

Sustainability Task Group Report

Terms of Reference

The Executive Committee, at its meeting in May 2021, formed a task group to address the sustainability challenges of the WCRC and resolved the following assignments:

- intensify the process of designing a long-term, comprehensive sustainability model that will address the challenge of the structural deficit of the core budget;
- the development of a process to activate the whole Communion to more strongly contribute to the work of the WCRC with witness, prayer, human resources, and financial resources;
- intensify the processes to secure funds to cover the shortfalls in the 2021 and 2022 core budget;
- intensify the process of developing a medium-term budget plan that will allow the election of a general secretary in 2022;
- engage a consultant to analyze why the WCRC is having such problems with sustainability;
- explore models used by other organizations.

1. The Understanding of Sustainability

The Sustainability Task Group engaged with the definition of sustainability in the strategic plan that has already guided earlier sustainability initiatives of the WCRC:

Sustainability should not be defined narrowly in financial terms. We are sustained in all things by the Lord Jesus Christ, who brings our communion into being and nurtures it according to God's will. While organizational sustainability, including financial stability, is one important part of the faithful living out of our communion, we also recognize and celebrate that we have much to share that sustains us in time and space. We take seriously the sharing of prayer, time, friendship, goodwill, and all the gifts of the Spirit as we carry out our ministry. All this is integral to the sustainability of the WCRC.

The task group found that this definition was well suited to guide the process to develop a long-term sustainability model as it was expressed in the terms of reference and, therefore, decided to put the activation of the Communion into the centre of the fundraising initiative to reach long-term sustainability.

At the same time, the task group was aware that also the short- and medium-term sustainability goals require urgent attention and therefore discussed how best to intensify the processes to secure funds to cover the shortfalls in the 2022 core budget and secure sufficient funds to allow the election of a general secretary.

2. The Work of the Sustainability Task Group

The task group had meetings in July and August and discerned that—seeing the increasing financial difficulties of the churches that till now contribute the bulk to the core budget—successful fundraising would depend on creating stronger enthusiasm and commitment in all the member churches.

To develop the best approach to meet this challenge, the task group decided that it would involve the regions to get advice about tone and asks most suitable to the member churches in a particular area. In this process the regional leadership would also be invited to approach member churches as ambassadors of the WCRC sustainability initiative.

3. Methodology

The task group decided on the following methodology:

- The sustainability initiative shall begin with **perspective discussions** with people representing the regions in leadership bodies of the WCRC (Executive Committee, regional councils, Finance Committee, Sustainability Task Group etc.) to
 - explain the financial challenges of the WCRC core budget;
 - assess the potential of the particular region to contribute to the sustainability of the WCRC (focusing upon contributions to the core budget, but also encourage other ways of supporting staff capacities and programmes);
 - define approaches and methods to approach member churches in the particular regions;
 - motivate the participants of the perspective discussions to act as ambassadors to promote the sustainability initiatives.
- **Communication with church leaders** to
 - make them aware of the difficult financial situation of the WCRC;
 - discuss ways to increase awareness and involvement of the churches in the mission of the WCRC;
 - explore potentials and limitations in the different churches to contribute to the sustainability of the WCRC on all levels;
 - encourage the church leadership to make the sustainability of the WCRC a priority in their churches.
- Convening **round tables** and initiating **individual discussions** with selected member churches to
 - investigate how contributions to the WCRC can be increased or at least stabilized;
 - explore how best to mainstream the support of the WCRC in churches and congregations, ministries, and organizations connected to them by creating opportunities for more intensive involvement in the life of the WCRC;
 - secure long term commitments to support the sustainability of the WCRC.

4. Activities during the Sustainability Initiative

To this day, the sustainability initiative has been in contact with the following regional bodies:

- Africa: Africa Communion of Reformed Churches (ACRC) Council, letter to all African member churches;
- Europe: WCRC Europe Steering Committee and European members of the Executive Committee, Finance Committee, and Sustainability Task Group;
- Northeast Asia: regional church leaders;
- Caribbean and North America: Caribbean and North American Area Council (CANAAAC) Steering Committee, members of the Sustainability Task Group, conversations with Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, Reformed Church in America, and Christian Reformed Church in North America.

The CGS shall approach the following regions in the first quarter of 2022, while work in other regions will be continued:

- Indonesia
- Latin America Alliance of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (AIPRAL)
- South Asia
- Southeast Asia
- Pacific

4.1 Discussions with Regions

The perspective discussions with the regions revealed a great variety of structures, self-understandings, and visions. The spectrum reaches from an emphasis on fellowship and sharing (e.g. in the NEAAC region) to a commitment to jointly live out the vision and mission of the WCRC in the particular region (e.g., ACRC, CANAAAC). Some regions focus on planning and implementing programmes in their own right (e.g. WCRC Europe).

The “COVID and Beyond” process demonstrated the importance of the regions for the life and work of the WCRC. While the established regions have active structures to communicate and cooperate with each other and with the global Communion, churches in areas without a regional structure are much less connected. To lay the ground for increased contributions from these regions, the Sustainability Task Group urgently sees the need to establish regional structures in areas where they do not yet exist.

All regions that we have been in contact with see the need for bringing the WCRC closer to the member churches and involving them more intensively in the mission of the Communion. Without such an increased commitment, it will be difficult to find viable solutions for the financial problems. But if the WCRC succeeds in kindling a renewed engagement, the regions see a possibility to overcome the problems. One of the positive results of the discussions so far is that the participants have—in different degrees—committed themselves to be ambassadors to make the initiative a success.

While the regions support the sustainability process, most of them do not see themselves in the position to contribute significantly to fundraising initiatives. The majority of members of the regional bodies are volunteers and have no access to the bodies of the larger churches that take decisions on financial contributions. To support those members on WCRC governance bodies who are not in the leadership of member churches, efforts should be made to enhance the connection between governance bodies and church leadership.

4.2 Discussions with Member Churches

The discussions with member churches resembles those with the regions in several ways. All churches that we have been in contact with expressed their commitment to the WCRC and many of them noted the wish to participate more in the life of the Communion. Both expressions are connected: We heard that without intensified contact, it would be difficult to maintain or even increase contributions. Many churches face financial difficulties themselves. They hope that participating in the work of the WCRC will contribute to the life of their congregations, which will lead to a stronger ecumenical commitment, which will justify contributions to the WCRC.

The collegial general secretariat (CGS) has begun its discussion with member churches in North America and had good meetings with PC(USA), UCC, RCA, and CRCNA. In all cases, the conversations yielded ideas for increased cooperation. From the American churches that were contacted, the CGS received signals that current contributions would be maintained and perhaps even increased.

4.3 Discussions with Mission and Relief Organizations

We experience that mission and relief organizations are interested in closer cooperation with the WCRC. The Presbyterian Mission Agency and *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World, Germany) want to partner with the planned advocacy programme of the WCRC. This will allow the appointment of a female executive secretary as demanded by the strategic plan with the portfolio of mission and advocacy, as well as the creation of a pilot of an advocacy network in Africa (see the Report of the Collegial General Secretariat for details).

The Sustainability Task Group welcomes this initiative because it offers the chance to finance an area of work where the WCRC will be very close to the needs of its member churches without requiring funds from the core budget.

Increased programme funds shall also bring more money into core budget. The partners who contribute to the programme budget allow a certain percentage be used to finance the administration of the programme work.

5. Summary

While these processes in the regions point in the right direction, they do not yet offer immediate solutions for the short-, medium-, and long-term needs of the WCRC core budget.

We nevertheless want to state that there is a realistic expectation to overcome the financial challenges of the WCRC in the long term. There is sufficient financial potential in the Communion and there are chances to tap these to cover the needs of the core budget.

The problem will be to sustain the organization during the time that we need to build an effective sustainability campaign.

However, these challenges will not go beyond the level that we are facing already now. If we want to see the situation in more positive terms: At the present moment, a balanced core

budget will allow continuing the operations of the WCRC in the structures of the interim. Additional financial commitments like having an in-person Executive Committee meeting or the appointment of a general secretary can only be funded from the core budget after substantial success in fundraising has been made.

The amounts that need to be raised are substantial: In 2023 and the following years, the budget deficit that would need to be covered by additional contributions would amount to almost 400,000 euro. At this point in time, no additional income can be guaranteed to fill this gap.

This situation requires careful coordination between the Officers Committee, Executive Committee, Sustainability Task Group, and General Secretary Search Committee to prepare the right decisions for the work of the WCRC in the coming years.

Irrespective of which decision shall be taken, we recommend that the Executive Committee extends the work of the Sustainability Task Group to the next General Council, to develop a longer-term sustainability plan, with regular reports to be made at each Executive Committee meeting and the General Council. We believe that with this extension we can present a realistic sustainability plan that covers secure funding of the core commitments and activities of the WCRC.