

Training local church leaders in strategic planning - A case study of the Garano Kale Heywet Church, Ethiopia

Introduction

Garano Kale Heywet Church is a rural church in a coffee growing area located 25 km south of Awassa off the main Ethiopia-Kenya highway. It was established in 1970 by 50 devout Christians. They worshipped in home churches and around homesteads. In the early years there were no regular ministers preaching and teaching the congregation. Instead, members nurtured and built each other up in the word of God. The church had to go underground during a time of government persecution in 1975. Since then the church has gradually grown in size, influence, service area and ministries. It now has a membership of 812 (52% women; 48% men); it serves an area of almost 1,000 households; and it has a large number of church ministries, including prayer, youth, children, outreach, choir, visitation, development, education, training, missionary sending, and social services.

In the mid-1990s the Kale Heywet Church of Ethiopia denomination, of which the Garano church is a part, began an intensive and long-term organisational and leadership development project, called Project Gilgal. This project had a profound impact in opening up the hearts and minds of church leaders and church members throughout Ethiopia to the role the church can play in community transformation. (Click here to read a case study on Project Gilgal).

Training for leaders in participatory strategic planning

One key aspect of Project Gilgal's leadership development training was training of leaders in participatory strategic planning. The aim of this training was to help local churches become long-term oriented, visionary and outward looking.

A number of key leaders from Garano church participated in the training:

- The chairperson of the Assembly of Elders
- The church secretary
- The Women's Ministry chairperson
- The Development Ministry chairperson
- The church evangelist

They received a week's training from district leaders who had themselves been trained by Project Gilgal's national training team (known as Change Agents). The training focused on:

- increasing knowledge about participatory strategic planning;
- increasing the participants' ability to cascade knowledge to other church leaders;
- helping participants understand the mission and vision of the church;
- increasing the capacity of leaders to do a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis of the internal and external environment affecting the growth of the church;
- improving participants' ability to prioritise organisational objectives;
- helping participants identify and develop resources for church growth;
- helping participants learn how to prepare a five year strategic plan for their respective churches.

In addition, training was provided in team building and pastoral ministry, to help participants resolve local disputes and pastoral crises that were identified as frequent problems in the local churches.

The need for the training

The training tapped into a desire amongst the Garano church leadership to see change within the church. "We were very desirous in our hearts that the church has to change; that our ministry should be effective; coordinated and life changing. The timing of the training was perfect because we were on the cross roads of choosing which way to go."

The training also helped the participating church leaders to identify why the church needed more participatory and strategic planning:

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- The church was carrying out its ministries in a very traditional way without proper planning of activities i.e. identifying problems; assessing its resources; listing activities, scheduling and monitoring (who does what when)
- All the ministries of the church were implemented haphazardly without proper coordination, with lots of competition.
- Assignments were often given to leaders/members verbally and were often forgotten and were not followed through affecting the effectiveness of church ministries
- As proper planning was not done based on an in depth analysis of needs, the leaders' approach was fire fighting and often focussing on the symptom and not on the root causes of the problem. Solutions for problems were given as they occurred and were too costly in terms of time and resources.
- The church's focus had always been on short term needs within the church, with no attention given to the external factors affecting the church
- The church budget was simply a list of annual expenses, prepared without consultation of others members of the leadership. It was often incomprehensible and difficult to read.

Training and raising awareness of the whole local church

The leaders from Garano church who had participated in the training then returned to their church to train other leaders and church members in the strategic planning skills they had learnt. They focused on the full time minister, the elders of the church, the youth, Sunday school teachers and 25 congregation members. In addition, a general awareness discussion was held in the church for three consecutive Sundays as well as discussions in bible study groups and home fellowships.

The passing on of the training was appreciated by the church members, though less educated members found it difficult to engage with. The quality of the training was not as high as that provided by the original trainers at district level, and the local trainers could have benefited from having more follow-up and support from the district trainers. It would also have been beneficial to have had more opportunities to give feedback from local level back up to district level, so that progress could have been monitored and lessons learnt for future trainings.

Impact

Despite these limitations, some significant impact has been achieved, not only by the strategic planning training but also by the training in team working and pastoral ministry.

At church leadership level:

- There is a greater commitment to, and practice of, servant leadership principles (of serving the congregation rather than being served)
- The honesty and transparency of leaders has increased
- Office management skills have improved (eg, book keeping, accounting, payment vouchers, the use of proper receipts)
- Budgeting has significantly improved. "We used to consume our entire budget by the middle of the financial year, but now we plan based on our resources and review the way the budget is being consumed constantly to avoid overspending."
- There are much clearer leadership structures and roles

At congregation level:

- Members of the church have started sharing what they have with the poor
- Ministries within the church have started providing much greater support to widows, the elderly without support, orphans and the disabled
- The youth of the church now repair houses of the elderly and the poor, and assist in the preparing of their farms, planting and harvesting their crops
- Members are more willing to accept the authority and leadership of the church leaders due to the positive change in leadership
- Tithing and gifts have increased (from 3,500 Birr/month 7-8 years ago to 22,000 Birr/month)
- Christian farmers' productivity has increased considerably (resulting in their unprecedented increase in tithing and gifts)
- The vision of the church is now in line with the mission of the Kale Heywet Church denomination as a whole

At community level:

- The church is now viewed as a symbol of God's love and compassion to the poor.
- The churches' emphasis on work ethics and the motto that Christian farms should be the best in terms of productivity has indeed captured the attention of the wider non-Christian community.

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- Ghat (leaf chewed by the youth), alcohol drinking and cigarette smoking has considerably declined in the community due to the example set by the Christian youth.
- A saving culture has developed. Previously, farmers used to spend all the money they had during harvest

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