



Uniting Church in Australia
ASSEMBLY
Assembly Standing Committee

21-23 July 2023

DOCUMENT 9

Title	UnitingWorld Report
Type of Paper (Information/Decision)	Information
Assembly or ASC Minute	
Consultation	
Purpose	To update the ASC on UnitingWorld's work
Rationale & Findings Summary	
Attachments	Attachment A: UnitingWorld's Approach Document (excerpt from the Governance Framework)
Proposal/s	That the Assembly Standing Committee: 1. Receive the UnitingWorld Report
Submitted by	Dr Sureka Goringe (National Director), SurekaG@unitingworld.org.au and Rev Dr Steve Bevis (Chair of the Board)

UNITINGWORLD

Highlights of FY23

1. Re-opening of international travel – partner visits and regional conferences for the first time in 3 years.
2. A full refresh of all programs with partners, resetting for a post-pandemic world, while maintaining community work.
3. Responding to humanitarian emergencies in Tonga and Vanuatu.
4. Strong recruitment success for key roles and great results in staff engagement survey.
5. Ramping up relational connections between the UCA and our partner churches.
6. Raising UnitingWorld's profile in the aid and development sector.
7. Dr Anne Patel-Grey leading the staff in an inspirational workshop on decolonisation, as part of our covenant journey.

The Focus of FY23 has been restoring capacity.

8. In June 2022, the UnitingWorld Board recognised the need to take-stock. UnitingWorld and our partners needed to restore our strength after the pandemic, and re-orient ourselves for recovery and growth in a fundamentally changed world.
9. The Business Plan for FY23 focussed on re-building core capacity after the serious disruption caused by COVID-19: partnership capacity, program capacity, fundraising capacity, and operational capacity.

Restoring Partnership Capacity

10. We have brought onboard Rev Dr Apwee Ting as the International Partnerships Manager dedicated to reinforcing the theological framework for our mission and building connections between the UCA and our partner churches. This role cannot be funded from project based income, but in the absence of UCA grant funding, the Board approved the use of reserves.
11. Resumption of international travel has enabled partner visits, restoring those personal relational connections that are at the heart of our work. This is especially significant given the changes in leadership on both sides over the last three years.

Restoring Programming Capacity

12. We are nearing the completion of two massive initiatives. The first was to work closely with our partners to review the assumptions and designs for every project, to ensure their fit for the post-COVID world. This included fresh community consultations, baseline data gathering and gender and disability audits.
13. The second major initiative was to review and refresh our programming approach, design methodology and the tools and templates used for program management. A copy of UnitingWorld's new Partnerships Approach is appended for your enjoyment.
14. Despite the massive workload that the review process entailed, our partners continued to implement projects in the community, albeit at a more modest level than previous years.

15. The Programs team has been restored to full staff numbers and we managed a smooth transition of the Head of Programs role, with the newly recruited Peter Keegan overlapping with Jane Kennedy for two months before Jane finished at UnitingWorld after 10 years.

Restoring Fundraising Capacity

16. The key achievement for this team was restoring staffing levels to pre-COVID levels. The Donor Relations team is back up to four, there are fourteen ambassadors on board, and there is only one vacancy in the campaigns team.
17. The UnitingWorld Sunday initiative was launched in May and has been implemented by 55 congregations so far. We are hopeful of more take up over the year.
18. We have been building our digital marketing capacity, which will enable us to personalise and tailor our communications and use social networks to reach 'UCA-adjacent' cohorts – those people who have a historic link with and are sympathetic to the UCA but do not attend church.
19. We received new DFAT emergency response grants for Tonga volcano recovery and Vanuatu cyclone recovery. We have also made it to the next round of applicants for a significant new grant for the Gender Equality Theology work in the Pacific.
20. We have also received two DFAT grants to facilitate the Pacific Conference of Churches, and the Pacific Theological College to build up their governance/administration capacity such that they can receive direct funding from DFAT. A third grant enabled us to support Micah to deliver the Pacific-Australian Emerging Leaders Summit that brought ninety young Christians from a dozen Pacific Island countries, Australian first nations,
21. The economic climate has made it a tough year for fundraising. Despite the timely roll-out of high quality campaigns, our fundraising performance was down compared to previous years, in line with an Australia wide decline of about ~15% in charitable giving.

Building up Operational Capacity

22. UnitingWorld is due for re-accreditation by DFAT, which is a prerequisite for accessing Australian government aid grants. These are currently about 50% of our income.
23. We have carried out a review of all our policies and procedures and have submitted a 150 page organisation profile describing our governance and quality systems in detail. We anticipate the in-person review team will be visiting for a week in Oct/Nov 2023 as the final stage in the process.
24. We have transitioned our finances from TechOne to Business Central, albeit with considerably more pain than anticipated due to staff turnover at Synod and Assembly. We have recruited a new Head of Finance.
25. We have implemented cyber-risk mitigation plans, working with Synod, and have introduced a new section to our risk register for this area.

Restoring our People

26. The wellbeing and health of our team was a significant focus of management energy this year. The strain of the COVID years, the weariness brought about by uncertainty, the struggle to maintain program delivery without travel, and the turnover of staff, meant that our high-performing, hard-working staff needed time to heal and recover.
27. Our initiatives included encouraging rest and time-off by offering incentives to take leave and offering extra days off; organising workshops on secondary trauma, self-care and mental health, and a series of

measures reminding people of the joy of our mission, encouraging staff to share how their values aligned with UnitingWorld's purpose, and planning social gatherings and meal-sharing to build up trust and understanding between old and new staff.

28. A key part of the journey has been navigating the structure of 'hybrid' work. We have been holding off on locking in a definitive policy, allowing experimentation with different modes of working. We are still gathering information and staff views on the right balance between individual flexibility and what is required to deliver strong culture, collaboration, and innovation.
29. We were thrilled to see our efforts rewarded by a strong positive response in the Staff Engagement Survey in December last year with a 100% participation rate, strong scores on alignment, belonging, staff wellbeing and significant improvements against the 2020 scores.

Rebuilding the Board

30. The UnitingWorld Board has come through a period of significant turmoil and is now finding a new equilibrium.
31. Lin Hatfield Dodds indicated her need to step down from her role as Board Chair within a year of her appointment, and following an intense recruitment process, Rev Dr Steve Bevis was appointed and took up his role in Dec 2022. Two other new members were appointed in July 2022.
32. The Board currently has ten members of a maximum of twelve. Given the high proportion of new members who have only recently been able to start meeting in person, the Board is focussing on building a strong board culture and deep understanding of the business, before recruiting new members.

The road ahead

33. FY23 is the third and final year of our current strategic plan. Over the course of the coming year, we will be developing a new strategy for the three years ahead. The Board has identified the major contextual challenges that the UCA, her church partners and UnitingWorld will have to face. These include the following:
 - a. Frequent humanitarian disasters will set back developmental gains.
 - b. More time and money will have to be diverted to responding to disasters.
 - c. Disasters will attract more public fundraising income.
 - d. Disaster resilience will need to be designed into every project.
 - e. Partner communities become displaced.
34. Climate change:
 - a. Frequent humanitarian disasters will set back developmental gains.
 - b. More time and money will have to be diverted to responding to disasters.
 - c. Disasters will attract more public fundraising income.
 - d. Disaster resilience will need to be designed into every project.
 - e. Partner communities become displaced.
35. Localisation & Decolonisation
 - a. Strong partnerships and networks with local actors will be an asset.
 - b. More funding will bypass NGOs and go direct to local actors.
 - c. 'Expertise' will become less important for NGOs.
 - d. Brokering will become more useful as an NGO role.
36. Geostrategic shifts
 - a. Fracturing of internationalism across the globe.
 - b. Global socio-economic fragility due to COVID, climate change and conflict.
 - c. India grows to large youth population and ongoing inequality issues, but with more resistance to international aid.
 - d. AusGov's strategy and funding will be strongly regional – SE Asia & Pacific.
 - e. Infrastructure development dominates over human development in AusGov strategy.
 - f. 'Securitisation' of aid with military considerations intersecting with aid strategy.

- g. Aid directed to refugee resettlement, labour mobility, climate finance/loss & damage grow.
- h. Traditional development aid declines as resources go to e, f and g.

37. Shrinking civil space

- a. Increasing authoritarianism in regional governments.
- b. Social media driven fracturing of public discourse into enclaves makes consensus harder.

38. Increase in displaced peoples.

- a. Due to both conflict and climate change induced disasters

39. Fundraising Communications

- a. Loss of trust in institutions and organised religion
- b. Compassion fatigue as Australians face more disasters and a fragile economy.
- c. Declining UCA membership and decline in members connected to partners.
- d. ACT 2 and transitional times for church polity.

Building our reputation

40. While the full strategy is yet to be developed, some elements of it are already emerging.

41. UnitingWorld's highly localised partnership approach and strong relational networks gives us a rare advantage over more traditional models of development NGOs in the current climate. We must leverage this as much as possible.

42. Our ability to broker relationships and facilitate collaboration will be critical for finding partners, collaborators and co-investors.

43. We need to be ready to source more funding that flows directly to our partners and doesn't necessarily go through our books. Extending our reach and our impact doesn't always require us to grow financially.

44. We are gathering research data on the impact of our work over the last decade that we believe will demonstrate that when development is locally-led and in respectful partnership, we catalyse greater impact than we fund directly. Unplanned spin-offs and tangential growth happen organically. We plan to demonstrate that UnitingWorld's way of working buys more than your money's worth.

45. We are slowly building up our profile in the aid sector. We are a very small NGO in comparison to giants like WorldVision, Oxfam and Fred Hollows. However, recruiting a Head of Operations has enabled the National Director to spend more time engaging more widely. The National Director has leveraged her role on the ACFID Board, and UnitingWorld's membership of Micah to do more advocacy in Canberra, including meetings with the Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the Minister for International Development, senior US government/USAID officials and senior DFAT officials.

46. The ND also serves as Chair of CAN DO (the Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations, an eight member consortium) which has facilitated widespread networking in the Pacific. UnitingWorld has been a partner of choice for the DFAT Office of the Pacific program for church engagement, and several of our advocacy engagements have been influential in shaping policy.

Poised on a watershed

47. UnitingWorld is at a moment in time where historical ways of working are under serious threat, and new opportunities are simultaneously opening up. However, UnitingWorld is ultimately an instrument of the Uniting Church, existing to embody and implement the church's missional intent.

48. How the future unfolds will depend as much on whether the people of the UCA are able to catch the winds of the Spirit into a new age of revival or continue to decline.

49. We believe that our overseas church partners have much to offer the UCA in prophetic truth that will help us. UnitingWorld will strive at all times to bring this voice back into our church, to inspire, encourage and challenge the UCA, in the hope that it will make a difference.

Attachment: UnitingWorld's Partnership Approach