

## In detail: Key principles for the local church

By local church, we mean the local Christian congregation that the organisation is relating to in the community. This may be the local congregation of a denomination (such as the Anglican Church or the Baptist Church) or it may be an independent church without formal denominational ties.

### The role of the local church in church and community mobilisation

The role of the church in a church and community mobilisation process is:

- To understand their calling to integral mission
- To help to mobilise the community as a whole to engage with the process
- To contribute their resources (time, money, labour, etc) to meeting the needs of the poor in their community
- To work with the community in ensuring that responses to poverty issues are guided by Christian values and principles
- To pray for the process, and seek God's guidance and blessing.

### Key principles

Contexts where church and community mobilisation processes are most effective are those where the local church involved shows the following characteristics:

#### 1. The church is led by humble, facilitative leaders

- The church leaders model servant behaviour to the rest of the church.
- They are humble and willing to learn.
- They are facilitative in style, not dominating.
- They encourage others to use their gifts.
- They are committed to team leadership.

#### 2. The whole church is involved in, and owns, the process

Social action should not be done only by key activists. It needs to be part of the church's life-blood. For this to happen, values and attitudinal change is vital. Biblical envisioning is a crucial aspect of this. Without whole church ownership, the church does not adequately engage, and any resulting initiative struggles to retain its distinctiveness.

Time needs to be spent on helping the church to:

- overcome its prejudices and fears
- realign its priorities
- accept every member ministry
- embrace the gospel of love and God's concern for poor people.

#### 3. The church is a listening community

This is radical: the church is used to instructing people and giving answers, rather than listening! The church needs to:

- **Listen to others:** There is a need to learn and practise inclusiveness and acceptance within the church first, and to learn from each others' experiences of poverty. This can be threatening to top-down leaders.
- **Listen to the community:** This is where radical change often takes place as church members discover the reality of their neighbours' lives. Such listening needs to go beyond consultation to empathy, valuing and seeking to understand.
- **Listen to God:** There is a need to continually reflect on what is being learned about God through the process, to ask how God is already at work in the community and to ask how the church can become co-workers with him in this task.
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#### 4. The church is a releasing community

There is huge potential in communities. An important question for the church is how it can help to release this potential for the good of everyone. Churches need to consider partnership and ownership of initiatives with the community.

It also needs to reflect on whether the church itself models a 'releasing' community. Are people freed to use their gifts and are they valued for doing so? Capacity development of the core group is a key part of this.

## 5. The church focuses on relationships, not projects

Poverty is about broken relationships, and one of the church's main roles is that of bringing reconciliation and healing to such relationships. Small changes that build community should be encouraged. Also, not every mobilisation process needs to result in projects: changes in attitudes, values and simple acts of love and compassion can make a big difference.

## 6. The church is a celebrating community

It is important that the focus of mobilisation processes should be on positives – on what is good at in the church and community, and what is going well – and not just on the problems.

It is also important that the church recognises the gifts that God has given the church and the community, and celebrates these.

## 7. The church is a prayerful community

Spiritual reflection must be a key element guiding the church throughout the process. The church must look to see what is distinctively Christian about what they do.

## 8. The church is a united community

Reaching out to the community is hugely demanding. If there are splits already within the church, these will get wider during a mobilisation process. The church needs to model unity to the wider community. There is also a need for unity between churches in a local area. Where this happens, the churches tend to grow (John 17:23).

## 9. The church is a patient community

Mobilisation processes take time to change attitudes, build relationships and overcome suspicion.

## 10. The church is a giving community

- The church recognises the resources it has (time, money, labour, expertise) and gives these freely for the benefit of the wider community.
- The church does not wait for external resources before it thinks it is able to act.
- Such attitudes may take time to develop. In some processes, churches set up their own internally-focused project (e.g. raising resources to build the pastor's house, or repair the church roof), before they can gain the confidence to work with the wider community.

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