

## What is the role of Christian NGOs, and how should they relate to the local church?

### Strengths of Christian NGOs

**Technical expertise** Christian organisations have staff with a good understanding of poverty issues and methodologies. They may have specialist knowledge that no-one in a community possesses, such as knowledge of water engineering or nutrition.

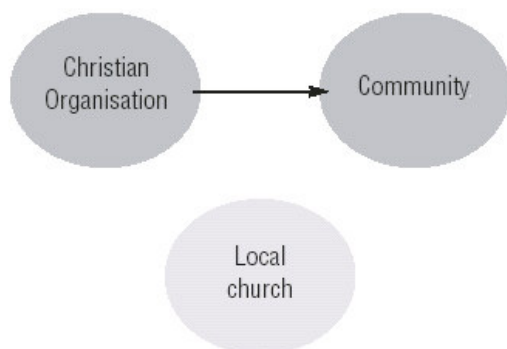
**Equipment** Some organisations may possess technology which is not usually present within a community, such as well-drilling equipment or medical equipment and supplies.

**Experience** Christian organisations may work in a number of communities, and over time, gain an overview of local, regional and national issues. They also learn about what works and what does not work in the local area and culture.

**The staff** of Christian organisations are dedicated to relief, development and advocacy work, without competing priorities which staff of local churches may face.

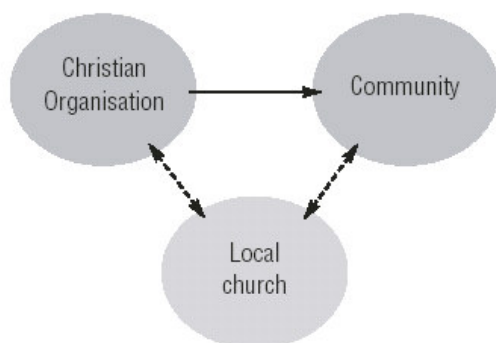
**Access to, and ability to handle, funding** While local churches and communities should be encouraged to use their own resources to support their initiatives, there will be some initiatives that require external funding, such as borehole drilling and constructing community buildings that are resistant to natural hazards. Christian organisations may have access to funding that cannot be accessed directly by a local church. For example, an NGO or a development department of a denomination is more likely to be successful than a local church in applying for funding from an institutional donor. This is because they are usually registered as organisations and have the expertise to develop proposals, manage funding and write reports.

### Different models of how Christian NGOs and local churches interact



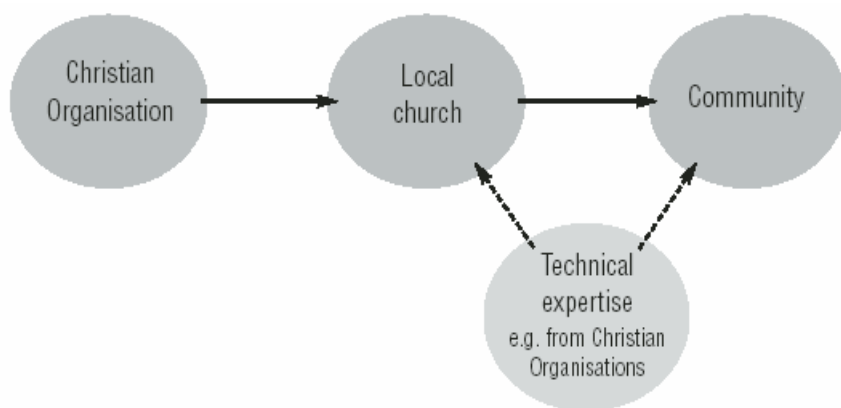
#### Isolation model

A Christian organisation works directly with the community. No linkage with local church. The local church may or may not be doing social action in the community.



#### Involvement model

A Christian organisation works directly in the community but involves the local church in its work by encouraging prayer. It may consult with the local church, since it usually represents a cross-section of the community. The local church may provide volunteers to take part in projects carried out by the Christian organisation. These projects may be relief or development projects. The Christian organisation may encourage church members to take part in advocacy campaigns. The community makes a connection between the work of the Christian organisation and the witness of the local church.



### Empowerment model

A Christian organisation envisions and mobilises the local church to carry out integral mission in the community. The church responds to needs in the community or mobilises the community to respond to its own needs. The Christian organisation, or other organisations, may be invited to work directly in the community to provide technical expertise that the local church or community lack.

## Potential new roles for Christian organisations empowering local churches

Christian organisations (whether development departments of denominations, Evangelical Alliances, theological colleges, or Christian NGOs) that want to adopt the empowerment model of relating to local churches, may need to adopt new roles and break away from some of their traditional approaches.

TYPE OF ORGANISATION	CHALLENGES OF TRADITIONAL APPROACH	POTENTIAL NEW ROLES
Development department of denomination	Temptation to implement projects with little or no contact with, or involvement by, local churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Envisioning and training pastors and church members in integral mission</li> <li>• Training pastors in leadership development</li> <li>• Providing advice on design and implementation of community initiatives</li> <li>• Facilitating learning between local churches and between local churches and other development actors</li> <li>• Assisting with funding for large community initiatives. This may involve facilitating transfer of funds from wealthy churches to poor churches, or from donors in the North</li> <li>• Using networks to provide advocacy support to local churches</li> </ul>
Evangelical Alliance or Fellowship	Implementing projects, often without the involvement of members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Envisioning and training pastors and church members in integral mission</li> <li>• Co-ordinating communication between member churches on key themes and issues related to integral mission</li> <li>• Facilitating learning between local churches</li> <li>• Training pastors in leadership development</li> <li>• Advising on where resources (expertise and skills) are available, such as linking local churches to Christian NGOs</li> <li>• Using networks to provide advocacy support to local churches</li> </ul>
Theological college	Theoretical rather than practical. Training in using the Bible, but not necessarily in how biblical teaching relates to poverty reduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training students in integral mission</li> <li>• Training students in leadership development</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for students to be placed with local Christian NGOs or churches involved in integral mission as part of the course</li> </ul>
Christian NGO	Tendency to implement projects with little or no contact with local churches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training local church leaders and members to act as facilitators of change</li> <li>• Training church pastors in leadership development</li> <li>• Providing advice and expertise in support of church initiatives at the request of the church and community, including needs assessments and specific technical advice and good practice</li> <li>• Providing placements for theological students</li> </ul>

Source: *ROOTS 11: Partnering with the local church*, Tearfund 2007, pages 18, 19 and 22

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency building a global network of local churches to help eradicate poverty

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