

## In detail: Key principles for facilitators

By facilitators, we mean those staff and volunteers who are responsible for the envisioning and mobilising of the church and the community. Normally there are 1-2 facilitators who work with each community.

### Role

The role of facilitators in church and community mobilisation processes is:

- To build relationships with the church and community leaders
- To envision the local church in principles of integral mission through bible studies and discussions
- To help the local church identify and mobilise its own resources
- To facilitate the community in describing their community, and gathering and analysing information
- To facilitate the community in envisioning, planning for, and working towards a better future, using their own resources
- To help communities initiate projects and encourage monitoring of those projects
- To build the capacity of the local co-ordination group, the church and the community so that on-going sustainable development is possible

As one pastor put it: "The facilitator role is that of a mid-wife, helping to bring into being something that is new and wonderful. The facilitator does not create the new life, but is there to help and support at this crucial stage."

### Key characteristics of facilitators

The character and skills of the facilitator should include:

#### Passion and motivation

- Motivated and envisioned by their Christian faith to serve the church and poor communities
- A passion for integral mission.

#### Christian character

- Spiritual integrity that is respected by the church and wider community
- Humility
- Willingness to learn
- Compassion.

#### Valuing others

- Ability to listen
- Ability to relate well with others
- Valuing of, and esteeming, others
- Ability to understand the church and the community
- Willingness to spend significant time in the community.

#### Commitment to releasing the potential of others

- Commitment and passion to empower and release the potential of others
- Not wanting to solve everything themselves.
- Ability to adapt the process to each context

#### Ability to adapt and work with where the group is at

- Flexible
- Willingness to ask naïve questions.
- Ability to deal with conflict
- Handling criticism and conflict in a positive way (often facilitators are made the scapegoat for uncomfortable change)
- Staying neutral in church disputes.

### Training facilitators

A very effective model of training facilitators developed in East Africa's PEP approach is that of: theory – practice in community with trainer – practice in community without trainer – reflection on learning with peers and trainer – more theory.

This approach helps to transfer skills, and build a strong team of facilitators committed to mutual learning. However, this model of training can be very time-consuming and place large demands on facilitators.

In addition to training facilitators in the process of church and community mobilisation, facilitators need to be trained in the following areas:

- handling of complex situations,
- the replication of the process in new communities
- the on-going support of mobilised communities
- managing the overall programme
- understanding HIV and AIDS, and how to facilitate community discussions in this area
- understanding advocacy, and how to facilitate community discussions in this area
- understanding disaster risk reduction, and how to facilitate community discussions in this area.

## Key principles

### **1. Invest time in building relationships with both the church and community leadership from the beginning**

This helps to speed entry, integration and implementation, and avoids damaging power struggles.

1. Build close relationships with the church leader. The closer the relationship between the facilitator and the church minister, the greater the opportunity for them to work together in building the capacity of the core team and church. This is so important that it may be appropriate for there to be an initial "dating" period before church and facilitator agree they can work together. During the process, this means having regular catch-ups to discuss the progress of the process.
2. Church leaders require a lot of self-confidence and courage to trust processes where they are not directly involved. Facilitators need to work closely with them, engaging them in the process, encouraging them to envision the church congregation, and to support the core team.

### **2. Build the capacity of the core group**

Facilitators should always try to work with a core group within the church. They can act as a sounding-board, share the co-ordination of the process, and be the champions of the process. They can help to ensure that ownership of the process permeates throughout the whole church and that it doesn't get stuck with just the facilitator or church leader.

### **3. Address the values and attitudes of the church towards its community at an early stage**

Addressing the attitudes and values of the church towards the community is essential, especially when churches only get involved in their communities through evangelism. Bible studies are very effective in envisioning and motivating church members for integral mission, and exercises that help church members listen to others can help to transform attitudes. Taking people to visit other churches to see what others are doing can also be inspirational.

Many churches have a strong dependency culture, and may view involvement in a church and community mobilisation process as a quick way of gaining resources, or increasing church attendance. Time needs to be invested in changing such mind-sets, through building relationships and sharing the vision of the process.

Keep neutral about disputes within the church, but where appropriate, do explore the underlying issues if these affect community engagement. The facilitator, as an outsider, can ask "naïve" questions about the church's history or present situation, helping to challenge and confront people's thinking.

### **4. Give time for communities to reflect critically on their situation and to dream about the future, as this is the key factor in mobilising the community**

Helping a community to reflect on their current situation from a number of perspectives (e.g. economic, environmental, political, social, spiritual) and to think what might need changing for the better is an important part of energising communities. This is best followed up by allowing communities to dream of the possibilities for their communities without constraint. This aspect of the approach unlocks people's aspirations as well as their potential to achieve far more than they think. Such an approach is only effective if it is done in the context of having an open agenda.

### **5. Intentionally focus on creating a process that is sustainable beyond the facilitator's involvement**

This means:

- Building an expectation and helping communities to resource as close to 100% of their own requirements as possible
- Helping communities form development committees and building the capacity of such groups
- Encouraging and helping the formation of partnerships with other groups, agencies, government and the wider church
- Intentionally building the capacity of certain individuals so that they can maintain the process
- Encouraging inter-village visits and learning.

## **6. Encourage a distinctively Christian process, creating space for biblical reflection, prayer and celebration**

The facilitator should look to create space for spiritual connection and reflection throughout the process. In essence this is about allowing space for God to speak into the experience and plans of a community. This is not a tangible or pre-planned thing but more acknowledging that the mystery of God can shape future direction of individuals and communities. (See Rick James "Making Space for Grace" published by Swedish Mission Board 2005 for more on this).

Encouraging prayer and reflection on the Bible throughout the process is a critical element of ensuring that the process remains rooted in Christian values. Church and community mobilisation can lead, with the positive economic and physical improvement in people's lives it brings, to the embracing of negative aspects of modernity and the erosion of positive aspects of local culture, unless communities are actively helped to reflect on what change might mean for them and explore the impact of different value systems which inform the various approaches to how development is done. This should include exploring the relevance of Christian based values and how they inform practical action as well as looking at traditional cultural values which should also inform practical action. These are two critical safeguards for hopefully ensuring the development of the community is a positive one in which the Christian distinctive of development and the local culture and identity is sustained into the future.

Building in celebration of what has been done/ achieved is also important at every stage of the process. This is an important way of addressing people's low self-esteem, and showing them how, with God's help, they can bring about change. It also helps people to see the positive aspects of both church and community life, rather than just the problems.

## **7. Monitor the process closely and use changing contexts to strengthen rather than undermine the process**

The most effective facilitators are those who monitor the process closely, and are aware of changes early on within the church or the community that may affect the process. They may turn possible hindrances to the process (e.g. crocodile attacks) into issues around which to mobilise the community, or address problems (e.g. core group de-motivation) at an early stage so as to keep the process on track. To respond in a timely and effective way requires the facilitator to be in regular contact with the church and community and to be flexible in their response.

## **8. Help the community set clear, realistic and flexible time-frames, milestones and rest periods to ensure the process maintains momentum**

One of the greatest challenges to church and community mobilisation is that enthusiasm can flag if the process goes on too long. If the facilitator helps the church and community set time-frames for the process, these can, if treated flexibly, provide a real spur to the process. It may also be appropriate for the facilitator to encourage the community to build "rest periods" into the process, particularly at labour intensive periods of the year such as harvest, as otherwise the number of community meetings the process requires may become crippling.

## **9. Ensure key issues such as HIV and AIDS are addressed**

Communities sometimes struggle to identify some of the major poverty issues in their community, particularly where these are connected to sensitive and even taboo issues such as HIV and AIDS, or where they are related to somewhat more technical issues such as disaster risk reduction. It is therefore important for facilitators to help prompt discussion amongst the community in these areas, where this is relevant, and to suggest possible responses where the community needs help. This may be especially the case in community health where essential health messages may need to be communicated in a top-down way if new and better practices are to be adopted.

On the issue of HIV and AIDS, facilitators should:

- Become deliberate in probing issues related to HIV/AIDS – design tools that the community can use to describe, gather and analyze information directly related to HIV/AIDS, leading to community determining action to take to address HIV/AIDS
- Facilitate the community to develop action plans that address the plight of HIV/AIDS in addition to the other issues the community may identify
- Identify and train community action teams (CATs) to facilitate participatory processes specifically addressing HIV/AIDS in the community
- Link the HIV/AIDS programs that the dioceses are currently involved in with the CCMP action plans, hence ensure there is one coordinated front to address HIV/AIDS

On the issue of reducing risk in disaster, facilitators should:

- Facilitate the community to analyze trends more deeply, especially identifying those to do with disasters and coping mechanisms, and predicting probable ones (by identifying indicators that point to imminence of disaster)
- Facilitate communities to develop practical strategies to prepare for possible disasters and how to appropriately deal with them
- Equip CATs/structures/committees with skills to monitor the indicators and to mitigate the factors before disaster strikes.

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