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The International Discourse on Ecumenical Diaconia as a Chance to Strengthen the Specific Profile and Potential of Churches as Actors of Eco-Social Transformation—A German Perspective

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Abstract: There has always been a conviction in the ecumenical movement that social service is part of the essence of what it means to be the church. The strengthening of social and political witness of churches through church-related agencies and networks in the context of the beginning development discourse from the 1960s until the 1990s, however, led to a scenario in which the secular language of development and political action received much attention. In 2014 at the Malawi consultation, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Action of Churches Together (ACT Alliance) reviewed their working relationships and explored better collaboration between agencies and churches, stating that the specific nature of churches as entities with an added value and particular profile in the area of social and political service would be strengthened. From this consultation, a mandate was given by the WCC Central Committee to develop a study document on the understanding and core components of the concept of "ecumenical diaconia", which then was made available to the 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe, 2022. This article introduces the context, major content, and key convictions of this study document and related discussions in Karlsruhe. It answers the question: what is the significance of the global ecumenical fellowship of churches in focusing on a common language of diaconia and a more explicit church-related terminology to describe and strengthen the social services of churches and their engagement in diaconia and social witness? It is recognized that this article is predominantly written from a German context and perspective in its construction of the international discourse on ecumenical diaconia.

Keywords: diaconia; Christian social practice; social services; ecumenism; World Council of Churches; ecumenical social ethics; ecological transformation; social transformation; churches; ecumenical movement

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1. Introduction: Celebrating 175 Years of Organized Diaconia in Germany

During the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, in August/September 2022 a new 140-page study document was introduced to and discussed by the ecumenical fellowship of churches, published under the title "Called to Transformation–Ecumenical Diaconia"[1]. This article introduces the context, major content, and key convictions of this study document and related discussions in Karlsruhe. It answers the question: what is the significance of the global ecumenical fellowship of churches in focusing on a common language of diaconia and a more explicit church-related terminology to describe and strengthen the social services of churches and their engagement in diaconia and social witness?

German churches are celebrating a significant jubilee in 2023, related to 175 years of organized social work of Protestant churches in the country. This is also a special occasion for contemplating the relevance of the strong connectivity between churches and diaconia from a global perspective. A campaign titled "Out of Love: Diaconia"[2] was

created, and resources are being made available to commemorate the impact of the famous Wittenberg 1848 speech of Johann Hinrich Wichern. During the national convention of Protestant churches in Germany in that year, he criticized churches for their failure to address the needs and concerns of the impoverished urban masses resulting from rapid industrialization and the Napoleon wars in the first half of the 19th century.[3] His strategic recommendation to form a national platform and joint committee of organized social care ("Central Ausschuss für Innere Mission") laid the basis for strong connectivity between churches and diaconia in Germany for the subsequent decades. Decades later, this led to the formation of the Protestant agency for Diaconia and Development (Evangelisches Werk für Diakonie und Entwicklung, EWDE), which has had its headquarters in Berlin since 2012; with its 800 employees, it can be regarded as the biggest Christian NGO in Europe. Protestant diaconia in Germany in the 175 years of its history has become a brand name and a strong agency alongside and within local churches. With 600,000 employed workers and 700,000 volunteers, it is one of the largest and widespread employers in German society, today operating within the stable framework of state–church partnership relationships and with a major part of its services offered for the poor, suffering, and needy, considerably co-funded by the state authorities within the German welfare system (Hübner 2021).

2. Internationalizing Diaconia after the Second World War

What is less known than the history of *national* diaconia within Germany is the parallel history of international or worldwide diaconia that became called "ecumenical diaconia" in the dialogue with the global ecumenical movement (Werner and Ross 2021). Whereas diaconia (or "Christian love of the neighbor" as it was called in the earlier stages) first and foremost was always a response of Christian communities to situations of need in the immediate context of local environments, it is clear already in apostolic times that there was also a realization of the churches' responsibility to respond to situations of need in the far distance (for example, collect for Jerusalem ((1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15; Rom 15:14–32); famine in Judea (Acts 11,27–29)). Christianity, from its founding periods, remained aware that God's promise and rule of mercy is the whole earth (Ps. 24,1), the global inhabited space (the oikumene), and that all of those in need amongst the "least" ask for our response (Mat. 25,40). With interchurch aid having long been a structural component of diaconia, the main unleashing factor for the discovery and unfolding of ecumenical diaconia as intentional assistance to people in need and populations afar and even beyond membership in the church was the ecumenical movement in the early part of the 20th century. The last decades of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century saw a growing concern for Christian social thinking and the first pioneering conferences for ecumenical social ethics, particularly the Stockholm conference in 1925, which will be commemorated by the Church of Sweden and its ecumenical partners in 2025.[4] The encounter both with massive destruction and refugee movements in the aftermath of the two World Wars and the subsequent widening of horizons of the ecumenical movement to include issues of unequal distribution of resources in the period of decolonialization paved the way to a strong commitment to the ecumenical and international dimension of diaconia. In 1945, all Protestant churches in Germany came together to found the Office of Inter-Church Aid (Hilfswerk der Evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland) (Füllkrug-Weitzel 2016). In the same year (three years prior to the formation of the WCC), the Division on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (later called Commission on Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (CICARWS)) was established in Geneva as part of the "WCC in formation". Both can be understood only in the context of the huge refugee crisis and the urgent need for the reconstruction of European countries at that historical moment. Germany, at that stage, had to cope not with 1 million refugees (as in 2015), but with 15 million refugees. Thus, the early ecumenical movement in the post Second World War period was confronted with two major challenges, for which two distinct early instruments of ecumenical diaconia were developed (although the terminology was still developing in that period): The first major challenge was the reconstruction of Europe and the refugee crisis: CICARWS was

the main instrument of engaging in interchurch aid and ecumenical diaconia in this regard. The second major challenge that soon followed was the one related to the processes of decolonialization and the growing gap between rich and poor countries in the Global South. The main instrument of response developed in this regard was the missionary assistance program of the International Missionary Council (IMC), which has existed since 1922. A major paradigm shift emerged with the formal integration of the IMC into the WCC in 1961 during the assembly in New Delhi: now the ecumenical movement became truly global. The work in interchurch aid irreversibly was enlarged by newly emerging issues concerning development, liberation, and structural economic injustice. It is interesting to see that with the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC) and the WCC, the mandate of CICARWS was also changed to combine interchurch aid with global diaconia or ecumenical diaconia: in 1961, the new mandate of CICARWS was stated as follows:

> The aim of the division shall be to express the ecumenical solidarity of the churches through mutual aid in order to strengthen them in their life and mission and especially in their service to the world around them (diaconia) and to provide facilities by which the churches may serve men and women in acute human need everywhere, especially orphaned peoples, including refugees of all categories. (See Murray 1961, p. 7; also quoted in Robra 1994)

The growing awareness of the mutual relationship between ecumenism and diaconia in the 1950s and 1960s stimulated a process of a gradual widening and merger of both agendas (interchurch aid in Europe and missionary assistance in the global context) and their related instruments. In 1957, an international consultation held in the Evangelical Academy of Berlin introduced the concept of ecumenical diaconia and deepened the conceptualization of this new understanding. It reflected a strong sense of postwar Christianity in its commitment to struggle for global peace and overcoming hunger on global scale and to hold together the vision of a 'responsible society' and the churches' commitment to 'social diaconia', both to be understood in a global perspective, hence the new emphasis on ecumenical diaconia (Akademie 1957; Berg 1959).

In 1959, a national collection was organized by all Protestant churches in Germany to provide support for the global poor, mainly in west Africa at that time (Biafra crisis). Bread for the World, the Protestant development agency in Germany, was born out of this globalized concern for the poor and a passion for new shapes of ecumenical diaconia (Füllkrug-Weitzel 2016). Having received ecumenical aid and support from churches in the west and south, Protestant churches in Germany wanted to become actors and drivers for solidarity in ecumenical diaconia on a permanent basis. The later rights-based approach to ecumenical diaconia then emerged as a direct consequence of the learning process in ecumenical social ethics to understand the structural root causes of rising inequality and global poverty. The commitment for a partner-centered working methodology, i.e., the need to collaborate and to support partner organizations from both church-based background and the secular agencies of civil society, which can render an effective contribution to the eradication of poverty and the improvement in human rights situations of women, children, and the marginalized, can be seen as a direct implication of the interest to support approaches in social development from below and to put people's interests first.

3. Ecumenical Diaconia in the Context of the Discourse on the Development Paradigm in the Period of 1968 to 1991

Bread for the World grew in close collaboration with the global ecumenical instruments, which were created in the 1960s and 1970s in the spirit of a new sense of the global dimensions of a "responsible society": the IMC-based global study project Rapid Social Change (1955–1961) provided a first entry and opening of the growing debate of development issues. The 4th Assembly of the WCC (held in Uppsala, 1968) can be regarded as the beginning of a formal engagement of the institutionalized ecumenical movement in the global development discourse. The transformation of interchurch aid into development aid was critically discussed at that time, indicating that despite the changing political frame-

work and new opportunities for cooperation between church-based ecumenical diaconia and state development programs (and funding), a theological concern remained vital in many circles to keep the churches' international work for social justice with a clear Christian profile, close to its original foundations rooted in the mandates for ecumenical diakonia, and not to lose its distinctive marks as a church based activity—a debate taken up today again with the new study document of the WCC and ACT Alliance on ecumenical diaconia after 2014.

The Commission of Churches for Participation in Development (CCPD, founded in 1970) became a major partner for Bread for the World as well as the unfolding instruments of CICARWS as the project division for ecumenical diaconia in the WCC. The failure of the first development decade and its concept of development as modernization to acknowledge the relevance of the factor of religion in social transformation processes (Werner 2019; see also Tomalin 2015) and the growing disparities in terms of social progress, access to basic means of life, and the pervasive influence of postcolonial dependency, however, also provoked very critical questions with regard to the condition in which ecumenical diaconia had to take shape. Was a fair and mutual approach to ecumenical diaconia possible at all in a context that suffers from continued dependency between churches mainly in a giving role and other churches mainly in a receiving role? Who sets which priorities and formulates the conditions determining who sits at the table and in which role? This was the background for the study process on Ecumenical Sharing of Resources (ESR), which was initiated in the WCC after the 5th Assembly (held in Nairobi, 1975).[5] This was a reaction to the so-called "moratorium debate" on the sending of personnel and funds, raising critical questions about selfhood and the identity of churches in the Global South challenging the static division between and portraying of 'receiving' churches and 'sending' or 'giving' churches. The ESR study project aimed at a new framework of relationships that would free the churches from traditional roles of being either a sending (giving) or a receiving body and enable them to overcome structures of inequality and dependency between rich and poor. A broader understanding of what is meant by "resources" was projected, including spiritual, cultural, and human resources, as well as financial and material goods. The ESR study called for just relationships based on equality, which would allow for mutual accountability, sharing of power, and true interdependence. These require a holding together of mission, development, and service, which were seen as sometimes moving apart and being treated separately, both in theology and organizational structures. The study materials of the ESR process (WCC 1980) are still worth rereading as they include questions that are still relevant. However, even the guidelines on ecumenical resource sharing finally presented at the WCC (WCC 1988) could not present a breakthrough in the mechanisms of ecumenical diaconia on a broader and international scale, as too many partners were involved and much of the implementation of these goals took place in regional or bilateral networks or international mission boards (such as the United Evangelical Mission (UEM)[6]; Communeauté d'Eglise en Mission (CEVAA)[7], and others). In the same time period, the Nairobi Assembly in 1975 replaced the term "development" and deliberately articulated a new umbrella concept of a just, participatory, and sustainable society (JPSS) to inspire ecumenical diakonia, which presented a definite break with the equation of "development" and economic "growth and modernization" (see also ACT Alliance 2008) and was a response to the growing recognition of the persistence of poverty and misery and of the limits of and threats to the Earth's capacity to sustain human life.

4. Bringing Churches and Agencies Together Again: The Study Process on Ecumenical Diaconia after 2014

The growth and further professionalization of church-related development agencies and humanitarian actors in the 1990s led to the formation of a global network of agencies for ecumenical diaconia, called ACT Alliance or Action by Churches Together for Development. It is the result of a merger in 2010 of ACT International, which was formed in 1995 to work on delivering humanitarian aid, and of ACT Development, which was formed in 2007.

ACT Alliance[8] now presents a strong institutional presence of specialized ministries at the international level, which works in close collaboration with the WCC[9] but no longer as one of its subunits (as had been the case with CICARWS): around 130 specialized ministries and churches are now joined together in this international umbrella organization, which provides strong visibility of ecumenical diaconia in the global world of development and humanitarian actors at the UN level as well as in several regions. While it could be argued that the institutionalization of ACT Alliance presented, to a certain degree, a separate institutionalization of ecumenical diaconia over the ecumenical fellowship of churches (and their primary instruments of national or regional councils of churches), which was seen as necessary due to the demands of effectiveness, rapid reaction, and decision-making mechanisms particularly in international humanitarian work, a countermovement could be sensed soon in the debates, which started in the second decade of the new century.

In the international dialogue in the second decade of the 21st century, one could sense increasing signals of a renewed interest in the ecumenical rediscovery of the ancient tradition of diaconal witness and services, particularly in churches in the nonwestern world (Ham 2015; Dietrich et al. 2015). Since 2012, international gatherings and consultations have called for a new attention and greater emphasis on the diaconal ministry of the church and the relevance of diaconia and advocacy in theological training and ministerial formation.[10] There is a long tradition of reflecting on diaconia and diaconate in the history of the World Council of Churches (White 2002). In the ecumenical missiological dialogue, the renewal of diaconia had also become a major issue, focusing on diaconia from the perspectives of the marginalized (WCC 2012). Some church traditions since then have developed explicit framework documents to describe theological and biblical perspectives on their understanding of diaconia[11], whereas in other traditions, the term and concept of diaconia (some use also the language of "social services" or social ministries) is used but does not yet have so much common conceptual grounding (Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (2009); Robra 2005). However, in many churches, both in the nonwestern world as well as in some western countries, training capacities, theological resources, and deliberate planning for diaconal capacities both in local churches as well as in diaconal agencies are still at low levels or given very unequal priorities. Conversely, there was a huge interest in learning and rediscovering the nature and ancient traditions of diaconal service in churches in multireligious contexts, both in Asian and African contexts. Kjell Nordstokke argued that in much of the ecumenical discourse so far, the reflection on *diaconia* and *diaconate* has followed two separate tracks: the first considering *diaconia* as interchurch aid in contexts of human need, while the entry point of the second has been the ecumenical perception of the church's ministry and, within it, a possible renewal of the diaconate. Nordstokke argued that these two tracks, to a large degree, have not been interrelated but have mainly remained isolated from each other. This has limited the reflection on both concepts; consequently, both had lost momentum in ecumenical theology (Nordstokke 2011, 2013). As a consequence of a longer process of discussing relationships both of the estrangement as well as of a new rapprochement and interaction between churches, specialized ministries and ecumenical organizations (the WCC, ACT Alliance, and LWF) had planned a major new learning process on key issues of ecumenical diaconia in Malawi in September 2014.[12] This international consultation emphasized that a strong relationship needs to be built between churches and specialized ministries in order to express a visible commitment of churches to peace, justice, and sustainability in societies. Specialized ministries were called to further develop ecumenical solidarity and to strengthen cooperation with churches. It is a result of this process that, some years later, the first version of a major study document was published both by the WCC and ACT Alliance on ecumenical diakonia, which also served as a background document for a back-to-back conference of the ACT Assembly and the WCC Executive Meeting in autumn 2018 in Sweden (WCC 2017). The basic intention of this study document was to understand diaconia as a dimension integral to the nature and mission of the church as a whole at all levels of its existence. Diaconia was viewed as a key expression of the strong link between what the churches are and what they do. Reflection on

ecumenical diaconia requires understanding of both dimensions: the churches' being and their joint action as a worldwide communion of Christians and institutions.[13] After a special working commission on ecumenical diaconia from the WCC and ACT Alliance reworked this first version of the study document in order to deal with some criticism of orthodox member churches of the WCC (Phiri 2018) and after adding two substantial chapters on ecumenical diaconia in confessional contexts (chapter 8) and ecumenical diaconia in regional contexts (chapter 9), the 140-pagesstudy document was released in 2020 and made officially available to the 11th assembly of the WCC meeting in Karlsruhe in August/September 2022 under the title Called To Transformation—Ecumenical Diaconia(WCC-ED) (WCC 2022).[14] It is accompanied by major reflections and an addendum on the diaconal work of churches in the context of COVID-19 (WCC 2022, pp. 116–36). The following ten short reflections (paragraphs no. 5–15 in the subsequent sections) shed some light on the characteristic key convictions and main reflections from this historic paper, which is the first comprehensive and foundational theological study document on diaconia for the level of world Christianity.

5. The Potential of the New, Yet Ancient Semantics of Ecumenical Diaconia

During the New Delhi assembly of the WCC in 1961, there were only three major thematic sections planned for the assembly, very simply identified as Unity, Service, and Mission. This convincing thematic structuring of the assembly was not just for technical and administrative facilitation or reasons of brevity: it was a foundational theological statement at that early period of the global ecumenical movement expressing the fundamental conviction: the three original streams of the global ecumenical moment, namely faith and order, life and work, and world mission inseparably belong together and complement each other in their integrity. There is no ecumenical movement without the service dimension, i.e., the dimension of diaconia. While diaconia serves as a publicly known brand name only in some western European as well as Scandinavian churches, while other churches use different terminologies to refer to the phenomenon of social presence of Christian faith (such as integral mission, social service, and philanthropy), there are common ancient roots of all Christian churches that relate their social witness to a semantic family of words rooted in some derivates of *diakonein*. The cloud of words belonging to the diak-root—meaning serving others, freeing slaves, applying social protection laws for the needy, and establishing regular support systems for widows, orphans, women, and the elderly—according to the WCC-ED study document, belong to the very essence of what it means to be the church and to act as a church. As much as the missionary success and credibility of the ancient church was very much due to its diaconal inclusivity, the diaconal language was indispensable and remains of pivotal importance in today's secularized or multifaith environments for the credibility of the churches' witness and service. The three classical forms of interchurch aid, regular social support for the marginalized, as well as humanitarian action in emergency situations showed up as indispensable dimensions of being the church already in ancient biblical tradition (collect for Jerusalem and emergency aid during famine as cited before).

The return to this precious common biblical language of church involvement in social services, action, and advocacy sends an important signal of a strengthened ecclesial identity of social action and critical Christian participation in development: While the churches are certainly and actively joining modern development discourses in debates about the understanding of the SDGs and the advocacy activities of civil society, their work cannot be completely and indiscriminately absorbed by these secular discourses. Instead, the social and political involvement of churches has its own specific language and profile by which it is linked together both horizontally and vertically to the global fellowship of churches, to the ecumenical dimensions of church history, and to the different current contexts of global Christianity. The ancient narratives of diaconal service, which are uniquely interwoven with the narratives of preaching and proclamation as the other ministry dimension of the church (see: book of Acts), remain significant for the identity and relevance of the global church. This is because these ancient diaconal narratives have communicative

significance and relevance in any social and political context, be this rural or urban, modern or premodern, pre- or post-enlightenment, secular or nonsecular. Thus, the critical reminder of the common and ancient biblical language of diaconia is crucial and relevant for a process that is about the rediscovery and deepened understanding of the social relevance of the Gospel in contexts of nonwestern Christianity, particularly in those contexts where, for historical, political, or doctrinal reasons, it was not yet possible to develop large-scale diaconal institutions or even any social activity of Christians beyond the realm of private households.

6. Realizing the Distinctiveness of Churches as Actors of Social-Ecological Transformation

The joint WCC/ACT Alliance Document (WCC 2022) devotes a whole section to the issue of the Distinctiveness of Diaconal Action (WCC 2022, chp. 6). The interest of the WCC-ED document is that the churches remain distinct in their profile and that their added value as communities of faith becomes apparent. Church-related social services should be more than "Oxfam with church hymns", to quote a well-known slogan from the working group on ecumenical diaconia. The document is quite clear that this distinctiveness has to be repeatedly realized, and it is not sufficient to just claim this on a doctrinal or rhetorical level:

> To clarify the distinctiveness of diaconal action does not imply a claim of superiority, that diaconal agents are better and more trustworthy than other social agents. It simply means recognizing what has motivated Christians to take initiatives and establish institutions and organizations, and asking how their traditions and values, their bonds of social belonging and partnership, can be activated and become valuable assets in the daily performance of diaconal service. (see WCC 2022, chp. 6.1.)

Three distinct features on what churches can offer as a distinct profile and potential to bring into the processes of social and ecological transformation are named and spelled out here:

(a) Churches are communities of hope, lived hope. Therefore, they are sleeping giants of social transformation that present additional resources for resilience of hope, which are related to their specific language, the language of liturgy and spirituality. This might not be easily measurable in terms of project outcomes and impact assessment, which we have become used to so much. Still, this spiritual resilience is essential as it provides us with a sense of dignity, of purpose, and of not serving in vain in contexts of suffering and desperation. The resilience of hope also needs to manifest itself, to take physical form, in 'resilient communities'. Hope motivates and mobilizes communities to jointly come through times of adversary. This has relevance for all social transformation processes but also in the immediate survival phase of humanitarian disasters. Being a community of lived hope implies that involvement in development work or ecumenical diaconia can never just be reduced to project reporting, administrative monitoring, and impact-measuring paperwork, although these are relevant ingredients in successful and result-oriented development cooperation. These parameters are not everything and are insufficient alone. Otherwise, church-related development actors would become like any other department within a ministry of development cooperation or any secular organization of international humanitarian aid. Communication between churches and church-related faith actors needs time beyond project business, time for spiritual listening, for the fellowship of mutual praying and sharing one vision of hope together, for weeping together on the sorrows we experience, and enjoying together the successes with which we are graced. The quality time and spiritual depth of dialogical partnership work are some of the benefits underlining the distinct profile of churches' contributions to development work. The return to the biblical language of diaconia is a safeguard against the inherent danger to lose the ecclesial and prophetic dimensions of Christian

social service against the secular- and often economic-growth-driven concerns for development.

> "The language of diaconia and of development represent different universes of discourse and practise which cannot be easily be brought together. Diaconia refers to a constitutive dimension of the life and mission of the churches as communities which are called to live as an active witness to the values of the kingdom of God. Development is a socio-political concept and economic concept which is rooted in the postcolonial efforts to improve the economic and social conditions in the newly independent countries in the southern hemisphere". (Raiser 2017, p. 2)

(b) Secondly, churches are communities of Kingdom values, of spiritual resources that contribute to value change on wider social masses levels, which is so urgently needed for a new mentality of living within planetary boundaries. Nothing is more important today than to change the mentality of people, sharing in the common conviction that all have to change their lifestyles, their consumption patterns, their travel, mobility and traffic customs, their nutrition, and their production and waste management cycles in order to live within the planetary boundaries. The churches are therefore, to use a semantic that was developed in government and the German Ministry of Development Cooperation (BMZ) discourses on religion and development, important and indispensable factors of the cultural and value-driven dimension of eco-social transformation. Churches are also key players to resist the growing trends of shrinking spaces for civil society in a context where the intersection between faith and human rights (Prove et al. 2022) is sacrificed by autocratic governments that are not ashamed to support the recession of global democracy and the erosion of civic spaces to an extend that is unprecedented.[15]

(c) Finally, churches are not just trapped and confined within the predominant discourse patterns of state development cooperation or the SDG agenda (as an example, see the ACT Alliance document "Our Understanding of Development" 2008, which later gave rise to the debate on ecumenical diaconia during the Busan assembly 2013) (Ham 2013). Churches are empowered and called to ask critical questions beyond the current national economic paradigm, even beyond the current SDG development framework concept and its assumptions on growth and progress: Do we have a really convincing new mega-narrative to be shared with populations that makes the imperative attractive for all to seek for a new balance between reducing our resources' depletion from this Earth and the needs to correct the huge global economic inequalities that still mark this world? Already, the current version of the ED Document is challenging the SDG framework for not having sufficiently integrated the issues related to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which was a key focus at the Karlsruhe Assembly.[16] Some years ago, the Pope Francis 'Laudato Si' encyclical was moving toward something like a new mega-narrative, as it was about sharing what we have, in contrast to the Agenda 2030, which still presupposes a 'growing the cake', so that there is something to be shared for all (Hickel et al. 2023). We are still in the search for a global new mega-narrative that can bring people, nations, and civilizations together in one sense of direction, which does not allow for polarization on narrow-minded nationalistic or partisan interests.

7. Nurturing Bilingual Approaches in Social Services and Advocacy-Keeping Faith-Based and Rights-Based Languages Together

The WCC/ACT Alliance study document also favors the development of "bilingualism" in the understanding and practice of diaconia and social action: "What is distinct for diaconal actors is that they refer to religious concepts, in addition to secular, when explaining their action and its objective. This is an expression of the interdisciplinary nature of diaconia; it is social action rooted in socio-political knowledge and analysis, and, at the same time, it is faith-based and rights-based action." (WCC-ED No 6.2.). By using this bilingual approach, the WCC is intending to avoid both extremes: the self-secularization of

a church that, while trying to be most effective and impact-oriented in terms of its concrete social action, tends to forget about the specificity of its own language and tradition, as well as the other extreme: to avoid the danger of a church becoming self-isolated or over-spiritualized in its religious language, either by trying to protect its own limited existence or by defending the small individual and personal realm of faith. The point of this concern for stressing the spiritual nature of the church and its identity, and therefore the bilingual nature of the churches' engagement in social and ecological affairs, is to communicate who we are and what we do as churches and not to keep something for ourselves, which essentially belongs to ecclesial identity (mirroring Phil 2, 6–11 . . .). This is not opposed to churches opting for strong cooperation with secular development and social change actors (governments as well as intergovernmental organizations (INGOs) and the private sector). It remains important for churches to cooperate with nonreligious and other religious actors not only for effectiveness of their social witness but also for the secular actors to understand and appreciate the potential of local faith actors' engagement. This is why churches need to remain open and engaging with platforms such as Partnership on Religion and Development[17] (PaRD) and other secular actors in research and policy dialogue.

Losing a distinct and proper church identity can thus take place in two different forms, both to be avoided, namely to overemphasize social relevance and assimilation to secular milieus as well as an overemphasis on self-protection and withdrawing from the political and social arenas. Emphasizing a bilingual approach and interdisciplinary competences in church-related international diaconia and humanitarian work nowadays means not to shy away from spiritual or religious language in cases and contexts where this is appropriate and supports the specific identity of church-based social action. The added value churches can bring to the social and political arena is because they speak a faith-based language, which then properly needs to be translated to ethical and political language. It certainly is known that that articulating faith language to the people can be quite challenging in religiously pluralistic contexts, as recipients of these social actions are often more interested in being supported than in their religious subscription and message of hope if they are not religiously inclined. However, the issues of explicit faith language have been quite vividly discussed in recent years, both with regard to the general strategy for humanitarian action and development[18] as well as, for instance, in the field of psycho-social care.[19]

The specific value given here is that only faith-based language can engage with the fundamental layers of beliefs, values, and convictions, where social and political transformations must take root for the transformation to be lasting, i.e., sustainable. Faith language in long-term perspectives can thus be a decisive factor deciding about the sustainability of social-ecological transition processes. The language of ecumenical diaconia thus seriously considers the reality of more than 85% of the world's population, which, in its mindset, is coined and framed by different forms of spirituality:

> Most of the people in the world are religious. Diaconia must take this reality seriously. While Ecumenical diaconia does not intend to proselytize or work towards conversion, it rather recognizes the spiritual needs and context of the world, which is multi-religious. While doing interventions in the world, spiritual needs of the people we work with must be taken seriously.[20]

It should be noted, however, that the WCC-ED study document is also very much aware of the need that the changes of religious landscapes in Europe and beyond also imply mutual challengers between faith language and secular mentalities:

> An interdisciplinary and dialectic approach implies critical communication between the two. The secular language will question the validity and range of the religious terms, and vice versa.[21]

8. Recognizing the Value and Legitimacy of Different Social Shapes of Diaconia in World Christianity

Another remarkable feature of the WCC-ED study document is its strong sense of a legitimate plurality of different forms of social ministries and diaconal action in World Christianity:

> There is no sense by which one special institutionalization of the diaconic, which for historical reasons has become dominant in one part of the world is regarded as normative or superior to other forms of social witness and diaconia.

In Section 4.5. "Diaconia as discipleship" (WCC 2022, p. 48ff), there is a remarkable paragraph in which the different forms of diaconia are spelled out:

> In the history of the church, diaconia has always linked love for one's neighbors with the passion for justice and sustainability. It has become common understanding in world Christianity that this takes up different forms, which are complementary and cannot be played off against each other. These different dimensions of the mandate for a diaconal church and for diaconal discipleship are not expressed in equal manner in all circumstances, but their realization depends on the cultural, political and institutional contexts of different churches.

Thus, there exist different forms of diaconia, each with a different degree of professionalization and institutionalization:

- Social diaconia as individual acts of care, healing, and reconciliation in a local church or community;
- Diaconia as institutionalized assistance for marginalized groups and those suffering, by churches or specialized diaconal agencies;
- Diaconia as community work and empowerment for strengthening conviviality;
- Political or transformative diaconia, comprising efforts to transform living conditions and political frameworks contributing to injustice and conflicts, addressing the whole of society in advocacy and lobbying work on behalf of those suffering;
- Prophetical diaconia, addressing imbalances in power, access, and participation in societies, speaking truth to power, denouncing structural injustices
- Ecological diaconia, addressing fundamental issues of the protection of the environment and of climate justice (WCC 2022, p. 49ff).

The intention of the WCC/ACT Alliance study document is clear here not to take one model of diaconia, for instance, the agency model that emerged in Scandinavian or German Christianity, as a priority model for other regions that have completely different political and social frameworks for their forms of institutionalization of social services. All different social models of diaconia are in themselves legitimate expressions of the one solid concern of the global churches to serve those in need and to stand up for the rights of the suffering and neglected or violated.

9. Remaining Self-Determined and Distinct Church Priorities for Ecumenical Diaconia

Being drawn into the international discourse on ecumenical diaconia as a church-based development organization, the WCC-ED document sensitizes church-related actors to remain self-determined and independent in our decisions on priorities for projects and partnerships concerning ecumenical diaconal cooperation with churches in other parts of the world. Certainly, as an agency working within clearly regulated and mutually trustful relationships with state partners in the German context, church actors have to be attentive to regulations and frameworks regarding those who deserve primary attention and support. In this sense, church actors follow with attention and sensitivity the decisions concerning the groupings and prioritization of countries in the list of DAC countries, which, according to the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), are entitled to receive official development assistance (ODA) means.[22] It thus has an effect on the decisions of Christian agencies if

countries are grouped in the list of least-developed countries, low-income countries, lower–middle-income countries and higher–middle-income countries.[23] However, the decisions of the state regarding which countries are entitled to receive development funds cannot be the only criterion for church-based development actors to decide on how to prioritize their partners in the Global South. Current decisions on whether and to what extent to relate to partners, such as those in China, Brazil, South Africa, Ukraine, Russia, North Korea, or in other countries with high restrictions on civil society, are more complex than just to refer to economic indicators from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). An ecclesial assessment of the needs to support churches and church-related civil society organizations even in contexts that politically or economically would be regarded as not a priority country for state development cooperation should complement any political assessment and have its own ecumenical right and perspective. Maintaining ecumenical partnerships in ecumenical diaconia remains of strategic importance, even in contexts where, for one reason or another, no proper project funding currently is possible or advisable such as in closed countries with military governments or autocratic regimes. How to keep up with ecumenical diaconia in circumstances that deal with closed or highly restricted societies is a very sensitive issue in future collaboration in ecumenical diaconia as credibility over against other churches, credibility with regard to back donors, and effectives and protection against attempts to be politically misused are at stake. To keep up with small attempts, at least for transformative partnership relations and with efforts for capacity building and conceptual dialogue in issues of ecumenical social and peace ethics, remains of strategic significance, even in countries that remain difficult, partly closed, problematic, or completely blocked terrain for western or ecumenical Christian agencies.

10. Strengthening the Collaboration between NCCs and ACT National Forums

It was the main purpose of the consultation between the WCC and ACT Alliance in Malawi in 2014 that lead to the formulation of the ecumenical diaconia study document to prevent ecumenical platforms of churches from falling away from platforms of common action in humanitarian aid and development cooperation as established and continued within the structure of ACT Alliance. Explored through the work of the community of Practise on Religion and Development (CoPRD) and encouraged through the last ACT Assembly in Uppsala 2018[24] as well as by the WCC, leadership pilot projects have been undertaken in Malawi and Cameroon in order to find out how collaboration between National ACT Forums and National Council of Churches (NCCs) can be strengthened and improved in order to increase synergies between development actors and church actors on the ground.[25] That National ACT forums are mainly composed of representatives of northern development agencies cannot continue.[26] This also has an inbuilt and potential reformation dynamic relevance for the churches themselves and their democratic standards: the WCC/ACT Alliance document states:

> Agencies should be encouraged to develop strategies for working more closely with churches. Professor Christoph Stueckelberger, the founder of Globethics.net, claims that churches can often play a broader reaching role than single NGOs in transformation processes. He therefore recommends that agencies support processes that envisage strengthening democratic practices in the churches, developing responsible leadership, building competence, and creating corruption-free churches. (WCC 2022, p. 83)

The interest in the localization and decolonialization of humanitarian aid as well as for the bridging of gaps between international funding mechanisms and local faith actors on the ground has been strong, particularly for learning achievements in relation to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. In many cases during the pandemic, the local faith actors were to the most vivid and effective actors in providing education, medical training, and equipment for medical protection and assistance to those suffering from the pandemic.

One aspect, which was mentioned several times within the working group on ecumenical diaconia in this regard, was the interest to move toward a more permanent think tank and collaborative coordination structure between the ACT Alliance and the WCC in the areas of theology, ethics, and pilot projects (practice) of ecumenical diaconia. The idea of a joint reference group on theology, training, and pilot projects for ecumenical diaconia to be called together by both the ACT Alliance and the WCC unit on public witness and ecumenical diaconia could potentially answer the need for both a strong commitment to ecumenical social ethics and nurturing networks of social action and diaconia on foundational and ethical concepts and related pilot projects that inform the current work of the global fellowship of churches in the area of ecumenical diaconia. The formation of a joint reference group on ecumenical dianoia was finally included in the decisions and recommendations made by the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe through the report of its Programme Guidelines Committee.[27]

11. Building Bridges with Churches That Do Not (Yet) Have a Long Tradition of Ecumenical Social Thinking and Diaconia

The WCC-ED study document is quite clear on the conviction that the unity of churches' commitment in ecumenical diaconia is not a finished product but an open-ended process and always needs to be strengthened and reconstructed. There still is a lack of simultaneity between different confessional traditions and contextual approaches to Christian social witness and prophetic diaconia. There are churches both in the membership of the WCC as well as outside that, for several reasons, have had a shorter history only with regard to involvement in public social witness, ecumenical diaconia, and advocacy for issues of justice, peace, and integrity of creation because their social, political, and doctrinal background did not allow for making regular advances in this regard. One of the main intentions of the WCC-ED document is the closing of gaps in this regard and the initiation of creative mutual leaning processes between churches of different cultural and social contexts. There are many churches in World Christianity on the local level that have a genuine and vital concern for social witness and ecological care but, at the same time, did not develop capacities to build up professional regional institutions of diaconal action for establishing partnerships with churches in different geographical contexts or institutes for ecumenical social ethics and dialogue between faith and social sciences on issues that need to inform the public witness of churches today.[28] The processes of internationalization in the area of diaconia are moving quickly and rapidly changing the landscapes of World Christianity. However, very few people know or are aware of the fact that some churches and their social service agencies in Nigeria or China are much bigger than in churches in Germany or Switzerland today. We need a more deliberate process of ecumenization and internationalization of diaconia today after 175 years of national diaconia in Germany. How to live and deal with different speeds, dialects, and contexts of social diaconia actors within the global Christian family is one of the key challenges particularly in the current situation. Rather than co-opting a political language of swift exclusion, rejection, and denunciation for those churches who are different than our own traditional patterns of performing diaconia, we need to become open for new players, for instance, with churches with a migration background.[29] We need to be careful to not just applaud our given standards and ourselves but instead install mechanisms of mutual intercontextual learning from new language and innovative practices of other churches in World Christianity. Keeping the gates open for building new leadership in public theology, for responsible peace ethics, and for a common work on social and ecological diaconia in the end might provide better results rather than a trend of excluding those churches that currently are still lacking a clear, responsible, and focused statement on social ethics and diaconia. It is thus deeply tragic that the current war in Ukraine has not only gravely damaged the relationships between Russia and Ukraine, the east and the west, as well as between Orthodoxy and Protestantism in general: it also has diminished the open-minded learning interests of several Russian Orthodox theologians to learn from achievements and models of diaconial work in western churches (and

vice versa), which was a major opportunity for open dialogue between Orthodoxy and Protestantism that now seems disabled and might remain closed for some time (Werner 2020). Much remains to be achieved here.

12. Deepening the Common Commitment to Training and Theological Education for Ecumenical Diaconia

The WCC-ED study document is a strong reminder that competence building for diaconal action and presence in fields of social needs as well as in environmental stewardship is an essential priority in all churches, as the world is confronted with huge challenges of social inequality, long-term impacts of climate change, and destruction of natural biodiversity. Achieving the core goals of the SDG agenda will not be possible without involving the voice and services of churches and religious communities that have a mobilizing capacity beyond national governments. Demand for highly competent experts in diaconal services, poverty education, and ecological transformation will certainly be on the rise in the years to come. State governments should provide platforms of mutual collaboration and financial support with churches and other religious actors to realize their potential for eco-social transformation. It would be worthwhile for the WCC or regional actors of the ACT Alliance to convene a summit on training for diaconia and social services. The WCC and ACT could further deepen their joint vision for training and competence building for diaconia, social witness, and eco-diaconia while supporting the promotion of the closer collaboration of churches on these issues. Several sections in the last chapter of the WCC/ACT document are related to training and strengthening networks of ecumenical action in diaconia.[30]

The WCC document indicates a vast variety and different needs tor training for diaconia:

> Training for diaconia in local churches, specialized ministries and agencies is currently developed at very different levels depending on the history, socio-political circumstances and structural frameworks available for civil society organizations. In some churches, organization for diaconal institutions was not possible at all (for instance during the period of the Soviet Union). In other churches there are small scale diaconal activities possible within local churches, but no larger diaconal institutions yet. Some churches are in circumstances where it is possible to receive partial state support for Christian social diaconal services rendered on behalf of the churches, in other settings this is not possible at all. These differences are mirrored by very different levels of diaconal training and education for Christian social services. There are settings with strong and established schools, colleges or universities of applied sciences for diaconal sciences and social work, whereas in other settings there are almost no institutes of training and education available. (WCC 2022, p. 113)

The optimal follow-up project for the current WCC-ED study document would be a small research project to be pursued by a significant research institute to produce an advanced and diversified list with recognized and qualified training institutions of churches for ecumenical diaconia, prophetic diaconia, diaconia management, and ecological diakonia, which could be recommended to churches and agencies for increased mutual collaboration in training and research. This should be accompanied by considerations to revive a proper scholarship program, which is essential for building up competence in diaconal leadership for churches in the Global South and the East. Churches studying the WCC-ED document together should closely reflect on a strategic suggestion, which is given in this regard in the same section:

> Recent years have however seen a significant rise of interests and motivations for training capacities and curriculum model development in diaconia studies from churches in various contexts. It belongs to the core tasks of the ecumenical movement in the 21st century to enrich and facilitate diaconal learning and education in as many churches and different settings possible. This will allow

each local church to find access to appropriate training resources for strengthening diaconal capacity and to engage in mutual exchange, cross-border education, and ecumenical partnership programs for diaconal learning, which demands a common major commitment of diaconal agencies, development agencies, mission agencies, and educational networks.

This challenges churches, agencies, and ecumenical bodies to:

- Include capacity building in diaconia in their strategic and programmatic plans;
- Offer training opportunities for joint training and learning for employees and leaders, strengthening their diaconal competence;
- Elaborate and provide relevant training material;
- Encourage theological seminaries and other relevant institutions to include diaconia in their curricula and training programs.

Producing diaconal and developmental capacity building will also include a substantial reconsideration of the priorities of development agencies, with the goal of increased funding to be made available for study, training, and scholarships projects in this area.

There are promising institutes that provide an international training and research program on ecumenical diaconia such as the Institute for Diaconal Management Studies (IDM Institute) in Bielefeld,[31] which is partly funded by Bread for the World and UEM. I hope that it can continue its work.

13. Revitalizing the Common Memory of Ecumenical Social Ethics

It might belong to the role of those who have grown older to remind us of the value of those who have worked and witnessed before us in the cloud of witnesses and the treasures of wisdom, vision, and ecumenical tradition that they have given to us. These treasures of ecumenical wisdom and knowledge, particularly in the area of ecumenical social ethics, should not just stay with us personally but should stay with our organizations and networks that we have worked with despite the natural flow of different generations and staff. How to maintain an intergenerational management of ecumenical and diaconal knowledge in social organizations and churches is a challenge to the whole of the ecumenical movement but also specifically to Christian development organizations and church-related social services, and this applies to churches both in the Global North as well as in the Global South. How do we avoid the loss of ecumenical memory weakening the future witness and service of churches in the global ecumenical fellowship? How do we secure a smooth transition to future generations without keeping specialized knowledge as a personal property clinging only to well-established and closed communication circles? Each Christian church and organization will have to answer these questions in one way or another.

With shrinking state- and church-related funds made available, Christian diaconia and development cooperation will also have to be more creative to revive the ancient culture of charitable donations and philanthropy in order to answer the rising needs for humanitarian and social development assistance. How to develop proper standards for accountability and proper ethical standards for private actors in this field is a debate worth continuing without ideological one-sidedness or naiveté. We should be encouraged to learn again that churches in previous centuries and in different regional contexts have developed impressive institutions of diaconal assistance, not just in in charity approaches but also for political advocacy and justice concerns. To be explorative in terms of new models of financial sharing and new mechanisms of ecumenical sharing of resources in ecumenical diaconia is a priority for the next decades, as indicated in chapter 6.6. on diaconal assets in the WCC ED paper (WCC 2022, p. 73ff).

14. Keeping Together Social and Ecological Diaconia

Economic inequality, climate change, and its effects on the health situation of both humanity and the realm of animals as well as the global recession of democracy belong to the core challenges of the 21st century, which any involvement of churches in social diaconia

must address. Keeping together social diakonia, which articulates practical answers to the growing economic inequality and exclusivist tendencies of autocratic governments as well as eco-diakonia, which deals with the destruction of our planet and its natural resources, which cannot be seen anymore as exclusive or antagonistic mandates: they belong together inseparably. Experts have shown that the depletion of natural resources is accelerating each year. This is made visible by the preponing of the date of the so-called "earth overshoot day": the projected date in the year when our current economic system has exhausted all its reservoirs in terms of natural resources for which it is entitled if this is balanced with the regenerative capacities of this Earth. For Germany, this earth overshoot day was projected in 2022 as having occurred already on 4 May, for humanity as a whole on 3 August, for South Africa on 1 June.[32] All of the resources, which proportionately could be used and absorbed this year within the given planetary boundaries, are gone by this day: any continuation of the same rates of resources' depletion is simply living at the expense of future generations, i.e., living on credit. As the introduction of binding regulations for the upper limits related to resources extraction would need to be obligatory for all; this implies a shrinking economy instead of a continuously growing economy, and this will accelerate the social conflicts between different income groups. How to reduce global resources extraction while not fueling global income distribution and social subsidies conflicts will be a core challenge for steering a course of a just ecological transition while being the key theme of ecumenical diaconia. Keeping the issues of justice and overcoming of social inequality and exclusion as well as issues of the ecological transition to a new circular and non-fossil economy on the agenda with paramount priority will be the challenge to remain for decades on the agenda of both ACT Alliance and the WCC. How to hold together social justice and protection of ecological resources? How to develop both models of sustainable diaconia and of inclusive communities will remain the key task for the years ahead, which is the period of the biggest transition of humankind since industrialization. It was only in October 2021 that diaconia Germany agreed and decided on guidelines to make "sustainability" (Nachhaltigkeit) a key criterion for all its operational dimensions and implementation of this is still underway in its different layers.[33] Both issues, the transition to sustainable models of development as well as the overcoming of growing social inequality, are the key thematic areas that have been explored and laid out in the contributions of two international volumes for training in ecumenical diakonia, which were produced for the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe in September 2022 and have been presented to its Ecumenical Conversation on Ecumenical Diaconia, namely the twin publications of the International Handbook on Ecumenical Diaconia (Ampony et al. 2021) and the International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco Diaconia (Beros et al. 2022).[34]

15. Conclusion: Strengthening Ecumenical Diaconia as a Common Christian Response to Three Major Challenges of the 21st Century

To summarize, we have three key observations from these reflections:

(a) The joint study document of the WCC and ACT alliance represents a unique chance to intensify the ongoing global learning and dialogue process on the relationship between churches and diaconia, which can involve all segments of World Christianity, including mainline churches, orthodox, evangelical, and charismatic churches, which potentially can become a push for renewing social and ecological awareness and witness of churches globally, in other words to reformulate something like what Social Protestantism has been for some of the western churches in Europe and the North Atlantic. It presents a new step in the development of ecumenical diaconia because it abandons the individualistic concept of diaconia as individual acts of mercy and seeks ways to help people in need, which is characteristic of all churches, though diverse in shape and context. The transformative potential of social and ecological diaconia should be much more intentionally realized by churches, development agencies, and national governments.

(b) The ecumenical discourse on ecumenical diaconia presents a challenge to deepen and rediscover the integrity and comprehensiveness of the diaconal approach of Christian churches and to more visibly relate to each other aspects of social diaconia and ecological diaconia in a context where the SDG agenda is far from being likely to be fulfilled and completed by 2030 (WCC. EC 10 Report 2022).[35] It has been a major learning process in the history of World Christianity to move from individual-charity-based diaconia to structural diaconia, political lobbying work, and international social ethics, but it is still a major new learning process to move from social and political diaconia to ecological diaconia today. How to spell out ecological sustainability ethics for diaconal agencies and services to integrate the diversity of diaconal actors (i.e., churches with migration or ethnic and confessional minority backgrounds) into the national networks of engagement for social and ecological diaconia remains a key mandate for the future. The plea to focus on a massive new engagement for ecumenical diaconia in World Christianity is also an answer to the unprecedented intensification and accumulation of the global poverty, climate, hunger, health, and militarization crises, which have led to the fact that, for the first time in the history of the Human Development Index (HDI), trends have been moving backward on a global scale at an alarming rate for the last 2–3 years.[36] Thus, the strengthening ecumenical diaconia also presents a common Christian response to the three major challenges of the 21st century: rising economic inequality, the climate and health crises, and global recession of democracy.

(c) In a context where church membership seems to be shrinking and social as well as humanitarian needs and ecological disasters seem to be dramatically increasing, the integration of churches and social and ecological diaconia is also a vital contribution to strengthen the visibility, outreach, and relevance of Christian churches both in western as well as in nonwestern societies. It is far from being determined what is meant by diaconia remaining the "other and second language" of the Gospel, which is equal in theological significance and communicative reach to the language of proclamation and sermons.

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Notes

1 See: https://www.oikoumene.org/news/major-wcc-and-act-publication-on-ecumenical-diaconia-now-available-in-german; all language versions available on: https://www.oikoumene.org/de/resources/publications/ecumenical-diaconia (accessed on 10 January 2023).

2 See: https://ausliebe.diakonie.de/ (accessed on 16 January 2023).

3 See: https://ausliebe.diakonie.de/#historie (accessed on 16 January 2023).

4 It is remarkable to note various important new developments in this regard: 1889 Christian Social Union in England; 1887 Association protestante pour l'etude pratique des question sociale in France; 1890 Protestant Social Congress in Germany; 1907 Walter Rauschenbusch's major and profound publication: The Social Gospel, which was reprinted in 23 editions!; 1908 Social Creed of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America; 1914 World Alliance for Friendship through the Churches Konstanz (Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze); 1924 Birmingham: the famous Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) which published 12 large volumes on pioneering Christian social thinking); finally as a culminating event 1925 the First World Conference of Life and Work in Stockholm, which founded this crucial second wing of the early pre-institutional ecumenical movement.

5 On the whole history also see: van der Velden and Schulpen (2002).

6 See: https://www.vemission.org/en/ (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[7] See: https://www.cevaa.org/ (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[8] ACT Alliance is composed of more than 140 faith-based member organisations working in long-term development, advocacy and humanitarian assistance. See: https://actalliance.org/ (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[9] The WCC is a fellowship of 352 member churches who together represent more than half a billion Christians around the world.

[10] See LWF consultation on the future of theological education in Wittenberg 2012: https://www.lutheranworld.org/news/lwf-general-secretary-calls-greater-role-diaconia-and-advocacy-theological-formation (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[11] See particularly the work on Diaconia in the IECLB in Brazil from which the later General Secretary of ACT Alliance Rudelmar Bueno de Fario emerged. See: https://www.oikoumene.org/de/news/new-act-general-secretary-envisions-more-prophetic-diaconia (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[12] See: https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/church-organizations-explore-ways-of-strengthening-relationships (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[13] WCC/ACT Study Document on Ecumenical Diaconia, 2017, Introduction p. 2; This original earlier version of the paper from 2017 is available on a website of the Church of Norway: https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/smm/dokumenter/2019/wcc-ecumenical-diaconia-study-document.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[14] See: https://actalliance.org/act-news/Diaconia/ (accessed on 10 January 2023); https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Called-to-Transformation-Ecumenical-Diaconia_web-Low-Res.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[15] See: https://www.brot-fuer-die-welt.de/themen/atlas-der-zivilgesellschaft/ (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[16] See: https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/message-of-the-indigenous-peoples-pre-assembly-28-30-august-2022-karlsruhe-germany (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[17] See. https://www.partner-religion-development.org/ (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[18] See: ACT Global Strategy 2019–2026, section on role of religion and faith in: https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/EN_act-strategy-2019-26_web-3.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2023), page 13.

[19] See the debate on the IASC Guidelines on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Emergency Settings from 2007 and following studies on essential knowledge for humanitarian health actors about mental health and psychosocial support(MHPSS) in humanitarian emergencies. See: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/legacy_files/IASC%20RG%20doc%20health%20audience.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[20] Fidon Mwombeki during his presentation on the conference of Diaconia and Development of EWDE in Berlin, September 2022 (non-published manuscript).

[21] Section 6.7. Diaconal Language in WCC-ED study document, page 75.

[22] See: https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/daclist.htm (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[23] https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-standards/DAC-List-of-ODA-Recipients-for-reporting-2022-23-flows.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[24] See: https://www.oikoumene.org/news/archbishop-antje-jackelen-opens-act-assembly-in-uppsala (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[25] See: https://actalliance.org/act-assembly-posts/story-of-hope-wcc-act-alliance-pilot-learning-process-in-malawi-and-cameroon-to-strengthen-collaboration/ (accessed on 10 January 2023); also in: https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-act-alliance-pilot-learning-process-in-malawi-and-cameroon-to-strengthen-collaboration (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[26] See Fidon Mwombeki from AACC in a statement from 2022: "We face a problem of structural asymmetry between European and Southern churches, in the sense that in the South there are no strong "specialized ministries" like in the north. Even where there are, they have been formed as a result of encouragement, or demand from the north, for the churches to create similar structures like Europe. So, several "development services" have been established by some churches in the South which till now cause some frictions with the local churches. This asymmetry has created challenges for ACT Alliance, whose "majority" who are technically churches in the South, many do not even know or remember they are members of ACT Alliance. For that reason, the national ACT Forums in several countries are basically formed by national offices of Northern based specialized ministries, with minimal involvement of the national churches who have no separate "ministries." We must act quickly address this asymmetry to achieve the justifiable aspiration of ACT Alliance.", in his contribution to KDE conference Berlin Sept 2022, non-published manuscript.

[27] See WCC Report of Programme Guidelines Committee page 7, point 21, in: https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/RECEIVED-PGC01rev-Report-of-the-Programme-Guidelines-Committee.pdf (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[28] Very promising regional developments and case studies in this regard can be noticed for instance in Chinese churches, in Russian free churches, in Syrian churches, but also in Latin American churches, see the contributions of Theresa Carino and Ruomin Liu (p. 229ff), of Tatiana Gorbacheva (p. 159ff), of Alexi Chehade (p. 179ff) and of Rudolf von Sinner (page 269ff) in: International Handbook on Ecumenical Diaconia, Oxford 2021, Regnum Books, Part II, page 151ff.

[29] Terminologies and different cultural forms vary: 'Migrant churches' is a term often used, but not always adequate–particularly as Christianity is a migratory religion from its very start. 'International churches', 'non-historic denominations', 'diaspora churches', 'multi-cultural churches' are also used. See on current debates: Etzelmüller and Rammelt (2021).

[30] See: Section: 10.6. Strengthening structures of shared action. 10.7. Strengthening networks of cooperation. 10.8. Strengthening communication. 10.9. Strengthening diaconal capacity; Page 112ff.

[31] See: https://idwm-bielefeld.de/start (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[32] https://www.overshootday.org/newsroom/country-overshoot-days/ (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[33] See: https://www.diakonie.de/pressemeldungen/konferenz-diakonie-und-entwicklung-bekennt-sich-zu-un-nachhaltigkeitszielen (accessed on 10 January 2023). https://www.regnumbooks.net/products/international-handbook-on-ecumenical-diaconia (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[34] https://www.regnumbooks.net/products/international-handbook-on-creation-care-and-eco-diaconia (accessed on 10 January 2023).

[35] See particularly the recommendation of the assembly in Karlsruhe 2022 (EC 10.2.) (unpublished report):

- Recommends that churches and partners should be involved in ecumenical, intercultural and interfaith learning on social witness, prophetic diaconia and eco-diaconia.
- Strengthen and expand confessional, ecumenical and ecological diaconia scholarship programs to increase capacity and leadership development in the areas of ecumenical diaconia, social ecumenical ethics and eco-diaconia.

[36] See: https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22 (accessed on 10 January 2023); https://phys.org/news/2022-09-human-years-covid-crises.html (accessed on 10 January 2023); https://www.undp.org/albania/blog/human-development-index-reverse-why-are-we-ignoring-world-breaking-point (accessed on 10 January 2023).

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