

# SMC's Humanitarian Strategy 2017-2021

## 1. Introduction

The Swedish Mission Council (SMC) is an umbrella organisation in which 35 Christian organisations and churches gather to work for a world liberated from poverty and oppressive structures, in which people can influence their own situation and where God's creation is safeguarded for future generations. Our member organisations are churches and Christian based organisations with a long history of international relations and cooperation on human rights, democracy, peace and justice, poverty alleviation and humanitarian assistance.

Based on principles of reciprocity and partnership member organisations work together with their partner organisations in fragile contexts where communities are vulnerable to armed conflicts, protracted crisis, natural disasters, effects of climate change, poverty and discrimination. The organisations often have strong grassroots links and work in areas where few other actors operate. Through this extensive network, SMC provides financial support to development work in 46 countries in cooperation with more than 80 partner organisations on the ground.

Even though many of the SMC member organisations are active in humanitarian response only four member organisations and the Christian Council of Sweden (CCS) are currently (2016) eligible to apply for Sida's humanitarian funds through SMC. These organisations have been assessed by SMC and have the expertise, systems and capacity required to handle humanitarian funding from Sida.

One of SMC's comparative advantages, in humanitarian action, is its widespread network and its partners' long-term presence in local communities. Local organisations are not only the first to initiate responses in disaster situations and crisis, but also the entry points for strengthening local participatory systems and coping mechanisms to prevent future disasters. This long-term presence gives SMC's member organisations and their partners both legitimacy in local contexts and unique opportunities to bridge the gaps between humanitarian assistance, recovery and sustainable development. Local partner organisations also have profound insights into the local context and culture, enabling greater participation, more relevant responses, and sensitivity to conflict issues.

This strategy covers the period 2017-2021. It is guided by the SMC's strategic plan *Tillsammans för förändring 2017-2021* and its corresponding overall operational plan for the same period. This strategy is furthermore aligned with *SMC's view on*

*development cooperation* and SMC's thematic policies<sup>1</sup> which guide the humanitarian work. This strategy describes the foundation of SMC humanitarian assistance and will govern the strategic directions. SMC Sida Humanitarian Application 2017 – 2019 describes the implementation of the strategy.

## 2. Humanitarian principles

SMC's point of departure for humanitarian assistance is that the national government bears primary responsibility for the welfare of its people in emergency situations and crises. When governments are unable or evidently unwilling to assume this responsibility, external organisations and states have a duty to provide support to meet these needs, in accordance with international humanitarian law and established practice and principles.

SMC's humanitarian assistance is based on the humanitarian imperative and humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. All SMC's humanitarian member and partner organisations commits to the humanitarian principles and all organisations, that will receive funding, are signatories to the *Code of Conduct for International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief*.

SMC's humanitarian assistance is based on identified humanitarian needs in order to save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold dignity. Recognising the challenges of global humanitarian aid shortfalls, SMC will endeavour to focus and prioritise interventions where humanitarian needs are most severe and critical.

The development cooperation that SMC engages in is built upon a rights-based approach. SMC believes that the human rights-based approach holds important perspectives that may be applied to humanitarian assistance, whilst upholding the humanitarian principles. SMC's interpretation of the human rights-based approach can be summarised in four principles: Non-discrimination, participation, accountability and transparency. The four principles give guidance to how humanitarian assistance can be implemented and are in line with the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS).

The principle of non-discrimination upholds the right of women, men, girls and boys affected by disaster, conflict or the effects of climate change to protection and adequate support regardless of who they are. The right to participate in decision-making is fundamental to the human rights-based approach. Crisis-affected people can be directly involved in humanitarian responses on an individual level or indirectly via community representatives. Accountability is crucial for SMC's humanitarian assistance where SMC will strive to increase the

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<sup>1</sup> Policy för rättighetsperspektivet (2014-03-13); Hiv- och aidspolicy (2010-03-10); Antikorrupsionspolicy (reviderad 2016-09-29); Jämställdhetspolicy (reviderad 2016-03-10); Policy för klimat och miljö (reviderad 2016-04-28); Utvärderingspolicy (2013-05-14); Kommunikationspolicy (2016-03-19); Arkivpolicy (2012-12-06); Arbetsmiljöpolicy (2015-03-12).

accountability on all levels, following CHS. Connected to our accountability, transparency is essential in building trust and in demonstrating whether the humanitarian assistance is implemented without discrimination, or political, ideological and religious agendas.

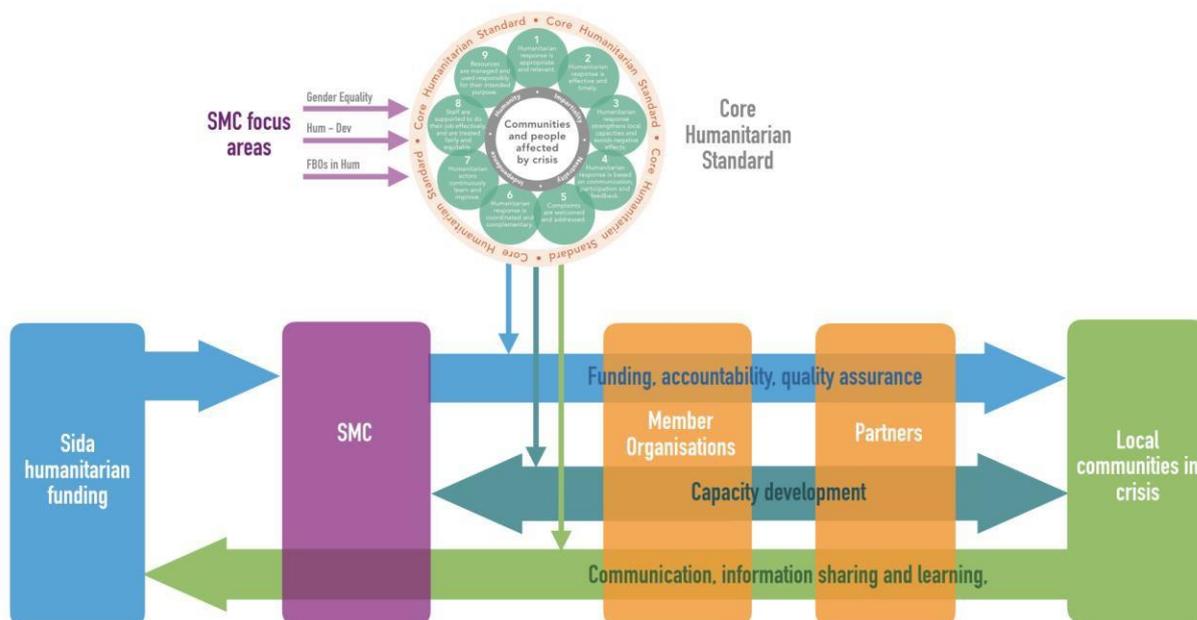
SMC has a commitment to making principled humanitarian actions as local as possible and as international as necessary. SMC is encouraged by the developments of the 'grand bargain' and the international recognition of first responders and local capacity.

### 3. SMC framework for humanitarian assistance

The overall objective of SMC's humanitarian assistance is to:

*save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold dignity for women, men, girls and boys who are suffering from armed conflict, natural disasters and the effects of climate change, and reinforce the capacity of local civil society to act as first responders and also work for a resilient society.*

Overview of SMC's Humanitarian Assistance:



The diagram highlights the interactions of Sida, SMC, members and their partners. SMC works through its network with respect to three roles: 1) Funding, accountability and quality assurance, 2) Capacity development, and through offering a platform for 3) Communication, information sharing and learning back up through the system. All of these roles are influenced by principles of the CHS, and SMC's three humanitarian focus areas: gender equality, linking humanitarian

assistance and development cooperation and the role of Faith Based Organisations (FBOs) in the humanitarian assistance.

## SMC operational roles and responsibilities

Being an umbrella organisation, SMC has three specific roles and responsibilities in order to safeguard efficient, timely, result oriented and qualitative humanitarian assistance by its member and partner organisations.

### **1. Funding, accountability and quality assurance**

CHS will form the basis of SMC's quality assurance of project and organisations to determine their eligibility to receive humanitarian funding. In line with CHS, SMC will assure a timely and rapid response to humanitarian needs, while simultaneously improving predictability, accountability and transparency.

### **2. Capacity development**

SMC will first and foremost promote capacity development among the member organisations, who in their turn will support capacity development among their implementing partners. However, this does not exclude SMC's direct involvement in capacity development of implementing partners through field visits, regional workshops, monitoring, trainings, etc. This is always done in close cooperation with the member organisations.

Learning together (SMC, member and partner organisations) is a key aspect of SMC's capacity development and SMC has over the years experienced that it is through joint capacity development that we best improve the quality and capacity on all levels. Joint sessions and activities will be further explored during this strategic period. Capacity development will be based on CHS.

### **3. Communication, information sharing and learning**

Communication and information sharing connect to SMC's role in capacity development, funding and quality assurance. SMC is convinced that listening to and learning with our members and partners are key for being a relevant humanitarian actor and responding to humanitarian needs with high capacity. Communication and information sharing also relates to the quality assurance role in developing relevant systems which help us to assure the quality and to monitor, evaluate, and adapt our humanitarian assistance.

For this strategic period SMC will strive to improve the communication chain between the different stakeholders (Sida-SMC-members-partners-local communities) and thereby strengthen the sharing of experiences, lessons learnt, best practices, information on humanitarian needs and local capacity to respond.

SMC intends to be more engaged in policy dialogues concerning humanitarian assistance. The work done by SMC members together with partners forms the basis for SMCs policy dialogue with policy makers at different levels. SMC will

help to ensure that members and partners perspectives are included in the policy debate. SMC will continue to collaborate with other humanitarian actors in the Swedish network for humanitarian actors (SNHA).

## 4. Strategic directions

With respect to the overall operational structure highlighted above, SMC has identified two strategic directions in order to strengthen the humanitarian assistance of SMC over the coming 5 years:

**1. Integrate Core Humanitarian Standard** into SMC's quality assurance, capacity development and systems for learning and evaluation.

SMC has recognised the CHS and its importance in quality assurance and capacity development. SMC will adhere to the CHS and humanitarian assistance will be guided by the nine commitments. CHS will be at the core of the quality assurance system for handling humanitarian funding and be the basis for capacity development programs. SMC will prioritise our capacity development efforts in accordance with identified organisational strengths and weaknesses relating to CHS.

Within the CHS framework, SMC will strengthen implementation, capacity development and learning in our three focus areas: gender equality, linking humanitarian assistance and development cooperation and the role of FBOs in humanitarian assistance.

### 1.1 Gender equality

SMC has a strong commitment to countering gender inequality and addressing unequal power structures. Natural disasters, effects of climate change, armed conflicts and protracted crises affect women, men, girls and boys differently, hindering equal access to humanitarian assistance and the fulfilment of human rights. Gender equality will be more strongly mainstreamed in SMC's quality assurance of humanitarian assistance and SMC will continue to give a special focus on gender equality in the capacity development of member and partner organisations.

### 1.2 Linking humanitarian assistance and development cooperation

One of SMC's strengths is having members and partners active both in humanitarian assistance and development cooperation. There is therefore significant potential to link humanitarian assistance to recovery and sustainable development. For this period SMC will increase effort and resources to support member and partners in their ambitions to link humanitarian assistance to development. SMC's objective is a more efficient system and a solid funding mechanism covering humanitarian assistance, early recovery and long term development.

### **1.3 Faith based organisations and humanitarian assistance**

Religion plays a significant role among many of the people who are affected by armed conflicts and natural disasters. FBOs have an advantage in the understanding of the religious context and FBOs may be important actors in the humanitarian assistance. Thus, SMC has a strong interest in addressing and exploring this topic in order to learn more on FBOs added value and unique position in relation to trust, legitimacy and humanitarian access but also the risks in FBOs mixing humanitarian assistance with faith or where religious and cultural structures, actors and practices hinder humanitarian assistance according to CHS.

**2. Expand the ability of SMC's member- and partner organisations to operate as first responders** – strengthening organisations to become relevant and efficient actors in humanitarian assistance, increasing the number of organisations that are able to engage in relevant and effective humanitarian interventions, and also recognising the role that member organisations have in improving the response of smaller actors in the humanitarian 'ecosystem'.

SMC member and partner organisations are engaged in areas vulnerable to both small-scale and major disasters or crisis as well as the effects of climate change. SMC has the relationships and channels to support these front line responders and contribute to a more efficient humanitarian response. SMC therefore seeks to make capacity development available to all member and partner organisations which are engaged in humanitarian assistance.

## **5. Objectives for the strategic period**

The overall objective of SMC's humanitarian assistance is to *save lives, alleviate suffering and uphold dignity for women, men, girls and boys who are suffering from armed conflict, natural disasters and the effects of climate change, and reinforce the capacity of local civil society to act as first responders and also work for a resilient society.*

In order to achieve this overall objective, SMC strives to contribute for change at the community level. It is the local community that ultimately, in itself, can prevent, manage and mitigate disasters and act quickly in the event of a disaster. The following desired outcomes are guiding the direction of SMC's humanitarian assistance.

### **SMC's desired outcomes at community level:**

*Local communities play a crucial role in saving lives, reducing suffering, upholding dignity and create opportunities to return to a normal situation after disasters.*

*Increased capacity of local communities, to prevent, manage and mitigate disasters they face.*

*Women, men, boys and girls are engaged in local decision making structures and their different needs are shaping program implementation.*

*Local groups are organized, influencing the authorities and taking an active ownership in humanitarian operations.*

### **SMC's objectives for the strategic period**

In order to contribute towards the overall objective and the desired outcomes at community level, SMC is taking an actor-focused approach to planning and monitoring the humanitarian work. This involves focusing on the actors that SMC can influence – ourselves (our internal processes), our member organisations and their partners.

The following table highlights the objectives of SMC's strategy in relation to the three operational roles of SMC as they apply to SMC's internal processes and to those of SMC's member organisations and partners.

	<b>Internal SMC</b>	<b>Member and partner organisations</b>
<b>Funding, accountability, quality assurance</b>	<p>SMC humanitarian assistance is rapid, timely and focuses on the most critical humanitarian needs, with specific attention to gender equality perspectives.</p> <p>SMC has an efficient system and mechanism covering humanitarian assistance, recovery and long term development.</p> <p>CHS is integrated and practiced in quality assurance and organisational assessments.</p>	<p>Systems and procedures foster local community ownership and decision making.</p> <p>A majority of the humanitarian projects are followed by support to recovery and long term development (funded by development funds).</p> <p>Humanitarian programs are increasingly informed by a gender equality perspective.</p> <p>CHS are governing members' quality assurance and methods.</p>
<b>Capacity development</b>	<p>SMC is catalysing capacity development with partners regarding how to integrate focus areas (gender equality, linking humanitarian assistance and development cooperation, FBOs and humanitarian assistance) and CHS into humanitarian programs and strategies.</p> <p>Capacity development is organised and targeted according to CHS based on organisational assessment processes.</p> <p>Capacity development is extended to a larger number of SMC members and partners in order to strengthen first responders.</p>	<p>Members and partners are integrating gender equality into their programs, developing clearer links between humanitarian and development work, and are increasingly aware of their role (opportunities and risks) as FBOs.</p> <p>Members and partners are integrating CHS into their programs and contextualising CHS.</p> <p>Members increase support to front line responders and capacity of local communities to respond to onset of disasters (humanitarian 'ecosystems')</p> <p>More member organisations are eligible to apply for humanitarian funds.</p>
<b>Communication, information sharing, and</b>	<p>SMC develops systems to better monitor and evaluate results/outcomes, and improve learning in relation to integrating and</p>	<p>Members and partners are actively learning from their programs through ongoing learning processes and</p>

<p><b>learning</b></p>	<p>contextualising CHS. SMC serves as a communication channel helping to ensure that local perspectives are included in policy debate, and to keep members and partners informed on Sida's priorities.</p>	<p>evaluation. Members and partners provide a channel to local communities to communicate their needs and local issues.</p>
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## 6. Learning and evaluation

SMC's actor focused approach provides a framework for monitoring emergent change in each of the actors, borrowing methods from Outcome Mapping as recommended in SMC's impact evaluation in 2016. Systems for monitoring outcomes will be developed as part of SMC's work plans for 2017-21 which will integrate the CHS. This framework will allow for ongoing adjustment of SMC's program.

The strategy will be evaluated during the first half of 2019.