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Strategic plan for Act Church of Sweden¹

For the sake of life and together in the worldwide church, God sends us, in our words and actions, to share the Gospel, defend human dignity, safeguard the Creation, and live in faith, hope and love.

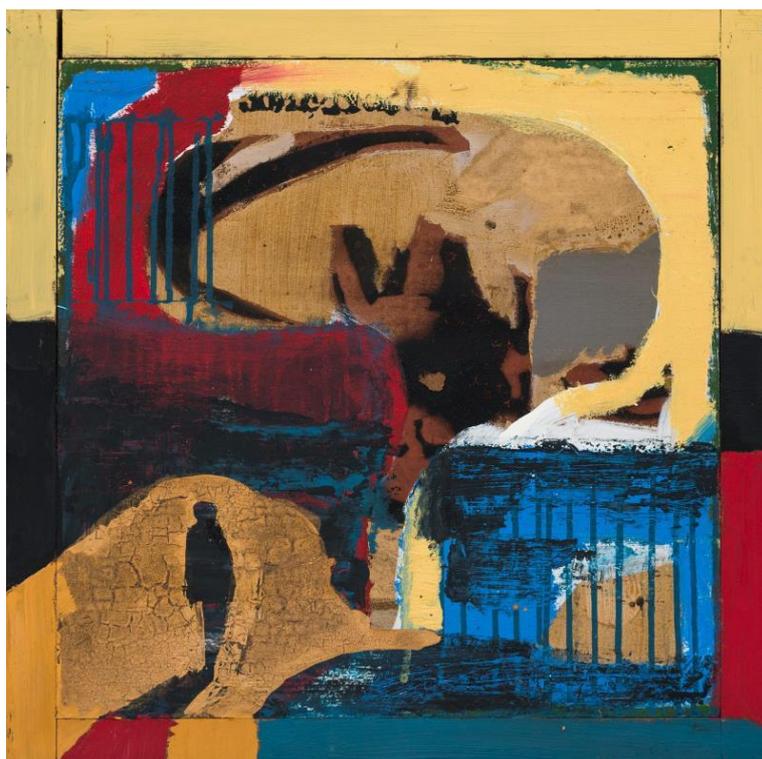


Image: Mercy and Power, Kent Wisti

¹ As of May 2019 the Church of Sweden International work was renamed Act Church of Sweden. The name has been updated accordingly throughout the document

Our vision is life in the realm of God, a healed Creation and humanity as one together with justice, freedom and peace.

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Foreword

It is more important than ever to have courage to live in faith, hope and love. Faith and hope for a more just and safer world, where we create space for people to grow, spiritually as well as socially. To clarify and shape, together in faith, the possibility of liberation in the encounter with Christ who transcended barriers and restored human dignity for the most vulnerable. To support, together in love, people and organisations that persevere in the work for people's dignity and rights, despite difficult circumstances. To work together to protect God's Creation, which has been damaged by the exceedingly harmful actions of humans for many years.

The times we live in are characterised by both hope and discouragement. The world's leaders have gathered behind Agenda 2030, which is about developing sustainable societies in both the South and the North, with the eradication of poverty and hunger by the year 2030 as its overall objective. A global climate agreement has been adopted, which is accelerating the transition towards fossil-free communities. Positive development continues in many parts of the world within many important social areas, such as maternal and child health, education for children and young people, and the reduction of tropical diseases. At the same time, despondency is widespread in a world with so many people fleeing war and persecution. The list of countries with serious internal wars and conflicts is long, and over 65 million people have fled their homes. This means that a major part of the aid must be used for humanitarian efforts. It also means that countries in Europe and North America are increasingly focusing on migration and security policies, with the risk of erosion of the long-term assistance for fighting poverty and developing democracy.

Nowadays, churches and faith-based organisations are generally regarded as parts of civil society, and are recognised and active contributors to development. As a result of the growth of the global civil society, which consists of a multitude of different actors and interests, issues of human rights, sustainable development, equality, gender justice and democratic participation have been placed high up on the political agenda of the world's leaders. At the same time, democratic development and respect for human rights have stagnated in recent years. Democratic values ensuring all people's equal worth have been challenged in many parts of the world. The scope of democratic actors such as the media, political opposition and civil society organisations has been reduced in many respects. The harsh social climate increases vulnerability of certain groups and human rights activists and leads to further collapse of the democratic arena, where many important voices are silenced in fear of threats and harassment. At the same time, authoritarian political leaders have strengthened their power, and political leaders and movements that offer simple answers to complex social problems have gained growing political support. These challenges require churches, church-based development actors and other civil society actors to work together to strengthen common analyses and strategies of the surrounding world. The ecumenical context of the Church of Sweden is particularly important in this respect.

People living on the margins in local communities face these global challenges every day. In local communities and countries, where Act Church of Sweden has an impact, we want to contribute to ensure that these people's experiences, perspectives and abilities are reaffirmed and utilised. Their hopes, difficulties and opportunities shall influence our understanding of the issues that are addressed in the Act Church of Sweden's work. Local groups, churches, church-based development organisations and other civil society organisations build societies and work together, in local ACT forums or other ecumenical arrangements, to bring about positive change.

Act Church of Sweden identifies and addresses the global and local challenges, together with a worldwide network of people and organisations. The priorities described in this strategic plan reflect

the breadth of the global ecumenical cooperation that we are a part of and which builds on the potential that exists in cooperation with other ACT Alliance members in regional and national ACT forums. The ecumenical approach takes precedence over how we collaborate with partners in our programme countries, and the context always determines what should be a priority. This means that the themes that each region and country focus on will be different, and Act Church of Sweden must be very flexible in its international work, while at the same time being clear about providing our expertise and competence in methodological development as well as in various selected thematic areas. Act Church of Sweden can contribute, in particular, to help create contacts and synergies between churches, faith-based partners and other actors in the development work, for example, specialised thematic resource organisations, the private sector and academic institutions. The aim is to support local churches and civil society organisations in their attempts to be viable and dynamic civil society actors, which contribute, through a human-rights-based approach, to help create a platform for people to be recognised, make an impact and have their voices heard.

The global challenges also affect other departments and levels within The Church of Sweden, and we cooperate in different ways and jointly contribute to how The Church of Sweden strategically responds to these challenges. At the Central Church Office, this is expressed by integrating several thematic areas with both international and national relevance, namely, climate and the environment, peace and inter-religious dialogue, social exclusion, as well as refugee work and migration. The main responsibility lies in different departments of the Central Church Office, but the role of the international work is to be responsible for implementation of the areas identified in this strategic plan, based on local analysis and from international ecumenical perspectives. The experiences of our own congregations provide inspiration for long-term solutions in the international work. This is evident, for example, in the work with refugee and migration issues. Act Church of Sweden alleviates acute vulnerabilities of migrants in our humanitarian work and promotes disaster prevention work in our development work, while at the same time collaborating with several different departments at the national level, to engage in dialogue with the government office and parliament on the current migration policy. Congregations are also actors for sustainable long-term solutions for migrants, in both their own activities and in strategic collaborations at the municipality level.

Overall, the revised strategic plan contributes to creating a clear overall direction for Act Church of Sweden in the coming years, and it forms the basis for setting goals and high level frameworks for the programmes and initiatives that are implemented in close cooperation with local partner organisations.

Erik Lysén
Director, International Affairs

1. Who we are

The Church of Sweden is an Evangelical Lutheran faith community and its international work is an integral part of the Church's life. God's love incites all of us to show consideration and take responsibility for each other, contribute to a better society and an ecologically sustainable environment. The congregation is the primary unit in the Church's organisation and is responsible for celebrating services of worship, teaching, carrying out diaconia and missions.ⁱ The parishes' involvement is a prerequisite for the international work and an expression of their participation in a global world and a worldwide church that we both influence and are influenced by. In its international work, Act Church of Sweden works in partnership on matters of church cooperation, humanitarian action, development cooperation and policy dialogue.

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. Act Church of Sweden has a particular responsibility for responding to the global challenges of our time, in mutual collaboration with churches and ecumenical organisations.

1.1 A theology for change

The Church of Sweden's identity and our work are based on a life-empowering theologyⁱⁱ that is relevant to people's life situations, and assumes an understanding that God in Christ shares people's joy and sorrow, chooses the path of suffering in solidarity, opposes everything that is destructive and paves the way for a living hope.

Faith and actions are linked and should be able to lead to change in real life.

1.2 Our mission

For the sake of life and us together in the worldwide church, God sends us, in our words and actions, to share the Gospel, defend human dignity, safeguard the Creation and live in faith, hope and love.

1.3 Key values

Act Church of Sweden is supported by three key values:

- **Faith, hope and love**

We are supported by belief in the Trinity of God, which creates, liberates and gives life and opportunities for reconciliation between people, between a person and God, and a person and the rest of the Creation. God's love is expressed towards all people, regardless of their faith, tradition and supposed differences.ⁱⁱⁱ

We are convinced that our efforts make a difference, that the Church is a fellowship of hope and that the world has a future.

In our belief in the God of life, we want to move from discontent to courage. At the centre of Christian faith we have the death of Jesus and his resurrection on Easter morning, giving us a defiant hope of life – it is never too late!

- **Human dignity and rights**

We are supported by the Gospel about Jesus, who takes the side of those who are suppressed or live in a vulnerable situation and safeguards their lives in spirit, body and soul. This applies above all to children, because they hold a special position in Christian faith.

Every person is created in the image of God and has the right to a life of dignity and to basic rights as stated in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We thereby oppose all forms of oppression or inequality. Every person is created in the image of God and human dignity cannot be violated.

We believe in and defend each person's own ability, responsibility and right to be the subject of their own life. This also involves identifying and taking action against power structures that prevent people from living a full life, whether the structures exist in society or in the Church.

- **The integrity of Creation**

God's Creation is constantly renewed. Everything that exists has inherent value, and all life lives in interdependence. Human beings hold a unique position in terms of taking responsibility and ensuring that life is not violated.

We see that the Creation, and thereby the long-term survival of the human race, is threatened by people's current impact on our planet.

We work towards achieving sustainable development, in which humans take responsibility for their lifestyle and its impact on nature, the climate and the environment. The struggles for peace, justice and sustainable development go together.

1.4 Church of Sweden as an actor for international Mission and Diaconia

The Church exists as a community sent by God with the mission to make God's love visible in the world. We share this mandate with other churches and want to perform it in mutual partnership, based on affinity and continuous learning. God is the one who calls and sends, the one who wants change in every person's life and in the world. God's mission, *Missio Dei*, emphasises the fact that it is God who acts out of love for the world and not the churches that come with God.^{iv}

Diaconia is an essential part of the Church's identity and God's love, expressed through the Church's care of our fellow human beings and Creation. Act Church of Sweden is performed through church cooperation, humanitarian action, development cooperation and policy dialogue. The overall mission is for Church of Sweden, as an actor of the international mission and diaconia, to cooperate with all good forces to contribute to re-establishing the Creation and to create a good society for all. By a good society, we mean a socially, existentially, ecologically and economically sustainable society. As a church, we have special access and opportunities to cooperate with other churches and religious organisations. Our shared experience enables us to discuss and challenge aspects regarding human rights from a theological perspective.

Act Church of Sweden 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). Church of Sweden is a recognised civil society actor with long experience in supporting local civil society organisations around the world. Thus, Church of Sweden is both an Evangelical Lutheran church and a professional development and humanitarian organisation.

Like God's love and mercy, human rights exist for all people, without discrimination or based on gain. There is clear harmony between the Church of Sweden's theology and the fundamental principles of a human rights-based approach (HRBA), that is, participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability. Both have the inviolability of human dignity and all people's equal worth in focus, without discriminating. The individual is seen as an actor who can contribute to change, together with others. A person has the right to spiritual development and democratic participation in a church or religious community as well as to influence and participate in local and national social development. By virtue of their status as rights holders, all individuals can acquire the courage to challenge power structures that prevent them from living a full life and demand political, economic and human rights accountability. The HRBA provides a language that facilitates the dialogue on root causes of poverty, discrimination, violence and oppression. It is a language that enriches and complements the language the Church has developed in its interpretation of the Gospel. The HRBA makes it possible to link problems at a local level, close to individual people, with critical work on structural issues related to human dignity and power.^v

In its development and humanitarian work, Act Church of Sweden takes advantage of the special opportunities and experiences we have as a faith community. As a church, we have broad foundation and are part of a global network that has access to local actors and partners at the grass-roots level. This enables us to provide support to civil society organisations and marginalised and vulnerable people living in isolated areas, where churches and other religious institutions, for example, are the only supporting and trusted actors in society.

Within the development cooperation and policy dialogue, we predominantly support faith-based actors within our network. Faith-based actors' strong commitment and undertaking to serve people and society ensures sustainability and long-term perspective on development, which reinforces their capabilities to achieve results and often creates a special trust and authority.

The global network is a great advantage in the humanitarian action as it enables cooperation with organisations that are either already present or are locally rooted. Local partners are familiar with their society, know the language and have a good understanding of the cultural context. Based on this knowledge and presence, they are able to quickly analyse the needs and conditions as well as start the humanitarian work. There is also a long-term aspect to the work by the possibility to combine existing humanitarian work with continued development work.

As a church, we have a lot of experience in helping people in crises, and it is obvious that we also promote the psychosocial well-being in crisis situations. Act Church of Sweden has developed special expertise within the psychosocial approach, which means that the humanitarian work, apart from satisfying physical needs, shall also meet the social, emotional, spiritual, cultural and psychological needs that arise when a disaster occurs.

1.4.1 THE ACT ALLIANCE, THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

For The Church of Sweden, the ecumenical collaboration is a given. Together, we share faith, tasks and experiences, and contribute with different abilities and resources. As different parts of the same body, the ecumenical family is mutually dependent on each other and jointly responsible for each other. The strong ecumenical identity is expressed internationally, especially through membership in the World Council of Churches (WCC). As a Lutheran church, we are part of a special historic and theological community with the Lutheran church family and are members of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF).

Through LWF and WCC, conditions are created for joint undertakings, together with other member churches and church-related organisations such as the Christian councils and aid organisations. Focus is placed on the visible unity of churches, ecumenical theology and work with various diaconal questions of justice, where the latter has the main point in this strategic plan. The LWF is also engaged in global development cooperation and humanitarian action.

Act Church of Sweden is a member of the ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together, ACT). ACT is one of the largest global faith-based alliances for humanitarian work, development work and advocacy. Its objective is coordinated cooperation to find solutions to challenges that face the world, at the local, national and global level. The ACT Alliance's global strategy and undertaking influence Act Church of Sweden's strategic choices and collaboration within this strategy.

Many of Act Church of Sweden's partners are members of or closely affiliated with ACT, LWF and WCC. The development of these organisations is, therefore, of great importance for the strategic focus of Act Church of Sweden. Act Church of Sweden will continue to actively engage to develop these organisations, with the goal that they should be relevant for its members and do well-developed work with quality and accountability.

2. What we want

2.1 Vision

Our vision is life in the realm of God, a healed Creation and humanity as one together with justice, freedom and peace.

2.2 Theory of change

Faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation, and our theology is the driving force in our work to enable the realisation of human dignity and human rights in society and the church.

Humans were made creative, with the ability to take responsibility and contribute to change. To form and support compassion in a broken Creation gives hope, and together with all good forces, we work for liberation from poverty, oppression and violence.

Act Church of Sweden employs several principles to ensure justice and sustainable development. These, in turn, form our method of working and our collaborative relationships at the local, national and regional level, and hence constitute our overall theory of change.

2.2.1 FAITH AS A DRIVING FORCE AND RELIGIOUS ACTORS

Religion has power and influence over people's feelings, thoughts and actions and can be a positive or a negative force. Faith and religious convictions can be used to guide, liberate and comfort people as well as instil responsibility for one's own life and in society. Faith and religious convictions can also be used to oppress and stigmatise people and exploit people's vulnerability. It is important to identify which beliefs and traditions contribute to the positive power of religion for people and in the development of society. Act Church of Sweden builds its theory of change on the basic assumption that faith has a positive meaning at both the individual and the social level, and that religious actors have great influence in the change work. Faith can give inspiration, courage and power to take a stand for people who live under threat,

Theory of change in brief

- Faith in Jesus Christ is the foundation for Act Church of Sweden. Faith and religion influence values, decisions and behaviour in an individual's everyday life as well as in society. Religion, like faith and conviction, and like religious actors, has the potential to contribute to positive changes.
→ *Faith as the foundation and driving force and religious actors are important resources for change.*
- Human rights form the basis for human development and collaboration.
→ *Human rights are the starting point for Act Church of Sweden's work.*
- Humanitarian work in accordance with the humanitarian principles is required for human rights to be met in humanitarian crisis situations.
→ *Act Church of Sweden's humanitarian work is based on the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law.*
- All people have rights and are key actors in their own development and in that of their surroundings.
→ *Empowerment and participation are necessary to achieve change.*
- A vibrant civil society is a key issue for democratic development, as civil society, including faith-based actors, plays an important role in a society's development, as an agent for change, watchdog and a monitoring and driving force.
→ *Democratic space and organisation provides increased empowerment and prerequisites for accountability.*
- The state has the primary responsibility for ensuring that human rights are protected, respected and assured. Human rights are also influenced by the actions of non-governmental actors such as religious actors and private sector.
→ *Accountability is necessary to maintain human rights.*

are oppressed or find themselves in vulnerable or marginalised situations, and for promoting their lives and hope for the future. Act Church of Sweden sees a clear role for churches and other religious actors, such as religious leaders and faith-based organisations, in the work to make people stronger as active participants, rights holders and citizens of societies and communities. Act Church of Sweden wants to take advantage of the potential of churches and other religious actors to contribute to positive change, and therefore integrates a conscious approach to religion and religious actors in our international work.

2.2.2 HUMAN RIGHTS AS A STARTING POINT

In our theological understanding, every person is created in God's image and has the right to a life of dignity and to basic rights, such as those expressed in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every individual, without any form of distinction, is entitled to all human rights and freedoms. Discrimination is unacceptable. The fact that human rights are the starting point for our work is demonstrated, for example, by a gender-integrated and human rights based approach that Act Church of Sweden adopts in our development work and policy dialogue.

The humanitarian work is an important part of our work for human rights, and its aim is to save lives, relieve poverty and uphold human dignity. International humanitarian law applies in conflict situations.

2.2.3 EMPOWERMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Act Church of Sweden believes in every person's ability and right to take responsibility for and realise his or her own life. Many people feel powerless to influence their own and society's development. The recognition of all people's entitlement to rights provides a way of relating to power and inspires us to challenge power structures and demand political and legal responsibility. This can enhance people's self-esteem and empowerment and allow them to feel that they can influence their own development as well as that of their surroundings.

Participation is vital for people's ability to be key actors in their own and in society's development. Understanding the perspectives of those who are vulnerable, their life conditions and progress come into focus through meaningful participation. Methods for increasing people's participation are, therefore, an important part of Act Church of Sweden. Gender justice and equality are closely linked to power and the ability to participate, and are vital for the assurance of human rights. Therefore, Act Church of Sweden integrates a gender and equality perspective in its international work and works to bridge over gender discrimination structures in our work and the work of others.

2.2.4 DEMOCRATIC SPACE AND ORGANISATION

To enable individuals and society to demand economic, social and political accountability, democratic space is essential. Civil society's space is a key issue for a country's well-being and development, but also a prerequisite for Act Church of Sweden to function. Hence, Act Church of Sweden works to safeguard, protect and expand the democratic space for civil society and individuals working for human rights.

When people act together and organise themselves, they have greater opportunities to advance their ideas and demand their rights in unison. Organisations with a good capacity and financial structure and that actively participate in networks can reinforce these prerequisites and contribute to a strong civil society and democratic social development. Thus, the mobilisation and organisation of rights

holders is a key factor in well-functioning human rights based approach. Therefore, enhanced organisation and strengthening of organisations in civil society must always be the aim of the activity supported by Act Church of Sweden.

2.2.5 ACCOUNTABILITY

The prophets of the Old Testament already challenged worldly power. Our understanding of the Christian faith and the call to be a prophetic voice has always called on churches to address abuse of power, challenge oppression and inequality and demand accountability, both in their own contexts and towards decision makers in society. In order to protect, respect and fulfil human rights, states and other actors that influence the upholding of human rights need to be held accountable for their actions, politically and legally. Accountability is, therefore, a necessary part of Act Church of Sweden's work and is ensured, for example, by the Church's own and its partners' policy dialogue at different levels. It is part of our mission to identify and act against power structures that prevent people from living a full life, whether the structures exist in society or in the Church.

2.3 Overall objectives

The work of Act Church of Sweden is carried out within the framework of six thematic areas, as described below. Each area has an overall objective that describes the changes to which Act Church of Sweden wants to contribute, with room for adaptation according to contextual differences. Priorities within each objective are described under each area. Act Church of Sweden relates to and shall contribute to the fulfilment of Agenda 2030 and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

2.3.1 THEOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT

In recent decades, numerous secular actors have become increasingly aware of the significance of religion, faith-based organisations and religious leaders for development and development cooperation. UN agencies, as well as government agencies and decision makers, are seeking increased cooperation with religious actors. Agenda 2030, with its global Sustainable Development Goals, has intensified this development. This illustrates the importance of understanding the role of religion in society, and the influence that faith communities and other religious actors have on the development of society. However, most people live in countries where the right to freedom of religion or belief is severely limited or restricted. The politicisation of religion is increasing and is contributing to polarisation in society and between people, which in the long run can lead to religious radicalisation.

Act Church of Sweden, as part of the worldwide church, engages in the work for change, together with churches and religious actors throughout the world. It is a mutual work that contributes to increasing people's capability and influence to formulate, express and practise their faith and contribute to the church being relevant at the current time in its own context. Freedom of religion or belief, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation as well as work for sustainable development have a counter-effect on radicalisation and extremism, and promote peaceful and pluralistic societies. By understanding the connection between theology, diaconia and human rights, churches can fulfil their mandate and social responsibility.

Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute to:

- *The realisation of people's right to freedom of religion or belief in church and society.*

- *People's opportunity and capability to interpret the church's mission and vocation, and their contribution to the realisation of human rights, including social protection in church and society.*

Priority areas for Theology and development:

Freedom of religion or belief. Act Church of Sweden seeks to promote reflection and exchanges of experiences regarding theological, legal and political perspectives on freedom of religion or belief. This includes intra- and inter-church as well as inter-religious dialogue and capacity building, and seeks to enhance people's empowerment and organisation. Meeting places in the form of theological education and exchanges at different levels promote mutual learning, more thorough understanding of each other's contexts, as well as foundations and motives for belief.

The churches' mission and social responsibility. We want to contribute to people's and thereby the churches' capacity to interpret and fulfil their mission in the world and to develop a theology in relation to diaconal work, including development cooperation and humanitarian action. Reflections on these matters are articulated, among other things, in theological education and exchanges. We want to support the work of churches and their role as actors in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the global Sustainable Development Goals. We want to work so that states take their responsibility to ensure human rights for all people including social protection. Churches and other civil society actors have an important role to play in driving forward the development of publicly financed social protection, without replacing state responsibility.

2.3.2 JUST PEACE

There has been a large increase in violent conflicts in recent years, and the positive trend of reducing violence and more effective conflict management has been reversed. The world, including many areas where Act Church of Sweden has long-term cooperative relationships, is again characterised by conflict. Conflicts are often fuelled by economic or social injustices, and division is reinforced by the fact that parties to the conflict use group membership to portray the enemy in negative light. This can be, for example, belonging to a religious or ethnic group, people's gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, or an individual's civil status. Migrant workers and refugees are often particularly vulnerable. Women are seldom involved in decision processes in conflict situations – either before, during or after a war. This is a violation of women's rights and makes sustainable peace impossible. Economic interests such as arms trade contribute to escalation of conflicts, to a great extent. Even after peace agreements, access to weapons continues to impede opportunities for fighting poverty and peaceful development.

These issues are relevant for Church of Sweden also in its own context, as churches and religious actors sometimes contribute to the stigmatisation of marginalised people. There has been an alarming increase in radicalisation and violent extremism in recent years. Therefore, the current religious context needs to be included in peace and conflict analyses. Strengthening people's safety, opportunities and empowerment to claim their human rights is an important part of Act Church of Sweden's work for peace. The peace work is based on international law, which includes human rights and international humanitarian law, and helps to strengthen individuals' and society's coping mechanisms and resilience.

Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute to:

- *People's access to improved human security, ability and empowerment to prevent and manage conflicts and participate in peace and reconciliation processes.*

Priority areas for Just Peace:

Participatory and inclusive peace processes. Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute to political and social peace and reconciliation processes from the perspective of justice - taking into particular account transitional justice. We want to ensure women's participation as well as all people's manifest right to participate in and shape peace processes and decisions concerning conflict prevention and conflict transformation at all levels. This also applies to young people, indigenous peoples as well as religious and ethnic minorities.

Human security. We want to ensure people's safety, physical and mental well-being and their ability to defend themselves against threats to their own safety. We seek to promote actors who claim human rights for structurally exposed groups and refugees, and who work for the protection of civilians during armed conflict. Global peace work is important for achieving human security; therefore, we want to work towards disarmament and weapons trade control, in particular by enhancing society's capacity and mobilising power.

Conflict prevention. We want to work towards lasting peace and build a culture of peace in our work. Inter-religious dialogue and cooperation can be a force for peace, reconciliation and development, and, as a Church, we have a special role to play in preventing religious radicalisation and extremism. We seek to confirm our tradition of nonviolence in order to prevent and transform conflicts and to promote a gender-integrated peace work as well as assure conflict sensitivity in all our activities.

2.3.3 GENDER JUSTICE AND GENDER EQUALITY

Inequality is a widespread problem and an infringement of human rights. It exacerbates poverty and hunger, and has negative effect on health and economic growth. Social and cultural norms prevent women and girls from participating fully as members of society, and make it difficult for them to gain access to important social and economic rights such as education, healthcare, property and financial services. Destructive norms that link masculinity with power, violence, sexuality and alcohol consumption have negative consequences for development and human security at both the social and individual level. All of this undermines women's opportunity for sustainable livelihoods and limits access to sexual and reproductive rights, as well as power and influence over their lives. Sexual and gender based violence includes, for example, human trafficking, domestic violence, honour-related violence and harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child marriage, and it is used as a strategic weapon in armed conflicts. Gender based violence also affects to a large extent lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transsexuals (LGBT persons).

We take a firm stand against injustices due to gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Theology legitimises both cultural expression and religious norms concerning gender in ways that can counteract gender justice and equality. In certain contexts, religious actors have direct power in matters related to marriage and family law. But theology is also the basis for the work to ensure each person's equal opportunity to live a full and equitable life. The Church of Sweden works to ensure that everyone, regardless of gender, has the same power to shape society, the church and their own lives.

Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute to:

- *Improved conditions and opportunities for women and men's equal participation, voice and leadership in church and society.*
- *People's right to physical and sexual integrity in church and society.*

Priority areas for Gender Justice and equality are:

Equal participation, voice and leadership in church and society. Act Church of Sweden seeks to promote gender-conscious leadership within its own organisation, in churches and in partner organisations by creating venues for reflection and exchanges of experiences relating to gender and power hierarchies. It is important in the Church, as in society in general, that women are leaders and may be interpreters of holy texts, preachers of traditions and bearers of the priesthood.

Combating gender based and sexual violence. We seek to combat all forms of sexual and gender based violence. We want to work to ensure that leaders and representatives of churches and church-related organisations take decisive action in this matter. Sexual and gender-related violence is an increasingly global problem that is encountered in all countries, within all religions and in all social classes.

2.3.4 SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) are part of human rights, but have not been given attention in many cases because they challenge taboos, norms and discriminating structures. As a result, maternal and child mortality continues to be high throughout the world and the restriction of and stigmatisation associated with contraceptives, abortions and treatment of sexually transferred diseases remain strong. Views on SRHR, relationships, family and equality are often strongly affected by religious traditions and norms. Traditional and religious leaders have great influence in many countries and tend to advocate certain types of relationships and condemn others. This has frequently had negative influence on social attitudes and has helped to maintain and sometimes increase vulnerability of certain groups. These groups include women, children, young people, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender, inter-sexual people and queer people.

We emphasise the positive value of human sexuality, and we oppose cultural and religious practices that are harmful to individual persons' physical integrity. We believe that sexual and reproductive health and rights are essential for people's power over their bodies, sexuality and life. In our work with SRHR, we especially include children's health during their first five years of life. Rights include the right to decide over one's own body, sexuality, co-habitation, maternal health and reproductive choices. A specific example is the lack of preventative actions and access to treatment for people living with HIV.

Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute so that:

- *People's sexual and reproductive health and rights are upheld.*

Priority areas for SRHR are:

Sexual and reproductive healthcare. Act Church of Sweden aims to improve access to maternity care, preventative healthcare for women and children, comprehensive and appropriate sexual education, access to contraception, family planning as well as legal and safe abortions. We emphasise the relationship between maternal and children's health as an important part of SRHR, as the health and well-being of mothers strongly affects children's health and development.

Change in attitude and behaviour concerning SRHR. We seek to increase the capacity of local churches and religious change actors to promote SRHR through respectful dialogue. Religious actors have a duty to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights in a positive way. The dialogue

should oppose discrimination, stigmatisation, norms and practices that are harmful to individual's physical integrity and life.

2.3.5 FAIR AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Many countries have been successful in reducing absolute poverty and strengthening access to healthcare and education, among other things. At the same time, economic development has not reached everyone, and differences in income are growing. Competition for natural resources, weak domestic resource mobilisation, corruption and armed conflicts, along with high level of informal economies, limit political will and reinforce vulnerability. Population growth and unsustainable lifestyles contribute to increased pressure on ecosystem services, on which people's lives and livelihoods depend. Climate change further exacerbates the vulnerabilities of people and communities.

People's ability to sustain themselves lays the foundation for safeguarding many human rights. Agriculture still forms the basis of economic livelihoods for large proportion of the world's population, and plays crucial role in completely eradicating hunger. Opportunities for a just, inclusive and sustainable social development are affected by commercial forces and increased corporate power and influence over a country's development. Exploitation and unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, corruption, lack of opportunity for land rights, and unfair trading conditions disadvantage people living in poverty. Those who are most severely affected by this, for example, indigenous peoples, have the least opportunity to make their voices heard.

In Act Church of Sweden's work, we see the earth as a gift to be shared fairly between those who live on it and those who will come to live on it. The work for fair and sustainable livelihoods involves contributing to the assurance of people's human rights and ensuring that future generations enjoy the same opportunities. It also involves, in the long-term development work and in the humanitarian work, strengthening the opportunities and conditions for people to organise themselves, assume control over their situation, make their voices heard and have a share in economic development.

Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute so that:

- ***People living in poverty are empowered and their economic, social and cultural rights are upheld.***
- ***People and communities have improved capacity to adapt to and manage the effects of climate change.***

Priority areas for Fair and sustainable livelihoods:

Sustainable production and consumption. Act Church of Sweden seeks to promote people's opportunities to participate on fair and sustainable terms in their local and national economic development, for example, through Fairtrade. Humans, not least women's, empowerment grows if we contribute to strengthen inclusive production and trade conditions. Sustainable production is further strengthened through work in Sweden with sustainable consumption.

Responsible businesses. We want all corporate actors to have full respect for human rights and to contribute to fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals. States bear responsibility for protecting citizens by ensuring corporate accountability and by providing opportunities for victims to receive fair compensation. Corporate actors increasingly profile themselves as responsible, but at the same time there are many examples where the potential that companies have for social and economic security is not transposed or where activities are in violation of human rights.

Climate justice. We seek to contribute so that climate changes are met by actions that prevent natural disasters and increase the resilience of people and societies to climate change. Sustainable farming methods and focus on rural areas are means to manage climate-related risks and migration from rural areas to urban areas. This is primarily through disaster prevention work and climate adaptation of methods and working approaches. We want to ensure that states take ambitious climate measures to comply with the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals.

2.3.6 SAVE LIVES, ALLEVIATE SUFFERING AND UPHOLD HUMAN DIGNITY

The humanitarian challenges are enormous and the humanitarian needs continue to increase largely because of protracted armed conflicts and due to sudden and re-occurring natural disasters, and sometimes these overlap in the same humanitarian context. Humanitarian crises are becoming more frequent, more complex, affect more people and last longer. The number of conflicts in the world is the highest since the beginning of the 1990s, with increased and systematic violations of humanitarian law and principles. The number of refugees, internally displaced people and migrants throughout the world is expected to remain high and affect global development as well as international relations. Many people are born into refugee status and into statelessness in refugee camps outside their countries of origin. It is not uncommon that the countries that accept the most refugees face problems with poverty, conflicts and political oppression.

For Act Church of Sweden, 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.

Act Church of Sweden's humanitarian action is governed by the humanitarian imperative and the humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence,^{vi} and the humanitarian principles shall take precedence in internal conflicts of interests. Coordination between different actors and community levels is essential for effective humanitarian funding, response and disaster management. Act Church of Sweden's humanitarian action coordinates with the development cooperation for the purpose of strengthening coping mechanisms and resilience in people and societies. This is done, for example, by promoting the organisation of efforts and mobilising local societies' own resources.

Act Church of Sweden seeks to contribute to:

- *Saving lives, preventing and alleviating suffering and upholding human dignity and human rights in emergency situations.*

Priority areas for the Humanitarian work:

Saving lives and alleviating suffering. Act Church of Sweden seeks to support emergency life-saving measures undertaken by partner organisations, both in long-term humanitarian efforts and in sudden humanitarian crisis, for example, armed conflicts or natural disasters. These measures can include everything from providing water and food in the most acute stage, to in the short-term developing

protection systems for the most vulnerable groups, for example, by giving children access to safe schooling.

Psychosocial well-being. We want to work 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 crisis 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. We work 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 well-being and resilience. We want to promote a psychosocial approach in humanitarian work and strengthen partners' capacity to integrate it into their humanitarian action.

Local ownership. In our humanitarian work, we want 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^{vii} of the world's humanitarian aid goes directly to local organisations. Act Church of Sweden seeks to increase support for local actors, support locally led efforts, and highlight local perspectives on protection, survival and recovery. In particular, we want to assure women and children's perspective and active participation.

3. What we do

Act Church of Sweden seeks to put its approach into practice by integrating gender awareness, human rights and a civil-society-based method of working in our programmes and activities, in accordance with our obligations of quality and accountability. Cooperation, dialogue, capacity building and rooted policy dialogue together with our different types of partners are important methods to achieve this, as well as the fact that the work is based on involvement in Sweden. Regardless of the context, Act Church of Sweden seeks to provide meeting places, exchanges of experiences and capacity building measures so that churches and cooperation partners can become, to an even greater extent, dynamic civil society actors that change societies in a positive direction. We seek to create links between partners within and between countries and regions, and between different levels in joint policy dialogue.

3.1 Approaches and methods

A strong and viable civil society, with space to work freely in its own right and with its own voice, is the prerequisite for achieving the objectives of this strategic plan. Organisation is a condition for democratic social change, and active, inclusive participation builds individuals' skills, capabilities and self-esteem. Hence, organisation is both an end and a means for our international operations and permeates our methodology.

3.1.1 COOPERATION AND NETWORKING

Act Church of Sweden cooperates with partners in several different ways based on the local situation and global societal changes. Many of the partnership relationships are long-term and are characterised by cooperation that aims to bring about change for vulnerable people around the world. Cooperation

with churches often has a historical basis, and these relations are built on long-term and open processes for mutual exchange and learning.

As a member of the ACT, LWF and WCC, we are influenced by the strategic orientations of these organisations. Our international work also contributes to the global processes that affect the design of strategies and practical cooperation. The common analysis and broad cooperation that come with membership provide depth and breadth, which reinforces our international work. This also helps to enhance the aid and development effectiveness.

ACT's global strategic plan provides a framework for cooperation within ACT, but also involves different types of cooperation in country and regional programmes as well as in humanitarian action. In the future, we will see more joint activities, where members coordinate and contribute resources and their own particular skills. This concerns, for instance, coordination in relation to local cooperation partners, local coordination within local and regional forums for ACT members as well as joint capacity building. In the humanitarian work, the ACT Alliance forms the main framework for partner cooperation.

In the policy dialogue work, all partners are important for gathering information as well as social impact. Broad cooperation with organisations and networks is required at all levels for effective policy dialogue work. Authorities and companies are, on the one hand, objects to influence the work and, on the other hand, important actors to collaborate with for change. Act Church of Sweden is, therefore, included in several overarching and subject-specific networks, and collaborates with actors that are relevant to what we want to achieve with the policy dialogue work. The ACT, LWF and WCC are particularly important actors for coordination and cooperation. All three organisations have accreditation with the UN. This enables Act Church of Sweden and other churches and church-related organisations to link issues and partners locally, nationally, regionally and globally. The growing interest in the role of religion and religious actors in development issues, including Agenda 2030 and the global Sustainable Development Goals, has increased the demand for the competencies of the ACT, LWF and WCC from the international community.

Central to church cooperation, development cooperation and humanitarian action are local partners, such as churches and organisations that work for human rights, justice, freedom and peace based on their identities, mandates and roles.^{viii} Act Church of Sweden wants to be an active partner that contributes to strengthen churches and organisations in their specific roles and mandates. Cooperation with partners shall be characterised by organisational independence and equality in relationships, mutual respect, joint accountability and quality, in accordance with the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development and the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS). Act Church of Sweden can assume various roles in relation to the churches and organisations we cooperate with, depending on the current situation and the specific partnership. We want to accompany our partners, assure good conditions for their operations and existence, challenge them to develop and strengthen in their roles, and mobilise resources and support for their work. Depending on the specific cooperation, Act Church of Sweden can contribute to a partnership in different ways, such as financial support, capacity building within our thematic areas, companionship and moral support, networking, advocacy work and outsourced personnel. We also work with networks and other organisations^{ix} to strengthen partners' capacity and roles.

3.1.2 THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND REFLECTION

Theological education and reflection refer to academic education, continuing education and popular adult education of religious leaders, employees and volunteers. It is part of the understanding of our

basic task as well as a method for attaining the objectives in the thematic areas and programmes. In many parts of the world, there is a lack of well-educated priests and qualified teachers.

Theological education and reflection contribute to the enhancement of the churches' spiritual depth and theological relevance. Access to good basic education is needed to be able to work theologically on sensitive matters with churches and educational institutions, which are described within the thematic areas. Leadership in churches, which has the ability to reflect theologically on the present time, is a prerequisite for churches to be able to perform their mission.

A holistic view that combines good knowledge with familiarity with a variety of methods and perspectives can counteract over-selective and narrow theology. Pedagogics also need to be continuously strengthened and developed, so that teaching models that promote in-depth learning, critical thinking and independent knowledge attainment have a prominent role.

When people interpret their lives in the light of the Bible's texts, it gives power and inspiration to change their life conditions. Through education, new knowledge and learning is achieved from common reflection. Various types of training of leaders, including leadership and organisational development, for example in churches, have also become an increasingly important part of Act Church of Sweden.

3.1.3 PARTNER DIALOGUE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building is an important part of all our partnership collaborations.^x Act Church of Sweden seeks to strengthen its partners' capacity to be democratic actors that achieve sustainable results for vulnerable people, based on their own mandates and goals. In this way, we are able to contribute to a strong civil society and conditions for people to be active participants and citizens in the communities.^{xi} The collaborations contribute to strengthen Act Church of Sweden's own capability and opportunity to work.

Act Church of Sweden takes a holistic view of the term capacity and wants to help partners to fulfil their mandate, objectives and roles. The partner dialogue defines opportunities for specific capacity building activities and mutual learning. This may be, for instance, increased capacity to work towards positive change within the thematic areas in which Act Church of Sweden has specific competence, expanded networks in relation to relevant actors or a strong role and participation in the civil society. It may also be improved systems for internal democracy, transparency and accountability.^{xii}

The capacity building activities are planned and monitored together through dialogue and common initiatives. This is done in close cooperation with other actors in our network. The capacity building may include various types of activities such as trainings or net-based courses, thematic or methodological support and south-south exchange. In certain cases, it may also include the secondment of staff.

3.1.4 STAFF DEPLOYMENT

Staff deployment plays a vital role in ensuring the relevance and quality of the work. Presence through staff deployment is in many cases a condition for understanding the context in which churches and partners operate and for developing and deepening relations with churches, partners and resource organisations, as well as international bodies in a given region, for example, embassies and the EU missions. Act Church of Sweden has three categories of staff deployment: regional representatives, humanitarian personnel pool and seconded personnel.

Deployed staff contribute to an important country- and region-specific contextual analysis, partner awareness, network building, in-depth dialogue and capacity building within selected areas of cooperation. In return, they also receive skills, experiences and competencies to carry out the work of Church of Sweden, locally in dioceses and parishes as well as at the national level, and they contribute to a more in-depth understanding of the identities and roles of churches as civil society actors. They can also play an important role in the friendship relations that exist between the Swedish dioceses and parishes and churches in other parts of the world.

The tasks of the regional representatives are directly linked to the objectives of the country and regional programmes and their thematic focus. Representatives cooperate with local ecumenical networks, the ACT Forum and partners. The role involves, among other things, representing Act Church of Sweden's work, identifying new relevant partners, resource organisations and networks, strengthening the capacity of existing partners and contributing to mutual learning. The regional representatives play a key role in the policy dialogue work, as they can link different partners who work on the same issues, be active in the policy dialogue work themselves on site in the country concerned, or identify issues that need to be addressed further in the global policy dialogue.

Act Church of Sweden has a personnel pool, which makes it possible to assist with staff in humanitarian crises. They play a key role in the work to build partners' capacity within psychosocial approach and assist with technical support in order to ensure that this approach permeates the humanitarian work.

When Act Church of Sweden second staff to a partner, it shall be on the strength of a request from the partner for the purpose of building their capacity. The task shall relate to the objectives of the country and regional programmes or the humanitarian programmes and thematic focus, and be clearly defined. The task can also relate to the work of the global ecumenical alliances. A secondment can also have the objective of enhancing relations with sister churches, in which case the international department will then cooperate with other departments at the Central Church Office.

3.1.5 ROOTED POLICY DIALOGUE

Act Church of Sweden calls the efforts to influence political processes and decisions, as well as attitudes and social norms, policy dialogue. We use this term to accentuate dialogue as a method and approach. Policy dialogue is long-term work with the aim of contributing to positive change in policy and practice, in terms of peace, justice, equality, security, economic and ecological sustainability and the assurance of related rights. Act Church of Sweden shall have a long-term perspective and be based on an analysis of the root causes of the problems, when designing our strategies for policy dialogue.^{xiii} We strive to create and reinforce synergies between actors at the local, regional and global level. Policy dialogue complements our partner's work on accountability and is pervaded by the gender-based and human-rights-based approach. Our pursuit is a coordinated, coherent and effective policy dialogue that promotes and contributes to sustainable structural change, both nationally and internationally.

In policy dialogue, Act Church of Sweden operates together with local, national, regional and global organisations and networks, both religious and secular. We also cooperate with foundations, educational institutions and research institutions, interest organisations and bilaterally with partners. This cooperation mutually reinforces Act Church of Sweden and partners. The work involves both moral and legal duty bearers. Various methods are employed to achieve change, for example, lobbying, capacity building and influencing opinions through media and mobilisation. It is especially

important to create opportunities for dialogue and to identify and strengthen actors for change in situations where the democratic space is restricted.

In order to ensure relevance and contribute to empowerment and dignity, Act Church of Sweden endeavours to give people and societies that are dependent on decisions at the national, regional and international level, the opportunity to participate in the formulation of problems, analyses of the root causes of problems and proposals for actions, and, if possible, to become involved and influence by participating in relevant arenas. Policy dialogue is linked, therefore, to the challenges we see in country and regional programmes and humanitarian programmes, and is built on support from partners and staff, including deployed staff. Research, including theological research, also constitutes an important basis for policy dialogue.

Lobbying is an important part of the policy dialogue work, both for putting pressure on decision makers to take action on the global policy issues and for influencing attitudes, positions and actions in the church and society. This can be done, for example, through participation in societal debates or long-term work with congregations.

3.1.6 MOBILISATION IN SWEDEN

Act Church of Sweden is supported largely by voluntary and strong local involvement. It is the interaction between local involvement in Sweden and churches and other grass-roots movements abroad that gives us our mandate to carry out our work. Local involvement is also an important prerequisite for financing international work.

The international work forms a naturally integrated part of many dioceses and parishes, where the importance of working in solidarity with our partners in churches throughout the world is a day-to-day driving force and inspiration at the local level as well. We want to support and increase this involvement, but also raise awareness of our work within both the Church of Sweden and society in general. The objective is to increase the number of parishes, private individuals and companies that donate money or time to Act Church of Sweden and hence contribute to an even broader movement for change, locally as well as globally. It is essential to work with new and modern methods of fundraising in order to create conditions for our work.

People in general have a willingness and drive for voluntary involvement. We want to take advantage of and encourage this through flexible forms of involvement and communication. In this way, we may contribute to meetings between people who want to turn faith into action, generate hope, take action for a more just world and inspire others to get involved. We want to continue to promote an active participation in international issues among Church of Sweden's staff, those volunteering and other members at the local and national level in Sweden. Visibility and participation at arenas, fairs, festivals and other meeting places is an important part of our work to raise awareness of the international work and sharing experiences with our cooperation partners. In the same way, we, together in public opinion work, contribute to change in the advocacy issues in focus by Act Church of Sweden, particularly with respect to Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Act Church of Sweden has a supporting role in relation to dioceses and parishes for the purpose of contributing to quality assurance and, by means of popular adult education, of increasing knowledge and involvement in the international work and associated church relations. An example of this is the comprehensive work with exchanges and trainee programmes together with dioceses to give young people and other people an opportunity to share their faith and life experiences. We can also give support to dioceses and parishes' own relationships to the extent that this is required and practically

feasible. Our focus is, therefore, on strengthening the involvement for the issues that are presented in this document within all programmes and thematic objectives.

3.1.7 COOPERATION AND SYNERGIES WITHIN THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN

In our globalised world, we are all mutually dependent on one another, and the challenges at the global, national and local level are often interconnected. A lot of the work that is done at the parish level is often linked to what is happening globally. The Church of Sweden is an influential actor locally, nationally and internationally, and there are many areas where different parts work together and contribute to positive changes for people who live in vulnerable or marginalised conditions. Our involvement at all levels gives us special opportunities to adopt a holistic approach to the challenges.

Information sharing and internal cooperation are essential for taking advantage of all the experiences that exist within the Church's overall activities, creating synergies and maintaining our trustworthiness as an actor. This is done partly through mobilisation work but also at the Church of Sweden's national level. In meetings with other churches and organisations, the various sections of the Church of Sweden shall act as one coherent actor. This is particularly important in our ecumenical relations with the Christian Council of Sweden, the Swedish Mission Council, LWF and WCC. The various representatives of the Church of Sweden come from different parts of the church, and information sharing and internal coordination are prerequisites for ensuring that the representatives are able to raise different issues and yet represent the Church of Sweden in its entirety.

The work with Agenda 2030, migration and climate are examples of areas that require internal cooperation, as much of the work done at the parish, diocese and national level is linked to the challenges we work with in the international work. We see opportunities to increase efficiency and relevance through closer cooperation on policy dialogue, learning and the development of understanding and working methods within certain areas such as migration, climate and sustainability, the mineral-extracting industry, indigenous peoples as well as technology and ecumenism. We therefore want to strengthen the link between national and international work, and cooperation within the Church of Sweden during the strategy period.

3.1.8 COMMITMENTS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality and Accountability^{xiv} are fundamental aspects in governance, strategy and implementation of Act Church of Sweden. In our work, we want to shift imbalances of power so that rights holders and target groups are informed, know their rights, are treated with respect and can make decisions and participate in the work that affects their lives. Act Church of Sweden is certified in accordance with CHS, *HQAI-chs-2016-001*, which confirms that quality and accountability are reflected throughout the work.

We have expertise in specific methods and approaches to ensure that people are always at the centre. This includes a human-rights-based approach, gender mainstreaming, community-led programming, ownership as well as knowledge of and capacity building for psychosocial support.

As Act Church of Sweden rarely implements directly, the focus of our quality and accountability work is with our partners. Within the partnerships, Act Church of Sweden contributes to developing good accountability mechanisms by providing expertise in the above mentioned methods and approaches. In dialogue with partners, we identify capacity building opportunities for continuous improvement. Act Church of Sweden's role in each partnership is to facilitate and enable, not dictate and control. Rather than imposing our accountability commitments on our partners, the aim is to share standards,

promote quality and accountability and contribute to the partnership with methods and approaches that put people at the centre.

Act Church of Sweden is committed to:

1. a human rights based approach
2. gender mainstreaming
3. promoting ecological sustainability
4. equal and mutually accountable partnership
5. efficient, results based, and appropriate response and to do no harm
6. transparency and participation
7. handling complaints
8. be a learning organisation
9. staff care and competency
10. the ACT Alliance's Code of Conduct for Members and the current Swedish requirements under the Swedish Fundraising Council, the Swedish Fundraising Control and the Swedish Public access to information principle

3.2 Act Church of Sweden's international programmes

Act Church of Sweden structures most of its international work through programmes. These programmes help frame, organise and govern the work based on the specific tasks and mandates as well as the overall objectives set out in the strategic plan. The content and objectives of the programmes are developed according to the situation and conditions specific to the programme context. It is important that the contextual analyses, descriptions and mainstreamed perspectives in the programme activities clarify the way in which we are contributing to the realisation of Agenda 2030 and the global Sustainable Development Goals.

The work that Act Church of Sweden does with partners in the programme countries are determined by region and country-specific contextual analyses. These contextual analyses are carried out together with faith-based actors and ACT members in regional and national ACT forums, or in broader civil society forums, if applicable. This means that thematic focuses and target groups will differ in each region and country, depending on the context. Act Church of Sweden must show great flexibility in its work with regard to supporting regional and national analyses and priorities. The programmes adopt a human-rights-based and civil-society-based approach and ensure the integration of the following perspectives in their planning and implementation: gender, conflict, environment, children and religion.

The following programmes will be implemented in 2018-2022:

- Country and regional programmes
- A Humanitarian programme
- A programme for global policy dialogue

3.2.1 COUNTRY AND REGIONAL PROGRAMMES

We cooperate with partners^{xv}, networks and resource organisations in selected countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East. The programmes involve development cooperation, policy dialogue on country and region-specific issues, church cooperation as well as humanitarian action when needed. Programme objectives contribute to align the work within the respective country and regional programmes. The regional programmes supplement country programmes by providing a regional perspective to regional challenges and partners. Their focus and results shall relate to local needs and problems that affect people's vulnerability.

The development cooperation aims to address the root causes of injustices and problems of poverty, and to contribute to sustainable, inclusive and peaceful societies, where people living in vulnerable or marginalised conditions have faith in the future and their own capabilities. Human rights, strengthened civil society and accountability are seen as key factors for achieving this, as well as efforts to increase social and individual coping mechanisms and resilience through disaster and conflict prevention. Act Church of Sweden strengthens locally-based civil society actors in their efforts to improve people's living conditions on the basis of a human-rights-based approach.

There is preparedness among the country programmes to cooperate and coordinate development cooperation with humanitarian action within the country. Following the more acute humanitarian phase, possibilities of incorporating the humanitarian work related to recovery in the country programmes will be investigated.

Act Church of Sweden engages in locally and regionally rooted policy dialogue at the national, regional and international level within the framework of the country and regional programmes, for the most part together with churches and partners. The issues that are raised in the policy dialogue have been identified with partners or in local and regional ACT forums. The policy dialogue relates to and reinforces the work that is carried out as part of the development cooperation.

Act Church of Sweden works on church cooperation as an integral part of the country and regional programmes. The work focuses on the mutual development of the church as an organisation and social actor, support for the development of theology, theological education and practice, mutual theological reflection, leadership development and a strong capacity for diaconal development work and human rights. It involves long-term strengthening of the churches as part of the civil society and giving support to sister churches in their endeavour to be contextually relevant and contemporary. It is important for us as a church to accompany churches around the world, and our long-term relations make it possible for us to work on capacity building and bringing about change over time. Long-term work with religious actors on theological education and reflection based on our key values lay the foundation for and reinforce the work that is done as part of the development cooperation, humanitarian action and policy dialogue.

3.2.2 HUMANITARIAN PROGRAMME

In collaboration with other members of the ACT Alliance and local partners, Act Church of Sweden carries out humanitarian work to save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold human dignity for the advantage of people affected or threatened by disasters or conditions similar to disasters. The work is based on a psychosocial approach and local ownership, and aims to strengthen coping-mechanisms and resilience in various ways. Membership of the ACT Alliance enables Act Church of Sweden to provide support for the organisations that are present before, during and after humanitarian crises, and which are locally rooted and work on recovery and development on a long-term basis.

Act Church of Sweden must be prepared to assist with support in humanitarian crises, wherever they occur. Humanitarian support depends on the needs identified^{xvi} and is initiated on condition that there is a partner that has the capacity to respond to these needs. Where possible, the support should be linked to ongoing development work in the country or region, and also to policy dialogue. Exit plans should be made from the start of the humanitarian work, and where possible, transition to the ongoing development work should also be planned.

The Humanitarian programme has three priority areas that interplay and strengthen each other: saving lives and relieving poverty, psychosocial approach and local ownership. Act Church of Sweden is developing methods for a psychosocial approach in all humanitarian work and strengthening the capacity of partner organisations. This is one of Act Church of Sweden's specific contributions in the ACT Alliance. Local ownership in the humanitarian work is promoted by, among other things, locally led initiatives and with local partners to support and advocate the perspectives of people affected by disaster on their own situation, protection, survival and recovery.

Together with partners, Act Church of Sweden engages in policy dialogue on issues that are identified by partners or in local and regional ACT forums. The policy dialogue is based on international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles. Act Church of Sweden is a recognised global actor within the advocacy work to safeguard and protect mental health and psychosocial well-being in crisis situations.

3.2.3 PROGRAMME FOR GLOBAL POLICY DIALOGUE

In collaboration with national, regional and global ecumenical organisations and networks, Church of Sweden carries out lobbying and advocacy work within the thematic areas at the Swedish, European and global levels. The issues that are raised in the global policy dialogue are global, cross-boundary challenges that are considered vital for fighting poverty effectively and for sustainable development, and that are affected by decisions made in Sweden, the EU or at a global level. Agenda 2030 and the global Sustainable Development Goals are important examples of decisions that influence our activity.

The work within the programme for global policy dialogue complements the policy dialogue work that is done as part of the other programmes. It links issues that are relevant to people living in vulnerable or marginalised conditions to over-riding global processes, for example, by specifically raising migration and asylum issues. As part of the programme, Act Church of Sweden also works on increasing democratic space, the humanitarian principles and international humanitarian law, the Swedish, European and global aid agenda, and the overall principles of aid and development effectiveness, as these create conditions for achieving change.

Validity and monitoring of the document

This document governs Act Church of Sweden. The document describes the identity, mission, vision and overarching goals of Act Church of Sweden, and contains a summary of the theological starting points that are developed in the guidance document *A Life-empowering faith as our driving force*.

The strategic plan relates to other governing documents, guidelines and positions for Act Church of Sweden, and contains preparatory writings that relate to the overall strategic work of the Central Church Office.

The document was ratified by the Council for International Mission and Diaconia on 23 March 2017, and subsequently adopted by the Church Board on 3-4 May 2017, as valid for the period 2018-2022.

The document is a revised version of, and replaces, the strategic plan for Act Church of Sweden's International work (as of now Act Church of Sweden) for the period 2014-2017.

The strategic plan is reviewed annually. Evaluation and review should be seen as an integral part of the ongoing follow-up and performed as necessary.

Notes

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- ⁱThe congregation and hence the fundamental task of the Church are described in the Church Ordinance for the Church of Sweden, Section Two.
- ⁱⁱ See also the basic guiding policy for Act Church of Sweden: *A life-empowering faith as our driving force*. This describes a contextually conscious theology. Theology means “words about God” and deals with how we speak about God, how we formulate and express faith, which accentuates the meaning of practice and life here and now. The *experiences* of the life we live affect our theology and interpretation of the Bible, and, for their part, theology and the Bible’s texts present a challenge to each society and ideological structure. This means there is a mutual relationship between theology and practice.
- ⁱⁱⁱ A Pastoral Letter from the Bishops on Diacony, 2015, page 23.
- ^{iv} Act Church of Sweden follows ethical guidelines that apply internationally and opposes all form of coercion, exertion of power or exploitation of people in vulnerable situations to get them to adopt a particular faith (*A life-promoting faith as our driving force*). God’s mission emphasises the fact that it is God who takes action in the world and not the churches that come with God. (Together for life, the WCC’s mission document). The Church does not exist for its own sake but to participate in God’s mission. Therefore, a mission can never be an activity directed from one group to another, or implemented to expand the Church for the sake of its own income or to increase its membership. In the international work, this reasoning is based on human rights and the right to freedom of religion and belief.
- ^v *Guidelines for a human-rights based approach within Act Church of Sweden*. 2016:5.
- ^{vi} The Red Cross’s Code of Conduct for humanitarian work.
- ^{vii} According to the Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 20160, it was 4% in 2015, page 65. Development Initiatives.
- ^{viii} The Church of Sweden’s partnership is defined in the *Guidelines for Partnership Cooperation in Act Church of Sweden*.
- ^{ix} With resource organisations, cooperation takes place with no financial support or with limited financial support for restricted and specific tasks.
- ^x *Guidelines for Partnership Cooperation in Act Church of Sweden*.
- ^{xi} *Act Church of Sweden Partner Capacity Building Manual*.
- ^{xii} Ibid.
- ^{xiii} See *Guidelines for Policy Dialogue in Act Church of Sweden* for further information.
- ^{xiv} See *Quality and Accountability Framework* for Act Church of Sweden.
- ^{xv} Collective term for all churches and organisations with which we enter into specific agreements on cooperation to contribute to mutually agreed development.
- ^{xvi} According to the *Guidelines for Act Church of Sweden’s Humanitarian Work*.