

# EU-CORD Strategic Direction 2022+

## Rising to the Challenge



## Foreword



This strategic direction is launched as EU-CORD enters its 25th year.

As we start a new cycle of engagement, we are conscious that the drive for partnership and collaboration, which launched the network, remains. As Christian civil society organisations, we seek our place in bringing transformation as imitators of God's kingdom in the here and now. As a network, we have chosen to embark on this journey together.

We are learning along the way. We work best when we are agile, unafraid to let go of things that are not working and ready to adapt to where there is energy and purpose. In uncertain times we know that we are stronger together.

Where we are challenged is in collectively defining the value that we seek from our network approach and making the most of the opportunities that present themselves.

The strategic direction 'Rising to the Challenge' is a response to the changing global social, economic, digital, health and political environment. It helps members and their partners to better support each other through these changes to bring reconciliation to an increasingly fragmented world.

As we name the challenges that stand in the way of peace, reconciliation, and human dignity, we need, now and more than ever, to rise to meet them.

It implies a more radical approach; it implies a sense of urgency, but it also implies a sense of hope – if we continue to rise, then we have not given up.

This strategic direction has come about following analysis of the Members Satisfaction Survey and 9-months of reflection by members on existing work areas, and extensive consultation to develop the strategic priorities. The strategy was approved by its members on 9th November 2021.

At the heart of our discussion has been exploring how we, individually and collectively, can increase our impact and what role EU-CORD can play to achieve this. Specifically, how we support each other as small and medium-sized Christian humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, and advocacy organisations to meet our goals in an environment where there are higher expectations, increasing competition for resources and a more complex operating environment.

**Ruth Faber**  
CEO, EU-CORD

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# Mission, Goals & Values

## Mission

*Christian organisations collaborating for a transformed, just, and equal world.*



## Goals



1. Supporting members and their national counterparts to develop partnership approaches, diversify funding options, and access funding from the European Union.
2. Equipping members and their national counterparts to advocate towards European policymakers on issues concerning humanitarian action, sustainable development, peacebuilding, and the role of faith-based organisations.
3. Communicating the added value of faith-based actors and the importance of engaging with faith communities towards the European Union and other civil society actors.
4. Developing the knowledge of members and their national civil society counterparts through mutual capacity building and learning.

## Values

**Relationship:** at the heart of the network lies the quality of the relationship between us and those with whom we partner and the degree to which we co-operate.

**Servanthood:** we strive to achieve our mutual goals in a spirit of servanthood, supporting each other while respecting each agency's specific identity.

**Compassion:** through our actions, we show that Christian organisations can bring a professional standard of work that embraces humanity and promotes dignity.

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## Strategic Priorities

5. Considering the 'existential funding challenge' address barriers to partnership and inspire more project collaboration.
6. Renewing our focus on funding opportunities and donor trends to help members navigate the EU institutional funding landscape.
7. Implementing an agile advocacy approach that will extend members' advocacy reach, joint approaches and impact the policy and practice of the European Union.
8. Enhancing collaboration at the senior level with our CEO's & Senior leaders better connected for encouragement, leadership insights, and issues impacting the sector.
9. Exploring how Christian identity is reflected in members' programming and how the added value of this can be communicated to donors and other stakeholders.
10. Further developing an online approach to mutual learning with a wider range of topics and with more opportunity for contribution from members and their national civil society counterparts

## New in our Programme Portfolio



**Funding & Partnerships:** refocusing this area of work to return it to the core mandate of funding, collaboration and looking for partnership for humanitarian, development & peacebuilding programming. We want to create more opportunities for interaction beyond physical meetings and engage with members national counterparts and offices globally.

**Advocacy Hub:** shift from fixed advocacy areas to an agile member-led approach with more efforts to link members working on similar advocacy topics and then making the link from the grassroots to the EU level.

**CEO & Senior Leaders:** extending the opportunity for relationship building beyond General Assembly meetings to foster strategic partnerships in programming, advocacy, and fundraising. We believe that 'iron sharpens iron' and that by challenging and supporting each other, we become stronger.

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**Faith in Action:** the strategy introduces a new area of work that brings together members interested in exploring and demonstrating the impact that faith organisations have through a project monitoring, evaluation and learning lens.

**Learning space:** a new dedicated programme that brings capacity building initiatives including workshops, seminars, and roundtables into one space. The programme will give members an opportunity to share and learn from each other, as well as external experts, on a wide variety of topics. With most of these taking place online, we extend opportunities for knowledge sharing to national counterpart staff and partners across the world. The dedicated space also means that other programme areas can focus on their core business.

The strategy also identifies several **cross-cutting priorities** to be integrated into all our work and which responds to some specific issues that are important to us:



1. Showcasing the role and contribution of faith-based organisations in a world of social polarisation.
2. Re-framing partnership norms and supporting local actors, including faith-actors, throughout the peace-development-humanitarian nexus.
3. Disability inclusive humanitarian and development action
4. Communicating the impact that the climate crisis is having on those who are least responsible and most affected.

We also commit to moving beyond the rhetoric and toward genuine efforts to counter bias, whether around race, gender, disability, or the agency of local civil society actors.

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## Challenges and Opportunities

We live and work in a challenging and complex environment. Globalisation means that domestic conditions are increasingly shaped by overseas events. There is a sense that the social contract between government and its citizens is unravelling, creating instability and a rise in social movements as social polarisation becomes more marked. Covid-19 has thrown into sharp focus the inequalities that still exist, be it within nations or between them. As countries become increasingly insular and nationalistic, we see the impacts on our sector both in terms of development policy and funding. While our individual supporters continue to be faithful, we see that there has been an erosion of trust in the NGO sector .

**1. One step forward, two steps back?** Once held certainties and assumptions are being stripped away. We have learned over the past few years that rights or attitudes which we had thought of as established– race, women’s rights, disability rights, civil society space are not as secure as supposed, fuelled in part by increasingly polarised politics and media.

*Our strategy needs to reaffirm our Christian understanding of human dignity, wellbeing, and flourishing, reminding ourselves and others that our resurrection message is a stripping of the barriers and tackling injustice where we find it. In this sense, we remain rooted in Christian social tradition.*

*Communicating value that we bring as Christian organisations to the sector in qualitative and quantitative terms is another important element that will be strengthened by the PMEL & Faith programme.*

**2. The meaning of partnership.** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development introduced a new narrative for development cooperation and aid relations, defining it in terms of ‘partnership.’ The European Union has taken a similar approach, shifting from ‘development cooperation’ to ‘international partnerships.’ External funding is now under the Directorate-General for International Partnerships with a corresponding name change for the Director-General. This has led to increasing reflection by civil society networks on how we reflect these changes and lead on the partnership discussion.

*Our strategy will have a stronger focus on bringing members together to partner with one another as the ability to form partnerships for advocacy, funding and programme support is going to be a key success factor for EU-CORD members in the coming years. The skills and the desire for partnership are not limited to EU-CORD members. Our ideas and approaches to partnership needs to inform engagement with a wide variety of actors with whom we are engaged, including national civil counterparts, communities, the private sector, research institutes, universities, governments, the EU institutions and other networks and alliances.*

*There are also opportunities to influence the EU, DG INTPA and DG ECHO as they develop their partnership approaches drawing on our experiences*

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*working with local actors, including faith actors. This piece of work will be reflected in all our programme areas as one of our cross-cutting issues and specifically between EU-CORD members in the Funding and Partnerships programme.*

**3.Cultural shifts and new narratives in the sector.** Criticism of the existing model of traditional humanitarian and development is growing. We see this in three critical areas 1) calls for the decolonisation of aid with voices such as Africa Rising, who are calling for empowerment and agency of countries and local civil society actors and movements to shift power from western INGO dominance. 2) the continued reflection on inherent bias in the sector, be it race, gender and disability. 3) criticism arising from insular and nationalistic tendencies that put donor aid targets at risk – a trend likely to increase as we enter a period of global economic uncertainty.

*If we are to remain credible, then we need to respond to these cultural shifts. This requires a strategic approach where we collectively come together to look inwardly and share our different perspectives, challenging our inherent bias and assumptions and taking a critical look at how we move forward to reconcile our European identity and power advantage versus empowerment and agency of others. In addition to this, we need to find new ways of arguing for donor aid targets, perhaps through a more 'solidarity' approach. This finds its expression in the cross-cutting theme of re-framing partnerships.*

**4.Longer-term impact of covid-19.** 2020 saw a major adjustment to our collective business approaches as we responded to the immediate impacts brought by covid-19. The disruption looks set to continue, and the impacts will be with us for a long time.

The pandemic highlighted growing inequalities, human rights abuses, vaccine nationalism, the vulnerability of the poor through weak health systems and overcrowding, which led to a general setback to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

For the first time since 1990, the World Bank expects the first increase in extreme poverty, with between 40-46 million more people surviving on less than \$1.25 a day. Estimates now suggest that the covid-19 outbreak will result in an increase in HIV, TB, and malaria-related deaths over the next five years, as up to 80 million children may lose out on routine vaccines. Decades of progress in key areas related to development, for example, school attendance is under threat.

In April 2020, 91% of the world's children were forced out of the classroom to prevent the virus from spreading, and these children are now at risk of falling behind in their education. Similarly, livelihood and employment opportunities ceased for many. All these factors contribute to a significant challenge for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is in its final decade.



For a network like EU-CORD, greater acceptance of virtual ways of working has greatly expanded our reach with engagement from a wider variety of partners and staff in countries outside of Europe than ever before.

*In terms of how we work as a network, we can build on the gains learned using digitalised approaches to adjust the way that we work – to be more inclusive and extend the reach that EU-CORD can have for its members and their national civil society counterparts.*

*The growing inequalities highlighted by the pandemic also reaffirms the continued need for advocacy on these themes.*

**5. Impact of the climate crisis.** We are now living through the impacts of the climate crisis, and global warming will exacerbate our growing vulnerability to disasters. Hundreds of millions of people will be in increased danger from climate-related hazards. The countries least responsible for global warming - the poorest nations – will be most affected by its consequences in both human and economic terms. The European Union is implementing this through the European Green Deal, which seeks for the EU to be climate neutral in 2050 – and this ambition extends to how it conducts its external actions, the so-called ‘greening’ of humanitarian and development aid.

We need to respond to this through our advocacy messaging, our programming, and the way in which we conduct our work. Our role is to draw attention to the impacts that climate change has amongst the varied communities where we are engaged and to lobby governments to implement new policy, approaches. We have an opportunity to contribute to the greening of our sector through theologically inspired practice. The impact of the climate crisis will be one of our cross-cutting thematic priorities.

**6. Changing dynamics and ways of working amongst EU-CORD members.** As a network organisation, members are also adapting to unfolding trends. This has a corresponding impact on the network. There is the impact of the UK’s exit from the European Union; shifts in members fundraising strategies which includes an expansion of affiliate offices within Europe and abroad, and closer integration between members, including mergers or a move towards federated models. We also see more geographically diversified governance and regional structures which challenge ideas of a ‘head office.’ We have seen that CEOs and Senior Leaders welcome opportunities to discuss these changes in a safe environment, and an example of this is the CEO Peer Group which launched in 2020 to discuss covid-19 impacts on organisations.

*In the coming years, we seek to strengthen opportunities for relationship building (and partnership) at the CEO and Senior Leaders level both through re-positioning our bi-annual General Assembly meetings and offering more opportunities for facilitated interaction between meetings. This will be held through the introduction of a specific CEO and Senior Leaders programme.*

*At the same time, we need to shift to more agile and innovative ways of working, which can enable us to be more responsive to meeting members’ needs and expectations.*

To address these challenges, we have identified strategic priorities that closely link with our network goals.

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# Our rising



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## Strategic Priorities in detail

### *1. Implementing an agile advocacy approach that will extend members' advocacy reach, encourage joint approaches, and impact the policy and practice of the European Union.*

**Background to the strategy:** EU-CORD members are engaged in a wide variety of advocacy initiatives that reflect the diversity of members' operations. From supporting the localisation agenda in humanitarian aid to advocating for a new UN treaty on the rights of the elderly. While members are committed to advocacy initiatives, they do not always have the capacity to meet this ambition.

Over the past few years, we have built up a good track record in terms of our advocacy with and through networks such as CONCORD, VOICE, IDDC and the informal Brussels faith-based group. We have developed good working relations with Caritas Europa, Act Alliance EU and Islamic Relief Worldwide.

As a network, however, we have learned that we need to develop a radically different advocacy approach to what we have implemented in the past. Approaches that focus on mapping members advocacy activities and then identifying 3-4 long term network-advocacy areas is not a good model for us. We can find ourselves locked into the advocacy areas which are not responsive enough to changes in members' advocacy own advocacy interests, or we end up with a lowest common denominator where members fail to see where the advocacy work is of direct relevance.

As a result, a new strategy is proposed which will deepen awareness amongst members of each other's advocacy initiatives, connect members working on similar issues and link members with EU advocacy opportunities, thus enabling members to extend their reach at the EU level. Where members have initiatives that they would like to bring to the EU but who lack the capacity to do so, the secretariat will continue to conduct this on their behalf. Providing expertise on EU policy influencing will remain a core function of the secretariat.

This strategic priority is implemented through the **Advocacy Hub**.

#### **Advocacy Hub objectives:**



- Develop an agile and responsive advocacy approach that supports members own advocacy initiatives.
- Build partnerships with EU-CORD members and other organisations working on similar goals to create to meet advocacy goals in a strategic way.
- Maintain oversight of key policies, events, and opportunities – relevant to members - that we can influence.
- Build on existing partnership arrangements and develop relationships with EU Institutions and National Government development/humanitarian agencies in Europe and in partner countries.

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**Value to Members**

More opportunities for members to team up with other EU-CORD members for enhanced advocacy reach and impact.

Giving member advocacy topics a global focus.

Timely information from the secretariat on advocacy opportunities: policies; debates; etc., in the EU institutions and the best ways to engage.

Giving member access to Secretariat expertise in EU advocacy lobby and advocacy.

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*2. Exploring how Christian identity is reflected in members' programming and how the added value of this can be communicated to donors and other stakeholders.*

**Background to the strategy:** this new area of focus for the network emerged to prominence in 2019-20 as members indicated their interest in working together to explore shared understanding and need for measurement of the role of faith in their programmes. The first meetings began as a task group under the Collaborations for Resourcing group but developed into a programme in its own right. Starting as a journey to explore and identify faith indicators, the programme has so far developed a 'Theory of Change', received learning from project monitoring, evaluation, and learning experts both outside and within the network and provided a platform for further learning regarding faith and designing measurement of faith in programmes. In taking this work forward, we broaden the programme potential beyond a focus on 'indicators' to include other measurements and ways of communicating around faith impact, value and relevance.

This strategic priority is implemented through the **Faith in Action** programme.

**Faith in Action objectives:**

- To share how Christian identity is reflected in programming from design to evaluation.
- Explore how the faith dimension can be qualitatively or quantitatively measured from a project monitoring, learning and evaluation perspective.
- Explore partnership opportunities to further this work, including with knowledge institutions to increase learning.

**Value to members**

To increase understanding of how faith can contribute to better humanitarian, development, peacebuilding, and advocacy outcomes and communicate this to external stakeholders.

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To learn from one another as to how the faith dimension can be measured and documented.

Provide a forum where members can grow in their collective shared understanding of the role of faith and its measurement in programmes.

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*3. Considering the 'existential funding challenge,' address barriers to partnership and inspire more project collaboration.*

*4. Renewing our focus on funding opportunities and donor trends with a view to helping members to navigate the EU institutional funding landscape.*

**Background to the strategy:** while the programme has taken slightly different forms over the years, this long-established area of work helps members navigate the complexities of new approaches to EU humanitarian and development funding under EuropeAid. While the bi-annual meetings and physical training in accessing EU Development funding have been appreciated, it has been difficult to encourage sharing and activity outside of these fixed points. We have also noticed that while coming together to share information about donors and looking for joint funding opportunities, we have shared a common goal – this has been slipping off the agenda in favour of capacity building or discussion on broad programming themes. In this strategic period, we want to re-orientate the group back to the fundamentals of funding & partnership - to help members to increase their funding portfolio and project reach. Space for capacity building and exploration of thematic areas of interest will be retained in the new Learning Space programme.

This strategic priority is implemented through the **Funding & Partnerships** programme.

#### **Funding & Partnerships objectives:**



- Encourage partnership approaches between members through deepening knowledge, building relationships, and brokering links between members where there is complementarity.
- Track, share and discuss funding trends and opportunities in private and institutional fundraising with a special focus on European funding sources.
- Support those eligible to receive funding from the European Institutions such as DG ECHO, DG INPTA) to apply for funding, understanding partnership models and navigate contractual obligations.

#### **Value to members**

An opportunity to build connections with like-minded organisations for potential partnerships.

Up-to-date information about institutional funding trends and funding opportunities from the EU institutions and European development agencies.

To learn how other Christian NGOs target institutional funding and potential other donors.

Improved knowledge of and capacity to access and manage humanitarian and development funding.

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High level of interaction and engagement by institutional fundraising amongst EU-CORD members: more active information sharing and support. In the European context, visibility to organisations profile and credibility as humanitarian and development actors.

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*5. Enhancing collaboration at the senior level with our CEO's & Senior leaders better connected to each other for encouragement, leadership insights, and issues impacting the sector.*

Background to the strategy: over the past 5-years, the twice-yearly General Assembly meetings have become an important moment for CEOs and Senior Leaders to interact, learn and share. These interactions, however, have been limited to the General Assembly space, but as leaders face increasingly complex issues, there is a sense that we can do more to support each other. The CEO Peer group session set up during the covid-19 crisis has shown that there is potential to extend this interaction outside of the General Assembly space and to better position the General Assembly as a meeting that focuses more on the needs of CEOs & Senior Leaders.

This strategic priority is implemented through the **CEO & Senior Leaders** programme.

**CEO & Senior Leaders objectives:**



- Create safe and stimulating meeting spaces where CEO's & Senior Leaders can learn, be challenged, and supported.
- Deepen personal relationships and organisational understanding to move us towards more strategic partnerships.

**Value to members**

Opportunity to meet and build relationships and partnerships with other faith-leaders in the sector from across Europe.

Leveraging the scale and profile of the network to engage with speakers on topics of interest.

A formal and informal setting to explore strategic partnerships.

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*6. Developing an online approach to learning with a wider variety of topics and with more opportunity for contribution from members and their national civil society counterparts as a means of mutual capacity building and learning more about each other.*

Background to the strategy: while capacity building has been a long-standing objective of the network for the first time, the Learning Space brings together all our thematic knowledge sharing and capacity building elements (freeing up the other programme areas to focus on their core business). Traditionally, the learning has taken place during

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physical meetings and in the regional training programmes which have taken place in Africa, Asia, and South America. This priority does not exclude physical workshops; rather, it emphasises the opportunity to do these online.

This strategic priority is implemented through the **Learning Space** programme.

#### Learning Space objectives:



- Host learning topics that are dedicated to learning and capacity sharing that complements EU-CORD's programme portfolio through workshops, seminars, and roundtables.
- Give members the opportunity to showcase their knowledge and expertise.
- Make use of the virtual learning environment to enable a wide range of staff and national civil society counterparts to participate.

#### Value to members

Opportunity to showcase work done in your organisation to an internal and sometimes external audience.

Access to a broad range of speakers and topics.

Where possible, addressing the faith aspect either as faith-based organisations and added dimensions of work with faith communities or leaders.

Accessible information in terms of cost and commitment.

Raise member capacities in areas linked to our other programme areas: Advocacy Hub, PMEL, CEO & Senior Leaders, Fundraising and Partnerships.

This strategic priority presents the themes which are cross-cutting across all our areas of work:

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*7. Incorporating the cross-cutting themes of 1) the role and contribution of faith-based organisations 2) disability-inclusive humanitarian and development action 3) re-framing partnership 4) the climate crisis.*

**Background to the strategy:** There are four issues that have emerged in the network as cross-cutting themes. Two of these, 1) the role of faith actors in the humanitarian and development sector and 2) disability inclusion, have been with us for several years (but not necessarily explicitly referenced in our strategic approach). In addition, for this strategic period, we have identified two more themes, 3) re-framing partnerships and 4) climate crisis.

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Role of faith actors: we have been engaged in several initiatives, primarily through the informal Brussels faith-based networks group. These have been instrumental in giving us visibility as a faith-based network towards the EU and in emphasising the role that faith plays in achieving good humanitarian and development outcomes. We are also a member of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD), which brings together governments, UN and FBO's to address the SDGs from a faith lens.

Disability inclusive humanitarian and development action: our approach to the Sustainable Development Goals has been to align with the leave no one behind commitment rather than with a particular set of goals. This has seen its fullest expression in our work on disability inclusion. Here we have developed a good reputation working with the International Disability and Development Consortium (IDDC) – of which we are a member, and with the European Disability Forum (EDF) to advocate for the EU Institutions to uphold their commitments under the UN CRPD. In this space, we have contributed valuable experience as largely 'mainstream' CSO's with experience working with the EU on development and humanitarian programming.

Re-framing partnership: the partnership piece finds its expression through the strategy. As a cross-cutting element, we remind ourselves of the need for new thinking and approaches while working with others on the same journey. In terms of our credibility, we need to show how we are thinking and changing – especially around partnership with local civil society actors. Some members are further along this journey than others.

Climate crisis: there has long been agreement in the network that the impacts of the climate crisis are having an increasingly negative impact on our development and humanitarian outcomes. Our challenge has been in finding an appropriate framing. At a global level, the next few years are crucial, and we have a responsibility to contribute whatever part we can.

As cross-cutting themes, we will:

- Continue to communicate the role and contribution of faith-based organisations and the need to engage with communities from a faith perspective towards the European Institutions and other civil society actors.
- Continue to advocate for the EU to uphold its commitments under the UN CRPD and frame this as our contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals in terms of the leave no one behind commitment.
- Re-frame our understanding and approach to work more inclusively with local actors, including faith actors, disabled-peoples organisations, and other representative groups in advocacy programming.
- Communicate the impact that the climate crisis is having on the communities where we work and integrate these messages across all aspects of our work.

### **Value to members**

Raising their profile as faith-based organisations and the value that they bring to the sector.

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Increased visibility of their disability-inclusive programming and linking this with our advocacy work brings added legitimacy.

New partnership models

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The final strategic priority is internally focused.

### *8. Strengthening the network's resilience and raising our profile.*

#### **Background to this strategy**

EU-CORD needs to be fit-for-purpose in how it positions itself as a faith-based network and as a credible partner and interlocutor. This is more than just a communications exercise but involves looking at all aspects of our organisation to show how we are responsive to a changing social and cultural context. In doing so, we open ourselves to be more inclusive and to encourage members in their own efforts to develop their own partnerships.

In the years preceding this strategy, there has been a significant shift in the cultural landscape. From the 2018 headlines about sexual abuse in the humanitarian sector to the #MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter, and the discourse on the decolonisation of aid and the role and legitimacy of northern NGOs, the impacts of the climate emergency on our sector and latterly, the continuing impacts of covid-19. As a faith-based network, it is crucial that we are systematically reviewing our current thinking and practice – transforming ourselves to be transformative.

The **Secretariat** has oversight of this strategic priority.

#### **Secretariat Objectives:**

- Bring clarity and a stronger voice to our position as a faith-based network.
- Bring in more voices and participation from members, including their national civil society counterparts, taking advantage of increased working in the online space to allow for a more open conversation on 'difficult' topics.
- Invest in our digital presence, especially the website, as our primary means of communicating the work of the network to an external audience.
- Streamline and improve the quality of our internal publications and tools in terms of functionality (ease of use) and design.
- Review of internal provision and simplification of governance and administrative compliance with a thorough review of legal statutes, Members Guide, Internal Regulations, codes of conduct and organisational policies to make us fit for purpose.
- Construct appropriate shared workspace and communication channels that members and the secretariat can use to best share information and encourage joint working.

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