

BRIDGING THE GAP



The role of local churches in fostering local-level social accountability and governance



Working through the local church is at the heart of Tearfund's approach to ending poverty. We do this through a process called church and community mobilisation (CCM). Essentially, local churches work with their own communities to identify and solve local problems using local resources.

It's a tried-and-tested approach that we've developed over 15 years in more than 25 countries. To make CCM even more effective, we've been pioneering a new approach called **CCM advocacy**.

This means local churches are now helping their communities engage with government officials, hold them to account and draw down resources for basic services such as boreholes and medical centres.

'Before CCM advocacy, I would never attend a meeting. I am old and uneducated. But now I take part, I speak out, I have even gone with the group to the [local council] to request boreholes and for the road to be cleared. Now I am confident and have a voice!'

AKELLO MAKULAS, MEMBER OF ARAPAI ADVOCACY GROUP

Key findings from Uganda

'Before CCM, I was a "nobody". Today, I am a councillor representing my parish. After the CCM training, I felt empowered to approach people and discuss issues that affected us, and people asked me to represent them at the local council. Through advocacy, we now have four boreholes and a functioning health centre!'

LUSI ACOR, AKOBOI COMMUNITY

We recently carried out a research project in Uganda, called *Bridging the gap*, to see how well this was working. The research looked at the results of CCM advocacy in communities in Uganda that were working with Tearfund's partner PAG (Pentecostal Assemblies of God).

The results showed that the church is uniquely placed to foster good relationships between local communities and local government, bridging the gap between the two:

- Communities and government trust local churches as a safe space where they can start a dialogue.
- Churches promote teaching from the Bible that encourages Christians to speak up for justice.
- With this biblical mandate, communities' confidence and knowledge grow. They are able to mobilise their own resources and devise their own strategic plans for effective advocacy. This enables them to gain their government officials' respect, access government budget and, increasingly, get the essential services they need.

FIVE KEY AREAS WHERE THE CHURCH ADDS VALUE

Our research showed that local churches can play a vital role in empowering communities to do effective advocacy in five key areas:

TRANSPARENCY



The church is a good example of a transparent organisation. It serves as a model for what people can expect from transparent procedures and processes. Once communities understand the importance of transparency, through advocacy training, they are more likely to ask government officials for information on budgets, for example.

'Since the training, the community in Owii know the information they need for advocacy. They proactively go to the local council office and request information. Sometimes there is push-back, but they are generally able to get the information they need.'

CHARLOTTE FLOWERS, CCM ADVOCACY RESEARCHER

CITIZEN EMPOWERMENT



The church promotes a vision that change is possible. Once the community are inspired and unite around this vision, theirs is a powerful collective voice. Their advocacy is stronger and has greater legitimacy.

'Before, you would get a [community dialogue] meeting with maybe only ten or so people attending and speaking on behalf of the whole village. Now, the whole village turns up. They have the courage now.'

JOSEPH OPIT, CHAIRMAN FOR SERERE DISTRICT COUNTY

INCLUSION



The church promotes inclusion and speaking up for the most vulnerable groups in society, including the elderly, those with disabilities and people living with HIV. Communities involved in advocacy are now taking practical steps to involve and empower marginalised members.

'We leave no one behind. People with disabilities and the elderly are brought [to meetings] on bicycles; we provide transport. Or, if they cannot attend, we get their ideas and bring them to government. The elderly are very important to learn from: we should never exclude them.'

OKULONYO COMMUNITY

GOVERNMENT RESPONSIVENESS



The church helps improve relationships between communities and decision-makers. It also equips communities to advocate more strategically. This encourages quicker, more positive responses from decision-makers and greater mutual respect between the two groups.

'Now the government can see we are competent, that our capacity has been built, and so [they] are happy to work with us.'

AKOBOI FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

POWER DYNAMICS



As relationships with decision-makers improve, there is a clear shift in power dynamics. Before, communities felt they were on the receiving end of whatever programmes the government chose to roll out. Now, by working together as a united group, they are in a more equal partnership with government and have a greater say on the issues that matter to them.

'Before this formal training it was just the government implementing their plans, but now [change] is from bottom up: people come together to plan and are able to influence.'

OMAGORO FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

Tearfund now plans to work with PAG and other partners around the world to scale up the CCM advocacy approach. We will encourage different communities to pool their advocacy efforts for greater clout. This will also help communities' voices be heard on the national and international stage.



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Visit www.tearfund.org/bridgingthegap to read the full *Bridging the gap* research report.