Micah Challenge Framework Papers

A series of papers commissioned by the Micah Challenge Campaign to provide frameworks for co-operative development of campaign strategies

The Micah Challenge is a global campaign to mobilise Christians against poverty. It is facilitated by the World Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network

The campaign aims to deepen Christian engagement with the poor and to influence leaders of rich and poor nations to fulfil their public promise to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, and so halve absolute global poverty by 2015

For further information and other papers in this series visit www.micahchallenge.org

Framework Paper 2
Key influences on local churches
Dr Tim Chester, July 2004

Objective
The first goal of the Micah Challenge is ‘to deepen Christian engagement in integral mission with the poor’. We want to encourage local churches to embrace integral mission in their own communities and beyond. We recognise that effectively to take this challenge to local churches we need to ‘influence the influencers’. Leaders and members of local churches are heavily influenced by their peers. Rightly or wrongly, people are much more likely to adopt new ideas if people they trust are advocating those ideas. The challenge is to create a movement in which peer influence reinforces and extends the engagement of local churches in integral mission.

This paper is designed to help national campaigns identify the key influences on local churches and local church leaders in their country so that strategies can be developed for influencing these influencers.

The paper identifies the main generic influences on local churches and local church leaders. It consists of a list of most of the influences in most contexts. This is to enable national campaigns to identify which of these generic influences are significant in their context. These will be priority audiences for the national campaign. National campaigns can then identify strategies to encourage these influencers to take up the message of integral mission.

The paper focuses on Christian influences as these are the influences that can be expected to advocate a biblical understanding of integral mission. Local churches and church leaders are also influenced by their surrounding culture.

Micah 6:8 "...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
Some of these issues are dealt with in the paper ‘Barriers to the Embrace of Integral Mission’

**Generic influences on local churches**

Often when first asked to think about key influences on local churches people think in organisational terms (denominations and so on). But relational influences are usually more significant. It is people we trust who most affect our views.

Not all the following influences will apply in every situation and their level of influence may vary greatly from one context to another. They are listed in alphabetical order.

*Campaigning organisations and networks*

Campaigning organisations are Christian organisations that campaign for a change in policy or practice. Some are focused on a single issue like abortion, others on a range of issues. Many send information to churches and encourage the support of church members in their campaigns.

Examples: Christian Action Research and Education (CARE, UK), the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC)

*Colleges and seminaries*

Bible colleges and theological seminaries. Not only are many church leaders trained through such institutions, but increasingly they are running short-term courses. There are also new forms of theological education such as distance learning.

Examples: Wheaton College, Fuller Seminary, London School of Theology

*Conferences*

Christian conferences not only provide teaching, but often they also provide a sense of identity. Many Christians define themselves by the conferences they attend. The conference platform speakers are key gatekeepers to these constituencies. Many of these conferences are extending their influence through tape ministry, publishing and mission ventures.

Examples: New Wine (UK), Spring Harvest (UK), Proclamation Trust (UK)

*Denominational structures*

Most local churches are part of a wider denominational structure. Independent churches are often part of an association. To varying degrees denominational committees or synods issue guidance or advice to local churches and provide oversight for local church leadership. They may also have denominational magazines, conferences and youth events.

Examples: The Anglican Communion, the Baptist Union, the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches (FIEC)

*Evangelical Alliances*

National and regional evangelical alliances or fellowships.

Examples: The Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA), World Evangelical Alliance (WEA)

*Funders*

Funders can include funding agencies, Christian trust funds and funding churches. Even when they do not fund churches directly, they may fund networks and programmes that churches participate in.
Examples: Tearfund UK

*High profile churches*
High profile churches are those who are looked to as a model by other churches. In some cases this relationship is being formalised through the creation of ‘cathedral’ churches.
Examples: St Helen’s, London (UK), Willow Creek (USA), St Thomas’, Sheffield (UK)

*High profile leaders*
High profile leaders may be church leaders, conference speakers, writers or media personalities – though often they combine a number of these roles.
Examples: John Stott, Steve Chalke (UK), Gerald Coates (UK)

*Local church networks*
In many cities and towns local churches are linked through networks or ecumenical bodies. Typically these groups might organise joint prayer meetings, Lent courses, Easter processions, city Christmas services and joint youth work.
Example: Churches Together in Anytown

*Magazines – broad circulation*
Many Christians, especially church leaders, regularly read a Christian magazine or journal.
Examples: Christianity Today

*Magazines – focused circulation*
Do not assume that magazines with wide circulations necessarily exert the most influence. Wide circulation magazines serve a broad constituency who pick and choose the ideas they read about. In contrast, some smaller circulation magazines and journals often define a particular constituency. Among those who share their outlook these often function as gatekeepers for new ideas and approaches.
Examples: Prophecy Today, The Briefing, the Banner of Truth magazine

*Ministerial networks (fraternals)*
In many cities and towns church leaders meet regularly to pray, share ideas and explore co-operative ventures. Some church leaders are part of fraternals which function as support groups and may not be geographically defined.
Example: the Anytown fraternal for church leaders

*Mission agencies (field)*
In pioneer situations local churches reflect the outlook of the mission agency or agencies that planted them. Even once an indigenous church is established, mission agency policies and personnel influence local churches.
Examples: Overseas Missionary Fellowship International (OMF)

*Mission agencies (home)*
Mission agencies also exert influence as they try to raise support and recruit personnel. The stories they tell shape people’s perception of what mission involves.
Examples: Overseas Missionary Fellowship UK (OMF)

*Mission networks*
Networks, primarily of mission agencies, that aim to co-ordinate resources and share ideas.
Examples: WEA Missions Commission, Discipling A Whole Nation (DAWN),

Micah 6:8 "...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"
Global Connections (UK)

**Musicians**
Christian singers, worship leaders, bands and performers.
Examples: Michael Card, Graham Kendrick

**Non-denominational structures and networks**
Some local churches have joined non-denominational networks to whom they look for oversight, advice and resources. For some churches these have replaced their denominational affiliations, but others have held them in tandem.
Examples: New Frontiers International (NFI), Pioneer

**Prayer networks**
Groups that organise prayer groups or prayer breakfasts.
Example: 24-7 Prayer, Lydia Fellowship

**Publishers**
Books are an important source of information and ideas in many countries. So Christian publishers can be key influencers, especially where the publishers have a strong sense of the message they want to communicate. As with Christian magazines, large sales are not the only indication of the extent of their influence. Some smaller publishers are as gatekeepers for certain constituencies.
Example: IVP

**Student networks**
Organisations that evangelise and disciple students on campus.
Examples: the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES), Campus Crusade, Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UK)

**Television and radio**
Christian television and radio can include programmes on mainstream television or specialist Christian stations.
Examples: United Christian Broadcasters (UCB), Benny Hinn

**Youth organisations and networks**
Organisations that evangelise and disciple young people. Some operate on the ground with young people alongside local churches, other provide resources and conferences.
Examples: Youth For Christ (YFC), Soul Survivor (UK)

**Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence on local church</th>
<th>Example</th>
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<td>Campaigning organisations</td>
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*Micah 6:8 "...what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"*
The following process is designed to help groups use the generic list to identify the key influences in their context so they can develop strategies to ‘influence the influencers’.

1. **Identify influences**
   Work through the generic list:
   1. Discuss whether an item on the generic list is relevant for your situation (for example, you may decide that missions networks are not a key influence on local churches in your context).
   2. Identify the main specific examples of each generic influence (for example, you may identifying the particular high profile churches that influence other churches in your context).

To help people think about the full range of factors that influence your context you might want to start with the following exercise:
- Ask people how they identify themselves as Christians. Keep asking ‘What kind of a … are you?’ For example, What kind of a Christian are you? What kind of an evangelical Christian are you? What kind of a Baptist are you? What kind of a Spring Harvest conference goer are you?
> Ask people to how they became convinced on integral mission. What factors influenced their commitment to integral mission?

2. **Rank influences**

Give people ten ‘points’ (or more if you have a large list of influences). Ask them to allocate these according to how influential on local churches they feel each influence is. They can give more than one point to an influence if they think it is particularly important. So, for example, they could allocate five points to one influence, three to another and one each to a further two. The influences can be written up around the room and people invited to allocate their ‘points’ by ticking the relevant influences.

Ask people to consider two factors when ranking the factors:

> the breadth of influence (the number of churches each factor influences)
> the depth of influence (the level of impact a factor has on those it influences)

A factor may only impact a small constituency, but it may be a key gatekeeper for that constituency.

This should give you a list of the most significant influences on local churches and church leaders in your context.

3. **Rank your influence on the influencers**

Repeat the exercise above, but this time allocate points according to how much people feel the Micah Challenge national campaign can influence each of these influencers.

The results of steps 2 and 3 can be presented visually in the following table:

<table>
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<th>Level of Influence on Local Churches</th>
<th>Level of Influence of Micah Challenge on This Influencer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 High influence on churches,</td>
<td>2 High influence on churches and can be influenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but cannot easily be influenced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Low influence on churches,</td>
<td>4 Low influence on churches, but can be influenced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and cannot easily be influenced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your priority should be on influencing factors in box 2 followed by those in boxes 1 and 4.

You may want to repeat this process for specific constituencies or denominations.

This series is edited by the Micah Challenge International Campaign Office.

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The aim of this series is to encourage discussion on the issues raised. Any comments are welcomed at the email address below.

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**Micah Challenge Framework Papers in this series**

1. Barriers to the embrace of intergral mission  
2. Key Influences on local churches

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