sweden is to contribute to the development of policies and standards, and to improve the professionalism of humanitarian actors.

### **5. Follow up of the guidelines**

These Guidelines for the Church of Sweden's humanitarian action were adopted by the Commission for International Mission and Diaconia on 19 March 2013 and shall apply until further notice. Initiatives to revise these guidelines may, when required, be taken by the management group for the International Work. The management group for the International Work is responsible for the implementation of these guidelines. The guidelines were updated on 22 January 2018.