

How to set up a social programme in your church

Timothy Project

Student Manual

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PART ONE – CONCEPTUAL BASIS

Lesson 1 - IDEAS ABOUT CHRISTIAN SOCIAL ACTION (CSA)

I. Introduction

In this module of the Timothy Project we explore the theme “How to set up a social programme in your church”.

PART ONE of the student’s book introduces important concepts about Christian Social Action (CSA), capacity building, and mobilization, which will help the reader to construct vision and practice.

PART TWO presents the Awareness Building and Mobilization Course (AMC), which you will be able to put into practice wherever you minister, once you have studied the contents carefully and reflected on your answers to the discussion starters which are found in the proposed interactive activities.

Together with this student’s book, you should have a notebook, keeping a record of your ideas, doubts and conclusions which you have in relation to the series of proposed meetings (AMC) and how you will minister them in the church.

II. Awareness building, Mobilization and Action

There are three stages which need to be gone through in order to set up a new Social Action programme in a church:

- Awareness building
- Mobilization
- Action

Awareness building is the process by which the church folk can come to understand what Christian Social Action is, then begin to desire to get involved in this action.

Mobilization happens when a group of people from the church begin to organise themselves and plan social actions

Action is when these people actually do something concrete which could be perceived of as the church’s social programme

The aim of this book is to offer you the tools and abilities with which you can lead your church through these three stages.

III. Before going further it is important to answer the question: What is a social programme?

Outline here what your answer to this question would be:

The first thing that I would say in reply to this question is that a social programme is not the same thing as a social institution or NGO (Non-Governmental Organization). Your programme may or may not become an institution in the future, but there is a lot of work which can be done to deal with social issues without needing a registered body or NGO for that.

A social programme can consist simply of *coordinated social actions*. It is common to imagine that a social programme needs a grand structure, such as a treatment centre for fifty drug addicts, funded by international organisations. However, a member of the church visiting prisoners, and taking with them presents, items of personal need not available in the prison, as well as communication from distant relatives, can be considered the church social programme, if that member receives recognition and active support from the church.

This principle is very important when you are thinking of starting a social programme, because it opens up many more possibilities for a church which perhaps cannot count on a large number of volunteers, people with administration skills, or indeed money. For a registered organisation these three factors are essential, but a social programme can have a much simpler structure, using the time and skills of just one or two people, and perhaps not even needing outside funding.

That way you do not need to wait around until you have raised lots of difficult funding. You can start with what you already have at your disposal.

One thing which is often called “doing social action” in Brazil, and which is not a social action programme, is an isolated day of charitable actions in a particular neighbourhood, followed with an evangelistic event in the evening. Such an event does involve actions of a social aid nature, such as free hair cutting, the taking of blood-pressure readings, the issue of essential ID documents and the like, and the serving of soup, nevertheless, these events do not promote long term change in the social reality of the neighbourhood. The objective is usually evangelistic, hoping to attract people through charitable deeds. This is not necessarily wrong in itself, but it is not a social programme. It is an evangelistic programme which uses charitable action as an evangelistic tool.

In contrast to this, the primary objective of any social programme is to seek the improvement of living conditions both for people and neighbourhoods. Such a programme does have spiritual impact, both directly and indirectly, and we will look at that later in the module, but the central aim is not to cut someone's hair so to be able to preach the gospel to them afterwards. The central aim of a social programme, in this example, should be that the person can always get to a barber and pay for it themselves (or may be even open a barber's shop), and then, consequently, if this is worked towards deliberately by a church, the person can experience the love of God through this action.

IV. Different levels of impact of Social Action

Having established the fact that a social programme can take on many forms, from the simplest ministry of love to the most elaborate organisation, we turn now to thinking about the type of impact a social programme is capable of promoting. For this we will reflect on three levels at which a social programme can function.¹

Social Aid (or Charity) acts as a temporary aid, or relief, such as food parcels for families in a tight situation, or relief work after a natural disaster. Planning for such actions can be one aspect of a social programme.

Opportunities for development are actions which provide opportunities for people who are normally placed on the edges of society to participate actively in society; for example, literacy or apprenticeship courses.

Social Transformation is when the neighbourhood, or society in general, is engaged in a transformation of the social conditions in which they live. This can be through things like community action, cooperative building efforts, housing associations, or even political engagement, for instance, pressuring for the elimination of illiteracy or poor pay structures.

Some only consider this third level as truly Social Action, given that the first two levels do not in themselves challenge the social and political structures which produce social inequality, which in turn generates people's needs.

To understand this, consider for a moment that *aid (or charity)* can create dependency relationships between the receivers, who accustom themselves to receiving, and the giver, who give in order to feel good. Such a relationship is called *paternalistic*.

A danger of providing *opportunities for development*, such as training course, is that whilst providing tools for survival within a society moved by capitalism, one might not question the fact that certain aspects of capitalism stimulate social inequality and, therefore, poverty.

¹ See Queiroz, C. P., "Evangelização e responsabilidade social, 30 anos depois" in *Evangelização e Responsabilidade Social* (São Paulo: ABU Editora; Belo Horizonte: Visão Mundial, 2004²) p.34-37

Nevertheless, it is undeniable that certain situations do demand aid. An exclusive vision which denies any value of charity would leave someone to die of hunger.² Furthermore, a realistic evaluation of the forces of globalization demands that we equip people with the tools to live within a market driven economy, even if we work at the same time to promote a transformation, towards a society based on principles of love, justice and equality, as opposed to profit and accumulation of wealth.

In fact, a health social action programme will seek to act on all three levels: *aid, opportunities for development and social transformation*, thus: If a family is in dire hunger, first give them something to eat; then help provide opportunities for them to have productive work; then fight for a society in which no-one needs to go hungry.

For this reason, we ourselves consider work on all three level of impact Social Action, recognising that despite the pitfalls; they combine to alleviate suffering and build a better society.

Lay out on the lines below, a situation which shows the relationship between the three levels of impact of social action, and the importance of each level. The situation can be real or imaginary.

V. Principles of an effective Christian Social Action programme

Here we relate what we consider to be the key elements for an effective programme, so that you can verify whether they are present in your programme (a sort of check-list).

[If you implant a social programme following the vision which we lay out in this manual, then we believe that all these elements will be present, but it is good to keep a copy of the list to check things out now and again during the running of the Course]:

- Prayer
- Know the neighbourhood, it's worries, problems and desires (Matthew 11:19)

² Comblin, J. "Diakonia na Cidade" in Andrade, S. and von Sinner, R. (orgs.) *Diaconia no Contexto Nordestino* (São Leopoldo: Editora Sinodal, 2003) p.86

- Know the resources that there are amongst church members and in the neighbourhood (Acts 4:32-37)
- Identify which worries, problems and desires the church can work with, by using the available resources.
- Prioritise actions
 1. *Discover crossover points between the needs in the neighbourhood and the resources available to the local church and community*
 2. *Decide which single action is the most viable amongst the most urgent*
 3. *Star with this one. Move on to another action just when this one is well established*
 4. *Add other actions to the programme also one by one, in the same way*
 5. *Always use different people for each different action*
- Planning (Luke 14:28-32)
- Evaluation (Matthew 11:1-6; 16:13-20)
- Involve members of the wider community in the search for solutions and the action, doing it *WITH* them, not *for* or *on behalf of* the neighbourhood (John 5:1-9; 2 Kings 4:1-7)
- Seek external funding (2 Corinthians 8)
- Constantly include Bible studies and sermons which deal with social issues as a normal part of church life (Deuteronomy 14:22-15:18; Leviticus 25; Nehemiah 5; Amos; Malachi 3:5; James; etc., etc., etc. !!!)
- Seek to have an impact on all three levels:
 - Aid
 - Opportunities for Development
 - Social transformation

Before reading any further, go back and study the Bible passages in the checklist above.

VI. Other things to read

Throughout this manual we refer to different books and authors. Below there is a list of some books which will help in your understanding of Christian Social Action, of the role it plays in the Church's mission and of the various formats your social programme can follow. We recommend that you read at least three of these books. Also, if you have access to the internet, it is worth visiting these sites:

About mobilizing the church:

http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/pillars/mobilising_the_church/

A wide range of other resources covering many subjects:

<http://tilz.tearfund.org/en/resources/publications/>

- Chester, T. (Ed.) *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral mission and the poor*
(Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2002)
- Gordon, G. *What if you got involved? Taking a stand against social
injustice* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003)
- Kirk, J. A. *What is Mission? Theological Explorations*
(London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999)
- Myers, B. *Walking with the Poor* (Maryknoll: Orbis/World Vision, 1999)
- Perkins, J. M. *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community
Development* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993)
- Peskett, H. and
Ramachandra, V. *The message of mission: The glory of Christ in all time and
space* (Leicester: IVP, 2003)
- Sider, R. J.,
Olson P. N. and
Unruh, H. R. *Churches that make a difference: Reaching your community
with Good News and Good Works*
(Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002)
- Yamamori, T.,
Myers, B. L.,
Bediako, K, and
Reed, L. (Eds.) *Serving with the poor in Africa: Cases in holistic ministry*
(Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1996).
- Yamamori, T.,
Myers, B. L., and
Conner, D. (Eds.) *Serving with the poor in Asia: Cases in holistic ministry*
(Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1995).
- Yamamori, T.,
Myers, B. L.,
Padilla, C. R., and
Rake, G. (Eds.) *Serving with the poor in Latin America: Cases in holistic
ministry* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1997).