

An Examination of Factors Influencing Church Reproduction: A Case of Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches

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Abstract

Self-reproduction of local churches can be attributed to the growth and expansion of God's kingdom. Although church self-reproduction can be instrumental in fulfilling the Great Commission, many established churches do not self-reproduce by planting new congregations even after existing for a long time. This study investigated factors that influence the self-reproduction of churches in a case study within the Nairobi Chapel Association. The study focused on ten Nairobi Chapel churches in Nairobi. The qualitative research method and the purposive sampling technique guided the study. Twenty participants were interviewed from selected Nairobi Chapel churches; the group included pastors, members of the advisory teams, and congregation members in selected congregations. The data was collected by interviewing the selected participants. The data were analysed through thematic analysis. The research findings pointed to the centrality of leadership in training and encouraging the congregation to plant other churches. The findings also indicated the need to develop a model of church-self-reproduction that is easily replicable without overrelying on financial input. In addition, the study findings revealed that for churches to self-reproduce, adopting a model that empowers and involves congregants of individual churches in starting new churches is of the essence.

Keywords: Church reproduction, Self-reproduction, Church Growth, Nairobi Chapel



Introduction

Self-reproduction of the church is critical to the expansion of the church. George Patterson argues that church self-reproduction is the quickest way to win people to Christ (Patterson 2013, 17). Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird affirm the place of church reproduction by stating: “We believe new churches are the best platform for followers of Jesus to live as salt, light and doers of good deeds in our communities (Matt 5:13–16), to demonstrate love in practical ways (Matt 22:34–40; John 13:35), and to intentionally make more disciples of Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19–20)” (Stetzer and Bird 2010, 12). The Great Commission also mandates believers to make disciples of all nations. Despite this, many churches do not reproduce themselves after being planted; according to Malphurs, the churches that do not reproduce either plateau or decline because they lack the vision of reproducing themselves (Malphurs 1998, 378). Thus there is a need to find out why some churches voluntarily and with normalcy self-reproduce while others struggle after being planted.

Nairobi Chapel is a church planted in the city centre of Nairobi in 1952 by British settlers (“Our Beginnings | Nairobi Chapel” n.d.). The church has its roots in the Plymouth Brethren Church movement and had no clergy. This all changed in 1989 when Oscar Muriu, then a young pastor, was seconded from Nairobi Baptist Church to help the dwindling congregation, transitioning the church from a laypersons-led church to a pastor-led church (“Our Beginnings | Nairobi Chapel” n.d.). The season of growth and shift in ministry strategy happened under Oscar Muriu. The vision of church planting at the Nairobi Chapel became the goal of fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19).

In the early 1990s, after this transition under Oscar Muriu, the congregation intentionally focused its target on a younger demographic that majorly included students at the University of Nairobi (Gitau, 2018, 17–18). The vision and initiative of church multiplication became a strong focal point when Nairobi Chapel moved from Mamlaka Road near the Nairobi Central District to a land they had purchased along Ngong Road, in 2005. Instead of moving the entire congregation to the new location, the church strategically planted four congregations all at the same time in different locations; Nairobi Chapel on Ngong Road, Mavuno Church on Mombasa Road, Mashariki Church - that later became a campus of Mavuno church on Jogoo Road- and Community Church in Kileleshwa that was later renamed Kileleshwa Community Church. Even though Nairobi Chapel had previously been



involved in church planting initiatives, this marked the missional strategic shift to church planting in accomplishing Nairobi Chapel's vision.

In 2018, Nairobi Chapel ordained Oscar Muriu as the Bishop, establishing a central office that coordinates and assists in managing the affairs of all the churches under the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. The central office is responsible for ensuring churches under the association continue with church planting and leadership development initiatives in their local locations. This desire is captured in the articulation of church planting. One of the Nairobi "Chapel's DNA" is captioned as "We are passionate about evangelism, but responsible evangelism leads to discipleship and discipleship leads to the gathering of new converts...the end result of which is new churches. Our vision is to *'plant churches that plant churches'*" ("Our DNA | Nairobi Chapel" n.d.).

As for the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches, by 2020, the movement had planted more than 200 churches. Whereas this number may denote success, some churches within the association have managed to organically and intentionally self-reproduce, while others have struggled. This partly explains why church planting is centrally managed by the mission's office. Since the self-reproduction of churches to fulfil the Great Commission is one of the desired values across the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches, the lack of self-reproduction of some churches presents a problem that needs to be examined (Our Values | Nairobi Chapel, n.d.). Therefore, the researcher investigated factors that affect the self-reproduction of some churches and the stagnation and struggle of others to self-reproduce among the Nairobi Chapel churches.

Statement of the Problem

The Nairobi Chapel is an association of churches that have emphasised church planting. There is much emphasis on planting churches, and the desire is for the churches planted in turn to plant other churches (Our Mission | Nairobi Chapel, n.d.) through a model referred to as "self-reproduction." However, despite this structured vision and mission in the church, as witnessed, much of the planting of new churches has been majorly done by the central church in Nairobi rather than the self-reproduction of individual churches. To determine this problem, the researcher sought to investigate the factors that affect self-reproduction among the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. This research focuses on the factors contributing to self-reproduction.



Literature Review

Factors Contributing to Self-reproduction

The term reproduction is popular in church growth and planting circles. Patterson and Scoggins interchangeably use church multiplication and reproduction to examine church growth (Patterson and Scoggins 2013, 17). They define church multiplication or reproduction as a church giving birth to and nurturing daughter churches, which then produce granddaughters, and so on; “This multiplication is purposeful, voluntary, and relies on God’s power,” they argue (2013, 17). Affirming Patterson and Scoggin’s definition of reproduction, it is essential to note the presence of motivation within the individual planted church to continue to self-reproduce. Church reproduction is part and parcel of healthy church planting, as emphasised by Murray, “The practice of Church planting may encourage the conclusion that reproduction is as fundamental a feature of the church as it is of a biological organism” (Murray 2004, 57). In other words, church planting and reproduction should go hand in hand. On the other hand, Garrison does not focus on self-reproduction but looks at movements. In his definition of church planting movements, he defines a Church Planting Movement (CPM) as “a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment” (2003, 21).

In looking at church self-reproduction, Murray observes that the benefit of church planting happens to both the planted church and the planting church; “Reproductive churches can impart much on the churches they bring to the birth, but church planting is also an opportunity for their renewal” (Murray 2004, 57). He compares the process of church reproduction to the biological process of an organism, metaphorically drawing a parallel where it is a healthy organism that develops both internally and externally. Similarly, a church that is healthy plants other churches.

In presenting a case for self-reproduction, by looking at it from missionary planting churches outside their cultural context, Ott and Wilson insist that church planting by itself is not enough; the characteristics of the kind of churches planted matter, and self-reproduction is key to church planting (2011, 13). Ott and Wilson suggest these characteristics are as important in the process of church planting, kingdom communities, healthy congregations, reproducing organisms, indigenous churches and independent fellowship (2011, 13). Ott and Wilson strongly advocate reproduction as a key concept in church planting (2011, 15). They



draw from Paul’s model of planting new churches in the New Testament. They argue that “only as churches reproduce the world can be reached with the gospel.” Ott and Wilson see planting churches that reproduce as an effective means of reaching the world. In their view, churches must intentionally implement a reproducing culture, “Church planters must seek to plant churches that have their DNA, the very vision and commitment to reproduce and ultimately multiply” (Ott and Wilson 2011, 15). Aremu, quoting Wagner’s definition of church planting, observes that he elevates reproduction as a part of church planting. Peter Wagner defines church planting- as quoted by Aremu- as “efforts to bring men and women to faith and incorporate them into growing, reproducing fellowship” (Wagner 2010, 11).

When successful church self-reproduction happens across multiple generations, it results in the growth of a movement. Therefore, to dissect the factors contributing to self-reproduction, the answers are certainly found in church planting movements. Garrison presents some essential elements when a movement is considered a church-planting movement. These factors include “a commitment to extraordinary prayer within the church, abundant passion for evangelism for the lost in the area the church is planted, there is submission to the authority of the word by members, local leadership within churches, involvement of lay leadership and lastly, the practice of house churches as they are simple and easy to replicate” (Garrison 2004, 172). Garrison reiterates that at the core of a church planting movement is the rapid multiplication of self-reproducing churches in an indigenous group or a specific population segment (2004, 21). His observations suggest that the work of rapid church multiplication results when there is an intentionality in seeing reproducing churches planted. Therefore, the factors mentioned by Garrison are practical and can be reproduced across different contexts (2004).

Rapid reproduction only results from planting churches that are planting other churches as part of their internal DNA. The natural result of this process is a movement fulfilling the Great Commission. Garrison also points out that church multiplication cannot be successful without a clear leadership plan. He highlights the importance of local leaders who are part of the local community where the church is planted and a system that uses lay leaders to plant the church. In agreement with Garrison placing lay leaders as a critical factor contributing to church multiplication, as these lay leaders, once raised in a local church



community committed to the vision of church reproduction, provide the needed leaders to start new churches (2004, 21).

Ott and Wilson, in their analysis, identify key factors as significant in the making of the church planting movement, which is a result of multiple generations of self-reproducing churches. First, at the centre of church planting movements is the work of the Holy Spirit; they are God-ordained. The second factor that drives these self-reproducing church planting movements is that they are Gospel-centred. Third, they have lay grassroots movements – there is intentional empowerment of ordinary members to live out their professed faith; at its core, it is a disciple-making movement. Fourth, they have a multiplication DNA; leaders, cells, and churches reproduce continuously (Ott and Wilson 2011, 73–75).

After extensive research, Garrison looked at church planting movements worldwide (Garrison 2004, 247). He expounds on these key factors that contribute to the continuing expansion of these church planting movements after the expansion of churches that self-reproduce. There is a balance between depending on God’s intervention in starting a movement of reproducing churches. The dependency on God is demonstrated as seen in these factors – an immersion in prayer, clinging to God’s word and the saturation of your community with the gospel. In addition, practical intentional steps are taken, like living the vision you wish to fulfil, building reproduction in every believer and eliminating all non-reproducible elements or activities in the church that may serve as hindrances to reproduction.

Similarly, Stetzer and Bird identify the following factors as important (Stetzer and Bird 2010, 169). First, they identify an element of leadership responsibility that falls on the leader to empower believers to participate in the process is seen as a major contributor (Stetzer and Bird 2010, 169). Second, they point to prayer and intentional multiplication, a ministry characterised by sacrifice and easily reproducible models as other key factors in making a church that multiplies through self-reproduction. Additionally, they make the case that for self-reproduction to happen, the model picked has to be scalable and can be replicated in order for self-reproduction to happen. Stetzer and Bird point to partnership and learning from other models as another factor in building a multiplying culture. In their opinion, learning from other cultures across the world adds value. Further, the authors give significant prominence to theological integrity as an aspect present in a church that self-reproduces. It comes across clearly that leadership through empowering other believers and dependence on



God through prayer as some of the factors in church self-reproduction. Though the factors identified by Stetzer and Bird are contextually focused on the American Church, they can be applied in other contexts.

Factors Deterring Self-reproduction

Ott and Wilson argue that churches can grow to maturity without reproducing after themselves. They argue that even though the work of churches self-reproducing is Holy Spirit-led, other obstacles hinder self-reproduction (Ott and Wilson 2011, 83-86). First, expensive church meeting places. The cost of finding, maintaining and paying for expensive meeting places could be a reason for churches hesitating from sending out their members. Second, it makes church planting dependent on formal and paid church planters. The cost of keeping paid workers in a movement can be prohibitive, causing stagnation in church reproduction. Formal education takes too long, so church planters will never be enough. Lastly, dependence on external resources may create the impression that it is impossible to plant without outside funding. It may also create an assumption among the congregants that outside sourcing will fund the church. They further argue that one of the major reasons that churches do not self-reproduce is because they lack intentionality. In their words, “reproduction must be intentional if the local church is to accomplish the full purpose which it has been created for” (Ott and Wilson 2011, 65).

Significantly, Stetzer and Bird identify seven obstacles facing American churches in self-reproducing and afterwards becoming church planting movements (2010, 170–75). First, they observe how American culture has been institutionalised into an individualistic culture that focuses on the self above the community. Second, the widespread Christian culture is a major hindrance to self-reproduction as it minimises the urgency of evangelism. The third is the money factor, which has taken centre stage in how churches and ministries operate. Fourth, ministries are primarily led by professional clergy, creating a passive indigenous believer who cannot function as a priest in the local church. In addition, there is a lack of intentional reproduction and a clear plan by the churches to reproduce themselves. Lastly, they identified the challenge of the lack of robust theological reflection that supports the work of church reproduction. What Stetzer and Bird discovered about the North American church makes it clear that the context where a church is located affects the factors that hinder the self-reproduction as both the individualism and Christian culture are unique to the North



American context. In addition, from what has been shared by the authors on the factors that deter self-reproduction, it is important to note that leadership or the lack thereof, impacts the self-reproduction of churches (2010).

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research method. Creswell notes that the “qualitative research method is an inquiry of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore the social and human problem” (1998,15). The researcher investigated the factors that affect self-reproduction among the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. The study depended on data collected carefully through the interview of participants. The qualitative research method was appropriate because the nature of the study problem was social and human.

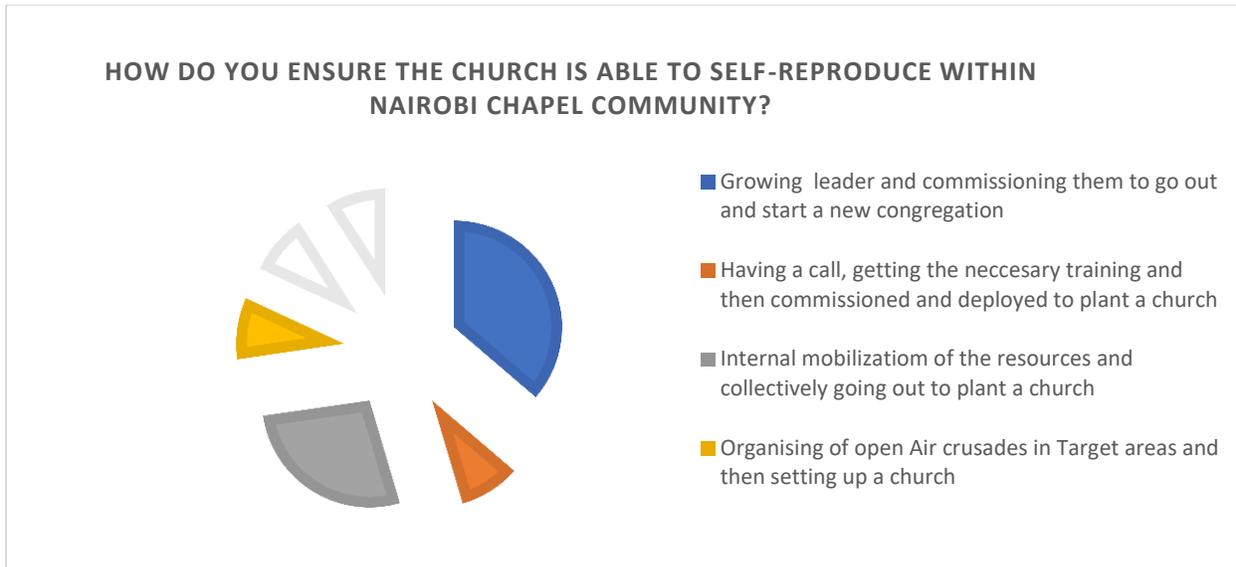
The Nairobi Chapel has been involved in the church planting process of more than 200 churches as of 2020. However, there are 50 churches currently under the direct oversight of the Bishop’s office. The researcher selected 10 of the 50 churches under the Bishop’s office for the study. The ten churches were chosen because the lead pastors had served for more than four years, had a functional advisory board, and were based in Nairobi. Also, the population selected for interviews comprised the Nairobi Chapel Mission pastor in charge of church planting training, ten lead pastors, and two other pastors serving within the churches. The researcher also picked seven key lay leaders of four advisory boards and three congregation members to participate in the study. The population comprised 16 men and four women. Of the four women, three served as advisory board members, and one was a lead pastor of one of the selected Nairobi Chapel churches. The lead pastors were available for either face-to-face interviews or phone conversations. Six of the ten interviews were conducted by telephone, while four were conducted in person. The respondents were available and accessible for interviews. The second group comprised the lay leaders under the selected Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. The third person interviewed was the head of missions and a pastor in charge of church planting at the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. Exactly 20 participants were the representative population of the entire Nairobi Chapel community. They gave information about the factors affecting church self-reproduction within the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches



Data Analysis and Discussions

Contributing Factors to the Self-reproduction of churches

Chart 2: How church self-reproduction happens at Nairobi Chapel



When examining what contributes to church self-reproduction, it was determined that leadership plays a significant role. Consideration was given to the fact that the collected data supported this conclusion. More than 66% of respondents strongly believed their church leaders understood their major tasks throughout church planting and self-reproduction. While 20% of respondents indicated there was more work to be done before leaders achieve complete comprehension, 10% of respondents were adamant that leaders were clueless and did not comprehend their role in church planting and church self-reproduction.

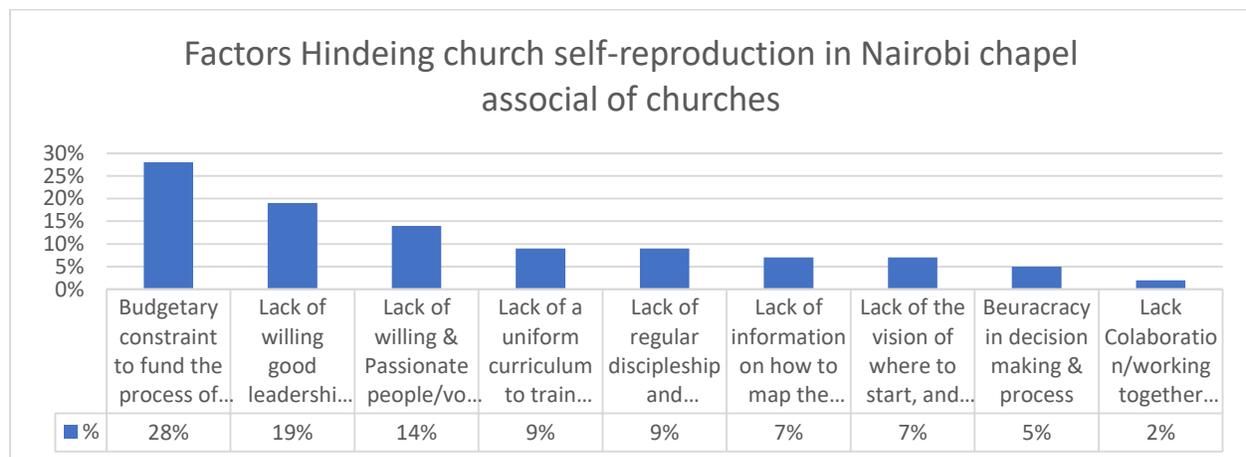
It is essential to highlight that the data indicated that church leadership significantly impacted any church that planted a new congregation. The church leaders played the role of envisioning the congregation through teaching on the missional necessity of starting new congregations, sharing inspiring stories with both the congregation, training the leaders for the world of planting new churches by establishing ministries that facilitate the same and trying to persuade the congregation to participate in planting new churches by contributing their skills, time and resources.



The findings revealed several methods in which the individual self-reproducing church engaged in missional action. For example, one participant highlighted outreach activities as their church’s model to establish a new congregation. When planting a church in Busia, Kenya, they rallied their congregation to prepare for and participate in events in the community; before planting the church, the activities included door-to-door outreach and crusades. The importance of leadership development and the availability of pre-trained leaders dominated the findings of an investigation into the self-reproduction of Nairobi Chapel churches.

Factors impeding the self-reproduction of Nairobi Chapel churches

Chart 1: Factors hindering self-reproduction at the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches



Notably, Res013 had a similar view that their church could reproduce itself due to their church planter’s training classes, which supplied the necessary leaders to plant churches in the community. The findings also pointed to the local congregation and leaders raising financial resources to support starting a new congregation. Res017, an advisory member of the Nairobi Waiyaki Way advisory board, recalled how their congregation mobilised financial resources, appointed a leader, and helped build a church in the Kangemi neighbourhood of the city. The planting of this church, according to Res009, was the congregation’s means of achieving the Nairobi Chapel Association’s goal of “Growing deep to reach wide.” As 28% of respondents indicated, the provision of financial support was cited by many respondents as



a means of supporting their congregation in self-reproduction. The other comprised initiating activities in the area where a church intended to self-reproduce, mobilising a core group from the church to pioneer the work of the new church, and finally mobilising congregational prayer before the self-reproduction process took place. One of the respondents stated, “Our church mobilised a group from the congregation for a mission trip to Busia in the process of planting Trinity Chapel Busia.” Another respondent detailed how his church planted a young adult church in Rongai. He stated, “Our congregation mobilised our young adults to go out and start a young adult-focused church. Within the group were key young adult leaders that played the role.” This was a good example of a congregation empowered to start a new congregation.

The researcher examined the obstacles to self-reproduction in Nairobi Chapel churches. In addition, the study investigated the elements that led to self-reproduction among the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. The data subject identified highly significant difficulties and aspects that affect or impede the process and objectivity surrounding church self-reproduction in the Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches. At 28% and 19%, respectively, budgetary limits to fund the church planting process and a lack of willing good leadership to oversee the church planting endeavour stood out as the most significant issues that affected and impeded church self-reproduction. Nevertheless, a respondent said there was potential for a greater harvest. According to the respondent, church planting is less about the availability of a leader than it is about the willingness of the sent leader to persevere despite adverse conditions in establishing a new church. According to the findings, the presence of committed and competent leaders in both the pastoral leadership and the congregation indicated a successful church likely to self-replicate.

Notable was the availability of resources to facilitate the establishment of a new congregation. Churches that had the means to fund either the purchase of necessary equipment or the payment of employees in the process of launching a new congregation were seen to have a higher chance of self-reproducing. As per the findings, a church was unable to self-reproduce due to its inability to meet the missional demands of the community in the absence of leaders prepared to plant new congregations. One of the respondents indicated that their church was unable to raise enough leaders to fill the leadership void resulting from the self-reproduction,



I'll begin with negatives that have hampered the church. One is finance because opening a new church requires finances because we need a place, a structure, or finance for rent, renting a premise. That is what would be affected. The other would-be available willing leaders to establish many churches, but as we are growing because this is our seventh year in Ngong and we can see the potential now reproducing within two or three more churches within this year, we can say that we are making progress, but what hinders many churches is finances and manpower (Res010).

According to the findings, a lack of a collaborative training process to train church planters/leaders on what, how, why, where, and when and a lack of regular discipleship and follow-up both stand at 9%, according to the findings. The lack of well-designed training materials and curriculum was proven to be a serious obstacle to training the pastors who will lead the newly planted churches. In addition, it was necessary to have a clear vision of how to establish a new church, its growing process, and where it is directing individuals in terms of the overall vision. At 5% and 2%, respectively, the aspect of bureaucracy in processes and decision-making and insufficient communication between ministries were cited as the least significant causes.

Summary Discussion

In examining what factors influenced self-reproduction among the churches in the association, the findings demonstrated that the availability of resources, specifically money, was a major deterrent to churches planting churches. A sentiment pointed out by Res002, Res0010, Res0013, Res0014 and Res019. For churches to get started, they needed to raise the necessary funds for rent, paying personnel, purchasing equipment and funding outreach activities. It was easier for a church to begin planting a new congregation when they had the funds to implement the vision. Aside from a lack of sufficient resources, the findings indicated that another challenge in the church's self-reproduction was a lack of ready and trained leaders to go out and start new congregations. The gaps in church self-reproduction models were an overreliance on money to start new churches and a lack of a robust training curriculum for congregations. The findings also revealed that a passionate leadership capable of sharing the vision of church self-reproduction was responsible for the success of churches stepping out to plant new congregations. When church leaders developed a clear communication strategy about the importance of church self-reproduction and followed it up with a plan, the churches planted a new congregation. Churches that had planted a new



congregation had a lead pastor who believed in church self-reproduction and communicated that belief. A continuous training plan for leaders to be available for church planting helped significantly as well. Churches with a leadership training component in the form of an internship programme or, in other cases, a church planting training school that produced church planting leaders. The observed gap is that the model of church self-reproduction required leaders who were trained within a specific timeframe. As a result, for church planting to occur, a significant investment in training was required. This finding agrees with the assertion of both Stetzer and Bird in their analysis of the factors like the development of leaders that have hindered Self-reproduction in North America (Stetzer and Bird 2010, 169). Despite the difference in contexts, leadership development is paramount for church self-reproduction.

Conclusion

The study established that self-reproduction has been happening among the Nairobi Chapel churches. Each congregation had an idea of what self-reproduction means and its importance in fulfilling the vision of Nairobi Chapel, summarised as “Growing deep to reach wide.” On the factors that affect the self-reproduction of churches, the research identified those that are a deterrent and the others that are significant contributors to churches’ self-reproducing. On the hindrances, the findings revealed the lack of resources as one of the major deterrents to churches starting new congregations. Churches with money set aside for mission, outreach, and planting purposes tended to be more successful in self-reproducing. As per the respondents, the available resources provided money for hiring venues, purchasing equipment, and, in other instances, facilitating a mission team to do crusades and evangelism for ministry purposes.

Additionally, the availability of leaders was another critical factor in determining whether churches could self-reproduce. According to the respondents, the research findings showed ease in starting new churches with an intentional leadership training and development track record. The respondents said it was easy for the churches to send out a team to plant a new congregation when they had a ready-trained leader to head a newly established congregation. Subsequently, the role of leadership training, or a lack of it, had a major impact on churches’ self-reproducing. Importantly, it was found that the main leader played a major



role in whether a specific congregation could plant. Members of a congregation where the leader had outlined a vision for starting a new congregation tended to succeed in self-reproducing. The ability of the key leader, and in the case of Nairobi Chapel churches, to communicate the vision of church self-reproduction galvanised the congregation to take the necessary step in planting a new congregation in an area a church had targeted.

Another factor that made church self-reproduction possible was the participation of the larger congregation together with leadership. The respondents presented the challenge of a lack of clear communication from the leadership to the congregants concerning involvement in church planting matters. The assumption that leaders and congregants understood the importance and their role in planting new churches resulted in some congregations failing to plant. It is important to note that lead pastors acknowledged the discrepancy between what they desired to accomplish and how others in the congregation understood what they needed to do regarding self-reproduction. Some lay leaders were unsure when asked if they understood their role in starting a new congregation. The disconnect between key leaders and the rest of the congregation in understanding the church's vision was a significant challenge.

The findings also identified the challenge of the planting model that the churches were implementing in self-reproduction. The model was heavy on the financial investment needed to start a new congregation. It also relied heavily on trained church planters and, in other cases, paid personnel. Because of the financial implication that came with the initiative of starting a new congregation, some churches were unable to self-reproduce as they desired because they lacked the requisite resources to self-reproduce.

Recommendations

- I. The Nairobi Chapel Association of Churches should explore the possibility of developing a church planting model that needs less financial investment for a church to start and be sustained. The challenge with having a model that requires an initial heavy financial investment is that it delays the self-production process of the congregation that is resource deprived.
- II. The Nairobi Chapel must enhance the empowerment of believers to plant churches. The current model of church self-reproduction is leader-driven, and the congregation has delegated the responsibility of starting a new church to what they perceive as a



“*professional pastor.*” Instead, the church must see the work of missions and starting of new churches as part of their spiritual acts of service and missional engagement. The empowerment will occur by training every congregation member to prepare for church planting.

III. In addition to empowering believers, the model of having a remunerated staff member lead a new church plant pushes the cost to be high and prohibitive. Thus, it needs to be reconsidered. Consequently, introducing bi-vocational lead pastors as leaders of the churches will result in many churches being planted as they will not need a salaried position of the lead pastor.

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