

## Approach

**Functional Area: Governance Framework**

**Date approved: 23 June 2022**

**Board Resolution: UWB20220623-9**

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### 1 Introduction

This approach describes the philosophical and theological lens through which UnitingWorld undertakes its work. It provides a bridge between UnitingWorld's vision and its policies and practices.

### 2 The Uniting Church's Approach to Partnering with the Global Church

The Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) affirms the importance of every human being and the welfare of the whole human race<sup>1</sup>.

The UCA pledges to seek the correction of injustices wherever they occur<sup>2</sup>. It is committed to working for the eradication of poverty and racism within our society and beyond. It affirms the rights of all people to equal educational opportunities, adequate health care, freedom of speech, employment or dignity in unemployment if work is not available. It opposes all forms of discrimination which infringe basic rights and freedoms. It is concerned with the basic human rights of future generations.

The UCA lives and works within the faith and unity of the global church and seeks to give expression to that unity.

The UCA understands that the work of addressing injustice, poverty and violence is best done in relationship with those who are directly affected; that locally owned and led actions produce lasting solutions with real impact; and that communities are best placed to identify solutions to their own needs. Therefore, the UCA is committed to working collaboratively with autonomous partner churches through relationships of trust, respect, and mutuality.

Based on these Christian convictions, the Uniting Church has mandated UnitingWorld to address the causes and consequences of poverty, injustice and violence through missional collaboration with churches overseas.

### 3 UnitingWorld's Mandate and its Constitution

The Mandate and the Constitution are the foundation documents that frame UnitingWorld's dual identity as an agency of the church and a registered charity. The Mandate uses the language of the church, to position UnitingWorld's role in the wider work of the Uniting Church in Australia. The

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<sup>1</sup> <https://assembly.uca.org.au/resources/introduction/item/134-statement-to-the-nation-inaugural-assembly-june-1977>

<sup>2</sup> <https://uniting.church/a-justice-oriented-church/>

Constitution uses the language of the law to outline UnitingWorld's public commitment to governance and accountability as a charity.

The Mission Statement from the Mandate, and the Charitable Purpose in the constitution are two descriptions of the same work, expressed in Christian and secular language respectively.

**Mission Statement (from the Mandate):**

*In response to God's purpose for the world and its people, to connect the people of the Uniting Church in Australia in missional collaboration with churches overseas in order to strengthen the church in ministry, and to address the causes and consequences of poverty, injustice and violence.*

**Charitable Purpose:**

*Motivated by service of God through serving those in need, the purpose of the organisation is to relieve the poverty, distress, sickness, disadvantage due to disability, destitution, suffering misfortune or disempowerment of individuals and communities in need, with a focus on those living overseas.*

To avoid confusion, the UnitingWorld Mandate explicitly quotes the Charitable Purpose from the constitution.

## 4 The Partnership Approach

We work to have strong, long-term, resilient, equal partnerships with churches in our region, and with whom we are connected through their Australian diaspora. We work through these partnerships to deliver collaborative programs that advance the cause of justice and build up the church as a social and spiritual resource for the community.

### 4.1 Mutually Transformative Relationships

God calls people to live in relationships. As people engage respectfully and openly in partnership with others from different cultures and contexts beyond Australia, they are opened to a greater experience of God. Our partnership approach deliberately seeks positive transformation for both parties through a healthy relationship.

While culture is the context for people experiencing God, culture also constrains how people imagine God. International partnership offers the UCA the gift of the capacity to imagine outside the Australian experience. In partnership with the UCA, others can understand life from a different perspective. People may learn how Christianity can be different from what they have experienced. They can come to know a more abundant life than the one they have lived.

A different perspective can challenge the way Australians live, leading them to read the Bible differently and to value aspects of faith they may have neglected. Partnership with Churches facing difficulty can re-energise Christians whose faith has become safe. Partnership with Churches experiencing the impact of climate change or unjust work practices can lead Australians to question

their approach to creation, economy and consuming, enabling us to become more just. Partnership with Churches where Christianity is a minority faith can help Australians to respect people of other faiths and still share the good news of Jesus.

Thus, partnership with Churches overseas helps animate and expand the faith of Christians in Australia. Partnership is a means by which the UCA receives resources needed to be faithful. It is a mechanism by which both partners are connected to live full lives.

Churches overseas are actively engaged in living out their mission in the context of their own communities and culture. God is present and known, and God's people are already engaged in helping communities unlock their God-given potential to set themselves free from poverty and injustice.

We believe that local communities are best placed to identify the solutions to their own problems. Our partners know their culture and context. Often, they can see simple, inexpensive solutions. Our partnership approach means jointly taking part in God's transforming work in the world. In collaboration, we come alongside partner churches, joining and supporting them in the work they are already doing and engaging in mutual learning. Where partnership involves material assistance it is heavily underpinned and informed by learning and collaboration. In partnership, we contribute our capacity and our financial resources to help fulfil their vision. Through exchange of experience and shared learning we help to build leadership and organisational capacity.

## **4.2 Mutually Respectful Relationships**

Our partnership approach commits us to an equal relationship with partners, characterised by mutual respect, transparency, accountability and a commitment and openness to two-way learning and support. We are mindful of the potential for power imbalance, particularly where we are a funder.

We acknowledge that global inequality in wealth and resources is an enduring injustice, and that Australia as one of the wealthiest nations in the world, has a disproportionate share in comparison to many of our neighbouring nations. When we offer financial assistance to our partners as part of our collaboration, we do so in recognition that this is part of restorative justice and not largess. Therefore, we continually seek ways to transfer power back to our partners in decision making regarding the deployment of resources.

We seek to be inclusive and participatory in our engagement with partners. We deliberately seek to build our partners' capacity to address issues that lead to inequality between partners. While our desire to live in relationship with our partners is ongoing, we will carry out our collaborative programs in such a way as to promote a future where our partners' work is sustainable without financial aid.

We will continually create opportunities for our partners to give us open and honest feedback, with a deep commitment to listen and respond with integrity. We will strive to be transparent and accountable to our partners in all our practices. We will take steps to actively communicate our own challenges and vulnerabilities, as well as sharing our skills and capacity.

We will seek to be culturally and contextually sensitive in our relationships and be aware of the impact of our colonial history on how we may be perceived. We will strive to limit any negative impact of Australian modes of working on our partners and work collaboratively to develop appropriate methodology for our collaborations.

## 5 Agreements that Frame the Partnerships

### 5.1 Church to Church Partnership Agreements

The UCA has relationships with many overseas churches. Some of these relationships have been formalised through a Church-to-Church Partnership Agreement, while others remain undocumented, although active. Church-to-Church Partnership Agreements are high level documents that address issues of mutual recognition between two Christian entities but do not stipulate or describe specific activities.

UnitingWorld does not conduct projects with all the overseas churches with which the UCA has a relationship or partnership.

### 5.2 UnitingWorld Memorandum of Understanding

UnitingWorld enters into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with a partner church, or a department of a partner church, before we undertake project activities together.

The MOU covers the mutual expectations of standards, quality systems and processes that both partners will adhere to in the conduct of any collaborative project.

The MOU is an umbrella document that applies to all collaborative projects. While it does not have an expiry date, it is updated from time to time, normally in response to changes in the regulatory environment.

The MOU is a vehicle for UnitingWorld to be open and transparent with our partners regarding the complex requirements for regulatory compliance UnitingWorld must meet. It reflects UnitingWorld's commitments as signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct and as an agency accredited by DFAT. While we work from a standard template for the MOU with all our partners, the content of the MOU is discussed and agreed in detail with the partner's key leaders, both at the time of signing and also when there are leadership changes at the partner church.

Amongst other things, the MOU captures how we will be mutually accountable for:

- Good financial management and for ensuring funds do not reach terrorist organisations
- The protection of children and those vulnerable to sexual abuse, exploitation and harassment
- Ensuring that any subcontractors comply with our agreed standards
- Obligations imposed by DFAT if the project accesses DFAT funding

## 6 UnitingWorld's Programming Approach

### 6.1 UnitingWorld's Development Approach

UnitingWorld's approach to development is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)<sup>3</sup> and the Australian Government's commitments to the SDGs. As a nation, "Australia is committed to the 2030 Agenda<sup>4</sup>, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development<sup>5</sup>. Australia is committed to the SDGs as a universal, global undertaking to end extreme poverty and ensure the peace and well-being of people across the world."<sup>6</sup> UnitingWorld reports our programs' alignment with the SDGs. Our development approach is articulated in our Development Framework which details our program commitments.

Everything we do at UnitingWorld has an impact at two levels:

- (i) at the grassroots: in the lives and actions of everyday people, and
- (ii) on organisations: in the structures and processes that enable people to work together to do more than they can do alone.

All Uniting World's programs are designed and implemented for the purpose of assisting vulnerable people and communities to overcome poverty, injustice and violence. Because we pursue sustainable change, our programs address systems and structures that hold people back from fair and equitable lives.

Through ongoing conversations with our partners, we develop program themes that help us focus our expertise and resources in areas of common concern. We connect our partners to each other through workshops and conferences (face-to-face and online), where they can share experience and learning with each other to strengthen their work in these themes.

We also take into consideration the significant intersectionality between gender, disability, disaster resilience and human rights across all development themes. We translate sustainable community development and human rights principles and through the lens of the Christian faith, so we can speak in the heart-language we share with our partners.

We are keenly aware that our partners have much to teach us, and we take seriously the need for UnitingWorld to build our institutional capacity in solidarity, allyship and the transfer of power. We commit to seeking and responding to feedback from our partners on our development approach and strive for continuous improvement.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

<sup>4</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.dfat.gov.au/aid/topics/development-issues/2030-agenda/Pages/financing-the-sustainable-development-goals>

<sup>6</sup> Sustainable Development Goals – SDG Knowledge Platform

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/memberstates/australia#:~:text=Australia%20is%20committed%20to%20the,of%20people%20across%20the%20world>.

## **6.2 Robust program design with a theological framework**

UnitingWorld's program design uses a combination of local wisdom, empirical data and published research to identify the most effective ways of achieving the desired development outcomes. Rooted in our Christian identity, our programming is also framed through Biblical and theological understanding about the nature of humankind and the world and shaped by our experience. UnitingWorld seeks to build on effective practices and draw from diverse sources of knowledge to move forward boldly but humbly, trusting in God's guidance and mercy.

## **6.3 Inclusive but privileging the poor, the vulnerable and the marginalised.**

UnitingWorld is committed to delivering development assistance on a non-discriminatory basis. We work with and through churches, but our programs aim to benefit all people regardless of their faith, sexuality, ethnicity, ability or gender.

We work with partners in their context. Because we target the vulnerable and marginalised, our beneficiary groups include those marginalised by the distribution of power and privilege in local society. They also reflect those marginalised groups that our partners are most able to impact or who are most likely to impact the wider community. As a result, our beneficiary groups may sometimes be members of sub-groups defined by their gender, ethnicity, disability or religion. We do not consider this discriminatory in the harmful sense, because the selection is based on need and the ability to have impact<sup>7</sup>.

## **6.4 Strengthening civil society organisations that support human flourishing**

We believe that strong local civil society organisations are crucial to the communities claiming and maintaining their rights and freedoms. Local churches, with membership and leadership at village and suburb levels, are powerful civil society organisations, through whom liberation and transformation is being delivered every day.

Our programs seek to strengthen and empower local churches to deliver robust programs for the benefit of their communities. In practice this involves projects that support:

- The development of tools for good governance and management.
- Growing skills in the design and implementation of community development.
- Advocacy to government.
- Training leaders from contextually disadvantaged groups, enabling them to be a strong, representative, spiritual and practical resource for their communities;

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<sup>7</sup> For example, in the Pacific where the Christianity is the dominant paradigm, and the Christian church is a powerful thought-leader and influencer of social norms; and where simultaneously society is patriarchal, women are poorly represented in public leadership, and domestic violence levels are high; we fund a program that supports women with recognised leadership potential to access higher education, alongside an agreement that the church will appoint them into visible positions of leadership when they complete their studies. This has the effect of advancing gender equality in the leadership of a prominent and influential civil society organisation, both bringing the voices and issues of women into the halls of power and setting an example to girls across the community. We do not consider this an activity that 'promotes religion or favours religious adherents' even though the primary participant group is Christian women. We do not consider it 'welfare' even though it supports individuals. Because of the unique Pacific context, it is a project that delivers society wide developmental impact.

- The development of Biblical theological resources that enable our partners to drive behaviour change and developmental impact through dialogue and messaging.

Mutuality is integrated into this aspect of programs, creating pathways for leaders from the Uniting Church to engage with and learn from the work and witness of partner churches overseas, bringing back new insights and inspiration into the life of the UCA.

## **6.5 Welfare, religious activities and partisan political activity**

In the context of how we choose our target groups (Section 6.3) and with whom we work (Section 6.4), UnitingWorld applies the distinctions made by DFAT regarding welfare, religious activities and partisan political activity as follows.

We will ensure that our representatives are aware of these distinctions and the implications of the following commitments. UnitingWorld will also ensure that its promotion and education activities reflect these distinctions.

### **Commitment on Welfare**

UnitingWorld accepts the DFAT guidance on what constitutes welfare:

“...care and maintenance, which aims to maintain people in a particular condition on a longer-term basis. Substantial and broad impact on social and economic conditions in the community is not normally expected from welfare programs. Welfare may be provided to an individual or family basis including home-based and institutional care programs, such as those provided by orphanages, homes for the elderly, hospices and the provision of food for those who are destitute. Exceptions to this may include situations where home-based care leads to inclusion in development and sustainable long-term change. Welfare projects are typically:

- implemented independently of other sustainable community development activities;
- include no strategy for integration into a broader community development program;
- provided on an individual or family basis, rather than on a community basis, and are unconnected to emergency needs; and
- are implemented on a long-term basis with no clear exit strategy.”<sup>8</sup>

UnitingWorld does not undertake projects that do not have long term sustainable outcomes for participants as described above. However, there are some projects that include elements that can be construed as social services or welfare, such as the provision of subsidised education for at-risk children or scholarships for leadership development to individuals. (See footnote <sup>7</sup> above).

UnitingWorld will distinguish between projects that include aspects of welfare and those that do not.

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<sup>8</sup> ANCP Manual 2021: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australian-ngo-cooperation-program-manual.docx> accessed 9/5/2022

Where funding is received that is stipulated exclusively for development (such as from DFAT), all activities included in the project design will be clearly articulated in the donor agreement, and funding only used in a manner pre-approved by the donor/DFAT.

The program management process will ensure that this distinction is applied to all projects.

### **Commitment on Religious Activities**

As described in Section 6.4, UnitingWorld programs include activities that aim to build the leadership and institutional capacity of our partner churches who are locally led, autonomous members of civil society in their country.

These may be perceived as 'religious activities' because the target participants are members of a religious organisation.

However, we do not undertake these activities without design logic that connects them to broader community development outcomes. Our church partners are influential organisations who have an explicit commitment to working for the benefit of their whole community, and we are committed to strengthening them to have greater impact in human development.

If there is DFAT funding involved, we are clear about what activity is supported and why in the funding application and reporting processes, and only proceed with approval<sup>9</sup>.

UnitingWorld's approach to community development recognises that a community's spiritual dimension is an important aspect of its general wellbeing and cannot be ignored in the process of transformation.

However, UnitingWorld believes that an individual's spiritual allegiance and practice is a sacred choice to be made freely. Because such choices should never be pressured or coerced, we do not believe that the offer to meet a developmental need should ever be made contingent on conversion or adherence to religion. UnitingWorld will not fund/support any activity that imposes a requirement for religious conversion or adherence on members of the community as a condition of participation.

UnitingWorld will not use funds earmarked for development for activities that:

- promote a particular religious belief; or
- Except in the context of institutional strengthening described above, directly or indirectly require adherence to a set of religious beliefs

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<sup>9</sup> As an example, we have a demonstrated track record of working with DFAT on developing Biblical theological resources that strengthen church leadership structures to achieve wider development outcomes such as reducing gender-based-violence in communities.



This is in line with UnitingWorld's charitable purpose, the ACFID Code of Conduct, the DFAT ANCP Manual<sup>10</sup> and the Church Agencies Network (CAN) Guiding Principles on Proselytization and Poverty 2014<sup>11</sup>.

### **Commitment on Political Activities**

UnitingWorld will not fund activities that promote or are conditional on specific political beliefs or membership of a particular political group.

However, UnitingWorld will support our partners and their communities to advocate for services and rights to government and other duty-bearers in their context.

Outside project activity, UnitingWorld cannot and will not limit the rights of its partner church staff or project participants to engage in the political life of their country.

UnitingWorld follows the DFAT guidelines to distinguish between community development and "partisan political activities". DFAT defines "political activities" as supporting a political party, candidate or organisation affiliated to a political party.

DFAT's examples include:

- NGO staff (UnitingWorld interprets this to mean UnitingWorld staff) being involved in party political activities in our partner's country;
- Using funds or resources to facilitate or support a specific political party, candidate or party-political organisation in a local, regional or general/national election;
- Using funds or resources to facilitate or support independence or separatist movements; and
- Using funds or resources to facilitate or support a particular politician or faction to gain power within a government or within a political party structure.<sup>12</sup>

## **7 Review Schedule**

**Date of next review:** June 2025

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<sup>10</sup> ANCP Manual 2022 <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australian-ngo-cooperation-program-manual.docx> accessed 9/5/2022

<sup>11</sup> Church Agencies Network: <https://www.churchagenciesnetwork.org.au/index.php/guiding-principles/> Accessed 9/5/2022

<sup>12</sup> ANCP Manual 2021: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australian-ngo-cooperation-program-manual.docx> accessed 9/5/2022