

Why is the local church so important to the work of Christian development?

God's primary agent of transformation

The local church is an outpost of God's kingdom and is used by God to transform communities.

Close to poor people

The local church exists at the grassroots of a community. It is present among poor people and often consists of poor people. The local church is therefore in close contact with local knowledge. It also benefits from relationships with other people and organisations in the community because the membership of the local church usually represents a cross-section of the community. The local church is part of the community, while a Christian organisation may be viewed as an 'outsider'.

Permanent presence

While a Christian organisation may leave a community, the church exists for the people in the community and is likely to be there for much longer than a Christian organisation.

Sustainable Christian work

If Christian work is to be sustainable, there is a need for a permanent Christian presence. This is what the local church provides. Without this, when a Christian organisation moves on, the work left behind may start to lose its Christian distinctiveness.

Natural context in which faith can be explored

Christian organisations are focused on relief, development and advocacy work, while the local church has a wider agenda, including providing space for those investigating the Christian faith.

Networks

The local church is often a member of a number of networks. There are links with other grassroots groups in the community through church members, and through working with other groups in carrying out community initiatives. There are also links with the wider church through denominations and Christian alliances. Membership of networks facilitates learning.

Resources

The local church contains many members who can be mobilised. This is particularly useful for labour-intensive initiatives. Also, some local churches have buildings which provide a place for community members to meet to discuss local issues. In times of crisis, church buildings can provide safe refuge.

Source: *ROOTS 11: Partnering with the local church*, Tearfund 2007, pages 17-18