

## ASSESSING THE OPPORTUNITIES: HOW TO CHOOSE TARGETS FOR CHURCH PLANTING

(This article is based on personal experience and the experiences of other revered church planters such as Rev. Raul Dirole in Zambezia and Rev. Abel Nove in Nampula, Mozambique.)

### Introduction

Talking about the assessment of opportunities for the identification of a possible or successful church planting is a process that demands for strategic planning. Strategic planning is said to be a systematic process of envisioning a desired future and translating this vision into broadly defined goals or objectives and a sequence of steps to achieve them (Business Dictionary: *ibid*). This implies that church planting is not an event but a process.

Jesus also emphasized the importance of strategic planning: “For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.” (Luke 14:28-33).

Furthermore, success is not based on mere planning but it also calls for or demands diligence on the part of the visionary and his

team in the church planting process. The Bible states that: “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.” (Proverbs 21:5 ESV). Contextually, poverty may be viewed as a failure to achieve one’s envisioned and desired future.

### How to Choose Targets for Church Planting

The word “assess” has the notion of examining and evaluating in view to estimate the nature, quality or value of something. In trying to assess the opportunities in view for choosing targets for church planting, it is advisable to do an environmental scan. What is “environmental scanning or contextual analysis”? It is a careful monitoring of an organization or group’s internal and external environments for detecting early signs or general opportunities and threats that may influence its current and future plans. This is known in most business and non-profit organizations as a SWOT analysis. SWOT is the acronym of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. Here are the things to be explored in each environment

#### Environmental or Contextual Analysis (External):

An external analysis is conducted to identify opportunities and threats. These opportunities and threats could be identified by asking and exploring the following:

1. *What are the characteristic of the physical environment in which the church wants to plant a church?*

2. *How many other, similar churches already operate in the same geographical area?*

By similar Churches we mean Churches that do not differ with us in values, doctrine and aspirations (Evangelicals).

3. *Who or what is the competition for funding?*

4. *What are the unmet needs in the designated ministry area?*

This question seeks to understand people and their conditions both spiritually and physically. This helps to bring new ideas to meet with the target group's needs.

5. *What are the demographics of the current membership (ethnicity, age, geography)?*

One has to understand the age group, traditions or customs and the natural features of the place. This may also help the church planting team to come up with possible ways or strategies for evangelism.

6. *What are the community's perceptions of the church's brand identity?*

Brand and behavior of the Church in other communities matter (discussed on further discussion)

### Internal Analysis

This process is purported to identify the team or organisation's strengths and weaknesses. The following questions must be examined:

1. *What are the results of needs and resource assessments already available, such as from the local Church or the denomination?*

Internal analysis is meant to see what the group, team, department or Church possesses in light of the opportunities and threats presented by the external environment. Two major factors are the

financial base and human capital, hence; any sign of lack be it financial or in human capital for execution is considered a weaknesses.

2. *How will the results of these assessments impact the ministries of your church?*

Here the church planter is looking at the complete picture of the church in terms of vision, mission, goals and objectives. If the intended church plant would not bring any impact to the church in general, it is not worth pursuing or executing it. This is what many church planters and denominations do not want to hear because they perceive this as unspiritual and not in line with the great commission.

3. *Is there justification for the Church?*

This last question is asked in recognition of the above questions and analysis. This could also further be answered by asking a series of the following questions:

- Exactly what problem will this solve? (value proposition) – Also phrased as “why are we doing this?”
- For whom do we solve that problem? (target market/persona)
- What alternatives are out there? (competitive landscape)
- Why we are best suited to pursue this? (our differentiator)
- Why now? (market window)

### **SWOT ANALYSIS**



## Further discussion

The major things that we look for in the field as opportunities for a church plant are:

### a. *The population*

Numbers matter most of the time in church planting. For example, a place of 200 people with over 4 sound churches is not feasible to do the planting. The other thing one has to say is that, in the process of assessment, the group must also establish the activities or sources of livelihood (what brings these people to this place). Where people are brought together for farming during the season and go back to their respective places thereafter, that place is likely not to be feasible for a new church plant. We have few such churches in Xai Xai. At the peak of farming season, the church has a bigger attendance and thereafter it goes back to just a handful of people.

### b. *How strategic is the place*

Some other places offer very attractive opportunities, not in terms of population but strategically in terms of value and sometimes serving as gateways to larger cities. For instance, Machipanda is a very small town (in Mozambique) but it is a gateway to Mutare, Zimbabwe. It would be very expensive for the Wesleyan Church to plant a Church from the south (Bulawayo) than to plant it from Mozambique. It is approximately 5km from Machipanda to Mutare and about 579km to Bulawayo. We just need to be strategic and more Kingdom-minded in reaching out to other places.

### c. *Demonic influences*

A place with a very strong influence of demonic activities, usher a very clear cut opportunity for a church plant. The entrance

to such places is very difficult and a clear sign of a battle between light and darkness. Conversely, very robust churches are born in such places (take note of how the Church is growing in China and other parts of the Islamic world). Easy entrance in other places might signal saturation of Churches and what only happens is a creation of more prodigal church members who go from church to church.

### d. *Types of churches operating in the place of consideration*

It is worth saying that in places where there are churches like Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists and cults such as ZCC, that place ought to be considered as presenting the finest opportunity for a possible church plant.

The SWOT Analysis also is meant to identify threats in the environment as mentioned above such as legal, opposition from other established Churches and local authorities. However, some view Muslims or Islam as a direct threat to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Conversely, Muslims are not a threat but the Church must view them as an opportunity to preach and establish Churches in their midst. Having said that, one is not negating their hostility but it is revealed that there is no time in the history of the Church whereby the Church was never bathed in blood, hence; the saying 'the blood of the martyrs was a seed for the growth of the Church.'

### e. *The community's perceptions of the church*

The identity and the place of origins of the church (denomination) matters much to many communities. Therefore, what people think about the church or new churches entering into their community must be established. Other communities are not comfortable with new brands. This is the very thing that almost took us down in Massinga whereby the church was new in

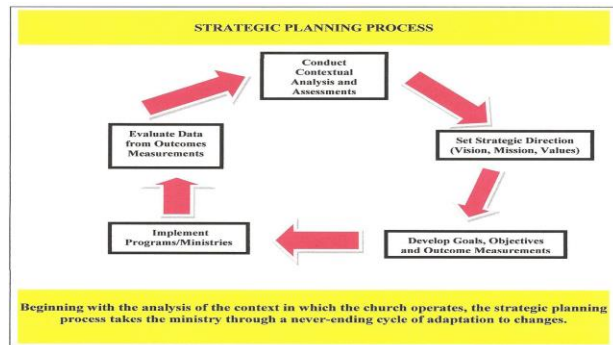
the district and province. The name sounded South African and during this particular time churches (cults) in SA were being accused human killings for rituals. So the Wesleyan Church in Massinga was labeled many names that in turn worked against it. In other parts of Zimbabwe (2003-2004), it was impossible to start a Church that bears western identity and even missionaries were not allowed in. Lastly, the assessors must present themselves accordingly because their behavior might be connected to the image and mission of the Church.

f. *Culture*

We look at issues of language, behaviours, norms and traditional beliefs. The church planting team must not assume that they know the language and shared values if they haven't tested them - more especially if the team is not local. Africa is a very complex world of its own. We may be speaking the same language but there are other terminologies that differ from one setting to another. It happened in 2004, a Jesus Film team came to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe to project the film in the Ndebele language. The team assumed that the Ndebele spoken in South Africa is the same as the Ndebele spoken in Zimbabwe. What happened was that people started leaving before the film was finished. The issue was that they could hear nor understand the language.

**The Importance of Assessment of Opportunities and Strategic Planning Process**

The assessment for opportunities, if well done, will help the church planter or the team to come up with a clear vision of what ought to be done, how, when, and how to measure the results in light of investment. It is the input that determines the output. This process will also help the team to determine tools, strategies, and resources needed for the Church Plant (implementation).



**This Figure does not differ from the SWOT Analysis but it takes you from step to step.**

For example, using inappropriate tools for church planting in other areas may yield unfavourable results. In 2001, we launched the Jesus Film Project in Swaziland. Two groups were created. One group was meant to show the Jesus Film in the villages and the other in the town of Manzini. The groups were trained for 3 months and every Sunday we were provided with transport to attend services in the chosen target churches. After six months of preparation, we showed the Jesus Film in Manzini and Mozomusha. The attendance in Muzomusha was 300 people whereas we had only 1 person with us in Manzini who happened to be there and was not a Christian. The second day we had 0 attendance of newcomers in Manzini and at the other side the number increased to 500. What was the problem with the Manzini group? We used a wrong tool for evangelism. We didn't do our research very well in town where everyone has access to television, DVDs and watches films in the comfort of his/her house.

The church planter must also be aware of certain events that command a huge following in the targeted place. To be strategic is also to understand when to launch because if the church planting activity will coincide with a certain event that is of interest to the habitants, it is likely to work against the major event of the church. This answers the question under justification: why now (market window)?

Assessment of opportunities for choosing targets of church planting informs the church where to invest and also answers the why, how, where and when questions. Planting churches in already saturated places is according to my opinion misappropriation and unwise deployment of Kingdom resources.

### **Conclusion**

It is said that “If you don’t plan, you plan to fail.” You can only plan well if you have taken time to assess the opportunities and threats provided by the external environment and strategise the way forward on the basis of your strengths. However, the Bible also states that: “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails,” (Prov. 19:21). This verse does not negate planning but any successful planning must be done in light of God’s purpose. It is upon this background that prayer must be an anchor from the onset. On the other hand, careful attention must be paid to the

leadership and commands of the Holy Spirit. Paul and his church planting team were kept from preaching the Word in Asia, kept from entering Bithynia because God’s purpose was set forth for Macedonia (Acts 16:6-10). Hearing from God is paramount.

However, it should be said that church planting is a process as well as an art or science. Any church plant that is done not in recognition of resources available may fail. I have seen churches naturally dying for the reason of a lack of resources, more especially human capital and finances. Available resources will determine the strategy or scope of a new church plant. Inadequate resources at times render the church incapable and not serious in the eyes of the new church members. This is what one has noticed with our new church plants in Malawi, Tete and other places where churches were hastily planted.



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# HOW TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES OF URBAN CHURCH PLANTING

**Key Scripture:** Acts 14:21-23

## INTRODUCTION

In many places of the world, planting new churches in the urban areas seems to be an obvious strategy to reach the lost. In others however, there seems to be many churches and people raise objections to establishing new congregations. On the other hand, people are saying urban church planting is not an easy work. Others say, "There are other churches in the area, why open a new church? The existing churches are struggling to survive, so why not help them?" These are valid questions, but allow me to share how to overcome challenges of urban church planting.

- a. Church planting is a biblical method, taken straight from the *Acts of the Apostles*

The New Testament church grew through the planting of house churches and Christian groups.

- b. The principles of sowing and reproduction are kingdom principles found in the scripture in Matthew 13:33.

- c. It takes a diversity of churches to reach an entire nation.

Different churches are called to reach different ethnic, national, cultural and socio-economic groups.

## HOW TO OVERCOME

### A. PREPARATION

1. A vision from God-

The vision for urban church planting must come from God. Man-made vision is bound to fail. It is important to know God's will.

2. Determine a target group to reach.

It is very important to have a target for easy evaluation. It is very important to have a target for you not to lose focus.

3. Local demographic research

You must know:

- The beliefs of that area
- The leaders of that area
- That strongholds of that area
- The gods of that area
- The boundaries of that area

4. Prayer and spiritual warfare

- Emphasize prayers for the new church planting.
- Church planting is an aggressive spiritual warfare strategy. The field is softened by the prayer of God's people. Prayer is the water or the rains that soften the ground.



## B. SOWING

Determine a sowing strategy

➤ Individual church planting.

At this level you just send one person to do urban Church planting.

➤ Church Planting team

➤ Field Evangelism. Find an area in the community where the people are. Preach to the people and from the people that come to Christ either plant a church or bring them into the new plant.

You organize more than one person to go and do church planting.

➤ Hiving off a group from the mother Church forms core group of the new church planting endeavor

## C. FORMING A SOWING TEAM

Even an individual church planter needs support, so there should be a sowing team to support the church planter.

## D. START A DISCIPLESHIP CULTURE

Build this culture in the church with the hope to raise up elders, pastors, and church planters for the new church plant.

Church planting intercessory team. Because of the spiritual battles on the group the urban church planter needs spiritual support as well

## E. BEGINNING TO BUILD THE COMMUNITY

Establish a “mother cell”. This will be a core group which will eventually grow and become the new church. The cell church, the house church, and the largest church in the world started as a cell group.

## F. PARTNERSHIP WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. The Holy Spirit prepares the hearts. Acts 10
2. The Holy Spirit is our Senior Partner

Paul affirms that we are God’s fellow workers (1 Corinthians 3:9).

3. The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the lost (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit is at work leading the lost to God’s truth
4. The Holy Spirit is the presence of God. Jesus promised His presence and power when we evangelize. (Acts 1:8, Mathew 28:20)



## G. CULTIVATION

1. Develop a relationship in the local community
  - Your presence should attract the community to be its friend
  - Interaction with people at all levels
2. Personal evangelization and networking
  - Door-to-door campaigns
  - Mass evangelization (crusades, media, etc...)
3. Publicity and exposure
  - Participation in community activities and events to make the church grown
  - Visiting and praying for the sick at the hospital
  - Visiting and preaching to prisoners
  - Services to the people in need

## H. SPIRITUAL GIFT SURVEY

- Who is gifted to handle the whole church ministry?
- Choose a qualified church planter.

## I. HARVEST

### 1. The first public service

The new church is a novelty in the community. This is a unique opportunity to attract seekers and to establish contact in the area.

### 2. Follow up and discipleship of new converts and seekers



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## **CONCLUSION:**

Urban Church planting is not an easy process. Many have failed trying. It is clear, however, that Jesus' mandate is to go into all the world. This includes planting new urban churches. Whether it is hard or not is irrelevant. The commandment is to go and make disciples of all nations. In the Great Commission Jesus said to His disciples: ``Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you...`` Mt. 28:19-20

## **EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP IN TIME OF CRISIS**

Leadership is one of the oldest human institutions. When God created the heavens and the earth, He entrusted into man the care of the Garden of Eden. Adam was to provide leadership for the management and sustainability of the garden. As man began to organize himself into families, ethnic groups and nations, the act of leadership was expanded to ensure that such social groups were stable and worked together to foster development among them. In this way men and women assume leadership in homes, institutions and the wider community. Among other things, leaders were entrusted with the responsibility to provide and manage resources and to defend their families or territories from external aggression. Where disputes or crises arise leaders were expected to handle these disputes and crises. Leadership is synonymous

to handling crises. A crisis is an unstable condition of extreme danger. It is a natural and inevitable tendency. Some people believe that effective leadership is measured by the ability to handle crisis. Extreme danger can be man-made or natural. Manmade crises are economic, political and socio-cultural motivated conditions such as deforestation, war, bad governance and harmful traditional practices. Israel for example suffered from slavery for four hundred years due to bad governance. Natural crises on the other hand is manifested in sickness, earthquakes, flooding, storms, fire, pestilence etc. The disciples suffered from a natural crisis when they encountered a storm in the sea.

Individuals, families, and institutions have different types of crises. Job had a personal crisis



when he suffered from a dreadful disease. Israel suffered from famine as they journeyed down to Canaan. Today people continue to encounter different types of crises. In twenty-one years for example, Sierra Leone has suffered from two national crises. First it was the ten-year rebel war. The war claimed the lives of many people. Many others had limbs amputated. In 2014 another circle of crisis erupted, the Ebola virus. Again this crisis claimed the lives of thousands of people and orphaned and widowed many children and women respectively. Crises are characterized by rebellion, grumbling, murmuring, fear, pain and suffering.

Crises need to be managed. It requires effective leadership to manage national and institutional crises. God called and commissioned Moses at the height of Israel's suffering as slaves in Egypt. Moses was to demand the release of Israel from slavery to freedom. Moses led Israel from Egypt through the wilderness wanderings. During this period Israel demonstrated the highest form of rebellious attitude against God and Moses. Nehemiah also became leader for Israel at a crisis period; Israel was suffering from a reproach, as the walls in Jerusalem remained in ruins. Nehemiah rose up to the task and took away the reproach. Both Moses and Nehemiah and many other leaders in the Bible provided effective leadership in such difficult moments until they became celebrated leaders in the Bible.

What does it take to become an effective leader in time of crisis? A crisis is the leader's examination, it is where his or her ability is tested and proved. Effective leadership in time of crisis is measured in two ways, the character demonstrated and the action taken by the leader.

## I. CHARACTER

The character of a leader in time of crisis should demonstrate the following attributes:

**Love his people.** A leader who wishes to succeed in a time of crisis must demonstrate love for his people; he should seek the interest and welfare of the people placed under his/her care. The leader must be able to demonstrate the highest state of love for his people; such love was the kind Jesus described in John. 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends."

**Faith in the Lord:** leadership in a time of crisis is to help people face and overcome the crisis befalling them. Man is limited in knowledge about the future but can help people face it by faith in Christ Jesus. Christ knows the future and the crisis the leader and his people are going through; He will surely take the leader and his people into the future and remove the crisis.

**Humility:** Humility is a requirement for a leader in crisis. This is the quality for which Moses was well known. The Bible records that none was equal to him in humility. When Miriam and Aaron criticized him for marrying an Ethiopian woman, Moses never reacted violently; when God's anger was aroused against them he interceded on their behalf. Humility enables the leader to submit to the feelings and views of the people. It means identifying with the needs of the people and alleviating the crisis confronting them.

**Courage:** A crisis sometimes plants fear in the leader thereby making him or her inactive in handling the problem. When the cruel hand of Jezebel became unbearable on the prophets in Israel, Elijah was overtaken by fear and fled from her presence (1 Ki. 19:9-11). When God commissioned Joshua he admonished him to be courageous and not allow himself to be overtaken with fear. Courage is a kind of spirit that enables a leader to face danger or pain without showing fear. This is what strengthens a leader and keep him working tirelessly.

Love, faith humility and courage are attributes a person should possess to become an effective leader in a time of crisis.

## II. ACTION

Apart from these attributes, to become an effective leader a person should take the following actions.

**Seek God at all time.** Leadership is instituted by God. He identifies the leader and defines the task. When a leader encounters a crisis while carrying out God’s commission he must go back to Him and seek his support in overcoming the crisis. The leader must do this in prayer and fasting and be willing to obey God’s instruction in handling the crisis. Moses was one leader who believed that a crisis can be handled through intercession. In prayer Moses had always interceded on behalf of Israel. When Nehemiah knew that the walls in Jerusalem still remained in ruins he prayed and fasted until he was able to win a divine favor. When Daniel was in crisis in Babylon he prayed to the Lord for deliverance. A leader who wishes to succeed in handling crisis must constantly seek God’s counsel and direction.

**Assess the nature of the crisis.** This involves analyzing the extent of the crisis for possible intervention. Nehemiah’s intervention in the

Jerusalem crisis was preceded by a thorough analysis of the situation (Neh. 2:12-16). Assessing the situation will help the leader determine intervention strategies.

**Communicate the crisis to stakeholders.** Taking action on a particular crisis is a collective responsibility of the people affected. After Nehemiah was able to define the extent of the problem, he communicated the problem to the people and was able to win their hearts until they were able to say, “Let us rise up and build”(Neh. 2:18b). The leader alone cannot solve the problem. He needs to communicate the problem to the people for their input in handling the crisis.

**Engage in handling the crisis.** When the leader seeks the face of God in a crisis, he will assess the crisis and communicate it to the people. When this is done, the leader will now engage fully in handling the crisis. It is certain that he will succeed because he has divine and human support.

With love, faith, humility and courage the leader is able to stay on track in time of crisis and take action about it. When character and action are combined the leader will effectively succeed in time of crisis.



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