



## WACC - NETWORK DEVELOPMENT

*Note on options to strengthen WACC's network development - Brussels 24 August 2021*

### Introduction

With support of WACC's donor Bread for the World, ODS was able to facilitate a process of reflection on the membership approach and structure of the association. This reflection built on existing thinking done by WACC on its challenges and opportunities around membership and its network,<sup>1</sup> as well as WACC's draft strategic plan 2022-2026 and its Theory of Change.<sup>2</sup> After a briefing and light desk research on WACC and its existing membership model, two workshops were organised with a wider group of stakeholders from across the association. The first workshop was aimed at sharing a diagnostic of WACC's current situation, combined with some research done by ODS on other network models in peer organizations. From the discussion, ODS distilled a number of models for the future of WACC's membership and presented these back to the group in the second workshop. Together, the group discussed elements of the different options that are fitting and aspects that are less relevant to WACC's mission and situation. The input from this second workshop, has been processed into this note, which briefly describes ODS' analysis, advice and action plan.

### Current situation

The main reason for considering changing the way WACC works with members and other stakeholders in its network, is that without an evolution the association will run the risk of losing relevance. WACC will need to ensure that diminishing membership is compensated elsewhere, that emerging issues, groups and people are able to understand WACC's added value and are willing to work together, and that income generation is diversified. The current approach serves a specific group of existing members well but is not as appealing to younger generations, conducive to ad hoc engagements or a dynamic approach to collaborating with others. Even the existing members however, is not as active as WACC would like them to be.

There is a shared sense of direction and certainly shared values however, there are many structures in place to collaborate and WACC has always worked closely with partners. This offers opportunities for solidarity and common direction that could be used more effectively, for gathering intelligence, disseminating the work of WACC globally and offer each other support. Members are also a source of accountability and legitimacy and can be expected to have a higher level of commitment to the organization, as opposed to a particular project or issue, and thus can contribute to its overall success more effectively and efficiently.

Updates to WACC's membership approach and structure, would need to ensure current members stay on board while offering new reasons for audiences WACC is currently not reaching to pay attention. This would increase engagement, build WACC's membership base back up, make its governance more effective and dynamic, and connect it to other networks and movements.

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<sup>1</sup> Captured among others in Consultation Background a note 'Building a Communication Rights Movement: Membership and Network Models'

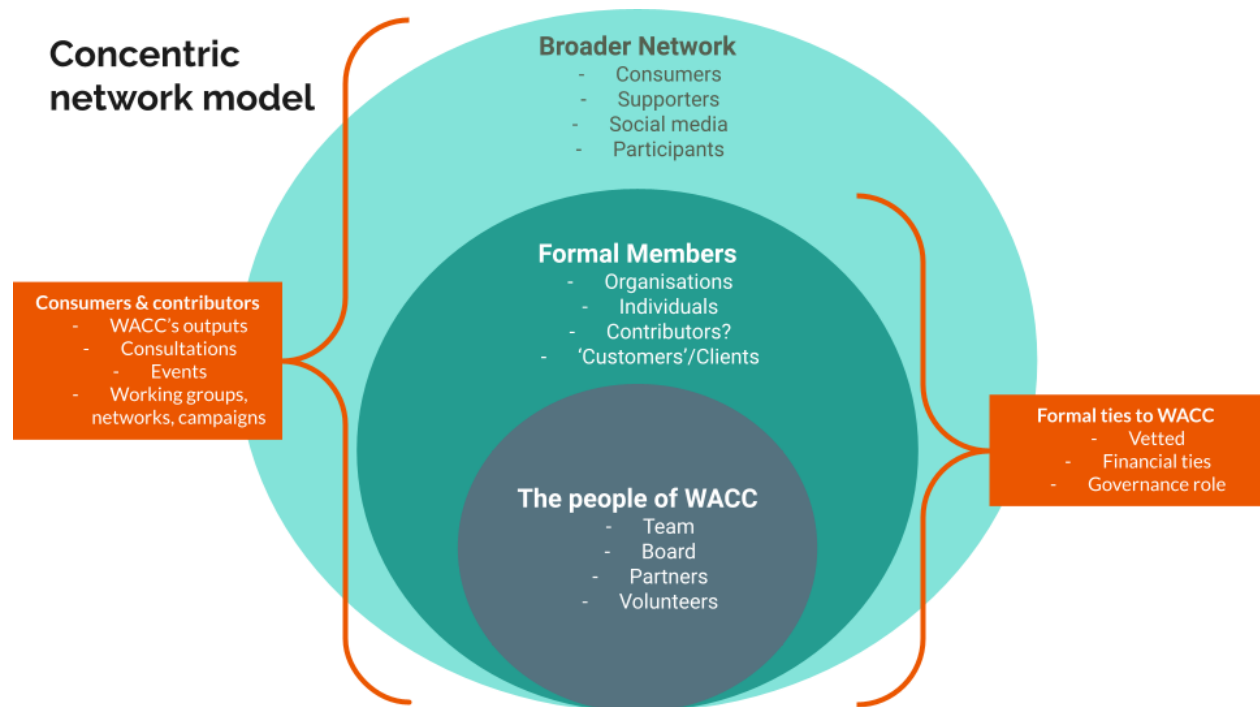
<sup>2</sup> In the 'Enabling People to Be Seen and Heard' document

## Going Forward

### *Principles/conditions for success*

To address some of the challenges facing WACC, a number of conditions need to be in place, regardless of the specific model that WACC decides to adopt for its network and membership engagement. These conditions are related to network and membership directly, or more indirectly as organisational conditions that allow WACC to work with its network in an effective way.

Firstly, a holistic view on membership, network engagement, field building and relationship management is needed. Given WACC's scope, both geographical and thematically, the need to connect grassroots with global policy levels and everything in between, and the interconnectedness with related issues and actors working on these issues, WACC needs to be dynamic, intentional, efficient and engaging in the way it relates to its network. In that sense, each contact should be seen as a node in WACC's network, able to connect WACC to others outside of its network, feed back intelligence or form coalitions to further the collective mission. Clearly, this means different levels of effort and resources for different actors at different times, and groupings within the network (based on closeness to the mission, geographic scope, thematic focus, etc.) would still be needed. The principle however, should be that the relationship is defined by what benefits the objectives of the two parties rather than a predefined distinction such as membership only.



Secondly, network and membership are often framed as governance and communication problems, which they certainly also are. For multi-level network organisations operating in complex environments to achieve fundamental change, finding operational solutions to be more effective is often equally important. Having smart systems for contact management (a CRM or database), collaboration and co-creation (both in terms of processes and fora, and in terms of digital solutions for remote working), knowledge management and communications, and managing (human) resources can mean the difference between a theoretical ambition and

practical improvements for WACC and its network. In that sense, WACC could operate as a facilitator of connections and emerging ideas in addition to having its own strategies and agenda.

Thirdly, it is clear that in concert with a network strategy, WACC will need to address some fundamental questions around its Theory of Change, its brand and focus, how it communicates about its own work, and a viable funding mix to support all its ambitions. While it is beyond the scope of this note, it is important to emphasise that to be strategic and sustainable in its network engagement and membership model, WACC needs to ensure that it is appropriate for its strategies and values. Likewise, for a membership strategy to work the underlying value proposition of the organisation and its unique role in the communication rights movement, needs to be understood by the right audiences in such a way as to make them want to join forces, support, spread WACC's messages, etc. Connected to this is the need not only to show what WACC's ambition is but also how it monitors its progress towards that ambition, which will allow it to tell a more convincing story towards donors, partners, constituents and internal audiences alike.

The ToC specifically describes how WACC envisions the relationship between its longer-term vision for change and the interventions it has designed to work towards that change. The steps between interventions and outcomes and between outcomes and impact however, are very large and it is not entirely clear what the intermediate changes would be like in practice. In addition, as WACC is operating in a crowded space and is experiencing challenges in positioning itself and in framing its added value, the links with other issue areas and the assumptions implicit in the ToC could be spelled out more clearly. A ToC that would be a bit more granular and open about where other actors or other issues come into the picture, would be better aligned with the complexity of the field and WACC's scope. An updated ToC narrative would also offer opportunities for WACC in connecting to existing and new audiences.

### *A hybrid model for WACC*

Based on the conversations with WACC on different network models, a mix of options seems most appropriate in the short term. The key aspects of such a hybrid model would be:

#### **Adding more and more informal options for engagement**

Rather than a fundamental overhaul of its governance, membership model or structure, which would require significant resources and would risk losing its unique identity, WACC could add more options to connect with its stakeholders and put in place mechanisms to engage them more strategically. Current members should be encouraged to remain an active member but other types of stakeholders - young people, smaller organisations, movements, groups who are digital first, other justice actors (e.g. in climate, anti-racism) should be offered something that fits their expectations as well. In addition to building its network in general, which would be important for being effective, this increases visibility of WACC beyond the usual suspects if it is accompanied by a smart communication and branding strategy. In addition, creating additional layers of engagement will ensure that there is a continuous pipeline of interested groups who could become full members, partners in projects, offer access to policy processes or donors, and generally add to the legitimacy of WACC's work. This legitimacy would come from the constituents who would become part to WACC's network, through which it can disseminate messages more widely, source views and insights for its strategies and policy work, and among which it can crowdfund for relevant initiatives. In practice this would mean that:

- WACC would restructure its membership levels to include more options to become member, acknowledging the historical role of current members and offering them members continuing benefits, while offering others free or discounted memberships with reduced benefits as well. This would allow WACC to continue to include individual members under a new membership category, add non-paying members without spending too much effort in vetting or servicing them. This approach would combine the best of both worlds: a smaller group of dedicated members who contribute significantly and require investment from WACC to keep them engaged, and a much larger group of members who may not contribute much in first instance but who could be important for WACC's work and from which group new full members might be drawn over time. To facilitate this a middle membership tier might be considered, with lower fees and less benefits than a full membership but more than a free membership.
- WACC will need to adapt its offer to members to this new membership structure to ensure that it is balanced. The benefit from being a full member should include a governance role, full access to WACC's resources and (policy) network and opportunities to mobilise resources together. Second tier members would perhaps not have a formal governance role but would be invited to provide input and have the right to participate in certain internal processes or meetings, and would receive a reduced set of benefits. Finally, a Free Membership would be more akin to a subscription whereby a financial contribution is voluntary but benefits are also limited.
- WACC would use materials, communications, and intelligence to engage audiences beyond its members as well, without immediate returns that are expected from members. However, building up WACC's database has intrinsic value, similarly to how many digital service providers make their money. With little effort, a large group can be reached from which a small but potentially non-trivial percentage will become members, share resources or provide valuable contributions to WACC's mission. For this to work in a way that does not incur high costs or reduce incentives for (potential) paying members, the membership levels need to be set intelligently and WACC needs a sophisticated database with insights into who is in the network, what they are working on and what they might be looking for in WACC.

#### Facilitate autonomous connections between network groups

Another approach that we see in other networks which was felt to have potential benefits to WACC's ability to strengthen its network engagement in an efficient way, is by building on the existing regional working groups and facilitate more horizontal collaborations between members. These connections can be regional, thematic, programmatic, interest-based, or a community of practice. It is clear that additional legal structures to formalise such groups are at this point unnecessary and quite burdensome but WACC could mobilise resources to facilitate its network to find each other, both by maintaining a database and by proactively identifying opportunities for forging connections. Practically, this would entail efforts at two levels:

- Setting up (digital) fora where stakeholders can find each other, share insights, collaborate and develop joint actions. This can be as simple as offering some resources for such groupings, to building an online environment for networking, to incorporating such sub-networks in WACC's formal governance structure. These fora should also include very light-touch versions that are very easy to start and discontinue, to lower the threshold for network members that may not have the confidence or resources to be part of very formal structures.

- Identifying key areas from WACC’s strategy, that require or benefit working structures bringing together members, staff, Board and external stakeholders. This could also include specific (organisational) projects, like developing the network or operationalizing the strategy itself. For these key areas, appropriate spaces can be established, supported and possibly resourced by the Secretariat to ensure there is progress in these key areas.

**Design & communicate member benefits**

In addition to clarifying WACC’s mission and ToC, there is broad consensus that the benefits of becoming part of the association should be better communicated as well. This should not be seen or presented as transactional, offering financial or other incentives only. Rather, WACC should indicate that it is interested to know what its members and partners are working on, what they would like to achieve, and how being part of the network would benefit those goals. In other words, where the mission of WACC and these actors align and can mutually reinforce each other. So while members of any kind have an interests in and the right to understand certain governance rights that they may have, access they might get or outputs that they can expect, this is not sufficient to get an engaged network.

In order to achieve that, a sense of common purpose is key and a recognition that WACC is an important network for them to achieve their goals. In that sense, WACC would strive to become a partner to others in the best possible way, rather than think about how partners further its interests. When done well, the aim would be to gain new members and (potential) partners who would come to WACC rather than being recruited, making this a sound investment. To make the system work and efficient with the limited resources and capacity available, a staggered offer would be most sensible, whereby valuable and detailed outputs and services are reserved for full members, partners an donors, but where non-paying members and others in WACCs network would also receive certain communications, summary reports, intelligence, or access. Below, we have summarised a number of potential benefits that have stood out in our engagement with WACC, which can be used to design and communicate about the benefits from being part of WACC’s network.

Added value for the network	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Mission: WACC’s mission is instrumental for achieving the fundamental change needed for Members to achieve their missions/ideals at a global scale</li> <li>■ Brand: Members may use the WACC brand &amp; be part of a global brand, which can offer security, credibility and legitimacy</li> <li>■ Governance: voting rights &amp; participation in Board, Working Groups &amp; Networks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Exchange &amp; capacity: Vertical intelligence, Horizontal exchange, Knowledge Creation</li> <li>■ Coordination Action: Members’ knowledge is brought together to facilitate coordination and exchange of ideas, propose and design actions, implement campaigns.</li> <li>■ Advocacy: Facilitation &amp; Convening</li> <li>■ Scale &amp; efficiency: advantages of scale towards a collective mission</li> </ul>

## Action plan

	Actions	Responsible
Network development	<b>1</b> Decide on the general diffraction of travel, choosing between a full overhaul of WACC's model, a hybrid such as the one proposed, or another way forward.	Board
	<b>2</b> Form a network development working group, consisting of staff, Board Members, Members and possibly external experts, to flesh out details, draft proposals, drive the network discussion and bring in others as relevant.	Board + Secretariat
	<b>3</b> Prepare a detailed proposal for an updated membership structure, adding member categories, clarifying the added value for different membership tiers, their rights and responsibilities, and a financial projection	Working Group + Secretariat
	<b>4</b> Draft an engagement strategy outlining which parts of the network should be prioritised and how, given WACC's overall mission, strategy and analysis of its context	Working Group + Secretariat
	<b>5</b> Develop a business plan for the network strategy, including costs, and expected as well as potential for income generation via foundations, institutional donors, individual donations (incl. crowdfunding) or offering services	Secretariat + External expert
	<b>6</b> Agree on the proposals and strategy with Members in an (extraordinary) General Assembly	GA
	<b>7</b> Develop and implement a Roadmap for implementation of the proposals	Working Group + Secretariat
WACC's Foundation	<b>8</b> Revisit WACC's Theory of Change, with the purpose of updating it, bringing it in line with the increased complexity of WACC's work and context, and to be able to serve externally as a basis for a new narrative about WACC	Board
	<b>9</b> Conduct a structure stakeholder mapping which includes actors working in adjacent fields, who have or should have an interest in communication rights.	Secretariat
	<b>10</b> Research the perceived lack of interest in ecumenical character of WACC's work, and potential alternative ways of presenting WACC's mission that might appeal to a wider audience without giving up the character and history of the association	Secretariat, External expert
	<b>11</b> A communication drive and/or campaign to present and promote any changes implemented, geared towards expanding WACC's network, focusing on specific target groups such as young people, activists from other fields, etc.	Organisation wide