



CASE STUDY | AACC

Institutional change towards the integration of population and development issues in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

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Box 1

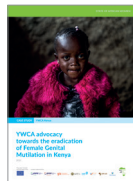
Overview of case studies and synthesis briefs (SoAW action learning process)

Case studies



The value of civil society alliances in realising women and girls' Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

IPPF Africa Region



YWCA advocacy towards the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation in Kenya

YWCA Kenya



Journalists networked across Africa for increased SRHR coverage in the media

IPPF Africa Region



Faith leadership of civil society collaboration towards adoption of the EAC SRHR Bill

Faith to Action Network



How African First Ladies spearheaded the successful launch of a continent-wide campaign to prevent HIV and AIDS in childhood

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Institutional change towards the integration of population and development issues in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

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Synthesis briefs



Progressing on the unfinished business

KIT Royal Tropical Institute



Coalition-building and multilevel connections

KIT Royal Tropical Institute

Institutional change towards the integration of population and development issues in the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC)

Churches can no longer ignore the growing challenges caused by unsustainable population growth on the continent. Unless the church starts addressing the issue of population and development urgently and adequately, it will not be able to offer transformative guidance to its followers on the continent. Faith institutions, including churches have a lot of influence in societies, and a wide grassroot network. They are well placed to support norms change around reproductive health and sustainable development. This case study presents the way in which the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) has raised this potential by encouraging their members to think about it and develop their own context-specific approaches.

Background

Africa is the second-largest and second most populous continent on earth with an estimated population in 2016 of 1.2 billion people. There are predictions that the continent's population will be at 2.4 billion by 2050. The challenge is on how to meet the increasing needs and expectations of a growing population while at the same time modifying the current production and consumption patterns to achieve a more sustainable development model. Population growth places pressures on the continent's resources -- water, forests, lands -- contributing to climate change and challenging environmental sustainability. However, population growth also shows successes as lower mortality and fertility rates reflect achievements in health and education and provide opportunities for the increasing population of working age to push economic development.

Reviews show that most African countries have given priority to the implementation of comprehensive reproductive health programmes and that some progress has been achieved in relation to the Cairo Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, maternal mortality has decreased as well as the number of child marriages. Governments have integrated reproductive health services into their health care services. The Maputo protocol¹ remains one of the most progressive legal instruments providing a comprehensive set of human rights for African women. Since its adoption 15 years ago, the Maputo protocol has contributed to the promotion and protection of women's rights in Africa. It places women as full, effective and equal partners with men in the development of their communities.

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) believes that the church should be on the front-line in engaging in reproductive health issues for Africa to claim its dignity in the long run. AACC, therefore, engages the churches on the continent to take a proactive role in advocating for actions that address the challenges and opportunities of population growth to promote sustainable development and ensures life with dignity for her people. AACC's commitment in this area is founded on its long-time commitment to women's rights and gender equality and its role in advocacy at local, national and continental levels (see box 2).

¹ Full name: Protocol to the African Charter on Human's and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.



Box 2. The All Africa Conference of Churches

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) is a continental body, which was inaugurated in April 20, 1963 in Kampala, Uganda. Since its formation, the AACC has gathered 198 member churches and Christian Councils in 42 African countries into its dynamic fellowship. It is the largest association of Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Indigenous churches in Africa and a member of the worldwide ecumenical network. The General Assembly is the Supreme Legislative Authority of the AACC that meets every 5 years. Through the General Assembly, the AACC elects its President, five Vice Presidents and Representatives from each of the five regions of Africa. Through its vision **“Churches in Africa together for Life, Peace, Justice and Dignity”**, the vocation of the organization is to foster and sustain fellowship and unity among the Churches in Africa for common witness and service to help people of Africa.

Since its inception, AACC has continuously championed the rights of women, working with national leaders, religious leaders and communities to advocate for and implement policies on women’s rights. A few examples:

- The 3rd General Assembly held in Abidjan, Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire) in 1969 called for the establishment of the Women and Youth Department to address issues specifically related to the respective constituencies.
- Delegates to the 4th General Assembly held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1981 also called on the churches “to recognize the potential of women, men and youth, as they are instruments of change, and that all efforts should be made to ensure their total representation and involvement”.²
- At the 8th General Assembly held in Yaoundé, Cameroun in 2003, delegates underscored the need to mainstream gender in AACC’s policies, practices, programmes and activities. Consequently, the General Committee held in January 2004 in Nairobi, Kenya, mandated the Secretariat to develop a Gender Policy and Guidelines.³
- At its most recent General Assemblies held in Maputo, Mozambique in 2008, Kampala, Uganda in 2013 and in Kigali, Rwanda in July 2018, the issue of gender and the prophetic role of the church was again emphasized.

AACC also undertakes advocacy at the continental level. The AACC together with member churches, National Councils of Churches (NCCs) and sub regional fellowships have actively accompanied and engaged African Union member states and governments on the continent on issues of democratization, human rights, political governance and socio-economic development. It aims to influence the implementation of the Agenda 2063⁴ in order to ensure a coordinated faith-based approach that impacts across the continent on issues affecting the African women.

² 1981 AACC General Assembly Report p. 71.

³ AACC Gender Policy Guidelines, 2005

⁴ In its Aspiration 6, Agenda 2063 is specific about women and gender equality. It calls for gender parity and inclusion of women in decision making at all levels of the society; empowerment of women in social political and economic rights, enabling rural women to own land and have access to credit and financial services and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence in socio-economic and political spheres.

Challenges and opportunities of institutional norm change towards the integration of population issues in church institutions

Population and development issues have strong theological foundations and one of the challenges has been the misinterpretation of bible scriptures. The high fertility rate in Africa is a result of many families not practicing family planning. The controversy among Christians about family planning comes from the mis-interpretations of a few passages in the Bible on human procreation e.g. *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth'"* (Genesis 1:28). Often, the comprehensiveness of this passage is not well understood. The command to be fruitful comes along with the command to be stewards of God's creation. Consequently, as responsible stewards, human beings cannot give birth to more people than the earth can be able to feed.

This perspective, however, is not always supported by church leadership. Family planning uptake is further challenged by traditional values and the societal perception that big families are a sign of prestige and success. Furthermore, high fertility rates are shaped by families' lack of resources. It is in this context that AACC has renewed its engagement with member churches on population and development issues.



AACC strategy to support the integration of development and population issues

In order to increase the recognition of population and development issues in faith institutions, and more specifically in its member institutions, AACC worked at two levels.

First, at the core is the change process at the level of AACC as an institution. Through its General Assembly, and with technical support from Faith to Action Network, population and development was put on the agenda, culminating in a strategy and concept note dedicated to the topic of population and development.

Secondly, AACC engaged directly with church leaders to strengthen their leadership on population and development issues both at the local, national, regional and continental level where AACC aims to strengthen the voice of faith and church leaders. Expected changes were that (1) churches actively engage in debates and discussion on sustainable population development, integrating theological, socio-economical, political and scientific aspects; (2) church leaders speak about population issues using the Bible as the most important tool to reach out and speak to their congregations and the communities as a whole; (3) churches engage in reproductive health debates at high level meetings.

AACC assumed that in order for church leaders to speak out they will require knowledge, skills and courage through capacity building, support from their hierarchy, church leaders and their constituencies, and increased engagement with NGOs/CSOs and governments to support policies in line with population issues.

It is in this context that AACC was supported by Faith to Action Network who provided technical assistance, and who accompanied senior staff and leaders of member churches to participate in national, global and regional policy making processes (Agenda 2063, AU Gender Strategy, CPD51 and CPD52). In the lead to development of the AU Gender Strategy,⁵ Faith to Action Network and AACC worked in partnership to organise an continental interfaith conference in Nairobi to provide inputs to the draft gender strategy. The conference was held between 22-25th October 2017. This partnership laid the foundation for discussion and final inclusion of population and SRHR issues in the AACC Strategy.

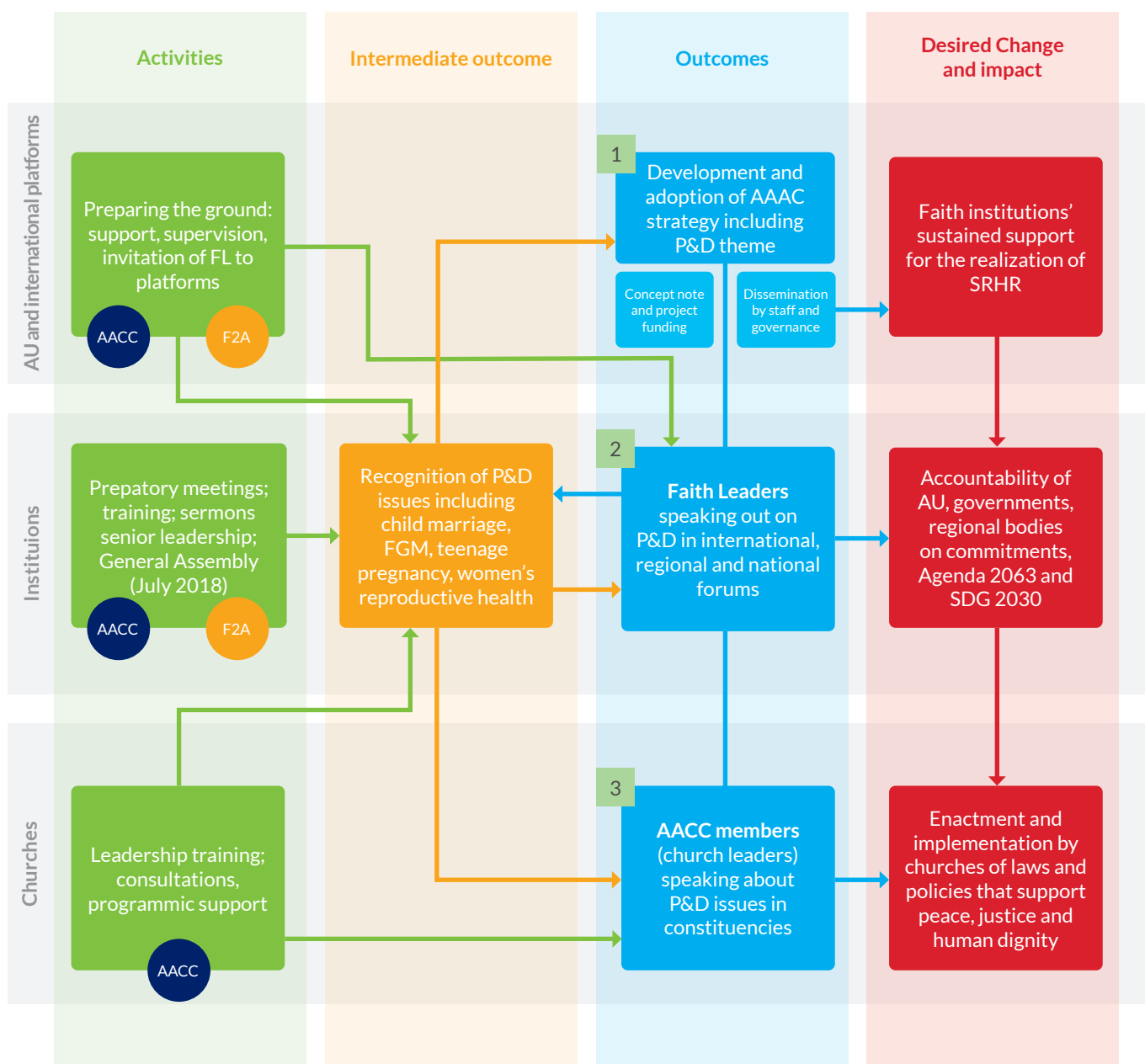
The AU Gender Strategy borrows a lot from international instruments such as CEDAW and ICPD. It also borrows from continental frameworks such as the Maputo Plan of Action. All these instruments place SRHR central to development and human rights. The preparation and discussions around the AU Gender Strategy, especially issues on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), is a key milestone in the subsequent discussions and adoption of population and development as a key issue by the 11th AACC General Assembly and subsequent inclusion in the AACC Strategy.

Other milestones include Faith to Action Network participation in a panel during the AACC Women-Preassembly to present on scriptural basis for family planning. It also advocated with different delegations attending the General Assembly (Theological Institute and women and youth delegates). Indeed, Faith to Action Network was a member of the working group that was tasked with drafting the 8th Theological Institute's Statement to AACC's 11th General Assembly. Although the Theological Institute's statement did not specifically address SRHR, it included issues such as gender and noted the need to address cultures that harm women and girls like FGM, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, breast flattening, and inheritance of widows which lead to undignified humanity.

Figure 1 presents the main activities of AACC and Faith to Action Network and their expected outcomes.

⁵ <https://au.int/en/documents/20190320/au-strategy-gender-equality-womens-empowerment-2018-2028>

Figure 1.
Theory of Change



Pathways to change

Outcome 1: an AACC strategy with P&D as a central theme

The AACC strategy 2019-2023⁶ proposes that the best theological approach to tackle the topic is from the basis of the family and to highlight the issue of sustainable population growth and its impact on development. Through this approach, AACC in its proposed interventions will demonstrate the link between population growth and development, assist churches to responsibly engage in reproductive health issues and research and make available statistical data and analysis on population growth in Africa.

The adoption of a multi-annual institutional strategy which recognizes population and development issues is the result of a long trajectory of initiatives and deliberations. The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in line with its constitution held its 11th General Assembly in Kigali, Rwanda from 2nd -7th July 2018, under the theme “*Respecting the Dignity and God’s image in Every Human Being*” (**Genesis 1:26 – 27**). In its deliberations, the assembly examined inter alia, the issues facing the continent and considered the role of the churches with the AACC taking the leading role. During the deliberations, reports were presented and discussed and resolutions passed or adopted.

There were pre-assemblies from various groups i.e Women, Youth and Theological Institute which led to **statements** that were integrated in the **Assembly resolutions**. These resolutions were adopted in the **general resolution**. After the Assembly, during the planning of the years 2019 – 2023 under the leadership of the AACC General Secretary, the staff converged to begin the development of the **AACC Strategy 2019-2023** with the help of a consultant. Inspired by the presentations on various thematic areas a decision was made to include the link between population and development, increase participation of men in the fight against SGBV, encourage abused men to open up/to for help, the plight of widows and the issue of migration and human trafficking. The AACC Strategy was tabled for discussion and approval by the General Committee. The secretariat also developed a specific concept note with population and development as a thematic area.

The adoption of the strategy and the concept note provides a window of opportunity for churches to address potential future problems arising from the population trends. It also proposes concrete actions and ideas to implement the strategy and hence forms a source of fundraising in order to achieve the objectives of P&D.

The outcome was achieved through several factors including the commitment of senior leadership within AACC and the content of the message in the strategy that combines evidence-based and faith-based perspectives and embeds the theme in the wider debate of gender justice and women’s rights.

Commitment of senior leadership

The adoption of the recommendations from the Women Pre-assembly by the 11th AACC General Assembly in 2018 marked a turn on adoption of SRH as a key programmatic issue for action by members. It is important to note that the General Assembly is the highest decision making structure at AACC. The 193 members come from Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox and Indigenous churches comprising of Churches, National Councils of Churches (NCCs), theological and lay training institutions and other Christian organizations in 42 African countries. The Assembly is attended by senior religious leaders from member institutions, women and youth representatives. The decisions made at the General Assembly form the basis for policy making and programmatic work undertaken to address the issues articulated in the AACC strategy which is often domesticated into institutional level strategies by member institutions. Indeed, AACC’s leadership has continued to lead the sensitization of leaders of its member churches to actively be involved in interventions to realise sustainable population for development. The leadership has also acknowledged the misperceptions that exist on family planning within the faith community. In the new message for the year 2020, AACC General Secretary noted that “*As AACC led the participation of faith-based actors at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD)+25 Nairobi Summit in 2019, it became very clear that there are a lot of distortions about the issue*”. In his statement⁷ during the World Population Day 2020, Dr. Fidon Mwombeki called on churches in Africa to start addressing the issue and other challenges associated with unsustainable population growth on the continent. He observed that “without sustainable population growth, sustainable development is not possible.”

⁶ <http://aacc-ceta.org/en/resources?download=17:strategic-plan&start=45>

⁷ <http://www.aacc-ceta.org/en/news/193-new-year-message-from-the-all-africa-conference-of-churches-general-secretary>

Emphasising the need for partnerships for sustainable development

Using evidence, in developing the Strategy, the AACC recognises and affirms the commitment expressed in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17⁸ supporting the argument that a successful sustainable development agenda requires partnerships between governments, the private sector and Civil Society Organisations / Faith Based Organisation. These inclusive partnerships built upon principles and values, a shared vision, and shared goals that place people and the planet at the centre, are needed at the global, regional, national and local level.

Embedding of population and development issues in broader issues of social justice

Within the AACC Strategy, the thematic issue of population and development has been embedded under the pillar of 'Peace, Diakonia and Development'. One of the reasons in including it in this thematic area is that achieving sustainable population is enveloped in contraversion. It implies by extension, practicing family planning and respecting engaging in sexual reproductive health information sharing and education. Including population and development in this pillar gives it same value as addressing peace, migration and human trafficking, climate change, environment and care for creation, engagement with global and continental agendas, advocacy for economic justice and diakonia. By strategically not including the issue under 'Gender, Women and Youth', population and development has been centrally positioned and divorced from being seen as a women or youth issue where it can easily be ignored or treated with less priority.

The statements⁹ of commitments made by the faith community (interfaith), the issue of access to SRHR services was considered in the same context with addressing harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), gender based violence (GBV), forced and early marriages and gender injustices perpetrated on a person of any gender.



⁸ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/globalpartnerships/> Accessed 13/2/2019

⁹ <http://www.aacc-ceta.org/en/resources?start=30>

Outcome 2: Faith Leaders speaking out on population and development issues at the global level

Whereas the development and adoption of the P&D theme constitute an important step towards the integration of population and development issues it requires translation into practice. AACC used different strategies to influence church leaders.

Through consultations and conferences, the AACC highlighted the issue of sustainable population and its impact on development. This encouraged church leaders to speak out openly, address and engage in discussions on reproductive health as a means of responsible stewardship on behalf of God. The AACC Governance and members of staff were encouraged to disseminate information on the Strategy in their respective regions and through their programmatic meetings respectively. The AACC has managed to speak on the Strategy and reach a huge number through its training on leadership and development.

In total approximately 150 church leaders from the Protestant, Orthodox and Indigenous churches both men, women and youth were reached through these strategies.

The ICPD+25 Nairobi Summit in 2019 provided an opportunity to strengthen faith leaders' voice at the global level. The AACC has been at the forefront in championing the involvement of faith leaders. In November 2019 AACC and F2A in collaboration with other ecumenical and interfaith organisations hosted the ICPD faith pre-summit in Nairobi, Kenya. The pre-summit provided a platform for faith actors to meet and plan their participation at the ICPD+25 Nairobi Summit through a series of consultative forums. A statement that reflects the specific roles of the faith actors was generated as well as a press release on the communique. The statement was captured during the Faith Leaders' Consultative Forum held on 28th March, 2019.

The 39 interreligious leaders present expressed that globally, over 83 per cent of the population identifies with a religion. Religion is a powerful force for social and cultural change, and therefore there is need for strengthening and expanding sustained engagement with a range of faith-based actors: religious leaders, faith-based organizations, as well as religious institutions (including churches, mosques and inter-religious councils) in ICPD engagements. Because of the role of religion in constituting or legitimizing social and structural dimensions of sexuality, people, organizations and governments must recognize that religious community will help accelerate the realization of the ICPD commitments instead of taking an adversarial position and perceptions that religion perpetuates stigma and unequal power relations between men and women in many of our societies (Faith Leaders' Consultative Forum on ICPD25-The Nairobi Summit, 2019).¹⁰

This engagement shows the added value of including religion as a main stakeholder in the implementation of ICPD PoA. It demonstrates a renewed focus on culture and religion as part of the broader efforts to move beyond religious and cultural stereotypes which impede promotion of gender equality and SRHR, hence a commitment to collaborate with governments and other stakeholders in implementation the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD PoA).

It is in the interest of the religious community and their moral responsibility that the ICPD Programme of Action is implemented, as it is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, 2030 Agenda, and African Agenda 2063. The outcomes of this consultative meeting served as input for the statement¹¹ made at the Nairobi Summit. One of the commitments in the statement was for religious leaders representing Hindu, Muslim and Christian faiths "to provide information and services on family planning/ child spacing, to all persons, as is consistent with our faith values".

¹⁰ Concept Paper on Faith Participation in the Nairobi Summit-Faith Leaders' Consultative Forum held at the Desmond Tutu Conference Center, Nairobi on 28th August, 2019.

¹¹ Statement of Commitments of Faith Actors Attending Nairobi Summit on ICPD25

Factors that led to faith leaders' statement at the Consultative Forum include an extensive process of engagement and partnership with global actors and national governments. The faith community has been active at the United Nations Commission on Population and Development (UN CPD) sessions. In Kenya, the two representatives from the faith community, Rev. Dr. Lydia Mwaniki of the AACC and Peter K. Munene of Faith to Action Network had twice attended CPD as part of the official Kenyan delegation. During the CPD session in 2019 (CPD52), pre-planning meetings for ICPD+25 Nairobi Summit were held at UNFPA headquarters in New York and the two delegates were involved. Their close working relationship with the Kenyan government (host of ICPD+25 Nairobi Summit) called for the faith community to extend support to the government in organizing the summit. Equally, the links established with UNFPA ensured the delegations checking on readiness for ICPD+25 Summit always met the two delegates while in Nairobi. As supporters of ICPD agenda, it was important for the faith community to have a statement that clearly defined their support to ICPD+25.

The issues that ICPD+25 Summit planned to address itself (such as zero maternal deaths, zero unmet need for family planning and zero gender based violence and harmful practices against women and girls) were issues the faith community was actively addressing in Africa. Through inclusion of such issues in the ICPD+25 Nairobi Summit agenda, the faith community found synergy and an opportunity to share experiences, learn and establish partnerships.



Lessons learnt

Trust between organisations, the identification of shared values and objectives are crucial in securing a lasting partnership. Faith to Action Network and AACC established a trusting relationship in early 2017. This relationship had received the support from the top management from both organisations. Among the commitments made in the relationship was to identify partnership opportunities for joint advocacy and other actions. As such, when the AU gender strategy policy making process started, the two organisations agreed to pool resources (human and financial) together to maximise on inputs from a diverse interfaith representation. Equally, Faith to Action Network identified AACC as one faith organisation that could send a delegate to UN CPD through sponsorship of Church of Sweden.

Exposure and linkages with various institutions (government, civil society, intergovernmental) are crucial for effective 'domestication' within organizational and institutional frameworks. AACC has observer status at AU. On the other hand, Faith to Action Network is a member of the UN Taskforce on Religion and SRHR and has led and participated in advocacy actions at national subregional, regional and global levels. Both organisations have engaged with justice and development issues at different levels and have members who are based at the grassroots level. These members trust the representation and the safeguarding of their interests by AACC and Faith to Action Network. As such, both organisations facilitate in establishing linkages between local needs (as articulated by their members) and international policy making processes and platforms (AU, UNCPD, UNCSW..) while representing the interests of their members. Both organisations feel the need to have faith institutions establish institutional frameworks that domesticate the provisions of some of the international instruments as a means to achieve transformation.



COLOPHON

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