

## 2. Ability to mobilise others

The local church is the best institution to empower citizens at a grass-roots level in many countries. It is influential, sustainable, indigenous and carries weight.

In Zimbabwe, the church is the only institution allowed to come together by law. In countries with significant Christian populations, it is difficult for the government to restrict the activities of the church, and particularly to stop it meeting, because in many cases, even the government ministers and judges are Christian. This gives the churches opportunities that are not open to other civil society groups.

### Example

Seventy churches in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, from across the denominational spectrum came together for the first time in 2005 following the government's slum clearance programme. The churches opened up their buildings so that evicted people could stay rather than being forcibly removed to remote rural areas, until appropriate infrastructure had been provided. It was the first time that the local churches had come together as one to speak and act with a unified voice. There was a strong sense of spiritual unity too, as for the first time church pastors from Catholics through to Pentecostals prayed together. Every Monday these pastors came together for prayer and support. This unity provided great strength. Whenever one pastor was arrested all the churches rallied round and provided support. Most of these churches were previously apolitical, but they have come to realise that unless things change politically, all other caring programmes will fail.

In other contexts, it may be appropriate for the local church to collaborate with the advocacy of other civil society groups, lending their voice and support to work already being done.

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