

Case study on mobilising a whole denomination through an organisational change process - Project Gilgal, Kale Heywet Church, Ethiopia

Kale Heywet Church (KHC) is a denomination in Ethiopia. It consists of 6,000 churches and over 5 million members. KHC was becoming a divided organisation where staff members at headquarters were losing contact with local churches. KHC was regarded as bureaucratic, with decision-making having to be passed up the hierarchy. This tended to restrict initiative at local level.

It was decided that an organisational change process was needed to unify the denomination and ensure that local churches were better represented within KHC structures and better supported by those structures. It was hoped that the process would result in local churches engaging more in meeting the needs of poor people in their communities.

After a review of KHC's ministries at national and zonal levels, a consultant was brought in to work with key KHC representatives to develop a Strategic Change Plan. The main aspect of this Plan was envisioning and training all members of the denomination about issues such as teamwork, decision-making and project planning. To ensure that everyone received training, a cascade model was used. Four trainers trained 300 leaders at zonal level, who in turn trained two trainers in each church. The two trainers in each church then trained their congregation. Another aspect of the Plan was training staff members in managing organisational change.

Steps in the process

1. Review of ministries at national and zonal levels.
2. Strategic Core (consisting of representatives of the board, some staff from headquarters and some zonal level leaders) trained by a consultant in change management and strategic planning over the course of five workshops.
3. Development of an Organisational Change Plan.
4. Implementation of the Plan, including training all members of KHC. The consultant regularly visited over a three-year period to train and mentor the trainers. Staff members of KHC were trained to manage organisational change.
5. Mobilisation of local churches to carry out integral mission in the community.

Impact

The process lasted six years and is ongoing. It has used large amounts of funds for consultancy input, the employment of four full-time staff and the production of training materials. However, there are some promising signs of impact:

Impact on KHC Leadership

- The attitudes and style of many leaders at KHC headquarters have improved. People now feel able to put forward their ideas and opinions during debates and discussions without feeling embarrassed or attacked.
- At zonal level, leaders use a more facilitative style of leadership. Financial accountability has improved.
- At district level, more care is taken over the selection of leaders and there is greater willingness to work as a team.
- At local church level, leaders are more committed to integral mission, better at strategic planning, more concerned about the welfare and views of church members, including women and youth, and more accountable to their congregations.

Impact on organisational structure

There were significant changes in KHC's organisational structure. For example, a Capacity Building and Community Empowerment Programme was formed. Other programmes were set up to address issues such as HIV prevention and treatment, and promoting literacy and education.

Impact on local churches

Churches are starting initiatives without waiting for permission from higher up the hierarchy.

Impact at community level

Many initiatives were started and have had a positive impact on local communities. For example, there was a 40 percent decrease in typhoid, malaria and child mortality rates in four communities where a dispensary was built.

Impact on church growth

In one community consisting of a marginalised tribe, most of the 5,000 members became Christians as a result of reconciliation work inspired by the process.

Lessons learned

Senior leadership's ownership of the process is crucial. Although senior leadership initiated the process, as the process went on, it became more difficult for some of them to engage with it. At all stages, there needs to be clear leadership and vision for the process.

It is important to develop the capacity of the training team in order to meet realistic expectations. Failure to do so can lead to exhaustion of key staff and bottlenecks in the process.

The process needs to be flexible in order to cope with local churches that begin to implement their training before all support structures are in place. Otherwise, local church initiatives may be poorly designed or badly managed.

Consider how to keep training at a high standard. This includes the motivation and support of trainers, and preventing over-reliance on written materials.

Gender issues need to be explicitly addressed. It is not enough to assume women will participate in the training. They may not attend due to lack of funds, low literacy rates or because, throughout the denomination, women are not usually encouraged to participate in leadership or church activities.

[Click here for a more detailed version of this case study in English and French.](#)

[Click here for a case study on one local church's experience of Project Gilgal.](#)

Source: *ROOTS 11: Partnering with the local church*, Tearfund 2007, pages 51-52