

Discipleship Centre Slum Development Programme, Delhi, India

A case study on establishing sustainable Christian communities in slum communities where there are no churches

The Discipleship Centre (DC) is a thirty-year old Christian NGO whose vision is to 'be a helping hand to facilitate sustainable and holistic transformation'. Its slum development programme aims to enable slum dwellers, particularly women, to re-establish their homes and employment prospects and to develop social relationships within their new environment.

This case study provides a step-by-step guide to the Discipleship Centre's Slum Development Programme, with a particular emphasis on the spiritual development aspects of the programme. It uses examples from two project areas – Kalyanpuri, where DC is now withdrawing after six years of work, and Sugbash Camp, where DC has just started work in the last three months.

Identifying a community

DC, committed to working amongst the poorest of the poor, identifies a slum community that is the poorest in the area.

Kalyanpuri: This is a slum community of about 3000 people, relocated from central Delhi ten years previously. DC began working in this community six years ago.

Sugbash Camp: A similar size slum community, but more recent than Kalyanpuri. DC began working in this community three months ago.

Conducting a needs survey

DC conducts a needs survey, and connects with the local church if one exists.

The community is brought together to do participatory activities to identify their needs and discuss possible responses.

Starting projects in response to needs

DC then helps to meet some of the priority needs identified by setting up projects. These may be related to:

- *children*: pre-schools, after school clubs (to provide supplementary education and to encourage pupils to do their homework), school drop-out classes (to help children who have missed school years to catch up and re-enter school), and crèche services (providing a safe place while mothers work)
- *income-generation training*: beautician training, needlework training, seamstress training, computer training
- *health*: immunisation programmes, HIV and AIDS awareness programmes, further training for traditional birth attendants.

The number of projects will be determined by the enthusiasm and interest of the community.

Sugbash Camp: After only 6 weeks in the community, DC is running a balwadi (crèche), supplementary education classes for several ages, and providing beautician and seamstress training. As their centre, they have managed to rent a fairly spacious area where all the activities can happen together. Already, the project is impacting over 60 children and 30 women from the local community.

Kalyanpuri: After six years of work, there are numerous programmes taking place in this community. In terms of education, over 220 children receive supplementary education, a meal each day, and a school uniform. Twenty 0-3 year olds are cared for in a crèche while their parents work. There is also a class for school-age children of migrants who, because of their temporary nature, cannot go to state school. In terms of community health, there is a record of every single family in the community, with up-to-date information on dates of vaccinations, illnesses, births, etc. The vaccination rate of children is now over 95%, leading to a significant reduction in child mortality. Health workers from within the community are now fully trained. In terms of income-generation schemes, there is a self-help group, and seamstress, beautician and computer training.

Building spiritual development into the programmes from the outset

From the outset of their work, DC are known to be Christians. As trust and relationships are built with the community, they will increase the Christian emphasis of their work. They will have times of prayer during training, and they will offer to pray with people who have problems.

Further opportunities to explore the Christian faith are made available. Children can attend one-day Bible camps, and adult training programmes give time one day each week for devotions and spiritual development. As good relationships have been formed, people are happy to receive these opportunities. DC employs a pastor and evangelist to help with this work. If possible, the pastor and evangelist will be local people, but this is not always possible.

Sugbash Camp: One of the DC evangelists is already teaching the children Bible stories and Christian songs, and every Friday the women have Christian teaching in their training. A pastor from a church 4 km away is being involved in the work.

Kalyanpuri: The Bible camps and picnics have proved very popular with the children and have led to significant changes in their lives. The children have also told their parents about Jesus and many of their parents have begun to explore faith as a result. A part-time pastor was employed to be a pastor to the projects.

Providing counselling support

DC appoints 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 works both one-on-one with people, but also through conducting Bible studies and discussion groups. The counsellor may be a local church pastor.

Kalyanpuri: The counsellor is a local woman who had become a Christian through the work and who has been trained by DC to counsel others. She runs discussion groups for 10-12 women 2-3 times every week, as well as providing lots of individual support.

Developing community leadership

In parallel with education and health programmes and the spiritual development programme, DC focuses on leadership development. Through the women it works with, DC encourages all the women in the area to form a 'mahila mandal', a local community organisation that is recognised by the government. The women elect a committee and a DC member of staff works with these women, building their capacity. Starting from a very low skills base, these committee members gradually gain knowledge and skills in accounting, project management, advocacy, running committees, etc.

The mahila mandal then begin to represent the interests of the community to the government (e.g. lobbying for improved water access), represent the needs of individuals (e.g. lobbying for individual rights to healthcare), and identify further community needs and approach donors and government to meet those needs. Throughout their training, the Mahila Mandal will also receive spiritual input from their trainer, and from the counsellor and pastor.

Kalyanpuri: The level of empowerment of the Kalyanpuri Mahila Mandal is extraordinary. Women who six years earlier had been semi-illiterate and barely surviving are now able to clearly articulate their goals for the community that they have come to lead and represent and to point to significant successes. Such successes include improving the water supply in the slum through advocacy work, setting up a self-help group for the poorest women in the community, and overseeing a number of primary health care projects. The group runs well ordered and transparent accounts. Some of the women have become Christians, and all of them are very positive about the church and the ongoing need for spiritual development.

Establishing or strengthening a local church

Gradually, people come to faith. If there is no local church, DC start a church, with the project pastor becoming the church pastor.

Kalyanpuri: Previously, there was no church in this community. A church has now formed under the leadership of the programme pastor. It meets in the programme centre and over 100 people attend, all from the local community. It is an amazing testimony to the work of God in transforming people's lives. The pastor has lots of credibility and is respected in the area because of his work with DC and because, through his interaction with all the various projects, he has developed good relationships with many in the community. The church is thus well-rooted in the community.

Building the capacity of the local community

The aim of DC is to build the community capacity to the extent where DC can withdraw and the community can continue. They do this by actively looking to encourage and train up local community people to take on roles in the project (e.g. as health workers, teachers, counsellors, etc), and by building the capacity of the mahila mandal and the church to take on the leadership of DC programmes. This takes a number of years.

Kalyanpuri: Almost all the education and health roles in the projects are now being done by people from the local community. Many of these workers have found potential and skills that had never been tapped before, and are earning an income for the first time in their lives. Many have also had their values transformed and have become Christians. In addition to this, Kalyanpuri is even providing the next batch of DC staff for the development work in Sugbash Camp.

Negotiating a successful exit strategy

DC helps the church and the mahila mandal to agree who will take responsibility for which aspects of the on-going programme. For example, the church might agree to run the education programme and the mahila mandal the health programme. Because there have been such close links between the pastor (and the church) and the mahila mandal throughout the process, working together is not difficult.

After DC withdraws, the church and the mahila mandal continue to meet together at least every month to discuss issues and progress. DC will continue to provide coaching support until it is no longer needed.

Kalyanpuri: The Mahila Mandal are convinced of the importance of continuing to involve the local church in decisions even now that DC are moving on. They recognise the vital importance of ongoing spiritual development. They articulated this in such a way: 'Whatever the church does, we will support'.

Moving on to another community

DC moves on to another community and begins the process again. It takes people from the new community on learning visits to the newly independent communities, and also brings people from the independent communities into the new communities to share their experience and skills.

Sugbash Camp: A number of the DC staff working in Sugbash Camp were community members in Kalyanpuri whose skills were built up through the programme there.

Conclusion

The Slum Development Programme requires large amounts of resources. In Kalyanpuri, at least 10 teachers, three health workers, three adult trainers, a counsellor, an evangelist, a pastor, a mahila mandal capacity builder, three crèche workers and a project co-ordinator were employed (at least 23 staff). For the first six years, almost all the costs were carried by DC and its donors. However, the result is significant holistic transformation in very poor communities, with the establishment of sustainable Christian communities where previously there had been no church.

Author: Tulo Raistrick

Information provided by Discipleship Centre, India