

Final Reflections: Arusha, Tanzania (12 September 2024)

Introduction

On 12 September 2024, a significant gathering was held in Arusha, Tanzania, to engage church leaders, community members, and stakeholders in discussions about the critical issues facing their communities. The meeting, which was facilitated with the aim of ‘listening, learning, and asking better questions,’ focused on the broader challenges of resilience and crisis as understood in the local context. The goal was to explore how the church and community leaders could respond to crises and build resilience, focussing on four key themes: Family and Social Breakdown, Economic and Employment Challenges, Moral and Spiritual Decay, and Environmental and Health Crises.

The discussions were deep and insightful, reflecting the lived experiences of participants. This report outlines the definitions of resilience and crisis as shared during the gathering, the four themes discussed, key takeaways for further reflection, team reflections, and the questions raised by participants for continued deliberation.

1. Definitions of Resilience and Crisis

Resilience

During the discussions, participants defined **resilience** as the ability to faithfully follow God’s promises while depending on Him through times of crisis. This resilience is manifested through prayer, forgiveness, grace, and problem-solving while trusting in God’s provision. It also involves a focus on maintaining moral integrity, staying calm under pressure, encouraging others, and finding the good in any situation, offering that as an act of faith to God. In summary, resilience in Arusha is seen as a spiritual journey, deeply tied to one's faith, where individuals and communities lean on God for strength and guidance through adversity.

Crisis

The participants defined **crisis** as a state marked by a wide range of challenges, including ignorance, family breakdown, economic hardship, moral decay, and environmental degradation. In Arusha, crises are seen as situations where social, economic, and spiritual factors converge, causing widespread disruption. These crises are often compounded by systemic issues such as unemployment, illness, crime, and false teachings within the church. The role of the church is crucial in addressing these crises, providing both spiritual guidance and practical support.



2. Four Key Themes Discussed

Theme 1: Family and Social Breakdown

Key Issues Raised

The participants explored the crisis of family and social breakdown, noting that the erosion of family values, increased divorce rates, family separations, and rising street children were major concerns. Social issues like drug abuse and lack of support for youth were highlighted as contributing factors.

Role of the Church

The church's role is seen as central to addressing family breakdown. Church leaders must lead with the fear of God, providing spiritual and moral guidance to families. Churches should also focus on mentoring youth before they enter family life to prevent future issues. Teaching family values and moral integrity must be a priority for church leaders.

Practical Steps for the Church in Tanzania

- Equip church leaders with the fear of God and a strong foundation in biblical truth, enabling them to lead by example.
- Initiate community projects that support families, such as marriage counselling and youth mentoring programs.
- Strengthen family values through consistent teaching on morality, respect, and responsibility.

Practical Steps for Local Church Communities

- Provide mentorship to young people to help them understand family responsibilities early.
- Organise family support groups within the church for counselling and guidance.
- Encourage prayer for church leaders to remain spiritually grounded and wise in addressing family issues.

Theme 2: Economic and Employment Challenges

Key Issues Raised

Economic challenges are widespread in Arusha, with unemployment, lack of skills training, and financial instability being central concerns. Participants expressed the need for practical support from the church to help families and individuals secure sustainable livelihoods.

Role of the Church

The church is expected to play a proactive role in helping community members by providing education and resources for entrepreneurship and small business development. The church should also support community members with access to capital for starting projects that generate income.

Practical Steps for the Church in Tanzania

- Offer practical education on entrepreneurship and small-scale businesses, teaching community members how to manage projects like farming or small businesses.
- Initiate small community-based projects, such as beekeeping or farming, to create job opportunities.
- Provide financial support or link members to micro loans to help them start businesses.



Practical Steps for Local Church Communities

- Mentor and support church members who wish to start businesses.
- Provide financial and material support to help individuals grow their businesses.
- Encourage accountability in how financial support is used to ensure resources are applied effectively.

Theme 3: Moral and Spiritual Decay

Key Issues Raised

Moral decay, including the rise in crime, drug abuse, sexual immorality, and false teachings in the church, was a significant concern. Participants stressed that the erosion of moral values is impacting families and communities, and the church must take an active role in restoring integrity.

Role of the Church

The church's role is to promote love and unity among its leaders and members. By fostering cooperation, the church can become a powerful voice against immoral behaviours. It is also crucial for the church to collaborate with government institutions to address societal vices.

Practical Steps for the Church in Tanzania

- Encourage unity and cooperation among church leaders to present a unified front against moral decay.
- Organise joint evangelistic programs to promote spiritual and moral restoration in communities.
- Work closely with the government to address issues like drug abuse, sexual immorality, and crime.

Practical Steps for Local Church Communities

- Teach and guide both spiritually and materially, ensuring that members receive holistic support.
- Mentor and support vulnerable groups within the community, such as the poor and elderly.
- Educate members on the importance of morality and integrity through consistent teaching and guidance.

Theme 4: Environmental and Health Crises

Key Issues Raised

Environmental degradation and health challenges, including pollution, deforestation, and diseases like malaria, are pressing issues. Participants stressed that environmental conservation and health education are essential for community well-being.

Role of the Church

The church can play a pivotal role by promoting tree planting, environmental conservation, and health education. It should also collaborate with local health institutions to provide medical care and preventive education.



Practical Steps for the Church in Tanzania

- Establish health centres to provide care and education on disease prevention.
- Collaborate with existing health institutions to ensure access to healthcare for church members.
- Organise health education workshops to teach the community about environmental preservation and healthy living.

Practical Steps for Local Church Communities

- Promote healthier eating habits and physical exercise among members.
- Offer training on environmental conservation and how to maintain clean surroundings.
- Organise community cleanups to improve the environment and reduce health risks.

3. Key Takeaways for Further Reflection

- **Community Engagement:** There is a clear need to increase community participation in addressing these challenges. How can the church engage the wider community in resolving these crises?
- **Inclusivity:** Concerns were raised about whether church initiatives are open to everyone or only to those within the faith. Should the church widen its scope to include non-believers in its programs?
- **Economic Sustainability:** Participants highlighted the need for the church to become more economically self-sufficient. What steps can the church take to develop economically?
- **Strategic Planning:** There is a need for the church to create long-term strategies to address these challenges. How can strategic planning be improved within church communities?
- **Leadership Accountability:** Participants called for more accountability from religious and government leaders. What concrete actions must leaders take to address these crises?
- **Ethical Considerations:** The growing expectation for compensation from participants attending gatherings presents an ethical challenge that requires careful navigation.

4. Reflections from Adriaan and Adam

Adriaan and Adam's reflections highlighted the diversity of themes and participants, the role of the church in leading change, and the importance of adaptability in facilitation. They also noted challenges such as fatigue among facilitators, the need to address compensation expectations, and the importance of helping participants discover their own solutions. The facilitators acknowledged that fostering a culture of self-discovery and problem-solving, rather than instructing, was an effective approach for rural communities.



5. Questions Raised by Participants for Further Reflection

- How can community participation be increased in the resolution of crises?
- Are seminars like these meant only for those who are already believers, or are they open to everyone?
- What can the church do to develop economically and become more self-sufficient?
- Do we have a strategic plan to address challenges in the church, families, and the wider community?
- What are the essential actions that our religious or government leaders must take?
- After learning about crises, what is now the true meaning of a crisis, and what are the root causes?
- How do the lessons learned translate into practical benefits, particularly regarding employment and family issues?

Conclusion

The gathering in Arusha was a valuable opportunity for church leaders and community members to reflect on the pressing challenges they face. The discussions were deep and engaging, with participants offering insights into how the church can play a more active role in addressing family breakdown, economic challenges, moral decay, and environmental crises. The questions raised and the key takeaways offer a clear direction for further reflection and action as the church and community leaders work together to build resilience and address crises in their communities.

