A new report from an international alliance of Christian aid agencies has pointed to the importance of gender equality in tackling poverty.

The report from the ACT Alliance, published to mark International Women's Day today, says that men and women must work together to make gender equality a reality.

It describes gender equality as central to meeting the needs of the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, including men.

The report cites examples of women and men leading innovative programmes in 13 countries that have enhanced the voice of women in workplaces, government and wider society.

These include programmes focused on peace-building, women's political participation, sexual health campaigns, and female-run micro-enterprises.

The report draws attention to the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where an estimated 1,000 women are raped every day.

The main perpetrators are soldiers, who are feared across the country for their brutal unprovoked attacks on communities.

ACT member Christian Aid and its partner, the Central African Baptist Community, are working with the army, judicial system and communities to train soldiers in civilian rights and bring an end to sexual violence.

In addition to providing support to rape victims, the organisations are running reconciliation events to help soldiers feel more accountable to citizens.

One woman found courage through the programme to press charges against her attacker.

"I feel proud of myself for speaking out about what he did to me, and I feel much more at ease, to know he is being punished," she said.

In Senegal, one programme is teaching young women safe sex and how to form healthy relationships. These women are then being released as mentors to girls in their neighbourhoods.

In Mali, campaigns to get more women on the election trail have seen a 42% increase in the number of women candidates in some regions.

The report concludes that real transformation occurs only when all members of a community have the will to change.

"Gender equality and women's empowerment are at the heart of ACT Alliance's vision for a better and more just world," said general secretary John Nduna.

“While there has been progress on gender equality in some countries, women in many parts of the world suffer from violence, discrimination and under-representation in decision-making processes."

Source: Christian Today India
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