

Approaches to working with local churches

In Section 2 we looked at models of interaction between Christian organisations and local churches. In this section we look at different approaches to working with local churches. These are illustrated using detailed case studies of Tearfund's partner organisations. The approaches are as follows:

- 3.1 **Church mobilisation** – Christian organisations mobilise local churches to work in the community. This approach fits best with the empowerment model (page 19).
- 3.2 **Church and community mobilisation** – Christian organisations mobilise the local church which then mobilises the community to help themselves. This approach fits best with the empowerment model.
- 3.3 **Church empowerment for advocacy** – Christian organisations empower the local church to advocate on community issues. This approach fits with both the involvement model and the empowerment model.

These approaches are not distinct options. Organisations may use different approaches with different local churches according to the local context. Over time, it may be appropriate for organisations to develop their work with a local church. For example, they may start off with a church mobilisation approach in response to a crisis and work towards a church and community mobilisation approach. Church empowerment for advocacy could be the only approach used with a particular local church, or it could be used alongside the other approaches.

3.1 Church mobilisation

Church mobilisation is the act of mobilising a local church to respond to needs in the community in which it is based. The focus of this approach is on local church pastors and their congregations. Pastors are envisioned to carry out integral mission (see Section 4.4 about envisioning). The pastors then envision their congregations.

The approach does not mobilise the wider community, but seeks to enable the local church to meet the community's needs. In this sense, it is a welfare approach because the church responds to the perceived needs of the community.

Common elements of a church mobilisation process include:

- envisioning pastors
- envisioning congregations
- setting up a core team to manage the initiative
- recruiting volunteers

- providing training to volunteers
- supporting volunteers.

In some places, local churches may already understand the need for integral mission, but may not be doing it because they lack confidence or expertise. A church mobilisation process may therefore focus less on the 'why' of integral mission and spend more time looking at the 'how'.

Case study

ZOE (Zimbabwe Orphans through Extended hands)

Due to HIV and AIDS, the number of orphans in Zimbabwe is growing rapidly. There is increasing recognition that traditional orphanages are inadequate, and that the church needs to respond more effectively. ZOE was set up to encourage local churches to care for orphans and to support them in doing this.

ZOE is an organisation with a minimal structure. For the first nine years of its work there were no employed staff and even now there are only eight. This was intentional. The founder did not want ZOE to become an organisation that implemented projects, but instead to be an agency that envisions and facilitates the local churches to act.

ZOE responds to requests from local church leaders for help in addressing the needs in their community. ZOE gathers together all the church leaders in the local area for a day in order to envision them. Bible studies play an important role in this because they help the leaders to understand the responsibility of the local church. Once the pastors have returned to their congregations to share the vision, many people usually come forward to become volunteers who care for orphans in the community on behalf of the local churches.

Each volunteer cares for no more than five families. The volunteers aim to visit each family at least once a month. The fact that the volunteers come back regularly has a positive impact on the families, especially if the household has been abandoned by the extended family. When they visit, the volunteers seek to identify the needs, look for signs of abuse, listen, help practically, share resources, share something from the Bible and pray with them. Common activities carried out by volunteers include providing feeding advice and advice on seeking medical help. The volunteers keep records of their visits and report on them at a monthly meeting of volunteers and local church leaders. This helps to ensure local church ownership of the work with orphans. It also ensures that the volunteers are supported in their work.

From the beginning of the process, ZOE makes it clear that it will not provide resources other than training, since the work is a church activity and responsibility. The local churches therefore take responsibility for the volunteers and help them to support families by providing regular offerings or practical help. For example, a volunteer might call on other church members to help to repair a roof or to prepare land for a family in their care.



A volunteer with some of the orphans he cares for.

Photo: Karyn Beattie



AIMS

- To raise awareness among local churches of the importance of ministering to orphans holistically, and to provide training in how to do this effectively.
- To strengthen the work of churches already involved in caring for orphans through training and support.



STEPS IN THE PROCESS

- 1 Envisioning workshop, offered to all local church leaders after an initial request from a few. The workshop:
 - uses Bible studies and participatory training approaches to look at the role and responsibility of the church and the needs of local orphans.
 - communicates the message that the first need of orphans is not physical resources such as food or housing, but rather love, care, support and nurture. These needs can be met only by local, loving people.
- 2 Pastors share the vision with their congregations and draw up a list of volunteers and a list of orphans in the local area.
- 3 Volunteer workshop, facilitated by ZOE staff or a volunteer area co-ordinator, with the venue and logistics organised by the local church. Issues covered include finding orphans, making visits, keeping records, identifying needs and involving existing community structures.
- 4 Visit programmes implemented by volunteers.
- 5 Monthly meeting of local church leaders and volunteers to share experiences, learning and problems.

Additional activities facilitated by ZOE include:

- Specialist training to enable local churches to provide greater assistance, such as setting up an income generation initiative, recognising child abuse or providing psychosocial support.
- 'Training of trainers' workshops for volunteer area coordinators, who go on to facilitate envisioning workshops.
- Exchange visits to enable volunteers to learn from each other. ZOE provides some funds for this.

IMPACT

The impact of ZOE's work is extraordinary. Seven years after it started, the programme had led to local churches caring for 15,000 orphans. Then there was sudden growth. In the following year the number of orphans cared for grew to over 40,000. This was partly due to an increase in the number of needy households because of drought and unemployment, but it was also because the number of churches joining the programme increased. The number of volunteers grew from 550 to 1,013 and the number of participating churches increased from 121 to 191 in the same year. Three years later, there were 600 churches involved in the programme and 2,000 volunteers supporting nearly 100,000 children.

Most areas that have started orphan care programmes have seen an increase in church attendance. As the programme shows the local church to be a caring community, it has gained respect.

LESSONS LEARNED

ZOE'S FOCUS ON TRAINING MEANS THAT TO EXPAND ITS WORK, MORE TRAINERS ARE NEEDED

The work has been so successful that there is high demand from other local church leaders for training. Some volunteers were therefore selected to become 'volunteer area co-ordinators', who could help to facilitate some of ZOE's workshops. This approach was seen as more empowering and sustainable than taking on new staff members.

SOME EXTERNAL RESOURCES MAY BE NEEDED The level of need and the number of orphans is so overwhelming that local churches often struggle to offer the most basic care. There is a need for external resources to supplement the resources that churches and volunteers are already contributing. However, this needs to be managed in a way that will not disempower local initiative and cause dependency. The focus needs to be on increasing self-reliance, such as through income-generation initiatives.

AS THE PROCESS IS SIMPLE, IT IS EASY TO REPLICATE ELSEWHERE It can take as little as 3–6 months from the pastor's initial request for help, to volunteers visiting orphans.

At the start of a church mobilisation process, pastors from a variety of local churches could be envisioned together. The pastors could come from churches in the local area, or from churches in a denomination. It can be a good idea to envision denominational staff first, in order to gain ownership at higher levels of the church structure. Many pastors of independent local churches belong to ministers' fraternal networks which provide an excellent means of relating to large numbers of local churches. The networks tend to be locally structured and focused, allowing for good networking, cooperation, unity and sharing of resources.

Case study

Transforma Project: Peace and Hope, Peru

San Juan de Luringancho is a poor district of the city of Lima in Peru. There are over 430 evangelical churches in the district. Peace and Hope, a Christian organisation, set up the Transforma Project to encourage those churches to respond to the needs in the area.



AIMS

To encourage and enable evangelical churches to develop actions of transformation in their communities from an integral mission perspective.



STEPS
IN THE
PROCESS

- 1 Relationship-building between Transforma staff and local pastors.
- 2 Surveys carried out to identify local church attitudes to integral mission.
- 3 Survey findings presented to local pastors.
- 4 Identification of five main issues that local churches were interested in addressing.
- 5 Training workshops for all pastors and church members. At the end of the training, participants took and applied the ideas with their own churches.
- 6 Intensive accompaniment and facilitation of selected churches in the poorest areas.

Transforma staff made efforts to build relationships with local church leaders. They invited key pastors to form an advisory group. They also invited pastors to lead their staff devotions and they compiled and circulated a monthly devotional guide written by the pastors. Once relationships had deepened, Transforma carried out a survey with the pastors to identify the understanding of integral mission within local churches and the extent to which they practised it.

The following findings were made:

- Local churches rarely focused on meeting needs of those outside the church
- Local churches only tended to provide one-off support to individuals rather than ongoing support
- When churches had tried to meet needs in the community, few had carried out a needs assessment beforehand.



Photo: Ian Horne

When the findings were presented at a breakfast for local pastors, many of the pastors became interested in receiving Transforma training. Training was provided to the pastors on the five main issues that the local churches were interested in addressing. Some of the local churches then worked together. For example, Transforma worked with four churches to carry out a needs assessment in the local community. Providing educational support to children was seen by the community as an important need. The churches therefore decided to provide a four-week holiday education programme for children in the area.

Transforma staff visited the churches regularly, envisioning and providing tools and resources for the church pastors to envision their congregations about integral mission. Transforma helped the pastors to think through ideas and helped to start off initiatives. There was a retreat for ten pastors to promote unity and help them to develop a joint vision for community transformation in San Juan de Lurigancho.

IMPACT

The process is ongoing, but there are already signs of impact:

- Churches have grown in confidence and want to do more in their communities.
- One hundred and twenty children attended the holiday education programme for children. The leaders of the community where the holiday club was run were so pleased with what the churches are doing that they offered land to one local church so that a church could be built in the centre of the community.

LESSONS LEARNED

THE COMMITMENT OF LEADERS TO INTEGRAL MISSION IS ESSENTIAL It has been harder to mobilise churches with leaders who have no experience of working with poor people.

GENDER ISSUES MUST BE CONSIDERED Some of the training workshops were originally carried out on Saturday mornings. This was not an appropriate time for women to attend. Future training will be planned at times that are more accessible to women as well as men.

Strengths of church mobilisation

The approach recognises the values of the local church. It seeks to build on, rather than ignore, the witness, experience and relationships of the local church.

The approach can be more cost-effective in addressing community needs than a Christian organisation implementing projects itself. Once funds have been invested in mobilising a local church, resources can be released by church members which cannot be easily quantified, but which can greatly benefit a community. These resources include

volunteers, gifts, skills, money, love and prayer. If a Christian organisation were to carry out a similar project itself, the project would be more expensive due to paying staff and office costs. It may also have less impact. For example, there may be less prayer support for the project.

The approach is more sustainable than carrying out individual projects. Every time a Christian organisation carries out a project, there are specific project costs such as staff time, materials and so on. When a new project is carried out there is a new set of costs. However, once a local church is mobilised it can respond to a range of community needs, now and in the future. The initial funds invested in church mobilisation therefore have a multiplier effect and can result in greater impact in the community.

The approach can enable local churches to focus on a specific issue which may have been evident in the community before the process started. Once a church is mobilised, it has better capacity to respond to a crisis when it happens, or carry out new initiatives.

The approach can show tangible results in a short space of time.

Weaknesses of church mobilisation

Initiatives that arise from the church mobilisation processes will normally be quite basic because **technical knowledge may not exist among church members**. This lack of specialist knowledge may mean that key issues related to the initiative may not be identified and addressed. This can lead to ineffective work, and at worst, can have a negative impact on the community. While churches can often offer resources that specialist organisations cannot, there may be situations where ill-informed church initiatives could do more harm than good. Therefore Christian organisations have a role in providing specialist knowledge.

There is a risk that local churches will carry out initiatives that are **not relevant to the community**. The local church may make incorrect assumptions about what the community needs.

Since church mobilisation processes tend to have a welfare approach, there is a danger that **community dependency on the church may be created**. While it is good that community members see the church as caring, the approach can result in disempowerment of community members.

As church initiatives tend to be simple and responsive, **they may fail to address the root causes of community problems**. While the church's ability to respond to immediate needs is a strength, there may be little sustainable change as a result of its work. This is unfortunate, since in many countries, the church has the potential and resources to be a strong advocate for change. Christian organisations, at the same time as mobilising the local church for action in the community, could also train the local church in advocacy (see page 42).

The approach relies heavily on the leadership and encouragement of the church leader. However, pastors are not always easy for Christian organisations to work with since they may have different priorities.

Pastors and churches have wider agendas than responding to needs in their community. The demands of church life can mean that at times, **responding to needs outside the church is given less focus and attention.**

3.2 Church and community mobilisation

Church and community mobilisation involves mobilising a local church to act as a facilitator in mobilising the whole community to address their own needs.

This approach is different from the ‘church mobilisation’ approach because once the local church is mobilised, it becomes a facilitator rather than a provider. The local church seeks to envision and empower community members to identify and respond to their own needs, rather than meeting needs for them. The local church therefore works **with** rather than **for** the community. The community is in control, but it is not necessarily left on its own after mobilisation. The local church can provide ongoing support to the community, and Christian organisations may need to provide technical support at the request of the community if needs are to be met.

Church mobilisation, as we have seen, can be useful in a crisis to respond to a particular need. However, where there is no specific urgent need in a community, but there is ongoing poverty, the church and community mobilisation approach is preferable. This is because it is more likely to be sustainable due to increased community ownership. The initiatives developed are more likely to be priorities for community members because the approach encourages community members to identify their needs and respond to them themselves. Community members will therefore value the initiatives more than if the local church simply acted as a provider.

While this approach and the church mobilisation approach both involve mobilising the local church, this approach involves an additional mobilisation process, as the table below shows.

	CHURCH MOBILISATION	CHURCH AND COMMUNITY MOBILISATION
Mobilise church	Envision pastors and members to carry out integral mission	Envision pastors and members to carry out integral mission
Train church	Train church to identify needs and provide some technical training in responding to a particular identified need	Train church to envision and mobilise the community
Church action in community	Church meets a need in the community	Church envisions and mobilises community to meet its own needs
Community action	None, or may work with local church in a limited way	Community identifies needs and responds to them with their own resources where possible

Case study

Wholistic Development Organisation, Cambodia

In Cambodia, many communities were disempowered in the 1970s because the oppressive Khmer Rouge regime reduced people’s ability to care for their families, to make community decisions and to participate in community activities. As a result, responses of local churches to need are often relief-orientated, which creates dependency.

Wholistic Development Organisation (WDO), a Christian organisation, wanted to challenge dependency and facilitate local churches to empower communities to take action. They trained Christian facilitators, who then envisioned local churches. The local churches identified six members to form a Christian core group, which worked with the community to identify problems and possible solutions. The facilitators and Christian core group provided support to communities as they addressed their own problems.



AIMS

To establish Christian core groups that have the capacity to implement integral mission through facilitating community initiatives that contribute to food security, income generation and health.



STEPS IN THE PROCESS

- 1 Selection and training of facilitators. Committed Christians who are actively involved in their own local church and who have a passion for serving the poor are employed by WDO as Community development facilitators. They receive training in community development, leadership, management, organising people, dealing with trauma, facilitating group meetings creatively, and developing character and values through weekly Bible studies.
- 2 Selection of target communities. Communities are identified by WDO on the basis of need and the maturity of the local church and its leadership.
- 3 Formation of community-based Christian core groups. The community development facilitators use Bible studies and discussion with the local church to help members to identify their vision for the future of their community and then how to plan fulfilment of the vision. The local church elects a small group of Christians to form a Christian core group, which acts as the main catalyst and organiser of the process.
- 4 Community needs analysis and action planning. The Christian core group brings the whole community together to discuss and identify the root causes of community problems and identify possible solutions. They also identify what local resources are available and what contributions members of the community can make in terms of time, labour, materials and money.
- 5 Taking action. The community takes action to address its problems with facilitation from the community development facilitators and Christian core group. Once the community shows a willingness to contribute its own resources, seed funding to support initiatives is given by WDO in the form of loans. Repayments are kept within the community to act as a revolving fund.
- 6 Developing the capacity of the Christian core group. The community development facilitators invest time in developing Christian core group members throughout the process so that eventually they can manage initiatives in the community with minimal support.

IMPACT

Trapeang Keh was a poor community with dry land, migration out of the area, ill health and debt. There was little trust or cooperation between members of the community. The church consisted of four members and they were persecuted and marginalised by the rest of the community. After the mobilisation process, the community members began to work together to address their problems, such as through digging improved wells and setting up irrigation systems.

Attitudes and relationships between community members changed. There is less social disruption because men no longer need to migrate.

The community discussions encouraged men to listen to women. Men's respect for women has therefore increased. There is less domestic violence and more sharing of 'women's' tasks with men, such as gardening, water collection and cooking. There is less quarrelling and fighting in the village and less alcoholism. Decision-making is fairer and more inclusive.



The community comes together to discuss local issues.

Photo: Jabez Production

Attitudes to the church have also changed. The Christians have grown in confidence to care for their neighbours and share their faith. There is less persecution and more respect for Christians. The church has grown, and all but two households now attend the local church.

LESSONS LEARNED

THOSE WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED POVERTY THEMSELVES TEND TO MAKE THE BEST FACILITATORS

The facilitators do not need to have any development qualifications or experience. In fact, those with formal qualifications tend to be less willing to stay in communities or travel to remote areas, and have not stayed long with WDO. Facilitators were willing to spend time in the community, including staying overnight, which many development workers are unwilling to do. This has led to the formation of deep relationships that has enhanced the success of the mobilisation process.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING HELPS TO OVERCOME COMMUNITY DEPENDENCY At the beginning of the process, communities were often resistant to participatory approaches and the emphasis on the importance of community involvement and responsibility. WDO overcame this challenge by investing time in each community, building relationships and sharing the vision of the work.

EXISTING POWER STRUCTURES CAN FEEL THREATENED BY THE PROCESS Local power structures, such as village development committees, sometimes felt threatened because the process empowers poor people and gives them a voice. The process often achieves far more in a community in a few months than village development committees achieve in years.

THE PROCESS WORKS BETTER WITH WELL ESTABLISHED LOCAL CHURCHES If churches were too young and immature, they were unable to take on the responsibility of being a catalyst for the mobilisation process. They saw the process as an opportunity to grow the church by offering aid as an incentive for people to convert, rather than as an opportunity for the local church to show that it cares about the community.

Case study

Participatory evaluation process (PEP), Uganda, Tanzania and Sudan

The Participatory evaluation process (PEP) has been carried out in a number of places in East Africa. It has been used for a number of reasons. For example:

- In Soroti, Uganda, staff of the Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) had become frustrated that existing programmes had struggled to gain local ownership and that local energy and resources had remained underused.
- The Diocese of Ruaha in Tanzania had become dissatisfied with traditional development approaches.
- In North Sudan, the Fellowship for Africa Relief wanted to build capacity at local church and community levels.
- In South Sudan, ACROSS wanted to build up the local church rather than implement projects.

PEP involves envisioning and mobilising local churches to enable communities to respond to their needs. After envisioning local church leaders and denominational staff, church leaders are equipped to share the vision about integral mission with their congregations. Bible studies play a key role in the envisioning process, sometimes taking place over three to four days. Another key aspect is the need for the local churches to see that they have the capacity to catalyse change in their communities. This is partly about recognising the local resources that the church and community possess, and partly about having confidence in one's own abilities.

Once a local church is envisioned, contact is made with community leaders and the possibility of working together to mobilise the community is discussed. The community is then envisioned and taken through a number of stages which involve identifying local issues that need to be addressed and the resources the community can use to address them. Various church and community members are selected to help to facilitate the process, which enhances local ownership.

To engage the local church with the theology and practice of integral mission at all levels so that it becomes envisioned and mobilised to act as an agent of community mobilisation, enabling communities to identify and address their needs.



AIMS



STEPS
IN THE
PROCESS

- 1 Envisioning workshop for denominational staff and pastors about integral mission. The participants select five or six pilot churches and appoint 15–20 people who will be trained as facilitators.
- 2 Training of facilitators. The facilitators are trained to envision local church members about integral mission.
- 3 Local church envisioning.
- 4 Local church resource mobilisation. Facilitators are trained in skills to help churches mobilise and make use of their own resources. They then implement the training in the local churches.
- 5 Relationship building between church and community. After training, facilitators arrange meetings between the pilot churches, community leaders and community members. At the meetings, three people from the local church and three people from the community are



An envisioning workshop for pastors in Ruaha, Tanzania.

Photo: Isabel Carter

selected to lead and shape the mobilisation process. Community members decide what these people will be called. In Soroti these were known as 'Church and Community Resource Persons'. In South Sudan they were called 'Awakeners'.

- 6 Community information gathering. Facilitators and Awakeners are trained in gathering information and then work with the community and a community-appointed Information Gathering Team to find out detailed information about the community.
- 7 Community needs analysis. After training, facilitators work with the community to analyse the information collected and decide which issues to address.
- 8 Community goal setting and action planning. After training, facilitators help the community to develop realistic goals and action plans.
- 9 Community implementation and monitoring. After training, facilitators equip community leaders and Awakeners to set up community development committees, implement action plans and monitor progress.
- 10 Renewal of denominational level ownership of the process. A workshop is run for the participants of the envisioning workshop that took place at the beginning of the process. Learning and outcomes from the process so far are shared with them to encourage ownership and support for the next stages of the process. They are encouraged to plan for replication of the process in other parts of the local area.
- 11 Ongoing training and support to the community development committees. Staff of the Christian organisation meet with the community development committees to identify their ongoing training needs. These might include training in financial management, supervision, monitoring and evaluation, project cycle management, community action planning and disaster management.
- 12 Replication. The whole process is repeated with more local churches and communities. The workshops are run by the facilitators from the first process, rather than an external consultant or member of staff from the Christian organisation.

The process has resulted in transformation in various aspects of community life. Transformation is most easily observed in the visual evidence, such as new buildings or wells, and more people attending church. But there is evidence that deeper, personal transformation has occurred in people's lives as a result of the process, as the box below shows.

'We were asleep before, but now we have a vision.' *Community member in North Sudan*

'PEP has helped us to know who we are.'
Church member in South Sudan

'If we would be left alone now and everyone were to desert us, we would be able to continue right to the end.'
Pastor in South Sudan

'Our eyes have been opened and everyone is more able to express themselves.'
Community members, North Sudan

'We should come together to face problems; my problem today will be someone else's tomorrow.'
Pastor in North Sudan

'Before our pastor heard of PEP we knew the word 'cooperation', but did not put it into action. Now we do!'
Community member, South Sudan

'The biggest change that the process has brought to me is the realisation that **I can do it**, but also that I must plan – things just don't happen themselves.'
Pastor in Ruaha

IMPACT

The process has had a significant impact at church level. For example:

- The local churches in Soroti that have completed the process, report a change in attitudes in church members. People see that their role is to give and not to get. The financial and in-kind offerings have increased dramatically. The churches have seen significant growth, both spiritually and numerically. The General Superintendent of PAG Uganda would like all districts to adopt the church and community mobilisation process in their local churches.
- In Ruaha, local people are becoming more involved in the day-to-day activities of the local church and taking part enthusiastically in its mission, which before they would have seen as the pastor's responsibility.
- In South Sudan, the process has led to increased unity. Local churches communicate better with each other and men and women work together more effectively.

At community level, many changes have taken place:

- One mobilised community in Soroti decided to take action against a community leader who had stolen the community's funds. The whole community gathered together and went to his house to successfully demand the money back. This has greatly encouraged the community.
- In one community in Ruaha, members of the church and the community provided the materials and labour needed to rebuild the house of a community member which had burned down. Before the process, local people would have helped her to put out the fire, but would then have expected her to reconstruct her house herself. In another community, the church has started income-generating groups involving rearing poultry and beekeeping. Another community identified the need to construct a teacher's house. They collected so many materials that they realised there was enough for the construction of three houses and not just one.
- In North Sudan, the process has brought Christian and Muslim communities together, which previously had no contact at all. Together they have addressed their need for drinking water by raising US \$5,000 and installing pipes to supply 1,400 homes. They also started other initiatives such as income-generation work, adult education classes, a kindergarten and buying a generator to bring electricity to a community. Some people would like to repeat the process with their new communities when they return home to South Sudan.
- In South Sudan, community initiatives include building a church and primary school, digging latrines and building a permanent bridge.

LESSONS LEARNED

THE PROCESS CAN BE EXPENSIVE AND TAKE A LONG TIME The process is high-input because it requires many workshops with mentoring support from the trainer in between. The process can be affected by people moving away and by external influences. It may be too slow to be effective in areas of instability and in urban areas where people move around more often.

THE PROCESS HAS HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF CHURCH AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS Facilitators and Awakeners have to give a lot of time to the process through attending workshops and mobilising the church and community. This may require staying away from home. An average facilitator may work half-time on the process for 18 months. There is a danger that Awakeners might move away or step down, which puts an additional burden on the remaining Awakeners. Community members are expected to attend community meetings and help to gather and analyse community information. These meetings may not be at an appropriate time, particularly for women.

PEOPLE ARE NOT PAID FOR THEIR TIME OR EXPENSES, SUCH AS TRAVEL COSTS The fact that the process has been carried out successfully in different places shows that there is considerable commitment to the process by all involved. There may be a need for the Christian organisation to fund the costs of facilitators at the early stages of the process so they do not run out of money. However, once the process has started to mobilise people, the church or community may begin to value the input of the facilitators or Awakeners and raise money to pay for food, accommodation and transport costs. For example, one community in South Sudan built a house in the church compound for people such as the facilitators to stay in when they visited. Another way to support the facilitators and Awakeners is to excuse them from contributing materials or money to community initiatives.



Community members with teachers' houses which are being built without resources from outside the community.

Photo: Nick Burn

SUFFICIENT TIME SHOULD BE INVESTED IN WORKING WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS as their support is key to ensuring that a large proportion of the community attend meetings and become mobilised.

IT CAN BE CHALLENGING TO CARRY OUT THE PROCESS IN REMOTE RURAL AREAS Staff of the Christian organisation have to be able to travel to the community regularly, a training venue is needed, facilitators need to be able to travel to the pilot communities, and there need to be enough educated people in a community to act as Awakeners.

IT CAN BE VERY DIFFICULT TO USE THE PROCESS IN A COMMUNITY WHERE THERE ARE ALREADY NGO PROGRAMMES because it is difficult to break through the dependency syndrome. It is possible that NGOs may come into the community during the process and offer quick solutions.

SPIRITUAL ATTACK IS REPORTED AS A CHALLENGE TO THE PROCESS This is not surprising since the process builds and equips the local church. Prayer support for the process is therefore vital.

Strengths of church and community mobilisation

The approach changes attitudes at various levels. The attitude of the local church to the community becomes more positive as church members discover their calling to serve the poor. The attitude of community members to the church improves as they see the church looking outward and seeking to make a difference in the community. Attitudes among church and community members improve as people begin to listen to each other and work together.

The approach encourages communities to rely more on their own resources and depend less on Christian organisations and other institutions.

Since the approach encourages greater use of local resources and changes attitudes, **it is more sustainable than other development approaches.** Since it is the local church that

mobilises the community, there is less contact between the community and external facilitators. The majority of the approach is therefore facilitated and monitored within the community.

The approach encourages replication. Once a local church has mobilised one community, it can share its learning with other local churches in the surrounding area so that they can mobilise their communities. If there is support from denominational level staff at an early stage, the approach is more likely to be replicated beyond the pilot churches and communities because there is ownership at a higher level. There is evidence that once other communities see the positive changes in a community, they are inspired and envisioned to make changes in their own community.

The approach can result in improved leadership at community level. As community mobilisation encourages people to be more involved in decision-making about community issues, community leadership becomes more accountable and transparent. The process may result in corrupt leaders being challenged or removed. In addition, the process may produce new community leaders as it usually involves training local facilitators who gain skills, confidence and experience to become able leaders.

Since it is the local church that mobilises the community, **the community begins to see the church in a more positive light.** As a result the local church may grow in terms of numbers. Since the approach should bring unity within the community, people are less fearful of being seen going to church and the church becomes a natural meeting place. The approach also encourages discipleship as church members are encouraged to study the Bible and are given responsibility for the work. The use of Bible studies to mobilise the local church encourages the approach to be a way of life rather than a one-off process.

Traditional development work involves organisations offering resources to the community, and perhaps asking the community to make a small contribution. Church and community mobilisation processes are different. **Communities and local churches are encouraged to consider their own resources first** and then approach Christian organisations for what is lacking. This is more sustainable and empowering than other approaches.

Weaknesses of church and community mobilisation

Church and community mobilisation can take time. It takes time to change attitudes and overcome church members' unwillingness to interact with the community.

The work can lose momentum. It is sometimes difficult to gain full ownership by the local church. Once processes start to focus on community mobilisation, some church members may lose interest and enthusiasm.

This approach can involve **a lot of workshops and a large investment of people's time** and Christian organisations' funds.

Church and community mobilisation processes take a long time – anything up to three years. There is a long time before there are tangible results in the community. The quality of the work can therefore suffer as people lose interest or move away. It is more vulnerable to external factors, which may result in changing needs at community level and abandoned initiatives.

One of the strengths of the approach is that it focuses on needs identified by the community and therefore brings sustainable change. However, by depending only on the perspectives of the community in identifying needs, **some key issues may be missed**. For example, the community may not identify hygiene improvements as a need, though it may identify safe water. If the community addresses the issue of safe water by digging a well but does not also focus on improving hygiene, there may not be such noticeable improvements in health. HIV and AIDS is another development issue that may be missed during needs identification due to lack of knowledge or stigma, but which, after being addressed, can have a great impact on community life. Another important issue is disaster risk reduction. Disaster risk reduction involves taking action to avoid future disasters or make them less destructive. This may not be identified by the community because community members are too focused on dealing with current problems. However, lack of attention to it may result in widespread suffering in the future if a hazard hits an unprepared community. A good facilitator can make sure that such issues are raised at the needs identification stage.

The approach usually relies on skilled facilitation. Facilitators should have good theological understanding, excellent participatory facilitation skills and a humble and servant-hearted attitude with commitment to empowering others. Facilitators provided by the Christian organisation usually mobilise local churches. Local church facilitators usually then mobilise the community. These local facilitators may have the necessary skills already, or may require training by the Christian organisation.

The approach may result in strained relationships within a denomination. As local churches are empowered, they may start to ask for more participatory and accountable decision-making within the denomination's hierarchy.

Christian organisations may find it **difficult to obtain funding for this approach**, since its outcomes in terms of community initiatives are undefined until towards the end of the process.

The approach may unrealistically raise expectations. While communities are encouraged to use local resources to carry out community initiatives, external support may be needed for some priorities. Christian organisations do not always have the funds or expertise to support such initiatives.

3.3 Church empowerment for advocacy

Advocacy is about speaking out against injustice. It is about mobilising communities to analyse their context, empowering them to become involved in political processes and helping them to defend their human rights. The local church is usually in a good position to carry out advocacy work:

- Church leaders carry influence, even in secular environments. In many countries they are recognised as having a legitimate role to speak out on moral issues. Church leaders often have a more powerful voice than leaders of Christian organisations.
- Local churches often consist of large numbers of people. Some types of advocacy work benefit from strength in numbers.
- Local churches exist at grassroots level. This enables them to understand the issues really well and to represent communities effectively. It also enables them to work with communities to carry out advocacy work.

Local churches that are part of a denomination may be in an even more strategic position to bring about change, since denominations benefit from strength in numbers and a variety of external linkages at each level of the hierarchy.

Case study

Pastors carrying out advocacy work in Malawi

Eagles, a Christian organisation in Malawi, envisioned a number of pastors to carry out integral mission. The pastors formed a group called 'Love in Christ' and together they identified the most needy people in their communities and took action to care for them. Over time, through working together in the community and being trained by Eagles, the pastors decided that they should be involved in advocacy work. They realised that some issues needed more than a practical response.

For example, the group heard that local leaders had signed an agreement with a sugar company which would force local farmers to grow only sugar on their farms. The local leaders had not consulted the farmers, and the farmers were not happy about the agreement. The group of pastors therefore organised the community to form a committee, which would discuss the farmers' concerns with the community leaders. The negotiations were successful and the sugar company was unable to carry out its plans.



A farmer and church leader standing on land they helped to prevent being sold.

Photo: Eagles

A local church may carry out advocacy work:

- **to support its practical work.** It can be helpful to encourage local churches to carry out advocacy work linked to their practical initiatives as most problems at community level have structural and political roots. Practical initiatives may only tackle the symptoms of the issue. Advocacy can be used to tackle the causes and leads to more sustainable development.
- **independently of the practical work it does.** For example, it could be part of an advocacy network and take part in protests and letter-writing campaigns for justice on one issue, while carrying out a practical initiative in the community on another issue.

Case study

Advocating for change in Zimbabwe

When thousands of people were displaced from their homes in Zimbabwe as a result of a government 'clean up operation', the local churches in the city of Bulawayo were the first to respond. They opened their buildings to provide shelter for the affected families and with help from a Christian organisation, they provided some emergency items such as food and blankets.

The Christian organisation took the opportunity to mobilise the local churches to speak out on behalf of the people who had been displaced. The church leaders came together and refused to allow the authorities to move families to holding camps until the facilities in the camps were acceptable. They also ensured that the impact of the 'clean up operation' was clearly documented so that the United Nations and media around the world could be informed.

The result was that this group of advocates from the local churches grew and became more vocal in defence of the poor. A year after the forced evictions, the local congregations went on a march to protest against the lack of government efforts to re-house those who had been displaced and to ensure that they were not forgotten.

The number of churches who are engaging in advocacy work has now grown into a national body for advocacy. The Christian organisation provides training to groups of local churches around the country. Once trained, the local churches work individually, together at community level and at national level to advocate on various issues of concern.

Methods of advocacy that local churches could be encouraged to use include:

NETWORKING – encouraging local churches to engage more with contacts and networks or to build new alliances to create a movement for change. These may be local church networks, national or international church networks or networks with secular agencies.

LOBBYING – encouraging people to speak directly to people who have influence to improve the situation. Members of the church may carry out this kind of advocacy work on behalf of the community.

RAISING AWARENESS – encouraging local churches to inform their congregations and the wider community about the situation so that they are aware of the issues. This can be done in church services, community meetings, public events or through giving out leaflets and providing training.

MOBILISING – encouraging local churches to persuade as many people as possible to contact decision-makers and call for change. This can be done through organising marches to show strength of feeling or encouraging people to write letters to those in power.

PRAYER – encouraging local churches to ask God to intervene, since injustice can be a result of spiritual forces and powers.

For more details about carrying out advocacy work, refer to *Advocacy toolkit* (ROOTS 1 and 2).

Some methods of advocacy may not be appropriate for churches to carry out in certain situations:

- In countries governed by oppressive or corrupt regimes, churches may decide that open methods of advocacy are not appropriate. However, subtle, non-confrontational advocacy work could be an option. For example, bishops and well known local church leaders could build personal relationships with people in government in order to persuade them to change policies. In some places the church may have a degree of protection to enable it to speak out, which other groups may not have. However, the church needs to be careful that it does not become too associated with those in power, particularly if they are unjust. Another example of non-confrontational advocacy work is educating local people about their rights as citizens to empower them to speak out. It could be helpful for local churches to make links with international Christian organisations who can lobby at international level against oppressive regimes on their behalf.
- In countries where the church is a minority or persecuted, churches need to be very careful about the extent to which they engage in advocacy. There is a danger that they may further antagonise the state and put their status at greater risk. However, building alliances with other minority groups could be beneficial and provide strength in numbers.
- While local churches can be a force for change due to their ability to represent the grassroots and strength in numbers, they may lack specialist knowledge to make advocacy effective. If churches do not show that they fully understand complex issues, they can lack credibility with decision-makers. Churches are generally better at speaking out on issues of general principle than they are at proposing solutions for policy issues. Networking and gaining support from organisations specialising in advocacy can improve local churches' ability to advocate effectively.

Case study

Mobilising the local church for advocacy in Honduras

As part of its Deborah programme, which aims to reduce domestic violence in the central zone of Honduras, the Christian organisation Proyecto Aldea Global mobilised local churches to carry out advocacy. The main targets of the advocacy work were those committing domestic violence.

A pastors' manual was produced, which contains tools to help pastors to raise awareness of domestic violence within their congregations.

Among other things, the manual contains sermon outlines, youth talks, and advice about counselling victims of domestic violence. Pastors were invited to attend seminars where the manual was used and given out. Posters were also distributed, which pastors could put up in their church buildings, and they were encouraged to wear purple ribbons to show that they support the campaign.

A march and rally to promote 'Peace in the family' was organised, which church members and pastors were encouraged to attend. Four hundred people marched through the town of Siguatepeque to raise awareness of domestic violence, to show local people that it is unacceptable and to enable people experiencing domestic violence to know where to go for help. The march was covered on Christian radio and television. As a result the number of women coming forward to report domestic violence and seek support has risen dramatically.



March to protest against domestic violence.

Photo: Esther Stensfield

REFLECTION

- Which of these approaches would be most appropriate in our situation?
- What structures would need to be put in place before we could carry out this kind of work?
- What research would need to be done?

Summary

In this section we have looked at three ways of working with local churches:

- Church mobilisation
- Church and community mobilisation
- Church empowerment for advocacy.