

Introduction

This report outlines the key insights, discussions, and reflections from the sessions held in Gaborone, Botswana on the 1st and 2nd of August 2024. The meetings were part of a larger research road trip aimed at understanding how the Church in sub-Saharan Africa is responding to crises and fostering resilience in their communities. It is important to note that this report reflects the views and experiences shared by the participants we met in Gaborone and does not represent the perspective of the Church as a whole in Botswana. However, it serves as a valuable starting point for further discussions, reflection, and research on the role of the Church in responding to crises and building community resilience.

Definition of Resilience and Crisis

Resilience in the context of Gaborone was defined by participants as the **ability to “stand against all odds”**. It represents a collective spirit of perseverance, consistency, and unwavering determination to overcome adversity. This definition underscores the community's commitment to enduring and thriving despite challenges. Resilience is not only about withstanding difficulties but also about fostering a collaborative spirit where communities come together to find strength and solutions.

Crisis was defined as a situation that requires **perseverance, resilience, and strength** to confront. For those in Gaborone, crises manifest in various forms, from personal struggles such as health and financial hardships to broader societal challenges like political instability and economic downturns. A crisis was seen not merely as an isolated event but as a complex interplay of factors that can compound and amplify each other, requiring tailored, context-specific responses.

Four Key Themes Discussed

During the sessions in Gaborone, four central themes emerged as focal points of the discussions:

1. Community and Collective Resilience

Participants emphasised the critical role of unity and collaboration in fostering resilience. The Church was highlighted as a unifying force that can bring people together to address crises collectively. A strong "We" mindset was deemed essential, where both leaders and community members work together to support each other through difficult times. Resilience was seen as a shared responsibility, where mutual care and cooperation were key to overcoming adversity.

Key takeaway: Building stronger networks within the Church and community can lead to more effective responses to crises. This includes creating spaces for open dialogue, sharing resources, and working towards common goals.

2. Contextualising Crisis

The discussions revealed that the definition and experience of crises vary significantly across different contexts. Some participants focused on personal crises such as family issues and health problems, while others highlighted societal challenges like drought, unemployment, and political unrest. This diversity highlighted the need for context-specific responses that cater to both urban and rural settings.



Key takeaway: Understanding the local context is essential for effective crisis management. Leaders must recognise the unique needs of their communities and adapt their approaches accordingly.

3. Leadership and Gender Dynamics

Leadership was a significant focus of the discussions, with a particular emphasis on the barriers women face in accessing leadership roles within the Church and broader community. Participants acknowledged the importance of gender inclusivity and the empowerment of women in leadership positions. The Church was seen as an institution that can either reinforce traditional gender roles or challenge them to promote equality.

Key takeaway: Addressing gender disparities in leadership and creating opportunities for women to lead can result in more holistic and effective crisis responses. Leaders must prioritise dismantling barriers that limit women's participation in decision-making.

4. Poly-Crisis and Interconnected Challenges

The concept of poly-crisis, where multiple crises occur simultaneously and amplify each other, was a central theme. Participants discussed the interconnectedness of challenges such as environmental disasters, economic instability, and social unrest. The Church's role in navigating these complex and overlapping crises was seen as crucial, both in terms of immediate relief efforts and long-term community resilience building.

Key takeaway: The Church must take a multi-dimensional approach to crisis management, addressing not just immediate needs but also the root causes of crises. Collaboration with other sectors, such as government and NGOs, is essential for tackling the systemic issues that underlie many poly-crises.

Key Takeaways for Further Reflection

- 1. Inclusivity in Crisis Response:** The Church must foster an inclusive approach to crisis management, ensuring that all community members, especially women and vulnerable groups, are involved in decision-making and leadership.
- 2. Context-Specific Leadership:** Leaders must develop a deep understanding of the specific contexts in which they operate, recognising that urban and rural communities may experience crises differently. Tailored solutions are necessary to address the unique challenges of each context.
- 3. Collaboration and Partnership:** The Church cannot address crises in isolation. Building partnerships with government bodies, NGOs, and other stakeholders is critical for developing comprehensive solutions to interconnected crises.
- 4. Sustained Support:** Crisis management is not a one-time response. The Church must work towards long-term resilience, focussing on sustained support through education, community development, and capacity building.



Team Reflections

The research team reflected on the immense value of open dialogue and shared learning during the sessions in Gaborone. The diversity of perspectives, ranging from local church leaders to expatriates, enriched the discussions and highlighted the importance of community-driven solutions. The team was particularly struck by the strong emphasis on unity and collaboration as a foundation for resilience. It was clear that while crises manifest differently across communities, the need for a collective response was a consistent theme.

One significant reflection was the role of the Church not only as a spiritual leader but also as a critical social actor in times of crisis. The team observed that in many instances, the Church was often the first to respond when crises struck, providing both immediate relief and long-term support. However, the discussions also revealed that there is room for growth in terms of integrating more gender-inclusive leadership and engaging with external partners to address systemic issues.

Conclusion

The discussions held in Gaborone provided valuable insights into the Church's role in responding to crises and fostering resilience. While the views expressed in this report reflect the experiences of those who participated in the sessions, they serve as a foundation for further reflection, research, and dialogue. The Church has a unique and vital role in leading communities through times of crisis, but it must continue to evolve and adapt its strategies to meet the complex, interconnected challenges of the 21st century. The key themes discussed—community resilience, contextualising crises, leadership and gender dynamics, and poly-crisis—highlight the areas where the Church can make a significant impact.

This report is not intended to be a definitive statement on the views of the Church in Gaborone but rather a starting point for further engagement and action. We invite stakeholders, church leaders, and supporters to reflect on these discussions and consider how they can contribute to building stronger, more resilient communities in Botswana and beyond.

