

RESULTS SUMMARY

Religious leaders in Tanzania stand up against misleading prophets

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PROJECT

Title:	Forum for Misleading Theology
Partner:	Nyakato Lutheran Bible College (NLBC)
Country:	Tanzania
Period:	January 2023 – ongoing till December 2025

CHANGE

Religious leaders within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) are taking action to end false and manipulating prophets who are luring communities into isolation and poverty. Through sermons and public events, religious leaders from the East of Lake Victoria Diocese and West Central Diocese are addressing and correcting misconceptions about Christianity. They are standing up against false prophets' promises to vulnerable communities of miraculous healing and prosperity from God in exchange for people's life savings.

CONTEXT

In Tanzania, the concept of "misleading theology" is growing rapidly in existence and use. As the title of the concept indicates, it is the use of theology to mislead; more precisely, it covers the growing phenomenon of self-proclaimed prophets, who, through charisma and eloquence, gain followers by promising vulnerable groups and individuals miracles in exchange for money and their uncritical fellowship. As a result, vulnerable groups, including women, young people looking for healing, and the financially and physically distressed, are drawn away from their families and safety nets in their pursuit of a better life. Unfortunately, people are disappointed when the miracles they seek do not happen. At that point, it is both shameful and stigmatised to turn to the communities they left behind.

CONTRIBUTION

In the preparatory phase of the current project, issue mappings were carried out in the targeted communities. Here, ELCT discovered the magnitude of the problem created by misleading theology and realized that no other Christian denominations were known to be addressing it. Being the second-largest Christian denomination in Tanzania, ELCT has a large reach across 30 regions in Tanzania and has, with this project, become a frontrunner in mobilizing churches and religious leaders to address and act against fraudulent prophets.

IMAGES



Workshop on harmonizing teaching and preaching towards an enhanced church, November 2023, Dar Es Salaam.



Gathered church leaders and pastors from Dioceses of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania- November 2023, Dar es Salaam.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

ACTIVITIES

The first step has been to establish a Theological Forum, which brings together pastors and theologians to find a way to preach Christianity so that it becomes a relevant alternative to misleading theologies. Moreover, the project also includes dialogues and theological reflections with theologians, lay preachers, and congregation members, and capacity-strengthening for pastors on how to best help victims of misleading theologies regarding psycho-social support and the stigmatisation by their families. In addition to these planned activities, ELCT headquarters, the East of Lake Victoria Diocese, and the West Central Diocese have taken the initiative to organise events specifically designed to strategise how to actively address and counter misleading theologies within the church. This focused approach has helped to ensure that the congregants receive accurate theological guidance, support a deeper understanding of their faith, and strengthen the overall resilience of the faith community.

LESSONS

As religion shapes many ways of life in Tanzania, the Church and other faith-based actors need to stand firm and address misconceptions and false teachings contributing to increased social injustice. As the problem exists across different Christian denominations, while the Lutherans have led the way in addressing it, other Christian denominations need to join efforts for the problem to be truly combatted. As part of the mapping of the problem, ELCT became aware that not only had many of the Lutheran churches been affected by misleading theology, but it also became clear that some theologians within the diocese of ELCT are practising misleading theology themselves. This kind of self-examination is difficult but necessary for the problem to be truly exposed, and ELCT hopes to inspire other denominations to follow its example.

EVIDENCE

The extent of the problem of misleading theology is well documented through the project's baseline survey in early 2023 in the Lake Zone and Western Zone areas, where the seven collaborating ELCT dioceses are located. The survey findings pointed out different reasons why people easily accept misleading theologies, including psychological, social, economic, religious, and pastoral factors. Furthermore, the fact that the Mission and Evangelism department of ELCT invited Nyakato Lutheran Bible College (NLBC) to participate and facilitate a workshop gathered by ELCT theologians to discuss the strength shows how ELCT sees it as important to address the problem. This made a significant contribution as it allowed them to share their interventions broadly, and together, the participants discussed what collaborative efforts needed to be made for a better situation, including strengthening Christian and theological education in the Churches.

DOMAINS

<i>Development strategy priorities:</i>		<i>Fragility and Migration</i>
<i>Changes in the lives of people facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability</i>		X
<i>Changes in laws, policies and practices that affect people's rights</i>		-
<i>Changes in the capacity of organisations and communities to support rights</i>		-
<i>Changes in partnerships and collaborations that support people's rights</i>		-
<i>Changes in participation of groups facing poverty, marginalisation or vulnerability</i>		-
<i>Changes in local leadership of development and humanitarian work</i>		X