

# **Christian Aid Angola: thirty-seven years of strengthening civil society for justice and peace**

An exit learning review

December 2020



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### **Acknowledgements:**

This research report was written by Dr Kas Sempere, with contributions and recommendations by the Christian Aid Angola team, two former Angola Country Managers, and a Christian Aid partner with expertise in Angola who wishes to remain anonymous and from Kate Newman, Karen Brock and Suzanne Fisher-Murray, who are all members of Christian Aid's Research, Evidence and Learning team.

Christian Aid Angola wants to dedicate this report to the people that Christian Aid Angola, partners and allies have worked with over many decades, with special mention to Zetó (José Patrocínio) from Omunga and Juliana Feliciano from UCF.

Christian Aid exists to create a world where everyone can live a full life, free from poverty. We are a global movement of people, churches and local organisations who passionately champion dignity, equality and justice worldwide. We are the changemakers, the peacemakers, the mighty of heart.

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**Cover:** Avelina Nangulande, 28, with her 2-year-old daughter Dominga outside their home in 16 June, a community for former street children, which was built after years of campaigning by Christian Aid's partner Omunga. If Avelina's daughter Dominga falls ill she will now be able to take her to the doctor. Thanks to Omunga's campaigning, the local authorities have granted 16 June residents free access to medical care, including emergency ambulances. Christian Aid / Eugenie Galbas

## List of abbreviations and acronyms and partner organisations cited in the report

ACADIR	Associação de Conservação do Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Integrado Rural (Association for Environmental Conservation and Integrated Rural Development)
ACC	Associação Construindo Comunidades (Association of Community Construction)
ACJ	Associação Cristã de Jovens (Youth Christian Association)
ACM	Aliança Cristã da Mocidade (in English, YMCA/YWCA, Young Men/Women's Christian Association)
ACTSA	Action for Southern Africa
ADRA	Ação Para o Desenvolvimento Rural e Ambiente (Action for Rural and Environmental Development)
AEDSA	Agencia Ecuménica para Desenvolvimento Social em Angola (Ecumenic Agency for Social Development in Angola)
AJPD	Associação Justiça, Paz e Democracia (Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy)
ALSSA	Association Leonardo Sikufinde Shalom Angola
ASSOGE	Associação Observatório de Género (Gender Observatory Association)
CICA	Conselho de Igrejas Cristãs em Angola (Council of Christian Churches)
COIEPA	Comité Inter-Eclesial Para a Paz em Angola (Ecumenical Committee for Peace in Angola)
CONGA	Committee of NGOs in Angola
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DASEP	Department of Social Assistance, Studies and Projects (part of CICA)
FMJ	Fórum de Mulheres Jornalistas para Igualdade no Género (Forum of Women Journalists for Gender Equality)
FONGA	Forum of Angolan NGOs
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICCO	Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation

IEBA	Igreja Evangélica Baptista em Angola (Evangelical Baptist Church in Angola)
IECA	Igreja Evangélica Congregacional em Angola (Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola)
IEU-CAA	Igreja Evangélica Unida – Comunhão Anglicana em Angola (Evangelical Church United – Anglican Communion in Angola)
ICRA	Instituto de Ciências Religiosas de Angola (Institute of Religious Science in Angola)
INESC	Instituto de Estudos Socioeconómicos (Institute of Socioeconomic Studies)
ISUP	Instituto Superior João Paulo II (João Paulo II Higher Institute)
Okutiuka	Associação Omunga (Association Omunga)
PMA	Plataforma Mulheres em Acção (Platform Women in Action)
UCF	União Cristã Feminina (Women's Christian Union)

## Executive summary

Christian Aid Angola is closing in 2020 as part of a wider restructure of Christian Aid. This review seeks to celebrate the Angola programme's thirty-seven years of work, and to capture learning to share that legacy with partners, other civil society actors in Angola, other Christian Aid programmes, and the development sector more broadly.

Christian Aid started working in Angola in the early-1980s to respond to the suffering caused by Africa's longest civil war. Since then, its main purpose has been to strengthen a weak civil society existing in a context of poverty, war, isolation and authoritarian rule. This review explores how Christian Aid Angola put this purpose into practice during three distinct periods: the civil war; Dos Santos' Authoritarian regime; and the recent timid openness of Lourenço's government.

One way in which Christian Aid and its partners achieved impact in this limited civil society space was by working with hard-to-reach communities, such as remote rural groups, people with HIV/AIDS, and street dwellers. It also achieved positive social change by focusing on policy, advocacy and campaign initiatives, such as the law on HIV/AIDS rights, legal advances in the protection of street children and supporting citizens illegally evicted by the government.

Civil society in Angola has progressively strengthened, but remains fragile. Considering the complexity of the context and the power and interests at play, the strategy adopted by the program was to shape partnerships with churches and human rights organisations so that together they could have greater impact than they could achieve alone. For some Christian Aid ex-staff, partners and allies, bringing these types of civil society actors together has yielded great results, and is one of the

approaches that distinctly sets Christian Aid apart from other international NGOs – showing its “added value” as a faith-based organisation.

Christian Aid sought to strengthen civil society space in Angola in many different ways:

- Supporting churches to provide humanitarian support and build sustainable peace by strengthening their skills in areas such as community development, strategic management, and the capacity to respond to emergencies.
- Supporting human rights organisations by promoting networks, making their work visible outside the country in Africa, Europe, and the Americas, and protecting them from potential government intimidation.
- Providing financial and strategic support to help organisations grow beyond one-off projects and activities. This was something that partners valued a lot during discussions.
- Connecting partners with donors and organisations with resources and strengthening leadership within civil society.
- Supporting and training partners to build more resilient organisations. This included learning how to better analyse their context and adapt their interventions to better support local positive change, and through learning skills in areas such as developing potential scenarios and theories of change to improve practice.
- Working collaboratively with partners and including them in strategic decisions.

As the programme closes, Christian Aid Angola is working to ensure that any ongoing proposals and links to new funders are strong, especially for the more fragile partners.

## Introduction

In December 2020, Christian Aid Angola is closing, as part of a wider restructure of Christian Aid, which is reducing its work from 37 to 27 countries globally, through 14 country programmes and 2 regional programmes across Latin America, Caribbean, Africa, Asia and the Middle East.

This review seeks to celebrate the work of the programme, and to capture learning about what worked and what didn't towards positive social change to share with partners, other Christian Aid programmes, and the development sector.

Angola is still a difficult country for civil society organisations (CSOs) to work in. While there have been improvements since the election of the current government in 2017, there are still restrictive laws and civil society and the right to peaceful protest is restricted. Human rights defenders and journalists, in particular, often face accusations of defamation and surveillance. Angola's governance system is centralised: there are no local elections and provincial governors are appointed by the central government. The President of the Republic, João Lourenço, holds both the role of Prime Minister and the Head of Armed Forces, concentrating state power.

Historically dependent on oil, the third-largest economy in Africa has been particularly vulnerable to falling oil prices since 2015. This "oil-curse" has created high inflation, and led to both cuts in social spending and social unrest.<sup>1</sup> Economic inequality in Angola is high (Gini coefficient of 51.3 in 2018<sup>2</sup>) and corruption is widespread (ranks 146 out of 180 in Transparency International's corruption perception index for 2019<sup>3</sup>). Both cause and effect of this political and economic profile is a long history of conflict, with the war for independence (1961–1974) followed by a twenty-seven-year civil war (1975–2002), and a repressive regime, especially until 2017.

Under these circumstances, Angola's civil society has struggled to grow and consolidate.<sup>4</sup> As a programme officer for Christian Aid Angola said: "In Angola,

growing as an organisation can mean pretty much not disappearing as an organisation". International development organisations are also affected by the narrow space for civil society and face political, institutional, operational and banking conditions that are often more challenging than those in other African countries.

Christian Aid started working in Angola in 1983, within the framework of the ACT Alliance, in order to respond to the suffering caused by Africa's longest civil war, and to address poverty and inequality.<sup>5</sup> For the first ten years, until 1993, the Angola programme was managed by the then West and Central Africa team, and was limited to one-off humanitarian responses. From 1994, it was led by the Southern Africa team and developed into a significant country programme which responded to emergencies and supported local development and advocacy work.

During thirty-seven years of work (from 1983–2020),<sup>6</sup> Christian Aid's Angolan partners have been exclusively civil society organisations (CSOs). Christian Aid Angola's main purpose was to strengthen a weak civil society existing under surveillance in a context of poverty, war and post-war isolation and authoritarian rule.

This review explores how Christian Aid Angola put this purpose into practice, strengthening Angola's weak civil society during three distinct periods: the civil war (until 2002); Dos Santos' authoritarian regime (2002–2017); and the timid openness of Lourenço's government (2017–present). Section 1 gives an overview of civil society in Angola. Section 2 and 3 narrate the evolution of Christian Aid's partnerships – from supporting faith-based organisations on matters of conflict and peace, to integrating human rights organisations during authoritarian rule. Section 4 discusses the interaction between faith and human rights organisations. Section 5 shares insights on how Christian Aid Angola strengthened civil society and achieved impact.

## Methodology

This learning review is based on a 10-day visit to Angola by Christian Aid's research, evidence and learning adviser Dr Kas Sempere. She carried out fieldwork with Christian Aid Angola's (then) country manager Rosário Advirta and programme officer Tércia Leite.

A review of evaluation and partner reports was carried out to learn about the history and evolution of the programmes. Additionally, the adviser drew on key informant interviews with Christian Aid Angola staff and ex-staff, as well as past and current partners.

Kas Sempere carried out visits to projects in Dumbi, Cuanza Sul province and the Female Christian Union (UCF) centre in Cazenga (Luanda).<sup>7</sup> During meetings with partners, Christian Aid Angola staff left the room once introductions had been made. All respondents gave their informed, voluntary, verbal consent to participate in the review and for their comments to be shared publicly in this report.



# 1. A short history of civil society in Angola

To start reflecting on how Christian Aid supported the strengthening of civil society in Angola, we first need to understand that the concept of civil society in the country is both recent and fragile.

Civil society in Angola has always been there, as the Secretary-General of partner Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola (IECA) reflected:

It depends on whether we take the western term 'civil society', or the Angolan term *comunidades* [communities]. Far back, we can talk about those comments in the kitchens in the communities, whose complaints then passed onto the *onjango* or community places of discussion, and from there, to the *soba* or community leader.

According to IECA's Secretary-General, the first expression of new versions of civil society in Angola was embodied in churches, especially the Protestant ones, which he identifies as the only force that opposed the colonial regime for a long time. This is true to the extent that the three independence movements emerged, although indirectly, from three major protestant churches, in different regions. This is a relevant social factor, both as a background for understanding political dynamics and interactions between the political power, civil society and churches, and to partially explain why the protestant churches and the Council of Christian Churches (CICA) have the potential to influence and bring together different political actors.

According to ex-Secretary-General of CICA and COIEPA (Ecumenical Committee for Peace in Angola), the civic struggle for liberation from Portuguese rule was 'active but not organised', and the lack of a common vision meant that civil society was weak after independence was won.

[Liberation groups] were 'civil society' because they were organized citizens that assumed responsibility for the liberation struggle. However, we all talked about independence, but did not have an idea of which society we wanted to replace colonialism with. Without that common vision, when the colonizers left, we entered a war in which we nearly destroyed ourselves.

Churches continued to have a substantial role during Angola's civil war, when they were one of the largest structures outside the state, providing humanitarian aid to war-torn communities. This was not without challenges. As CICA and COIEPA's ex-Secretary-General remembers:

Not even the churches could distribute [emergency supplies] in 1978–1979, even 1980, after the first attacks of the South African forces. The Council of Churches was obliged to hand over the resources to the Ministry of Social Affairs to deliver. Only in 1980–1981 were we allowed to distribute, and we set up commissions in each area.

For many INGOs, the end of the civil war in 2002 meant a move from humanitarian relief into development work. But some also perceived the end of the civil war as triggering a shift in the relationship between churches and the government, with some churches aligning closely with the government, out of fear of losing the benefits that a close relationship brought them, rather than speaking out for the poor and marginalised. This is because military control gradually brought a sophisticated, centralised, rich and controlling dictatorship, within a de facto "one-party state". Two different partners commented:

The Catholic church was strong in the defence of the poor until the end of the war [2002]. When the situation started to stabilise, that strength started to be questioned. I still have not managed to live with that. The balance is very complicated for the churches in Angola because there are few bishops that are sensitive to social issues. (Director, Santo Antonio Mission)

Before, even the faith leaders feared to express the real problems of communities as they could be accused of belonging to the opposition. Many were losing benefits. This culture of fear is still an impeding factor for faith leaders to speak. This culture remains. (Director, Department of Social Assistance, Studies and Projects (DASEP), IECA).

At the same time, as Christian Aid's Southern Africa regional director at the time pointed out, there was a growing popular recognition that Angola had the potential to be the richest country in Southern Africa because of its natural resources: minerals, oil, gas and land. However, there were concerns about whether this potential wealth would benefit the poor if there was a lack of transparency and accountability on how the funds generated were managed.

Angola's first human rights associations emerged in the early 1990s. While the single-party state formally ended in 1992 with a new constitution, the previous year saw the passage of legislation recognising the right to freedom of assembly and association, which allowed the formation of non-governmental

organisations (NGOs).<sup>8</sup> They found a government that was not used to associations. Human rights and development associations included Action for Rural and Environmental Development (ADRA), founded in 1991, Association Leonardo Sikufinde Shalom Angola (ALSSA), founded in 1995, Okutiuka founded in 1998 and Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy (AJPD), founded in 2000.<sup>9</sup> These associations added to the work being done by the churches and focussed on working with people who had been displaced by the war, or had lost family members as a result of the conflict, or had experienced illegal land grabbing and/or human rights violations.

The number of Angolan NGOs grew to the point that two networks were established by late 1991: FONGA (Forum of Angolan NGOs) and CONGA (Committee of NGOs in Angola, which also included international NGOs).<sup>10</sup> CICA and COIEPA's ex-Secretary-General recalls:

This [FONGA NGO Forum] created a feeling of citizen voice. When we entered the logic of a single party, it was hard to see if a person was a militant or citizen. You were not a citizen if you were not a militant [of the single party]. NGOs clarified that [distinction]... Action needed to become democratic and civic, not party-political.

Despite this apparent progress, considerable repression has remained until today. For some, the country's rich resources have not helped in broadening the civil society space. As a human rights defender noted:

Our government had expertise in not letting civil society grow. [For instance] they made bilateral agreements [with other governments] and left civil society out. When the international agencies accepted that their governments aligned in those bilateral relationships, because petrol helped each of these countries, Angolan civil society weakened, and that cooperation became irresponsible.

Another human rights defender raised how, still today, bodies such as the European Union may support Angola financially, but do not take a clear stand on human rights violations.

During the 38 years of President Dos Santos regime, civil society and human rights defenders were highly

monitored and repressed, and civic spaces were closed. No real separation existed between the executive, legislative and judiciary powers. This resulted in the use and abuse of legal frameworks to restrain and knock out civil society organisations, human rights defenders or any critical voices. This was done by an accumulation of presidential decrees overriding the current law, through "counter-terrorism" measures used to control partners' funds coming from abroad and by blocking their bank accounts, and by labelling certain organisations not granted a certificate delivered by the Ministry of Justice "illegal". Key activists were often threatened, organisations and networks were infiltrated, counter-information was disseminated in Angola and abroad, and litigation processes for defamation were often launched against any citizens questioning government practices. Unsurprisingly, this led to a weakening of civil society groups.

In 2015, President Dos Santos signed a Presidential Decree restricting the work of civil society organisations. The Decree was overturned in court by the Angolan Constitutional Tribunal two years later<sup>11</sup>, thanks to civil society pressure. That same year, national and international NGOs repeatedly called on the government to release 17 human rights defenders who were arrested during a book club meeting to discuss a text on peaceful civil disobedience. This international pressure and visibility contributed to the activists' release.

Since then, the new government has set out to fight corruption<sup>12</sup> and created space for press freedom and for civil society groups to operate. However, as only some organisations have been allowed to operate legally, some human rights defenders claim that the situation has not changed much. One defender said:

The President invited some [human rights] organisations like AJPD, Mosaiko and Omunga for an audience. We can see this as an opening. Yet, it is a conquest, not a favour... And still, they do not respect the right to demonstrate. No consensus exists about what that right means. Police in demonstrations still attack citizens. And no protection mechanism exists for human rights defenders. (AJPD)

## 2. Civil war and post-war: Christian Aid's support to Angolan churches (1983–2020)

Christian Aid started working in Angola in 1983, as part of a Consortium of European World Council of Churches members. In line with the evolution of civil society in the country, Christian Aid's first partners were churches.

Christian Aid supported churches to carry out humanitarian relief, peacebuilding, community development and the resettlement of displaced people. The European Consortium through which Christian Aid started working on Angola in the 1980, first supported the Emergency Programme through CICA, and later moved to form Action of Churches Together (AIA) together with Angolan Churches and faith-based organisations. AIA was a consortium, which later formed Ecumenic Agency for Social Development in Angola (AEDSA), which supported churches with resources to support emergency and resilience work, and skills like proposal writing and financing. A member of IECA remembers that AEDSA built the capacity of staff from church social development departments: "I myself benefited from a training in financial management, [and] in how to write good reports". The Christian Aid Southern Africa regional director at the time reflected, however, that the focus was on humanitarian rather than human rights work:

Partners in Angola were quite weak and certainly church partners. Around 1996–1998, we set a consortium with European counterparts in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Holland. We aimed to strengthen proposals from partners to [donors in] Europe and their ability to respond. The consortium got certain profile, mostly humanitarian. But the longer-term issues... I pushed for a human rights approach. Some of us were pushing for that even during the war. If the conflict stopped, who would get the land? Where was the gas and mineral money going?

Within the space of Churches and faith-based organisations, an increasing number of voices were calling for peace. For instance, the Lutheran World Federation Coordinator at the time was actively supporting civil society initiatives – including the Peace Building Programme, which brought together CICA members, Development Workshop, the Evangelical Alliance of Angola, the Catholic Church, and other civil society organisations. The coordinator brought the UNITA and the MPLA Women's Leagues together in South Africa to discuss Angolan peace, reconciliation and reconstruction. Then came the

Ecumenical Committee for Peace in Angola (COIEPA), the ProPeace conferences and other actions aimed at joining forces to call for peace.

With the end of war, Christian Aid put a greater focus on encouraging churches to engage more with Angolan powerholders. This was because when church leaders spoke to the government, it was focused more on peace and reconciliation than on issues related to governance and transparency around the management of oil revenues.

Ecumenical forums, cartas pastorais [pastoral letters] and audiences with the government were ways in which churches could put pressure on government officials. As the Secretary-General from partner CICA explained, letters were written and shared in church activities, and then launched in ecumenical gatherings or press conferences: "I feel the letters influenced the government – talking about the forgiveness of an enemy, of the need to reconcile with UNITA".

Christian Aid partners did not always have the will or capacity to engage with the government on issues related to human rights and governance. The country manager and the regional director from that time explained that their focus remained on community development:

Our partners became very used to the seeds-and-tools [humanitarian] programmes and it was extremely difficult to move on. The focus was to build sustainability in these programmes, thinking of climate impacts, providing guidance to communities. The [initial] peace-building programme ended in 2003 and the bulk of the funding until 2006 was for rural development, including land and water rights.

Around 2005, Christian Aid Angola produced a new country policy strategy. We tried to get our church partners to explore human rights work. If Angola was to achieve its potential, it was not [only] about what the community could do, but what the Angolan state could do. Making demands on the government was a new thing. The state saw this as a threat. We would encourage partners to come together and get greater communications and freedom of expression, linking with Radio Ecclesia, trying to do rights-based work. But that was challenging.

What is remembered best of the partnership between Christian Aid and the churches is the work with



communities in the provinces outside the capital. This, in the words of IECA's Secretary-General, was the "great hallmark" of the partnership. CICA's Secretary-General noted that it was a "big exercise": "It was in the churches where different ideas were presented. And international organisations enabled that." Projects ranged from supporting peace groups in schools and churches, to lengthy rural development initiatives such as Hope Mavinga (see Box 1). Outside Luanda, Christian Aid worked with remote communities in the provinces of Bengo, Huila, Kwando Kubango, Kwanza Sul and Uíje.

During all this time, the Angola ACT Forum remained a space for cooperation and synergies through the alliance. In 2014, the Lutheran World Federation,

Norwegian Church Aid and Christian Aid invested in a Memorandum of Understanding to better coordinate efforts, including support to Angolan ACT members and advocacy initiatives. However, joint action through a resilience project from 2017 to 2021 proved difficult, revealing gaps in theories of change, analysis, positions, management and practices.

In summary, Christian Aid partnerships with Angolan churches started through one or two umbrella organisations and then expanded to support local action. Christian Aid supported 20 churches and faith-based organisations between 2000-2005. Then the complex post-war scenario made clear the need to be more strategic and concentrate on partners with orientations convergent with Christian Aid.

## Supporting work in remote Mavinga



Pastor Ezekias from our partner IECA crosses a bridge in the remote district of Mavinga, Kwando Kubango province. Mavinga saw heavy combat during Angola's civil war, and even today the land is heavily mined. Credit: Christian Aid/Ollie Sykes.

The Evangelical Congregational Church of Angola (IECA) was created in 1880. Social action work was institutionalised in 1911, with the Improvement of People Programme. Education, health and agricultural development services were delivered in the villages around IECA missions, as well as training on farming, nutrition, literacy and sanitation. These 'evangelical villages' were intended as a model that others could copy.

The programme flourished in the fifties and sixties, but in the eighties – during the civil war and communist regime – many missions were closed, burned down or converted into military barracks. However, many people in the Churches, including IECA, stayed with the villagers. With Angola's first elections in 1992, hope returned, and



IECA created the Department of Social Assistance, Studies and Projects (DASEP), a technical department, to consolidate social action work. But after the elections, conflict returned. In 2003, after the end of the war, Christian Aid began to support IECA's work in remote areas where the government was absent and there were no services.

Hope Mavinga (2003–2008), a rural development and resettlement programme funded by Christian Aid working to help people displaced by the war in the remote Kwando Kubango province, was one such programme. Christian Aid's support to Hope Mavinga and the IECA in that time and place was courageous. Mavinga was a stronghold of UNITA – the faction which had lost the civil war. Although the MPLA government considered the area a 'UNITA community', UNITA leaders had been evacuated and it was the people left behind who were living with the legacy of war. Many people in Mavinga had disabilities because of injuries caused by landmines, and sexual violence attributed to police units had resulted in very high levels of teenage pregnancy.

Hope Mavinga aimed to transform 'UNITA people' into 'citizens' who deserved the support of the government. The programme went beyond bringing goods and building bridges. IECA used participatory methodologies to build citizenship. For example, if people said they had no water, the programme used a 'chain of why's' to find the cause. They also used biblical passages, local language proverbs, and the thoughts of African leaders like Julius Nyerere ("development and freedom are like eggs and hens; they exist together") to think about a better tomorrow. Literacy classes were used to instruct the community about rights, as well as to read and write. Grassroots workshops helped the community analyse their hopes and fears for the country's future. Encouragement was given to communities to write letters to the municipal administration.

DASEP's coordinator at the time in IECA – who was formerly in the military wing of the MPLA – remembers trying to change government attitudes towards the community. "We invited the municipal administration to inaugurate a bridge over the Kubia river in the Rivongo municipality. The administrator didn't want to come. He said, 'They will say I have no capacity to help the people, and that is a UNITA town.' I told him: 'If you don't go, you will lose. This village will get even more distant from you... and I'll report that to Luanda, to Radio Ecclesia.' The following day, he was there."

According to the programme coordinator, Christian Aid never worked in more accessible areas where other NGOs were working, and which would have made logistics much easier. It took a week to reach Mavinga, which had no internet or a reliable satellite; no cars could reach it, because of landmines, and it was expensive to operate in. For many years, Christian Aid was the only NGO which provided support there due to these challenges.

In time, villages working with Hope Mavinga became different to other areas where there were no programmes. IECA was asked to support governmental development planning in the area at a later stage due to their local experience and expertise.

Source: [www.iecaecca.com/index.php/82-portugues/205-accao-missionaria](http://www.iecaecca.com/index.php/82-portugues/205-accao-missionaria) and interviews

### 3. Authoritarian rule and Christian Aid's support to human rights organisations (2002–2020)

When the civil war ended in 2002, the MPLA government – which had become increasingly authoritarian and corrupt during the war – consolidated its position on power.

Many of Christian Aid's initial partners were faith-based organisations. Given the new focus of the programme on power, civic space and justice, most of these partnerships were phased out after 2005. Christian Aid started to consolidate its partnerships with human rights organisations from 2002 onwards, although it had collaborated with non-church groups before that. Overall, the partnership strategy evolved from collaborating with more than 20 partners in 2004 to 7 “strategic” partners in 2020.

In this report we are defining ‘strategic partners’ as those organisations which maintained an ongoing relationship with Christian Aid, and which received regular annual funding. According to Christian Aid Angola, they are strategic partners as they are able to work at micro, meso and macro levels to achieve positive social change. In contrast, ‘resource partners’ are commissioned by Christian Aid on a one-off basis to support and/or implement a specific task or process, such as providing training or supporting other partners with legal and/or technical support. Other peer organisations and entities, which do not hold any financial relationship with Christian Aid are referred to as ‘non-funded partners’. Table 1 lists partners by their typology as described above.

In the Angolan context, the role of resource partner was a new one, with some partners beginning to provide technical and organisational support to other partners instead of implementing activities themselves. For instance, the AJPD and Christian

Aid partnership stopped at the end of an HIV-AIDS project in 2010. Yet, the partnership between Christian Aid and AJPD was later restarted because other human rights partners expressed the need to have stronger legal support, and AJPD had the experience needed to provide it. AJPD eventually also began to provide training and mentoring in the protection of female human rights' defenders and, since 2017, AJPD has provided wider support to human rights organisations and defenders beyond Christian Aid's partners.

Programme allies were national and international organisations that helped strengthen civil society and could bring issues to the attention of international agencies. For instance, ACT Alliance, of which Christian Aid is a member, and other development NGOs supported the advocacy campaign of the Association of Community Construction (ACC) and the Mission of St. António, which aimed to put pressure on the Angolan government in order to recognise and tackle the hunger crises in South Angola.

In the partnerships, Christian Aid acknowledged its power as the donor and tried to be transparent, co-operative and participatory, while partners were required to embrace the same values institutionally and with the communities they worked with. When common values were no longer shared, or when the context required other approaches, partnerships were adapted (see partnership evolution in Table 1). In some cases this meant funded partners became non-funded partners, or strategic partners became resource partners, or the partnership or the funding stopped for a while, and resumed when conditions, strategies or leadership changed.

**Table 1:** Evolution of Christian Aid partnerships

Partners		Year partnership begins	Partnership evolution
<b>Faith-based organisations</b>	ACJ – Associação Cristã de Jovens	Pre-1999*	Partnership terminated in 2008.
	ACM – Kwanza Sul	1996	From strategic funded partner to resource partner providing one-off support on logistics and translations.
	CICA (CAIE) – Conselho das Igrejas Cristão em Angola	1982*	From strategic funded partner to non-funded partner (2008). Funded partnership resumed in 2012.
	COIEPA - Comité Inter-Eclesial Para a Paz em Angola	2003	Network dissolved. Partnership terminated in 2006.
	IEBA – Igreja Evangélica Baptista em Angola	1981*	Partnership terminated in 2006.

Partners		Year partnership begins	Partnership evolution
	IECA - Igreja Evangélica Congregacional em Angola	1981*	Strategic funded partner.
	IERA – Igreja Evangélica Reformada de Angola	1983	Partnership terminated in 2007.
	IEU-CAA – Igreja Evangélica Unida – Comunhão Anglicana em Angola	Pre-1999*	From strategic funded partner to non-funded partner.
	ICCO – Interchurch organisation for Development Cooperation	2004	Resource partner for one-off capacity-building work.
	Rede Esperança	2006	Network dissolved. Partnership terminated in 2009.
	UCF – União Cristã Feminina (ACM Luanda)	1999	Strategic funded partner.
<b>Faith-based and human rights organisations</b>	Missão Católica de Santo Antonio Gambos – Tyihepepe – CGN	2017	Strategic funded partner.
	Radio Ecclesia	1997	From strategic funded partner to non-funded partner. Funded partnership resumed in 2018.
<b>Human rights organisations</b>	ACTSA – Action for Southern Africa	1995	Resource partner.
	AJPD – Associação Justiça Paz e Democracia	2001	From strategic funded partner to non-funded partner in 2010. It became a resource partner in 2017 providing legal support, training and monitoring.
	ACC – Associação Construindo Comunidades	2007	From strategic funded partner to non-funded partner supporting CGN.
	ASSOGE – Associação Observatório de Género	2019	Strategic funded partner.
	Associação Omunga (Okutiuka)	2006	Strategic funded partner.
	Fahamu Africa	2008	From resource partner to non-funded partner.
	FMJ – Fórum de Mulheres Jornalistas para Igualdade no Género	2013	From resource partner to non-funded partner.
	HRW – Human Rights Watch	2014	Partnership terminated in 2016.
	Minibus Media	2008	Resource partner.
	On Land Productions	2006	Resource partner for one-off communication work.
	PMA – Plataforma Mulheres em Acção	2013	From strategic funded partner to resource partner.
	SOS Habitat – Acção Solidária	2004	From strategic funded partner to non-funded partner.
<b>Humanitarian / development organisations</b>	ACADIR – Associação de Conservação do Ambiente e Desenvolvimento Integrado Rural	2008	Partnership terminated in 2010.
	FONGA – Fórum das Organizações Não Governamentais Angolanas	1999	Partnership terminated in 2006.
<b>Research organisations</b>	INESC – Instituto de Estudos Socioeconómicos	2012	Resource partner for research-related activities.
	ICRA – Instituto de Ciências Religiosas de Angola	2008	Partnership terminated in 2014.
	ISUP – Instituto Superior João Paulo II	2012	Partnership terminated in 2015.

Source: PROMISE and Christian-Aid archives; \*approximate date

Most grants still went to churches, because of their capacity to deliver and to reach communities in rural areas. However, human rights organisations started to receive some funding from Christian Aid Angola. Its country manager (1999-2006) reflected on working with human rights organisations:

We took some risks. But the work done, especially in terms of land rights, had very strong voices [advocating for land rights], and this needed rapid support. This did not require huge amounts of money. Christian Aid was in a fantastic position to do that at very short notice due to the financial freedoms we had with core money. We were quite innovative and different. It fitted with the country context and strategy and provided quick support without the restrictions of government [donor] money.

The last Christian Aid country manager (2006-2020) reflects that:

We were one of the first international organisations to work with both human rights organisations and churches as our partners. Other faith-based INGOs also moved from working with churches only, to integrating human

rights organisations while, for instance, the non-faith agency OSISA worked initially with human rights organisations only and then integrated faith-based organisations.

This early move towards supporting human rights organisations enabled the country programme to respond to violence and authoritarianism, two of Angola's major challenges. The last country manager (2006-2020) summarised Christian Aid Angola's theory of change: "We believe that there would be no peace in Angola without the churches, and that there would have been no democracy – understood as freedom of expression, association and participation – without human rights organisations."

Christian Aid's role involved bringing together human rights defenders and international allies, supporting defenders to participate in international fora, and raising their visibility through international channels. Its partnerships with human rights organisations helped them reach vulnerable people, including prisoners, people with HIV-AIDS, homeless youth, pastoralists, women and girls, evicted citizens and migrants (see Box 2).

## Defending the most vulnerable

### The Association for Justice, Peace and Democracy (AJPD) & the rights of people with HIV-AIDS

AJPD was created in 2000 by university students to promote the rule of law. It pioneered work on the rights of prisoners and people living with HIV-AIDS. Christian Aid was the first funder of its HIV-AIDS project.

A former AJPD staff member explained: "When we started to work on HIV-AIDS, we wanted to work on discrimination and rights, not on prevention and sensitisation. We were seeing that people with HIV-AIDS were being discriminated against. [Despite living with HIV/AIDS] they continued to be citizens with rights to free medical assistance, to not to be dismissed from work, to live in a family without being discriminated against. That involved the government guaranteeing rights. Donors didn't want to fund this; only Christian Aid would. And I got to know the 18 provinces of Angola in that project.

We put pressure on the General Inspection of Work [Labour Inspection] to act against companies that were firing workers with HIV-AIDS. There was, for instance, this woman working for a security company. She prepared food to be distributed. Her husband passed away; she did not even know she was infected. She was dismissed from work and we asked the Work Inspection to go and visit to ensure redeployment into a workplace where she did not handle food, at the risk of cutting herself – either that, or compensation. The Inspection responded. The woman said, people do not talk to me, I don't want to be there. But she received compensation and opened a bakery with the money. She used to bring salgadoinho pastries to us. In 2003, we managed to influence Decree 42.3 which concerned HIV-AIDS at work and during training. The General Inspection of Work consulted with us, together with other organisations. But the challenges weren't limited to work issues. So, we wrote an annotated draft law on HIV-AIDS with recognised lawyers and shared it with the group of parliamentary women, who presented it as a legislative initiative. The Law 8-04 was passed in 2008. That law went beyond the right to work for people living with HIV-AIDS, to protect all the spheres of their lives."



## Association Omunga & the rights of street children



Rafael's family live in a breezeblock home in '16 June', a community for former street children, and the first of its kind in Angola. The local government built Rafael's house, along with over 80 others, after years of campaigning by Angolan children's rights group Omunga, supported by Christian Aid and Irish Aid. Photo credit: Omunga/Donaldo Sousa.

It was the existence of street children that led to the creation of the association Omunga, an Angolan human rights organisation.

"They were in the streets because of the war, or because they came from dysfunctional families. The state did not protect them, and hospitals would not take them in because they were dirty. We trained them and supported them to get their identity cards so they could access services. Our battle was for the state to build housing for them and to give them education and work opportunities.

In 2008, a space for the construction of houses in the highlands of Lobito was finally granted by the government, called '16 June'. The Governor of Benguela at the time was sensitive to the issue and helped with the construction of 110 of the 200 houses for homeless youth that the government had promised. Many found it hard to keep their livelihoods, because 16 June was far from where they were working. But the majority adapted and managed to commute between their new homes and their jobs.

From 2010 onwards, things improved. An agreement was reached with a training centre. Many homeless youths were trained for a job and given social protection. Still today they come to greet us and say: "Thanks for the training, that certificate gave me a job". A youth commission was created to talk with public institutions. They now need less support to access education and health services.

Omunga evolved towards working with other marginalised groups, such as people evicted from their houses without compensation, and more recently, with undocumented migrants and refugees. Omunga managed to create its own organisational brand which they applied to different projects. This included a Youth Journalists' Brigade, recording and bearing witness to human rights violations, and Quintas de Debate, public debates about the social and political situation of the country, which have, over time, become a safe space for outspoken voices."

**Source:** Interviews with partner staff

### 3. Building 'civil society' between churches and human rights organisations (2008–2020)

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Around 2008, it became clear that the church had the legitimacy to speak about values and that this was crucial, especially because corruption was so common. Their legitimacy came from having educated people in values and from having always been close to the people, suffering during the war... The church created [an] oasis of peace and respect in the middle of hell. And they have the numbers. Human rights organisations may directly influence fewer people. Yet, human rights organisations define boundaries. And these pillars [legitimacy, values and numbers, and progressive ideas and human rights boundaries] are indispensable.

Country manager (2006-2020), Christian Aid Angola

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From 1986 until 2003, Christian Aid's partners were all faith-based organisations; after this, human rights organisations were gradually integrated into Christian Aid's funded partnerships. Facilitating collaboration between these two types of partners was not free of challenges, with some less keen than others as seen from the following comment:

Churches have one way of working and the civil society has another. There is need to bring these two things together.  
(Staff member, IECA)

Both groups had to overcome concerns about working together. It was felt that civil society organisations sometimes provided a more critical view of the Catholic Church, while the Churches had to overcome prejudices it held about human rights organisations.

It was not easy at all for the Council of Churches to sit with civil society organisations, but this situation evolved towards more participation.  
(Ex-Secretary-General, CICA and COIEPA)

Churches are opening up more and more. Today, there is a larger understanding that, in reality, we all have a common purpose. (Director, AJPD)

In Bocoio, we [Omunga] accompanied cases of political intolerance where the Catholic Church was involved in creating situations of intolerance in the communities, such as [when some in the Church said] 'Those who are from UNITA cannot preach'. So, we wrote a report and sent it to the Bishop in Benguela. They did not believe it at first, but in conversation, we all agreed to review the case. (Director, Omunga).

Civil society [human rights] organisations were seen by the government to be in the service of imperialism, the CIA and UNITA, to destabilise Angola. Churches didn't want to be associated with them. There is a vision that churches cannot do politics, that they do humanitarian assistance.

When it was about peace, their involvement was very strong. When it was about violations of political rights like physical aggressions, the church would not sign up. On health, they would have a look. (Manager, AJPD)

During our visit, we saw evidence that there is still debate about whether the church should be defined as part of civil society, as many Angolans still see it as separate. IECA's Secretary-General said:

We churches are part of civil society. However, some [churches] will say that civil society [in Angola] has its radicalism and that churches shouldn't get involved to avoid being highly political. And the others [human rights organisations] will say that the church delays their dynamism.

Christian Aid made efforts to link these two worlds. "We had to learn to deal with differences, but partner organisations started to build alliances with each other. Today, we can prepare joint actions," the Angola country manager (2006-2020) said. There is evidence of this. AJPD has given human rights training to both faith and non-faith organisations; and Radio Ecclesia has been the loudspeaker for human rights organisations such as AJPD and Omunga's public debates. One notable success has been the 2019 alliance between the rural Santo Antonio Mission, AJPD, Omunga, SOS Habitat and Radio Ecclesia who fought to keep access to a community water fountain out of the hands of landowners in Gambos .

However, the director of human rights partner Omunga, noted that Christian Aid could have done more to build a common agenda with other faith-based organisations and could have done more to foster the sharing of information and learning between its different partner organisations:

It was a very good strategy from Christian Aid to diversify [partner types] because we all work on

human rights, but do it a bit differently. However, Christian Aid was not very resolute in sharing information for more solidarity in the [partner] meetings. There were advocacy activities about citizenship and housing that we assumed that the churches did not align with. And advocacy actions in which faith-based organisations reached a lot through dialogue with institutions. We were more outspoken, and in some cases, we paid a high price. So, things that churches were doing well, we could have learnt more from them to get more results. It may have had to do with overwork, but we never got to reach a common agenda.

Building trust and alliances often requires more than a shared purpose of fighting poverty and inequality, especially if there are different perspectives and ways of dealing with power holders. Also, the issue seems to be a general structural challenge in the sector. A representative of another international NGO in Angola, member of the Act Alliance, noted that:

One of our challenges still is to build a common agenda in the civil society. See ourselves as allies, not in a contest for funding. We have to see where we can collaborate, what we can confront together.

Given that a mixed group of partners was not easy to manage, why did Christian Aid adopt this approach? The main reason cited by partners and Christian Aid staff was that the faith-based and human rights organisations were often complementary and benefited from supporting interventions.

Churches had more legitimacy and social acceptance, as they had been established for longer, and were generally more trusted by citizens than the newer human rights organisations. Two Christian Aid staff members talked about their work with the faith-based partner UCF on women's rights – including a woman's right to control her own body – and about the benefits and challenges of working with faith-based organisations.

It has to do with the context. Parents in those [deprived urban] neighbourhoods would never let their girls go to a training that was not held in a Christian centre, led by well-respected ladies. It

would perhaps be easier to work with a non-Christian women's organisation, where feminism is more straightforward. But, for me now, the most important thing is to support churches on women's rights, given that they reach many people and can contribute to balance gender and power relations.

Culturally, a woman here doesn't say no to a man. To set limits, UCF uses the moral base, and positive [female] identities, based on "who I am" [rather than rights, explicitly].

On the other hand, human rights organisations were often more progressive in their messaging, despite facing a lack of social acceptance and the high personal and organisational costs associated with tackling human rights abuses publicly.

A second complementarity has to do with reach and access that the Church has in Angola. Due to the ongoing importance of the church within people's lives in Angola, churches reach many more people than human rights organisations. They are also present in both rural and urban areas, whereas human rights organisations are mostly urban. As AJPD manager said: "Faith-based organisations cover all the country and it is important to access this structure to share information on human rights". As a result, the Christian Aid country manager (2006-2020) said that the strengthening of rights-based approaches within faith-based organisations has been a pillar in Christian Aid's Angola strategy for decades.

In cases where we found human rights defenders in rural areas among Christian Aid's partners, they were related to the church – what we might call 'hybrid' partners. This is the case of Radio Ecclesia and the progressive Mission of Santo Antonio of the Gambos in the Huila province (see Box 3). These hybrid partners, and the joint work done by churches and human rights organisations, can be seen as expressions of the best of both worlds. Renowned leaders, such as progressive thinker Reverend Tony Nzinga (CICA and COIEPA's ex-Secretary-General), were also praised by some interviewees for acting as 'bridges' between the Church and human rights groups within Angolan civil society.



## Hybrid organisations: linking faith and human rights

### The Santo António Mission



Fourteen communities in drought-prone Huila province in southern Angola faced repeated attempts by their provincial government and powerful landowners to seize their water supply. An alliance of Christian Aid partners, funded by Irish Aid, empowered the communities to stand their ground and defend it. Local residents blocked the road, gave media interviews and sought advocacy support from senior church figures. The government backed down. During a drought in 2019 landowners again began illegally taking water from the spring – the community resisted and, for now, their spring is safe. Photo credit: Chiange Gambos Network.

The Santo António mission in the Gambos, Huíla, was created in 1895. Although slavery had formally been abolished, Portuguese colonials continued to sell people into slavery. The mission saved lives during its early history by buying people's freedom before they could be sold into further slavery.

Gambos is a remote area, often hit by droughts, and home to semi-nomadic pastoralists, who have no official rights to the land, but have always grazed their animals on it. Landowners well-connected to the government have been building large farms and seizing land and water historically used by pastoralists since 1997. The conditions of workers on many of the landowner's farms have been described as close to modern slavery. The Mission has documented examples of child labour, sexual exploitation, torture and land grabbing and has publicly denounced these crimes.

In 1999, the Vice-Governor tried to close Association Leonardo Sikufinde Shalom Angola (ALSSA) down. The association had been created as part of the church to honour the late Angolan Father Leonardo Sikufinde, who was murdered in 1985 and who defended human rights throughout his life. He spoke about life as a right that was not part of any political party, which led to the Vice-Governor complaining that ALSSA was a civic rights association, not a Catholic one. Father Pio responded: "The Governor cannot close a Catholic organisation as you would need to close the Vatican itself. It is canon law. You cannot close the organisation, and you cannot take us to prison either."

But after another outspoken publication on human rights violations, ALSSA was eventually closed by the Church. It was replaced by a new association, Associação Construindo Comunidades (ACC), which is independent of the Catholic Church, but which has the same mission and values as the ALSSA and the Santo António Mission.



Around 2008, ACC started engaging with the issue of urban housing demolitions. “In Lubango city, 8000 families were evicted by demolition [crews], and offered no relocation. Many youths committed suicide; others went into crime. Families were broken. The situation was serious.”

“In 2011, we [and ACC] started a radio debate and had a joint demonstration with Omunga about the demolitions in Benguela and Lubango, and a conference [to support] the campaign ‘Don’t Tear Down my House’.” Parliament eventually published a resolution urging for communities to be relocated before beginning the housing demolitions.

“Land grabbing, demolitions and evictions also happened in rural areas. Christian Aid continued to support us, helping bring pastoralists to Luanda to have audiences with the Human Rights Commission of the Parliament, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Presidency. We won on the rural side, and those illegal evictions mostly stopped. With the urban side it was harder, but demolitions halted there too with the change of Governor in 2012.”

## Radio Ecclesia

Radio Ecclesia, a Catholic broadcasting station in Angola, was created in 1954. Born to spread values of faith, peace and democracy, the radio stayed closed for nearly twenty years (1978-1997) due to the government’s media control. Christian Aid started supporting Radio Ecclesia in 1997.

During the “after the war dictatorship period” (2002-2017), Radio Ecclesia was an important forum for citizens to voice their concerns, debate and access information. However Radio Ecclesia has struggled to expand to broadcast outside Luanda over the last decades. While this is now possible politically, its expansion is being hampered by financial challenges according to its Director:

“The participation of Radio Ecclesia’s provincial correspondents is decreasing. The correspondents say: ‘I have content to share, but I do not have phone credit to share it with’. We had hoped that the new government was going to help the private media complying with the Press Law, a very old law which says they must support us. But nothing. They only want the radio to be heard in the cities, not in the municipalities.

Our fight has always been to be able to broadcast in all the provinces. Now we are still missing 3 of the [18] provinces. Still, today, some administrations do not allow the set-up of radio aerials [which would allow Radio Ecclesia to broadcast to those areas]. The national radio is broadcasting, [to all the provinces] but it is still controlled by the state.

We try to overcome these challenges through the Internet. We have debates in the local languages [online]. There is now more sensitivity to human rights and more demonstrations, and I am certain that it is also thanks to [our] radio work. We disseminate, we call people. And people start demanding more. Even inland, there are demonstrations. Nothing was happening before.

Lots of material was damaged after the recent floods. Most of [Christian Aid’s recent] resources went to [buying] technical material, training and computer software support to teams in the provinces. Now, with Christian Aid exiting, we are concentrating on [improving our] equipment. We want to use our final resources from Christian Aid to improve... the Luanda aerial, for better and more reliable long-term coverage”.

**Source:** Interviews with the Director of Radio Ecclesia, and the Director and one staff member of the Mission

## 4. Christian Aid's role in strengthening civil society in Angola

Christian Aid contributed to the strengthening of Angolan civil society by supporting the day-to-day work of the partners. In the interviews, partners highly valued the organisational support that Christian Aid provided, which helped to build their own organisational capacity. Partners also mentioned the important role Christian Aid played in providing bridging resources, which kept the organisations financially afloat until further funding was secured, providing access to funding organisations and opportunities, providing international exposure and support; strengthening individual leadership; and working from a distance, rather than through direct interventions.

### Organisational support

Nearly all the partners interviewed referred to Christian Aid's role in strengthening and supporting the growth of local Angolan organisations. The institutional support provided ranged from financial organisational support to partners, training, networking and advice on organisational development and programmatic strategies.

We had never paid social security to our workers [probably due to the war context]. But Christian Aid said that it was our fiscal responsibility. So, we applied for the legalisation and Christian Aid supported us. If we are not fiscally compliant, not clean, the government could close us down. The same happened with health insurance for workers. We once had to evacuate a seropositive worker to Luanda by plane and take her to a clinic, which had costs. That was the first time that AJPD budgeted for that, thanks to our work with Christian Aid. And this has continued until now. (Former staff member, AJPD).

Christian Aid would support with [the costs of] transport and office rental, when needed. It also helped with the administrative side, training on administration and finance, as well as helping with our organisational visibility in the internet. (Director, UCF)

Partners particularly appreciated Christian Aid's institutional support in times of hardship, such as during conflicts with the government, involvement in judiciary processes, transitions of leadership, and when offices and funding were lacking.

In 2002, we had a process with Paulo Tchilipica, who we called the 'Minister of (in)justice', about a

violation of human rights. The Minister started a legal process against us for defamation. It was quite likely that we would have been detained. We had no budget provision for lawyers. We sent emails to the donors. Christian Aid supported us with an international fundraising campaign. And we got Sergio Raimundo, one of the best criminal lawyers. Just the act of us engaging Raimundo served as a disincentive to the other side. The other lawyer sought an agreement and suggested that both sides retired their cases against each other. We said we didn't want to. Even so, they retired the case against us, and we did not have to go to trial. (Former staff member, AJPD)

It is like a boat fluctuating in difficult moments, when the waves are bigger, and the boat is about to sink... The time when we went to the tribunal, it was only Christian Aid that stayed with us. (Staff member, ACC and Santo Antonio Mission)

When I came back to take the lead of the Radio, I found it in such a bad state that without Christian Aid's help, I would have not been able to raise it again. Christian Aid understood our hardship. (Director, Radio Ecclesia)

After the passing of Omunga's funder, we organised an Assembly thanks to some small funds from Christian Aid. It was a difficult moment. We elaborated a new strategic plan for the coming years and re-structured the organisation. We have now three consolidated organs with separation of functions: a twenty-member assembly, an executive board, and a fiscal board. (Director, Omunga, an Angolan human rights organisation)

At a certain moment, we could not pay the rent. We had to leave our office in the city centre and work from our director's house. We built an annexe there: a garage. Christian Aid supported us then, and that gesture at that moment gave stability to Omunga. (Director, Omunga)

There was a funder three times bigger than Christian Aid whose project ended in June. From June up until February [2020], I had no salary. Christian Aid told me to make a small proposal for the transition, that they would support 50% of costs. (Director, Assoge)

Four partners discussed the benefits of Christian Aid's adaptive management approach, in particular the planning, monitoring and evaluation tools,

including context analysis, theory of change, strategy testing and outcome harvesting. They talked about how simple, dynamic and innovative they found this approach to be. By building organisational capacity, local organisations could create alternative pathways for action, develop organisational strategy and strategies for other projects and activities. A former staff member of AJPD, now with partner Assoge said: “Christian Aid taught us how to make our work to have impact in context. It is not important how many hundred meetings we have, but what results come from them. We evolved to [be able to] show impact, and this allowed us to grow with other donors.”

These accounts were corroborated by Christian Aid staff in Angola, who said:

I am happy that we helped organisations survive. For instance, many other donors had stopped funding Omunga, but after a while they started supporting it again. We were there in the meantime.

Partners like the ‘adaptive programming’ system [a flexible planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning approach to programmes], as it can be applied to the organisation as a whole and is not only limited to a project.

Almost all partners explicitly mentioned that Christian Aid gave them the freedom to evolve through training, organisational support and dialogue, when disagreements existed, without impositions. The relationship was honest, horizontal and transparent, and based on the needs of communities and partners. “In Christian Aid, what comes first is the empowerment of the partner. It lets the partner decide” as CICA’s Secretary-General said.

That institutional support and freedom of direction for partners was possible thanks to Christian Aid core funding and, since 2017, the provision of adaptive programming funds, in collaboration with Irish Aid. The current director of Omunga shared how the funds had helped them have greater impact with their work:

A thing in Omunga is that the most impactful activities are not necessarily part of, or recorded in, a project. Last year, there was a tragedy in the construction of a factory in a residential area. We had to respond and used the *Ekwatiso* [Irish Aid and Christian Aid core funding] resources to create a campaign. That is different from other [funders], because it allows quick interventions – the most important thing being the impact, the results. And we stopped the construction of that factory. Since 2008, our impact always had the

hand of Christian Aid in it. For all these years, it has been the pillar of our organisation.

Partners could also apply for Small Projects Funds (SPF) when they had a specific matter to solve which fell outside their funded programme work. This Fund allowed the programme to develop short-term partnerships with national or international organisations for a specific mission. For instance, the Fund supported a national Angolan organisation to publish and disseminate a film on human rights abuses experienced by the ethnic minority San. Christian Aid Angola acknowledged the need for such short-term funding in the country strategy and Theory of Change, as it helped local organisations to respond to the frequent and unpredictable variations of the Angolan context.

Overall, partners were unified in their appreciation of Christian Aid’s approach to funding, despite noting that the quantity of funding given was limited and had decreased since 2008. While local partners had enjoyed working on other projects with INGOs, local partners said the collaboration often ended abruptly when the project funding ended. Local partners also felt that the fierce competition for funding often constrained smaller Angola organisations from developing. For example, the Director of DASEP from IECA reflected that many donors want to be directly implementing programmes, and then, in reality, become competitors with national organisations, preventing Angolan civil society from growing. Partners felt Christian Aid’s support for local associations had at least partly helped to compensate for such funding limitations.

## Capacity development support

When possible, the organisational support Christian Aid provided was delivered by national partners who supported the capacity of other partners.

Christian Aid identified the weaknesses of each organisation that needed help, not in isolation, but as a group of organisations. Nearly all of us were weak in financial management. Those most capable helped others. For instance, IECA helped ACC. (Staff member, ACC and Santo Antonio Mission)

In some instances, partner-to-partner support even reached community associations, such as Ovatumbi, an association of pastoralist herders created in 2012 in the Gambos, a region of Angola frequently affected by droughts and famines. Ovatumbi gained skills from partner ACC in project implementation, safeguarding, administration and financial management. It was guided through the process of becoming formally registered and also gained key



skills to help it engage with the local authorities and advocate for greater respect for human rights. Christian Aid's support included strategic approaches, such as asking for minutes to be taken, and having different spokespeople attend meetings, to avoid leaders becoming targeted and isolated for their role as human rights agitators. These skills were used to help communities build peaceful responses to rights violations rather than resorting to violence.

As Christian Aid prepares to leave Angola, partners have requested that the exit strategy focuses on helping them to consolidate their liaison with other donors and consultants. In the past, Christian Aid often played that liaison role, as well as supporting partners by co-funding their work with other donors.

## International exposure and support

Partners highlighted the importance of raising the profile internationally of the situation facing Angolan civil society and, in particular, of the challenges facing human rights organisations.

For instance, Christian Aid Angola supported several partners to attend international fora such as the World Council of Churches summit, the African Commission on Human Rights and the United Nations. Christian Aid Angola also ensured "safe spaces" to help reflection and dialogue in a context of repression where communications were highly monitored, and government informants infiltrated many spheres of society.

Christian Aid Angola also worked with a range of international partners that supported Angolan partners through capacity building, organisational development and regional and global networking and visibility. For instance, the German organisation Minibus Media supported Omunga, UCF, and SoS-Habitat in developing their communication skills, and enabling community journalists to report human rights abuses at the community level, as well as to produce and disseminate educational participatory videos. The Angola newsletter and website of the UK-based campaigning organisation Action for Southern Africa (ACTSA) helped publicise the issues faced by vulnerable Angolans to their audiences, which include British businesspeople and academia.

This kind of international exposure helps broaden civic space. The Angolan government is mindful of its international image. Giving international visibility to what partners do – and the pressures they face – is important for adding value and legitimacy to their work; embassies can play an important role in this too. Angola's current President values the importance of civil society, including human rights organisations, and has invited them to discussions. This is of vital

importance because, as AJPD manager noted: "in Angola, when the President does something, the rest do it; it is like a flag."

These actions starkly contrast with the previous dictatorship. The IECA's Secretary-General reflected on the differences and the important role Christian Aid played in that era:

All that was mentioned about Southern Africa at that time was the war in the Congo [1996-1997; 1998-2003]. International exposure was important and helped against the brutality of the authorities. It was so easy to crush a group of people. And that is where Christian Aid and Norwegian Church Aid carried out a very important function.

The country manager added that Christian Aid had enabled partners to participate in a network of international civil society organisations working within Angola, and had invited Angolan human rights activists to visit Europe:

We had concerted actions of international advocacy with many countries in Europe. For instance, thanks to the British ambassador, we were able to unblock funding for Omunga. We also helped protect some organisations from being made illegal by the government. We also stopped some massive residential demolitions and many other human rights violations.

## Strengthening individual leadership

Christian Aid also supported the development of civil society leaders. This support has ranged from helping individuals to learn English or to take up further studies abroad, to providing economic support to allow them to recuperate to avoid 'burn out' or to pay for health treatments and / or training.

This support was important, given that it is becoming more and more difficult to retain leaders in civil society. For instance, Omunga's Director reflected that many leaders stay in civil society for a few years to learn, and then leave to work for the government.

Christian Aid has supported women in leadership positions in the church and in human rights organisations, recognising that their presence has slowly challenged the patriarchal culture within churches. Women leaders from UCF and CICA reflected:

The apostolic church women cannot be in the pulpit to preach. But the girls we train went to talk to the General Secretary of the church, and now they are allowed. (Director, UCF)

The change is slow, but it is happening. I have been invited to give talks and there are now some

churches that, after that, have women in the pulpit. There are many women being ordained. And there are women who have told me: "You are my role model". (Secretary-General, CICA)

Similarly, human rights organisations in Angola are mostly male-dominated, and women are often excluded from capacity building initiatives and international events organised by international organisations, as these initiatives often only invite executive directors (who are mostly male). Through the 'Women in leadership programme', junior and senior female leaders created a mentorship network, sharing experiences, challenges and solutions. For instance, the programme organised a learning exchange with the Shack Dweller Movement (Abahlali Basejondolo) on female leadership, land tenure issues, and women's protection from violence. This was done through working with Christian Aid South Africa's partner, the Church Land Programme.

The programme improved some participants' confidence and willingness to become leaders. For instance, a participant from Omunga explained that she attended the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights for the first time and overcame her fear of public speaking by making a presentation in front of the Angolan government, international organisations and African civil society peers, highlighting human rights abuses on migrants. The fact that her intervention at the Commission went well increased the legitimacy of her leadership position in her organisation.

## Managing the country programme from a distance

Christian Aid has never had an office in Angola and has always managed its activities from London. At the time of the visit, there was a Christian Aid Angola team composed of a country manager and several programme officers based in London, who travelled to Angola quarterly. Local staff living in-country all worked for partner organisations. To further help this remote management model, Christian Aid worked with two more international ACT partners in Angola: the Lutheran World Federation and Norwegian Church Aid, through a Memorandum of Understanding.

Partners had mixed perspectives on whether this distance model affected Christian Aid's goal of strengthening civil society negatively or positively.

- Christian Aid partners understood the limitations of operating in an expensive country in which it is legally difficult to operate (CICA, IECA). But this meant that some partners felt Christian Aid could not always fully follow the complex dynamics of partner activities and would have liked Christian Aid to be based in Angola, which would have allowed more sharing and learning (Assoge, CICA, IECA, Mission, Radio Ecclesia).
- Christian Aid provided timely and meaningful feedback despite the geographical distance, with regular communication online and frequent visits, three or four times per year. Ongoing contact was found to be the most important part of the partner relationships, with some favourably comparing the frequency of contact to that of other donors who were based in Angola, but who only met once a year to discuss evaluation and planning. (AJDP, Assoge, IECA, Mission, Radio Ecclesia, UCF). But there were exceptions: IECA and the Mission would have liked more visits, and the Mission would have liked longer visits, with less time pressure.
- Partners emphasised that a positive aspect of Christian Aid not having a presence in Angola was that it did not take the space of local actors. This pushed partners to be more responsible and autonomous, to grow and learn from mistakes (Assoge, CICA, IECA, Mission).

Overall, having an in-country office is not necessarily an indicator of providing support to partners – ongoing communication and high-quality feedback was critical for developing a strong partnership.

Two members of Christian Aid Angola staff were happy with the distance model and felt it helped partners and Christian Aid to respect each other's space without competing for funds. However, Christian Aid international was perceived by the Christian Aid Angola staff as becoming increasingly top-down and restrictive, and this had raised concerns. They would have liked Christian Aid to harmonise and simplify policies and to adapt its systems to the specific context of countries like Angola in which, for example, partners often have no easy access to banks, bank accounts may be blocked and there are limitations on the size of financial transfers, which can take a long time.

## Insights and learning

Christian Aid worked in Angola for thirty-seven years. During this time, the country has gone through a civil war, a long authoritarian regime, and is now experiencing a new government, which has only been in place for three years. Civil society in Angola has progressively strengthened, but nonetheless remains fragile.

During this time Christian Aid strengthened Angolan civil society by supporting organisations financially and through capacity building and by facilitating partnerships between churches and human rights organisations. Christian Aid:

- Supported the **growth and strengthening of organisations** beyond one-off projects and activities through, for instance, trainings so organisations could become adept at analysing their context, developing a more strategic approach, and adapting their interventions to ensure their work included the most excluded and marginalised communities. **This was the element that partners valued the most.**
- Shaped **partnerships with churches and human rights organisations** in which civil society actors worked together, and where **the best of both worlds generated impact**. For some Christian Aid ex-staff, this was the “added value” of Christian Aid: its ability to bring faith-based organisations and civil society actors together in order to have great impact. This approach sets Christian Aid apart from other international NGOs.
- **Supported churches** to provide humanitarian support and build peace, by strengthening skills such as community development, strategic management, and the capacity to respond to emergencies.
- **Supported human rights organisations**, by creating networks, making their work visible outside of the country and protecting them from potential government intimidation.
- **Connected partners** with other resource organisations and donors, and worked to **retain and strengthen civil society leadership**.
- **Worked collaboratively** with partners and including them in **strategic decisions**.

One way in which Christian Aid and its partners achieved impact in this limited civil society space was by reaching the most excluded and vulnerable, such as communities living in remote rural areas, people living with HIV/AIDS, and street children. Another way in which impact was achieved was through

policy and advocacy initiatives, such as advocating for the legal rights of people living with HIV/AIDS to access basic services. Activist campaigns achieved some advances in the protection of street children and in supporting citizens threatened with illegal eviction. Above all, Christian Aid and partners made visible some of the abuses and pointed to solutions and alternatives to ‘keep hope alive’.

What insights can be taken from Christian Aid’s experience in Angola?

1. **Core funds and small project funds were critical to Angolan partners’ ability to respond to situations and improve lives.** The funds allowed local partners to respond to organisational priorities and unexpected situations that might have been outside the scope of funded projects but relevant to their remit. Many of the organisations profiled in this report came about as a result of this limited but critical support. Christian Aid staff in Angola said the funds were used to “test the waters”, to help respond to unexpected opportunities or needs, to “bridge gaps” when associations are going through moments of hardship or strategic transition, and for “protection” when human rights defenders were at risk and a rapid response was needed.
2. **Working strategically to adapt to changing contexts and achieve greater impact.** Christian Aid Angola regularly reviewed and adapted its strategies to ensure they were aligned with its Theory of Change and supported partners to use strategic and planning methods, such as scenarios thinking, power and gender analyses, context analyses and adaptation, to help partners adapt to the changing context and focus on activities that would have the most positive impact.
3. **The future remains uncertain for some Angolan partners.** Christian Aid Angola is working to close its programme in the best way possible, ensuring that ongoing proposals and links to new funders are strong, especially for the more fragile partners. However, while some partners have solid structures, others do not, even after Christian Aid has partnered with them for an average of fifteen years (although some collaborations experienced interruptions). Others stay in a twilight zone, and it remains to be seen how well they will consolidate. According to the former country manager (1999-2006), some partners that Christian Aid worked with at a



significant scale are now closed. This is not necessarily a signal that the partnership didn't succeed, as there are many other factors potentially related to its closure. But this could serve as a reminder of the weakness of Angola's civil society.

Christian Aid partnerships tend to be longer than usual in the INGO sector, with most partners being supported for an average of fifteen years (see Table 1). As in other country reviews, this raises the question of when Christian Aid should exit a partnership, at least financially, and what strategy it has for accompanying a partner on its path towards consolidation. As done in the Angola programme,

changing the nature of the partnership from funded to non-funded, but still collaborating with partners to provide technical support or carry out joint programmatic work can help to smooth the transition for local partners.

Overall, partners praised Christian Aid for its organisational strengthening work. Christian Aid was "a sun umbrella that... protected the partner against the sun and the rain, and let it grow," said the manager from AJPD. Christian Aid staff reminded us that in a country like Angola, simply staying alive as a civil society organisation can be a victory – something that should not be ignored as the programme closes.

## End notes

<sup>1</sup> [www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/angola](http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/angola); <https://oilprice.com/Energy/Crude-Oil/Can-Angola-Overhaul-Its-Struggling-Oil-Industry.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI?locations=LR-AO-CV-TD-KM-CG-ET-GA-NA-ZM>

<sup>3</sup> <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/gini-coefficient-by-country/>; [www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2019](http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/corruption_perceptions_index_2019)

<sup>4</sup> <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/civil-society-in-angola-inroads-space-and-accountability/> (2006); [www.africanarenas.net/docs/sociedade%20civil.pdf](http://www.africanarenas.net/docs/sociedade%20civil.pdf) (2008); [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-20642-4\\_8](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-20642-4_8) (2016)

<sup>5</sup> [www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/angola](http://www.christianaid.org.uk/about-us/where-we-work/angola)

<sup>6</sup> According to some sources, Christian Aid began to support work in Angola in 1981. However, this happened within the framework of regional collaboration with the ACT membership organisation so specific Christian Aid work/events cannot always be easily evidenced.

<sup>7</sup> Partners and allies interviewed: AJPD; ASSOGE; CICA; IECA/DASSEPE; CGN (Mission of Santo Antonio in the Gambos); OMUNGA; Radio Ecclesia; UCF. Also: Reverend Tony Nzinga; Tony Dykes (Southern Africa programme ex-manager for Christian Aid Angola), Oliver Sykes (ex-country manager Christian Aid Angola); Luís Samacumbi (former general director, DASEP/IECA); Christian Aid Angola country manager and staff.

<sup>8</sup> 'Angola Unravels' (1999), Ch. XI 'Years of Repression' [www.hrw.org/report/1999/09/13/angola-unravels/rise-and-fall-lusaka-peace-process](http://www.hrw.org/report/1999/09/13/angola-unravels/rise-and-fall-lusaka-peace-process)

<sup>9</sup> [www.adra-angola.org/quem-somos-adra](http://www.adra-angola.org/quem-somos-adra); ALSSA was a hybrid, faith-based and human rights organisation. It was created to honour Angolan Father Leonardo Sikufinde-Shalom, murdered in 1985, who defended human rights throughout his life. [www.omunga.org/index.php/sobre/](http://www.omunga.org/index.php/sobre/); <http://www.ajpdangola.co/quem-somos-ajpd> [www.facebook.com/pg/DWAngolaCEDOC/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/DWAngolaCEDOC/about/?ref=page_internal). *Development Workshop*, created in 1981, is an exception <http://dw.angonet.org/pt-pt>.

<sup>10</sup> 'Angola Unravels' (1999), Ch. XI 'Years of Repression' [www.hrw.org/report/1999/09/13/angola-unravels/rise-and-fall-lusaka-peace-process](http://www.hrw.org/report/1999/09/13/angola-unravels/rise-and-fall-lusaka-peace-process)

<sup>11</sup> [www.ishr.ch/news/end-crackdown-civil-society-organisations-angola](http://www.ishr.ch/news/end-crackdown-civil-society-organisations-angola); [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/angola-victory-for-civil-society-as-court-strikes-down-ngo-law/](http://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/07/angola-victory-for-civil-society-as-court-strikes-down-ngo-law/)

<sup>12</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51221737](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51221737)

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