



STRATEGIC FOCUS AREA STUDY OF ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNANCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The **objectives of the study** were to: to report on what changes Christian Aid's accountable governance (AG) work is contributing to in policy-making, in the capacity of partners to improve their effectiveness and with attitudes and awareness of the UK and Ireland churches and Christian Aid supporters; to take an in-depth look at Christian Aid's work on AG and identify what works, what doesn't work and what should be done differently in the future; to improve understanding of and share lessons about the strengths and weaknesses of approach and overall change model; and to assess how work on AG integrates with and complements other strategic focus areas.
2. Taking a start date of 2005, the study **covered selected examples** of Christian Aid's work in advocacy and policy in the UK and Ireland, and support to partners in 11 countries. The study included desk research, semi-structured interviews with stakeholders and partners, and two country visits. In hindsight, a better balance of external and internal interviewees, and a narrower study scope, would have enabled deeper analysis and more thorough validation.
3. The study found that Christian Aid is **committed to working on AG** and sees a close fit between its essential purpose and accountable governance. It recognises this as highly political work. Once the [No Small Change](#) document agenda takes hold and [Poverty Over](#) policy shapes the organisation's work, AG should grow in importance.
4. In practice, Christian Aid **invested insufficient management, policy and advocacy capacity** in the period from 2006 to date to provide the political backing, clarity of analysis and influence the commitment to AG required. The necessary and strategic prioritisation in use of resources agreed in the corporate advocacy and policy (CAP) agenda (2006) did not preclude this investment. Insufficient investment resulted in a delay in clarifying Christian Aid's vision and strategy on AG and in building a discrete and coherent programme of AG advocacy and partner support. Work on AG is still seen as quite new within the organisation, it is unclear which aspects of the AG agenda Christian Aid seeks to address, and AG is poorly understood by many fundraising, marketing and supporter care staff.
5. **Good foundations** have been laid and much good work has been done. The strategy leader and the strategy group are working to sharpen the focus drawing on analysis and experience coming from partners' work and from the country-specific and issue-specific advocacy work. The recent three-country AG peer reviews provided useful analysis and lessons. There is an emerging recognition that AG is both a discrete programme of work and an important perspective and dimension that needs to be included in work on Christian Aid's strategic areas of secure livelihoods, economic justice and HIV. Generally speaking, the study found that these four areas are quite well integrated in country programmes and partners' work, however the demands of day-to-day management and reporting in Christian Aid's London headquarters results in some silo-like practice.
6. Christian Aid and its partners are **influencing policy-making** at multiple levels. The organisation led the way in highlighting corruption as a development issue and built an alliance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on this issue. Its long track record of country-specific policy

and advocacy work has made important contributions to UK, Irish, Spanish, European Union and, sometimes, US policy-making. It put the issue of poverty on the UK government's Israel/occupied Palestinian territories (I/OPT) agenda. Throughout the 2008/09 crisis, Christian Aid (within the Crisis Action Coalition) met with Tony Blair in his Quartet role and with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and No 10 special advisers. Reports on I/OPT have received positive US and United Nations feedback. It was successful in persuading the global Sudan lobby movement to press for a whole Sudan solution. It lobbied fruitfully for a coherent regional approach linking the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Rwanda, and is credited with contributing to the FCO view that policy on Rwanda needs to be revised. Christian Aid's advocacy work is influential on human rights issues in Colombia, Angola and the Dominican Republic, and on the humanitarian reform agenda.

7. The **external profile and influence** of country-specific advocacy work is high, and external official and peer organisation stakeholders describe Christian Aid as a serious, well-informed voice with good analysis, and as a useful partner. The profile and influence of the issue-specific corruption work is lower with official external stakeholders. To date Christian Aid is not seen as making a contribution to the broader governance and development debates; the decision to focus energies on the wider development agenda (corruption, tax, climate) has diminished its presence and profile in a key arena.
8. Christian Aid could **engage selectively but systematically in some aid and development debates** to influence the donor and NGO governance agenda. It could valuably document and profile its and its partners' analysis and approach to building accountable governance in materials directed towards key development opinion-formers and policy-makers. Christian Aid should engage visibly in **the corruption debate**, linking governance, corruption and tax issues.
9. Linkages between country- and issue-specific AG advocacy work need to be strengthened. The study also highlighted the need to keep advocacy targets and level of engagement constantly under review to ensure maximum impact.
10. The organisation is supporting quite **a broad range of partners' work** under the heading of AG. The core strategy is building policy knowledge and advocacy skills of the most marginalised women, men and youth. How people use this information and skills is determined by **national context**. In Ghana and India, where the state and policy environment are relatively open and civil society quite strong, people can engage with the state to demand accountability to constitutional and policy commitments. Opening up budget-making processes to scrutiny and citizen engagement is an effective strategy adopted by partners in Nigeria. In Angola and Colombia, where there is limited space for dialogue with the state but civil society is quite strong, partners' energies are directed towards defending human rights and human rights promoters, and using international presence and pressure. When civil society and the state are quite weak, as in Sierra Leone or DRC, Christian Aid gives priority to improving the capacity of civil society organisations at local and national levels so that they can begin to open up opportunities for influencing policy and holding government to account.
11. **Some examples:** Christian Aid's partner SEND Ghana is building citizen skills and setting up local monitoring committees. These monitor the Schools Feeding Programme and report findings to the district assembly and regional officials with the result that funds are used more effectively. It has devised a partnership model for citizen/government engagement that is influencing how government structures will develop in the future. In Angola, SOS Habitat has put the issues of demolition of houses and land evictions on the national and international agenda. Some local administrations are realising that they have to negotiate with communities. The street children and young people with whom Omunga, another Angolan partner, works are recognising their capacity to intervene on human rights, justice and social issues. They have got identification cards and some access to public services.

12. Although corruption is pervasive in most countries, none of the partners studied feel able to tackle the issue openly (at present). Programme staff members warn of the risks to partners and themselves of overt anti-corruption campaigns in country. Rather, as indicated above, partners are working actively to create environments where corruption cannot flourish with impunity. Christian Aid has to be guided by partners in this while being alert always to new opportunities that may emerge.
13. What is clear from the study is that there are **situations and times where AG work has of necessity to be linked to tangible outcomes**; the study has highlighted some productive cross-over of AG/secure livelihood programmes in Colombia and Angola. This integration is valuable but should not diminish the energy devoted to discrete AG programmes.
14. The view of the vast majority of staff interviewed is that, with some notable exceptions, Christian Aid does not integrate **gender analysis** well in its AG policy, advocacy and partnership. The low commitment and expectation of directorate and senior managers in this area is the main explanation given, but there are some capacity issues also.
15. **Conflict prevention and peace-building** are important aspects of partners' work in many countries, with some interesting and innovative work being supported, and are central in much country-specific advocacy work. The study found little evidence that conflict-sensitivity receives adequate attention across Christian Aid's work.
16. The issue of coherence between the external AG agenda and Christian Aid's **own accountability to supporters and partners** was raised by trustees and some internal stakeholders. This is outside the remit of the study as it is covered in a separate corporate strategy. It should be noted, however, that Christian Aid is currently applying for accreditation under the Humanitarian Accountability Project (HAP) that addresses downward accountability in humanitarian situations.
17. At present, **in the spectrum of civil society/NGO work**: 1 welfare; 2 policy literacy/rights; education; 3 mobilise/organise; 4 protest/monitor/dialogue/advocate/vote to influence decisions and ensure access to benefits and services; 5 representation to shape decisions and guarantee rights, most Christian Aid partners work in the 2 to 4 range. It is important to continue to strengthen and sharpen this work, to support partners to build inclusive and representative civil society organisations, faith-based organisations and social movements, and to formalise and democratise citizen/civil society/government relations.
18. More could be done also to support organisations working with the media to shape **public opinion and create forums for public debate** (including some existing partners' work in this area).
19. Christian Aid could put greater emphasis on working with partners to promote and support **representation in formal structures**, to open up political processes, systems and structures for greater democratic and accountable governance.
20. Promoting and supporting partners' strategic alliances with progressive political groupings working to **democratise political party structures, processes and ways of working** should be considered also. This is a critically important area in terms of the representation of women and socially excluded groups. Inclusive democratic representation is a guarantee of long-term change and accountable governance.
21. The study noted some evidence of Christian Aid **working with women's organisations and civil society organisations** addressing women's rights and gender-based discrimination and inequality within the AG focus but these partnerships do not appear to be the norm nor a major plank of AG work in any country programme studied. Actively seeking out and supporting such organisations would strengthen the lobby for women's rights and for gender equality and for

gender-sensitive and -inclusive governance, and bring more feminist analysis and experience into Christian Aid to complement its power analysis.

22. **Communicating AG work and issues to UK and Ireland churches and to Christian Aid's supporters** has proved a big challenge to date and is the area where least progress has been made, despite valiant efforts by the strategy leader and some others. To date AG issues have not been profiled in supporter communications and fundraising activities. Staff members are wary of communicating overt political messages on AG that may jeopardise income. The 'process' aspects of AG are seen as hard to describe.
23. There is a willingness on the part of fundraisers **to tell the full story to supporters**, to make the case for support for AG work which places the shorter-term material benefits in the context of longer-term work to make government better, respect for human rights secure and public services sustainable. Senior management will need to agree to explore and develop more overtly political and riskier marketing messages. The [Poverty Over](#) policy will provide a platform here.
24. **Gathering evidence and measuring impact** in a systematic way is hard for all focus areas. What is required is a different approach to monitoring and evaluation which itself is more process-oriented; pre-requisites are fewer, and smarter objectives and outcomes, time and capacity of staff and partners to re-orient reports towards recording, for example, shifts in attitudes and responsiveness of policy-makers, the informality/formality of spaces and mechanisms for citizen/state dialogue, and shifts in public opinion. The evidence of change framework being developed by Corporate Affairs is suited well to measuring impact of AG programmes because it allows for process outcomes and impact. The use of externally available tools, such as new the ACT Development Guide, *Assessing Our Contribution to Change*, needs to be encouraged.

RECOMMENDATIONS

25. **Corporate Strategy for Accountable Governance.** It is recommended that:

- a) within the [Turning Hope Into Action](#) refresh, the corporate strategy should be refined along the following lines: to support the emergence of strong, inclusive and democratic civil society organisations and social movements capable of holding government to account; to support the creation of formal mechanisms through which civil society organisations and social movements can hold government bodies to account; to carry out advocacy work in Europe and internationally on the accountability and transparency of governments, international institutions and bodies. (In this formulation, conflict-related work would be integrated in all goals.);

- b) work primarily on secure livelihoods with AG dimensions be moved to the secure livelihoods strategy, and that mining and other transnational corporations-related accountability work be moved to economic justice (in the [Turning Hope Into Action](#) refresh or in 2010); and

- c) the 2010-2012 corporate strategy for AG is developed with the advice and support of a small external reference group, and, in addition to the above points, consideration is given to the following areas: promoting and supporting inclusive and democratic representation in formal political structures, partner alliances with progressive political groupings working to democratise political parties, and public debate and public opinion forming and working with women's organisations and others advocating for inclusive governance; and that an explicit commitment is made to addressing AG from the perspectives of gender analysis, diversity and group inequality, and to fostering coherence between the focus area and Christian Aid's own accountability.

26. **The directorate.** It is recommended that Christian Aid's directorate:

- a) gives political support to a hard-hitting and uncompromising AG agenda;

- b) ensures sufficient programme and advocacy management support and policy, advocacy and communications capacity are allocated towards AG and accountable governance strategy group

(AGSG) work;

c) ensures expectations are sufficient staff time is allocated to using process-oriented monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and

d) communicates clearly and regularly its commitment to women's rights, gender equality and diversity and what its expectations are.

27. An accountable governance advocacy programme. It is recommended that

a) Christian Aid steps up its advocacy work on AG to raise its external profile on AG issues, covering broad governance issues (emerging from partners' experience) and specific issues: corruption, the governance dimensions of tax, and the emerging inequality agenda; and

b) that greater emphasis is placed on AG issues in Christian Aid's tax justice campaign and related policy and advocacy work.

28. An Accountable governance team. It is recommended that:

a) Christian Aid establish an Accountable governance team in a restructured Policy, advocacy and campaigns (PAC) division to locate AG work, build a coherent AG programme and raise its external profile and influence. The team would have responsibility for vision and strategy, defining the policy agenda and influencing externally, coordinating cross-organisational work, and gathering analysis and experience from partners' work (including from Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF) and Multi-Annual Programme Scheme (MAPS) programmes). The team could be organised in a number of ways. One proposal would be that a senior manager in the proposed PAC division could fill the management and coordination functions, with an AG strategy leader, a senior advocacy officer, and an information and documentation officer. The team would need a dedicated operational budget; and

b) a management-led cross-organisational internal AG policy and advocacy team be set up with the specific brief of building coherence across issue- and country-specific advocacy work partnerships and ensuring AG message consistency.

29. The accountable governance strategy group. It is recommended that the AGSG include the following in their work programme (in consultation with management and colleagues): building the fundraising case for support for AG work; building its own capacity (with internal or external support) to analyse AG issues from a gender perspective and to share this analysis with others; preparing some simple guidance on direct engagement in AG-related advocacy in country by Christian Aid staff; engage directly with internal discussions on the role of the state to ensure that this discussion is informed by and useful to AG work.

30. Working with women's organisations and civil society organisations on gender equality and equity. It is recommended that Christian Aid actively seeks to partner women's organisations and other civil society organisations advocating on women's rights and gender-based discrimination and inequality and for inclusive governance to strengthen women's movements, bring more feminist analysis and experience into partner discussions in country and in Christian Aid, and build staff confidence on this agenda.

31. Building learning and knowledge on AG. It is recommended that: a) specific information exchange and learning opportunities are incorporated routinely in departmental, divisional and team away-days for collective critical reflection on AG work; b) priority is given to opening opportunities for partner-to-partner learning at different levels on AG matters; and c) resources are allocated to carry out AG peer reviews every 18/24 months with findings disseminated widely.

32. Monitoring and evaluating impact. It is recommended that Christian Aid builds staff capacity and invests staff time and resources in the use of process-oriented monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, such as, its own evidence of change framework and externally available tools like the ACT Development Guide, *Assessing Our Contribution to Change*.

33. Scope and methodology of future studies. It is recommended that careful consideration is given to a) narrowing the scope of future focus area studies to enable deeper data gathering, analysis and validation and b) commissioning a joint study with one or more other NGOs to incorporate comparative analysis and aspects of peer review.

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