

Where does development fit in the church structure?

Some thoughts from Rick James

An unholy conflict?

I never imagined that it would be so contentious and conflictive. Surely if the church is responding compassionately to the spiritual, physical, emotional, social needs of people, we are all pulling in the same direction. But I have found that fitting development into the structure of the church is acutely sensitive and complex. Sometimes, there is almost no link - at times I have tried to help Christian NGOs work out how they can constructively engage with the local church (rather than bulldoze it aside). At other times there appears to be too much link - one strategy session I was facilitating resulted in the Bishop closing down a seemingly successful development programme because it felt out of his control. Perhaps I should not be so surprised by this conflict. Even the early church struggled with this in Acts 6 where support to the widows was causing friction. They formed a group and gave them responsibility to focus on this element of their ministry. So whatever the size, context, denomination - whether a small church in Andhra Pradesh or a global church of 80 million members - we have to continually work out relationship between the pastoral and the developmental aspect of the church's mission.

Polarised views

When looking at this issue, people's views seem to polarise quickly. Some argue for having 'clear blue water' between the church and the development work, to ensure clarity of purpose and prevent any misuse of funds. Others see that anything outside the direct control of the church is dangerous. They fear repeated experiences of Christian NGOs raising money from the church, but then ignoring the local church in its operations. Discussions seem to descend into 'in' or 'out' of the church generalisations and quickly become 'us' and 'them'. While inherent tensions will always be there, they can at least be mitigated where possible and actively managed. There are many creative ways to try to ensure the development work has the autonomy it needs to function effectively and the church has the involvement to own the work as theirs. Church ownership is essential, but this is not the same as complete control.

Clarifying Governance

Legal registration and governance is obviously a key issue. Should the development work be under the same governance as the church? Or perhaps it might have its own charitable status as a subsidiary of the church? Or maybe it should have separate registration as an independent entity entirely?

In each of these scenarios there are many nuances - shades of grey - which try to get the best of both worlds. For example with the church-controlled entity, they may have an advisory board of external professionals to give professional guidance. With the subsidiary charity, the independent board will still have to report to the church board on an annual basis. Or even with the 'separate' charity, there are ways to tie it into the church. For example, the church leader may be the Board Chair or may have the

power to select or approve the Chair. Or the church could automatically provide two or three ex-officio members of the board. The inter-dependent relationship between the church and the development institution is often captured on paper in some sort of Memorandum of Understanding or Social Action Policy.

It is vital to ensure that the legal governance of the development is clear and understood by all parties. But the legal governance alone does not guarantee integration of the development work and the pastoral work. We know that formal structure and written agreements alone do not determine behaviour. Whether the development work is viewed as part of the church depends on so many other variables, such as the people involved (leaders and staffing); the types of programmes, the sources of funds and therefore reporting requirements.

Beyond governance

As well as clarifying the governance question, I believe there are two other priorities to focus on in seeking to ensure that the pastoral and the developmental work hand-in-hand,

1. Continually engaging top church leadership with the development work
2. Integrating 'church work' and 'development work' on the ground

Engaging top church leadership

The development work needs to retain and often develop greater ownership from within the church. This makes it essential to continually invest in inspiring and explaining to busy church leaders about development. One church-related agency I know in Malawi takes the senior church leaders on visits to the communities they work with; they provide training modules on 'God's heart for the Poor' in the theological school; they set up regular meetings with the Bishops; they attend and provide input to weekly pastors' meetings; as well as inputs to the annual Pastors' conferences. Top church leaders have to be reminded to serve the needs of the people, rather than focus on their personal interests or even the needs of their church.

Integration at the grassroots

Some development programmes are more suited to local church involvement than others. Whereas massive service delivery projects tend to work *on behalf of* the church and thereby undermine church ownership, church and community mobilisation programmes (such as the Umoja approach <http://tilz.tearfund.org/Churches/Umoja/>) integrate the pastoral and the developmental throughout. If churches are to truly own the development work, this has to start from the grassroots. They have to be take responsibility and be involved themselves, not have development as a service provided to them by an NGO.

Concluding thoughts

There are no easy solutions to this challenge of integrating the spiritual and the physical; the sacred and the material; the pastoral and the developmental. It is hard enough to manage this in our own individual lives, let alone in the life of the church. We have to work hard to grapple with these inherent tensions. Governance may be a key place to start. This must be clear. It needs to be structured in a way that ensures

church ownership, while at the same time providing sufficient autonomy for the developmental element. There are plenty of differing options which avoid the black and white extremes. But formal governance alone will not solve the problems that also often arise in informal relationships. We must invest time in on-going communication, especially between church leaders and development workers. We may also have to focus our development approach on programmes that local churches can drive themselves rather than just watch from afar...