

Establishing sustainable Christian communities in slum communities where there are no churches

This guide is based on the work of the Discipleship Centre in slum communities in India.

Identify a community

Identify a slum community that is the poorest in the area.

Conduct a needs survey

Bring the community together to do participatory activities to identify their needs and discuss possible responses.

Start projects in response to needs

Help to meet some of the priority needs identified by setting up projects. These may, for example, be focused on children (e.g. pre-schools, after school clubs), on income generation training (e.g. seamstress training, computer training), or on health (e.g. immunisation programmes, health awareness).

Build spiritual development into the programmes from the outset

From the outset of your work, be clear that you are Christians. As trust and relationships are built with the community, encourage times of prayer during the projects, and offer to pray with people who have problems. Consider holding Bible studies and devotions for project beneficiaries, which they can choose to attend. Consider employing a pastor or evangelist whose specific role is to encourage and lead these aspects of the programme.

Provide counselling support

Consider appointing a counsellor who is available throughout the week to listen and advise people in the community on spiritual and family issues, and to provide support and prayer. The counsellor could work both one-on-one with people, but also through conducting Bible studies and discussion groups.

Develop community leadership

In addition to initiating community projects, it is crucial to invest in developing community leadership. Encourage the community to identify or elect people who can be trained in leadership skills and in accounting, project management, advocacy, running committees, etc.

Encourage the establishment of a Christian community that meets regularly

As people come to faith, or express increasing interest in the gospel, through the work of the project, consider starting a local church if there is not one already. The project pastor or evangelist could become the church pastor.

Build the capacity of the local community

Build the capacity of the community to the extent where all the programmes can be managed and run by local people. This may take a number of years.

Negotiate a successful exit strategy

Give time to discussing with the community the appropriate way of transferring the management and ownership of the programmes over to the community, and to discussing which programmes should be the responsibility of the new church community.

Start the process again in another community

Move on to another community and begin the process again. Take people from the new community on learning visits to the newly independent communities to enable them to gain inspiration and encouragement. Bring people from the independent communities into the new communities to share their experience and skills.

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