

Reflection and Key Takeaways from Discussions in Lusaka

Introduction: On August 15th, 2024, Adriaan Adams and Adam Burke facilitated a discussion session with leaders from various churches and organisations in Lusaka, Zambia. Although the attendance was slightly lower than in previous locations, the smaller group size allowed for deeper conversations and more personal sharing. The session aimed to explore how the church in Lusaka responds to crises, and participants engaged in rich discussions that highlighted key themes and perspectives.

Context: The gathering in Lusaka was part of an ongoing research project focused on understanding how the church in sub-Saharan Africa responds to crises. The discussions in Lusaka were particularly noteworthy due to the diversity of perspectives among the participants. There was a noticeable generational divide, with older leaders holding more traditional views and younger leaders advocating for more progressive approaches. This dynamic provided fertile ground for exploring different approaches to leadership, mentorship, and the role of the church in crisis situations.

Key Takeaways:

1. Diverse Perspectives on Leadership and Mentorship:

- The discussions revealed a generational divide in approaches to leadership and mentorship. Older leaders tended to emphasise traditional methods, such as established ministries and programs, while younger leaders questioned the effectiveness of these methods and called for new, innovative approaches. The importance of mentorship was highlighted, with a call for older leaders to listen to and learn from the younger generation.

2. The Role of the Church in Community and Political Engagement:

- Participants discussed the church's role in providing solutions to community issues, particularly in the context of infrastructure and systems. There was a strong emphasis on the need for the church to engage in relationships with political leaders to influence decision-making processes. This conversation was particularly relevant given Lusaka's status as the political capital of Zambia, where church leaders often have connections with government officials.

3. Co-Creation of Solutions:

- A key theme that emerged was the importance of co-creating solutions with the community rather than imposing solutions from the top down. This approach was more strongly advocated by younger leaders, who emphasised the need for the church to work alongside the community to address crises effectively. This theme resonated with previous discussions in other locations, where the value of community involvement and collaboration was also highlighted.



4. **The Power of Storytelling:**

- The discussions reinforced the significance of storytelling in African cultures, where oral traditions and shared experiences play a central role in community life. Participants were encouraged to share personal stories, which deepened the conversations and created a sense of connection among the group. The use of stories as a means of co-creating the narrative of the church's response to crises was a powerful tool in the discussion.

5. **The Use of AI in Thematic Analysis:**

- During the session, the facilitators experimented with using AI to assist in organising and thematically analysing the data generated from the discussions. This approach proved to be effective in identifying key themes, especially when participants provided abstract or conceptual words that were challenging to categorise. The use of AI in this context demonstrated its potential as a valuable tool for enhancing the research process.

Conclusion: The discussions in Lusaka provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of leadership, community engagement, and the role of the church in responding to crises. The generational differences in perspectives highlighted the need for a balanced approach that honours traditional methods while also embracing new, innovative solutions. The emphasis on co-creation, relationship-building, and storytelling as tools for addressing crises reflects the unique cultural context of Lusaka and offers important lessons for future discussions in other locations. As the research team continues their journey, these insights will serve as a foundation for further exploration and reflection.