

Detailed Report on Discussions Held in Mangochi, Malawi

Introduction

The recent gathering in Mangochi, Malawi, brought together church leaders and community members to engage in deep discussions about the critical challenges facing their communities. The discussions centred around the concepts of resilience and crisis, with a focus on understanding how the church and local communities can respond effectively. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the key discussions, the themes explored, reflections from facilitators Adriaan Adams and Adam Burke, and the questions posed by participants for further reflection.

Definitions of 'Resilience' and 'Crisis'

In the context of Mangochi, resilience was defined using the following key words: courage, self-belief, obedience to God, obedience to the promises received, forgiveness, love, caring, not judging people but the situation, faith, calmness, understanding, passion, supportive, and perseverance. From these words, resilience can be understood as the inner strength and spiritual steadfastness that allow individuals and communities to persevere through challenges, grounded in faith, understanding, and love.

Crisis was defined with words such as disappointment, desperation, witchcraft, confusion, misunderstanding, fear, lack of finances, division, doubt, unbelief, hopelessness, loneliness, hate, broken relations, opposition, and anger. In this context, crisis refers to a state of severe disruption or distress, where individuals and communities face overwhelming challenges that threaten their wellbeing and unity.

The Four Themes Discussed

1. Economic Challenges

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church in Mangochi is seen as a pivotal institution in addressing economic challenges by providing both spiritual and practical support to those in need. The church can help alleviate poverty by creating awareness, providing education, and facilitating community development projects.
- **Three Practical Steps for the Church in Malawi:**
 1. Establish community savings and credit schemes to empower individuals financially.
 2. Offer vocational training programs to enhance employability and entrepreneurial skills.
 3. Advocate for fair and just economic policies at the national level.
- **Three Practical Steps for Local Church Communities:**
 1. Create local job opportunities through community-based projects.
 2. Offer financial literacy workshops to help community members manage their finances better.
 3. Provide support to the most vulnerable, such as widows, orphans, and the elderly.



2. Ethical Failures

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church has a moral obligation to address ethical failures by promoting integrity, transparency, and accountability within the community. It can also act as a watchdog against corruption and moral decay.
- **Three Practical Steps for the Church in Malawi:**
 1. Launch campaigns to raise awareness about ethical conduct and the dangers of corruption.
 2. Develop ethics education programs that can be integrated into church teachings and community activities.
 3. Collaborate with other institutions to monitor and address ethical breaches within the community.
- **Three Practical Steps for Local Church Communities:**
 1. Encourage members to uphold Christian values in their personal and professional lives.
 2. Establish accountability groups within the church to foster ethical behaviour.
 3. Support whistleblowers and others who stand against unethical practices.

3. Social Dynamics

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church plays a crucial role in shaping social dynamics by fostering unity, peace, and understanding among diverse groups within the community. It can also mediate conflicts and promote social cohesion.
- **Three Practical Steps for the Church in Malawi:**
 1. Organise interfaith and intercultural dialogues to promote mutual respect and understanding.
 2. Lead initiatives that address social inequalities and promote inclusivity.
 3. Support community leaders in their efforts to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- **Three Practical Steps for Local Church Communities:**
 1. Create safe spaces within the church for open discussions on social issues.
 2. Offer counselling services to those affected by social conflicts.
 3. Encourage volunteerism and community service to build stronger ties among community members.

4. Institutional Challenges

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church is seen as a stabilising force that can help strengthen institutional frameworks by promoting good governance, transparency, and accountability within both the church and broader community institutions.
- **Three Practical Steps for the Church in Malawi:**
 1. Advocate for institutional reforms that enhance transparency and efficiency.
 2. Provide training for church and community leaders on good governance practices.
 3. Collaborate with government and non-governmental organisations to address institutional weaknesses.



- **Three Practical Steps for Local Church Communities:**
 1. Ensure that church governance is transparent and accountable to its members.
 2. Engage with local government structures to advocate for better service delivery.
 3. Support initiatives that promote institutional capacity building within the community.

Key Takeaways for Further Reflection

1. **Language and Interpretation:** The use of local languages in discussions greatly enhanced participation and understanding. Future sessions should consider the importance of language and provide translation services where necessary.
2. **Timing and Structure:** Starting on time and maintaining a structured schedule contributed to the success of the gathering. This should be a standard practice in future sessions.
3. **Participant Engagement:** Active participation was most evident during group discussions in local languages. This indicates the need to create environments where participants feel comfortable expressing themselves.
4. **Flexibility and Adaptation:** The ability to adapt the session structure to the needs of the participants, including extending time for translation, was crucial in ensuring the success of the meeting.
5. **Ethical Responsibility:** The discussions highlighted the church's role as a moral compass in the community, emphasising the need for ethical leadership and accountability.

Reflections from Adriaan and Adam

Adriaan and Adam reflected on the importance of language and cultural context in facilitating meaningful discussions. They noted that while translation added complexity, it also made the sessions more inclusive. The facilitators also discussed the need to start sessions on time and maintain a structured schedule. They appreciated the active engagement of participants during group work and recognised the importance of being flexible and adaptable to the local context.

Adriaan and Adam emphasised the value of modelling certain activities to help participants engage more effectively. They also reflected on the balance between guiding discussions and allowing participants to co-create the narrative.

Questions for Further Reflection

At the conclusion of the gathering, participants were asked to provide one question they were taking with them for further reflection. These questions included:

- How can the church effectively balance spiritual and practical support in addressing community challenges?
- What role can the church play in fostering economic empowerment in communities?
- How can church leaders be more accountable and transparent in their governance?
- What strategies can the church employ to address social conflicts within the community?



Conclusion

The gathering in Mangochi was a significant step in understanding the challenges faced by local communities and the role of the church in addressing these issues. The discussions highlighted the importance of resilience in the face of crisis and the need for the church to take an active role in promoting ethical behavior, social cohesion, and good governance. The reflections and questions raised by participants provide valuable insights for future engagements and underscore the importance of continued dialogue and collaboration.

