

## **Tearfund Advocacy case study**

### **Christians and politics in action - Kenya**

#### **Background**

Churches in Kenya have predominantly seen politics as a dirty business. Kenya lacks a Christian legacy of involvement in politics and those Christians who have entered Kenyan politics have often lost their Christian distinctiveness and credibility, leaving churches with no role models. Politicians tend to only be interested in the church when elections come along. Members of Parliament have often been wary of Christians and churches, as they have tended to use them for their own means rather than engaging positively with politics.

A wind of change started to blow across the country in 2000 when Kenya suffered a serious drought, the effects of which were felt both by the poor and the middle classes. The economy fell to its lowest level since independence, which encouraged everyone, including the church, to engage in the political system.

#### **Student involvement**

FOCUS, a Christian student movement, primarily trains students in evangelism and discipleship. As part of this they encourage Christian students and graduates to get involved in politics. They have established FOCUS Associates Social Action Mobilisation Office (FASAMO). The aim of FASAMO is to encourage Christians to get involved in politics and the economy, and to provide networks to facilitate this.

They have set up 7 professional groups to help bring a Christian distinctiveness in areas of policy. These groups range from lawyers, the media, teachers and medics. They have started to develop theological courses to develop students so that they are prepared before they graduate.

#### **Running for election**

As this work has developed FASAMO has met with Christians who either are considering involvement in politics or are actually considering running for election in 2002. Whilst FOCUS has no experience of being involved in politics, they immediately recognised the importance of encouraging this passion in these students and graduates. In December 2001 the interested people were brought together at a conference.

They discussed issues of how to fundraise in a country where politicians often raise funds in questionable circumstances; and how to help candidates campaign in a culture where mobs are usually used for this purpose. Other questions were addressed, such as which party should Christians join and how should Christians participate in party politics and keep their Christian distinctiveness. Originally FOCUS planned to have only one such conference but the members keep coming back with more questions and need to keep getting together to discuss the issues and to support each other.

FOCUS know of 20 Christians from different parties standing for election and are hopeful that they will get 3-4 Christian MPs into office at the 2002 elections. Due to the Kenyan political legacy when Christians have become MPs in the past and have often lost their Christian distinctiveness FOCUS is forming networks so that MPs will be able to consult on policy issues. The aim is to set up a Christian politicians professional group of sitting MPs, making it easier for a discussion on the Christian approach to politics in Kenya, and also leave a legacy for the future.

One of the interesting highlights is training on media relations that FOCUS have organised for these potential politicians, in conjunction with Christian Journalists Fellowship. The purpose was to give them basic ideas on handling the media in public and running media and political campaigns.

### **Coalition for Peaceful Elections**

During 2000, another Christian organisation, Christians for a Just Society (CFJS) created a public face for their work. Previously they worked privately among individuals already interested in politics. Working through churches around Kenya through prayer, speaking, action and networking, CFJS aim to bring a Christian influence into the political arena, through encouraging upright people to stand for election and encouraging all people to vote.

Members of CFJS include lawyers, businessmen and other professionals in influential positions and through these contacts CFJS already had built a good reputation as an organisation with integrity. Dennis Tongoi, Chair of CFJS, had built up good contacts with business leaders through his teaching on a Biblical approach to finance.

These business leaders were already working together to try and address issues of corruption in Kenya, which adversely affected their businesses. CFJS was working with them and in 2001 together they set up COPE Kenya (the **C**oalition for **P**eaceful **E**lections). Made up of civil society, business and religious organisations, COPE Kenya aims to ensure the electoral code of conduct is enforced at elections.

### **Forward Planning**

The elections are planned for the end of 2002 and COPE Kenya started well over a year before this so that there was enough time to build a broad movement for change, to develop clear policies and a strategy and to build good relationships with politicians and those standing for elections. COPE

Kenya therefore aims to encourage honest and open politics, fundraising and voter registration in the months coming up to the election, as well as peaceful voting on the day of the election itself.

Together with FOCUS, CFJS are educating the church about the need to vote (the turnout is usually about 45%) and explaining the issues that are important to think about. The church is increasingly recognising the scale of the issues that need to be addressed to help Kenya move forward, and their gradual involvement will ensure that 'politics' is not just left to the 'politicians'!

### **Theology of Politics**

Despite these advances, churches in Kenya are often still reluctant to get involved in politics as there as an informed theological understanding of politics is rare. Some view politics as dirty and full of compromises, such that Christians should steer well clear of it. Others think that the church should not challenge the government because Romans chapter 13 says that we must 'submit'. Still others think the church should focus primarily on saving souls and that social and political involvement could lead the church astray to follow the 'social gospel' or 'prosperity teaching'.

In response to this, CFJS recently started the *Fellowship of Christians in Politics* and are now planning a similar one for pastors to help them engage in the political process.

FOCUS also produce Bible study guides on different books of the Bible and on topics such as ethnicity and good governance.

### **Key advocacy learning points**

- Networking with many different groups
- Supporting those in positions of power
- Educating the churches to get involved
- Biblical basis for policy making
- Getting involved in the political system

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