

# Introduction

This book is aimed at Christian organisations that seek to transform communities through development, relief and advocacy work. These organisations may be church denominations, development departments of denominations, Christian networks, Bible colleges or Christian non-governmental organisations (NGOs). We recognise that in some ways these types of organisations are different. However, as this book is based on the idea that the local church is central to community transformation, we group all these Christian organisations together because we suggest that they can all have a similar role in empowering local churches. We refer to a particular type of Christian organisation when they have a unique role.

In this book we outline what is meant by integral mission and show the central role of the local church in this. We argue that by empowering the local church to carry out integral mission, Christian organisations can influence community transformation to a greater extent than if they work directly in the community and in isolation from the local church.

In order to do this, Christian organisations may have to change their thinking and their role. A key issue is to break away from the idea of only implementing compact, time-bound projects at community level. As integral mission involves local churches reaching out to communities in every aspect of life, we feel that it is helpful to use the word 'initiative' rather than 'project' when relating to local church activities. This is because many integral mission activities may be small-scale and ongoing, to such an extent that they become part of community life. Indeed, poor people often want to participate in community more than projects. The best thing the local church can do is to offer poor people a place of welcome and community. A small community initiative may be one way to do this.

Some integral mission activities carried out by the local church may need to be supported by Christian organisations due to the need for expertise or equipment. These may therefore seem more like traditional projects. However, in this book we make a distinction between projects and initiatives on the basis of who takes the lead. We use the word 'project' to describe work in the community which is led by a Christian organisation. We use the word 'initiative' to describe an activity that is started and owned by the local church, even if it receives some input from a Christian organisation.

One of the biggest challenges for Christian organisations, including Tearfund, in empowering the local church for integral mission, is to give up the power that we have over local churches and communities in terms of our resources, contacts and technical ability. It is tempting to use the local church for our own purposes. We hope that this book will be helpful as we work out how best to serve the local church, and through it, God's purposes in the world.

This book is intended to be thought-provoking as well as practical. There is therefore not enough space to make it into a comprehensive handbook that will enable a Christian organisation to mobilise a local church without reference to other resources. However, we do raise important issues, provide a few practical ideas to trigger further discussion, and provide a list of other useful resources.

The book starts by defining the local church and integral mission. In Section 2 we look at different models of interaction between local churches and Christian organisations. In Section 3 we look at three approaches to working with local churches. Section 4 then draws out key issues to consider when working on a strategy to engage more with local churches.