

Participatory Evaluation Process, Uganda, Tanzania and Sudan

Case study of open-ended church and community mobilisation

The Participatory evaluation process (PEP) has been carried out in a number of places in East Africa. It has been used for a number of reasons. For example:

- In Soroti, Uganda, staff of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) had become frustrated that existing programmes had struggled to gain local ownership and that local energy and resources had remained underused.
- The Diocese of Ruaha in Tanzania had become dissatisfied with traditional development approaches.
- In North Sudan, the Fellowship for Africa Relief wanted to build capacity at local church and community levels.
- In South Sudan, ACROSS wanted to build up the local church rather than implement projects.

PEP involves envisioning and mobilising local churches to enable communities to respond to their needs. After envisioning local church leaders and denominational staff, church leaders are equipped to share the vision about integral mission with their congregations. Bible studies play a key role in the envisioning process, sometimes taking place over three to four days. Another key aspect is the need for the local churches to see that they have the capacity to catalyse change in their communities. This is partly about recognising the local resources that the church and community possess, and partly about having confidence in one's own abilities.

Once a local church is envisioned, contact is made with community leaders and the possibility of working together to mobilise the community is discussed. The community is then envisioned and taken through a number of stages which involve identifying local issues that need to be addressed and the resources the community can use to address them. Various church and community members are selected to help to facilitate the process, which enhances local ownership.

Aim

To engage the local church with the theology and practice of integral mission at all levels so that it becomes envisioned and mobilised to act as an agent of community mobilisation, enabling communities to identify and address their needs.

Steps in the process

1. **Envisioning workshop for denominational staff and pastors about integral mission.** The participants select five or six pilot churches and appoint 15–20 people who will be trained as facilitators.
2. **Training of facilitators.** The facilitators are trained to envision local church members about integral mission.
3. **Local church envisioning.**
4. **Local church resource mobilisation.** Facilitators are trained in skills to help churches mobilise and make use of their own resources. They then implement the training in the local churches.
5. **Relationship building between church and community.** After training, facilitators arrange meetings between the pilot churches, community leaders and community members. At the meetings, three people from the local church and three people from the community are selected to lead and shape the mobilisation process. Community members decide what these people will be called. In Soroti these were known as 'Church and Community Resource Persons'. In South Sudan they were called 'Awakeners'.
6. **Community information gathering.** Facilitators and Awakeners are trained in gathering information and then work with the community and a community-appointed Information Gathering Team to find out detailed information about the community.
7. **Community needs analysis.** After training, facilitators work with the community to analyse the information collected and decide which issues to address.
8. **Community goal setting and action planning.** After training, facilitators help the community to develop realistic goals and action plans.
9. **Community implementation and monitoring.** After training, facilitators equip community leaders and Awakeners to set up community development committees, implement action plans and monitor progress.
10. **Renewal of denominational level ownership of the process.** A workshop is run for the participants of the envisioning workshop that took place at the beginning of the process. Learning and outcomes from the process so far are shared with them to encourage ownership and support for the next stages of the process. They are encouraged to plan for replication of the process in other parts of the local area.

11. **Ongoing training and support to the community development committees.** Staff of the Christian organisation meet with the community development committees to identify their ongoing training needs. These might include training in financial management, supervision, monitoring and evaluation, project cycle management, community action planning and disaster management.
12. **Replication.** The whole process is repeated with more local churches and communities. The workshops are run by the facilitators from the first process, rather than an external consultant or member of staff from the Christian organisation. The process has resulted in transformation in various aspects of community life. Transformation is most easily observed in the visual evidence, such as new buildings or wells, and more people attending church. But there is evidence that deeper, personal transformation has occurred in people's lives as a result of the process, as well (see the Impact section below).

Impact

The process has had a significant impact at church level. For example:

- The local churches in Soroti that have completed the process, report a change in attitudes in church members. People see that their role is to give and not to get. The financial and in-kind offerings have increased dramatically. The churches have seen significant growth, both spiritually and numerically. The General Superintendent of PAG Uganda would like all districts to adopt the church and community mobilisation process in their local churches.
- In Ruaha, local people are becoming more involved in the day-to-day activities of the local church and taking part enthusiastically in its mission, which before they would have seen as the pastor's responsibility.
- In South Sudan, the process has led to increased unity. Local churches communicate better with each other and men and women work together more effectively.

At community level, many changes have taken place:

- One mobilised community in Soroti decided to take action against a community leader who had stolen the community's funds. The whole community gathered together and went to his house to successfully demand the money back. This has greatly encouraged the community.
- In one community in Ruaha, members of the church and the community provided the materials and labour needed to rebuild the house of a community member which had burned down. Before the process, local people would have helped her to put out the fire, but would then have expected her to reconstruct her house herself. In another community, the church has started income-generating groups involving rearing poultry and beekeeping. Another community identified the need to construct a teacher's house. They collected so many materials that they realised there was enough for the construction of three houses and not just one.
- In North Sudan, the process has brought Christian and Muslim communities together, which previously had no contact at all. Together they have addressed their need for drinking water by raising US \$5,000 and installing pipes to supply 1,400 homes. They also started other initiatives such as income-generation work, adult education classes, a kindergarten and buying a generator to bring electricity to a community. Some people would like to repeat the process with their new communities when they return home to South Sudan.
- In South Sudan, community initiatives include building a church and primary school, digging latrines and building a permanent bridge.

Some quotes from those involved in the processes:

- 'We were asleep before, but now we have a vision.' Community member in North Sudan
- 'PEP has helped us to know who we are.' Church member in South Sudan
- 'If we would be left alone now and everyone were to desert us, we would be able to continue right to the end.' Pastor in South Sudan
- 'Our eyes have been opened and everyone is more able to express themselves.' Community members, North Sudan
- 'We should come together to face problems; my problem today will be someone else's tomorrow.' Pastor in North Sudan
- 'Before our pastor heard of PEP we knew the word 'cooperation', but did not put it into action. Now we do!' Community member, South Sudan
- 'The biggest change that the process has brought to me is the realisation that I can do it, but also that I must plan – things just don't happen themselves.' Pastor in Ruaha

Lessons learned

The process can be expensive and take a long time. The process is high-input because it requires many workshops with mentoring support from the trainer in between. The process can be affected by people moving away and by external influences. It may be too slow to be effective in areas of instability and in urban areas where people move around more often.

The process has high expectations of church and community members. Facilitators and Awakeners have to give a lot of time to the process through attending workshops and mobilising the church and community. This may require staying away from home. An average facilitator may work half-time on the process for 18 months. There is a danger that Awakeners might move away or step down, which puts an additional burden on the remaining Awakeners. Community members are expected to attend community meetings and help to gather and analyse community information. These meetings may not be at an appropriate time, particularly for women.

People are not paid for their time or expenses, such as travel costs. The fact that the process has been carried out successfully in different places shows that there is considerable commitment to the process by all involved. There may be a need for the Christian organisation to fund the costs of facilitators at the early stages of the process so they do not run out of money. However, once the process has started to mobilise people, the church or community may begin to value the input of the facilitators or awakeners and raise money to pay for food, accommodation and transport costs. For example, one community in South Sudan built a house in the church compound for people such as the facilitators to stay in when they visited. Another way to support the facilitators and Awakeners is to excuse them from contributing materials or money to community initiatives.

Sufficient time should be invested in working with community leaders as their support is key to ensuring that a large proportion of the community attend meetings and become mobilised.

It can be challenging to carry out the process in remote rural areas. Staff of the Christian organisation have to be able to travel to the community regularly, a training venue is needed, facilitators need to be able to travel to the pilot communities, and there need to be enough educated people in a community to act as Awakeners.

It can be very difficult to use the process in a community where there are already NGO programmes because it is difficult to break through the dependency syndrome. It is possible that NGOs may come into the community during the process and offer quick solutions.

Spiritual attack is reported as a challenge to the process. This is not surprising since the process builds and equips the local church. Prayer support for the process is therefore vital.

Source: *ROOTS 11: Partnering with the local church*, Tearfund 2007, pages 36-39