

# Report on the Discussions Held in Kigali, Rwanda

**Date:** 30 September 2024

**Audience:** Stakeholders, Church Leaders, and Supporters

## Introduction

The gathering in Kigali, Rwanda, on 30 September 2024, brought together church leaders, stakeholders, and representatives from the African Evangelical Alliance (AEA) to reflect on the role of the church in addressing crises and building resilience within communities. The discussions were structured around four main themes: **Governance and Church Relations, Psychosocial and Healing Process, Health and Access to Services, and Economic and Employment Challenges.** These discussions provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by church leaders and their communities in Rwanda, as well as opportunities for the church to play a central role in crisis response and resilience-building.

It is important to note that the views expressed in this report do not represent the position of the church as a whole in other regions, such as Jinja. Rather, this report reflects the voices of those we met in Kigali, and it serves as a starting point for further discussions, reflection, and research.

## Definitions of Resilience and Crisis

**Resilience** in the context of Kigali refers to a spiritual and emotional journey rooted in faith, hope, and perseverance. It involves relying on God during difficult times, exercising forgiveness, demonstrating compassion, and maintaining a hopeful outlook. Resilience is not merely about enduring hardships but about finding strength in faith to rebuild and continue walking with God, despite the challenges faced.

**Crisis**, as understood by the participants, encompasses a wide range of emotional, social, and economic challenges. These include governance issues, poverty, unemployment, psychological and relational breakdowns, and a lack of support networks. In Kigali, crises often have a deep personal and community impact, affecting mental health, social cohesion, and access to essential services.



## The Four Themes Discussed

### 1. Governance and Church Relations

Participants discussed the complex relationship between the government and the church in Rwanda, particularly in the context of governance policies that regulate church operations.

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church is seen as a mediator between the government and the community, providing moral and spiritual guidance. It has the potential to lead the way in promoting unity and trust between people and the authorities.
- **Practical Steps:**
  1. **Prayer and Collective Intercession:** The church must come together in prayer for the government and the community, asking for divine intervention in addressing governance issues.
  2. **Mutual Support Initiatives:** Church members must support each other during governance crises, ensuring that no one feels isolated or abandoned.
  3. **Leadership Training:** The church should equip its leaders to engage effectively with governance issues and ensure that they uphold accountability, justice, and compassion within their communities.
- **Challenges Identified:** A key challenge is navigating the regulatory framework imposed by the government, which includes requirements for theological training and building standards. However, the relationship between the government and the church in Rwanda was viewed more positively than in other regions, such as Nairobi.

### 2. Psychosocial and Healing Process

This theme focused on the emotional and psychological needs of individuals and communities facing crises. The discussions explored how the church can facilitate healing and restoration in the wake of trauma.

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church serves as a sanctuary for emotional healing and restoration. It has the responsibility to provide spiritual counselling and guidance, helping individuals process their trauma and move towards healing.
- **Practical Steps:**
  1. **Establishing Counselling Teams:** The church should develop teams of trained counsellors to address the psychological needs of the congregation.
  2. **Health Awareness and Education:** Churches should offer educational programmes to raise awareness about mental health and provide tools for managing emotional crises.
  3. **Field Visits and Community Engagement:** Churches should engage with communities through field visits to understand their specific psychosocial needs and offer tailored support.
- **Challenges Identified:** Participants highlighted the long-lasting effects of Rwanda's 1994 genocide, particularly for older leaders. Many church leaders are supporting their communities while dealing with their own unresolved emotional challenges.



### 3. Health and Access to Services

The third theme explored the church's role in ensuring access to healthcare services, especially for vulnerable groups in the community.

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church acts as a bridge between the community and healthcare services, helping people navigate the healthcare system and access the care they need.
- **Practical Steps:**
  1. **Creating Health Groups:** Churches should establish health groups to assist congregants in accessing hospitals and healthcare facilities.
  2. **Financial Support for Healthcare:** Churches can initiate fundraising programmes to help those who cannot afford healthcare.
  3. **Partnerships with Health Institutions:** The church should build partnerships with local health institutions to ensure continuous support for vulnerable members of the community.
- **Challenges Identified:** Access to healthcare remains a significant challenge for many in Rwanda, particularly due to financial constraints. The church can play a crucial role in advocating for better access to healthcare services and supporting those in need.

### 4. Economic and Employment Challenges

Economic instability and unemployment were central to this theme, with participants discussing how the church can help address these issues.

- **Role and Place of the Church:** The church is seen as a key institution in promoting economic resilience by fostering creativity, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy among congregants.
- **Practical Steps:**
  1. **Teaching Skills and Entrepreneurship:** Churches should organise training sessions to equip people with the skills needed to create employment opportunities or start small businesses.
  2. **Promoting Savings and Financial Literacy:** Financial education programmes should be implemented to teach congregants the importance of saving and managing money.
  3. **Creating Support Groups for Income Generation:** Churches can facilitate the formation of small groups where people collaborate on business ventures and share resources.
- **Challenges Identified:** Participants highlighted the need for financial support and guidance, particularly in navigating the complexities of starting businesses or securing employment.



## Key Takeaways for Further Reflection

1. **Addressing Emotional and Psychological Trauma:** The long-term psychological impact of the genocide remains a significant issue. Church leaders need support in processing their own trauma while helping others heal.
2. **Improving Church-Government Relations:** Rwanda presents a unique case where the church-government relationship is more constructive compared to other regions. This relationship offers opportunities for collaboration but also raises challenges regarding regulatory compliance.
3. **Focus on Practical Solutions:** There is a strong need for practical support, including financial management training, donor engagement, and programme development to help the church effectively address crises.
4. **Continued Dialogue and Collaboration:** The discussions underscored the importance of maintaining ongoing dialogue between church leaders and communities to develop long-term solutions for crisis management.

## Team Reflections

Reflecting on the discussions, Adriaan and Adam noted that while the themes discussed were similar to those encountered in other regions, the personal nature of the crises in Kigali was particularly striking. The genocide continues to shape leadership and community responses, creating a need for focused emotional and psychological support. They also observed the participants' eagerness to continue these dialogues, with many expressing a desire to formalise their crisis response through structured programmes.

The role of the government in regulating church operations was another key point of reflection. While this relationship presents challenges, the participants were generally positive about the government's role in fostering societal development.

A crucial takeaway from the team's reflection was the need for **more training and equipping church leaders**, particularly in crisis management and financial stewardship. This aligns with the participants' expressed desire for practical tools to address the complex challenges they face.

## Questions Raised by Participants for Further Reflection

At the conclusion of the gathering, participants were asked to provide one question they would take with them for further reflection. The following questions were raised:

1. How can I take these teachings and apply them in my community to respond better to crises?
2. What steps can we take as a church to ensure we are prepared to address crises effectively?
3. How can individuals be supported in building resilience within their personal lives and communities during times of crisis?
4. How can we better integrate faith and practical solutions when responding to crises like poverty and unemployment?
5. What role does the church leadership need to play in fostering collaboration with government and other organisations during crises?



## Conclusion

The discussions in Kigali highlighted the complex and multifaceted nature of the crises facing communities in Rwanda. The role of the church in addressing these challenges—whether through spiritual guidance, practical support, or collaboration with the government—remains central to fostering resilience and providing hope in times of hardship. The conversations also revealed a strong desire for ongoing dialogue and practical action, paving the way for further research, reflection, and the development of structured programmes to address the needs of the Rwandan church and its communities.

