

Factors Affecting Church Planting Strategies: A Study of the Baptist Church in Central Africa in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

This study examines the factors affecting church-planting strategies within the Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique (CBCA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Despite its long-standing presence and significant growth since its establishment in 1927, the CBCA has not achieved nationwide coverage, underscoring the need for more effective, structured church-planting approaches. The study employs a qualitative case study design, using semi-structured interviews and observations with purposively selected participants, including church leaders, pastors, missionaries, and congregants. Data were analysed thematically to identify key patterns influencing church-planting efforts. The findings reveal that church planting within CBCA is influenced by a complex interaction of leadership, financial, cultural, and socio-political factors. Leadership emerged as a critical determinant, with a lack of vision, inadequate training, and weak institutional support hindering effective mission expansion. Financial constraints and logistical challenges further limit the sustainability of new church plants, while cultural and linguistic diversity present barriers to contextual engagement. Additionally, the absence of formalised strategies and structured missionary policies results in ad hoc approaches to church planting. The study also highlights inconsistencies in discipleship programs, which undermine long-term spiritual growth and sustainability. The study concludes that CBCA's church-planting effectiveness can be enhanced through strategic leadership development, contextualised mission approaches, structured discipleship programs, and the integration of digital tools. By aligning theological foundations with practical strategies, the church can achieve more sustainable and impactful mission expansion across the DRC and beyond.

Keywords: *Church planting, CBCA, Democratic Republic of Congo, leadership, discipleship, missiology, cultural context, mission strategies*

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1. Introduction

The Baptist Church in Central Africa (CBCA), established in 1927 through the efforts of the Unevangelized Africa Mission, has played a significant role in spreading Christianity in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, particularly in North Kivu. Over time, the church

gained autonomy in 1964 and expanded its operations, growing into a large religious community with hundreds of churches, pastors, and members. Despite its long history and substantial presence, the CBCA has not yet achieved nationwide coverage across all 26 provinces, underscoring the need to examine factors that influence its church-planting efforts (World Council of Churches, 2018).

Historically, the CBCA evolved through missionary transitions, internal conflicts, and restructuring processes that shaped its identity and mission. It is currently affiliated with major global Christian organisations such as the Baptist World Alliance and the World Council of Churches, and it actively engages in both spiritual and socio-economic development initiatives. Guided by the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), the church aims to expand its reach and transform communities holistically, emphasising evangelism, discipleship, and social transformation (Bailey, 2006).

Church planting remains central to the growth of Christianity, serving as a strategic approach to reaching new populations and fostering community transformation. Scholars argue that new churches are effective platforms for discipleship and societal impact (Stetzer & Bird, 2010; Patterson & Scoggins, 2013). However, many churches, including the CBCA, face challenges such as limited resources, inadequate leadership, and a focus on internal maintenance rather than expansion. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing effective church-planting strategies that align with the mission of expanding God's Kingdom.

1.1 Problem Statement

The CBCA in the DRC aims to expand its presence through church planting, driven by members' fellowships in new areas resulting from business relocations. However, the CBCA lacks formalised strategies, tools, or methods for church planting, leading to ad hoc efforts that rely heavily on cultural practices and member-initiated fellowships rather than on structured missional approaches. This is compounded by a lack of leadership vision, inadequate evangelism, and limited follow-up, which undermine the sustainability and growth of new church plants. Despite the CBCA's commitment to church planting, specific factors such as cultural influences, leadership gaps, and the absence of strategic frameworks that facilitate or hinder effective Church planting in the DRC remain underexplored. This research will investigate the key factors affecting CBCA's church-planting efforts in the DRC, focusing on cultural dynamics, leadership deficiencies, and the lack of strategic planning to inform more effective and sustainable church-planting practices.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To identify the factors that affect church planting initiatives within the CBCA in the DRC.
2. To formulate missiological strategies within the CBCA in order to achieve God's mission across all DRC provinces and beyond.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Factors for Successful Church Planting

Leadership Factors

Several key factors contribute to the success of church planting. For the leadership factor, Oyedepo suggests that leadership is crucial to any institution's growth. The church is not excluded; in fact, no congregation can grow beyond its leader. Strong leadership will give birth

to a strong group, and a weak church is indicative of a weak pastor (Oyedepo 2018, p. 35). Oyedepo's position is that church planting depends on the vision of a particular church's Pastor as God gives it. The Pastoral Factor that is equally required for successful church planting is the leadership sacrifice, or sacrificial leadership, pointing to the fact that the price for church planting is enormous unless the church pastor is ready to take the lead by making up his mind to pay the price without getting involved directly in the church planting process; not much could be accomplished. From this conviction, Omitoyin has concluded that:

"The Lord has blessed our church with the gift of leadership. We are divinely blessed with a strong pastoral team, a strong diaconate, and a Church council. All the pastors, deacons, and council members have been greatly committed to our church-planting thrust. We have all pursued this vision with determination and worked with one heart and one mind. Hence, we experience great accomplishment in our pursuit of Church planting. One bone of contention is that if the Pastor is not interested in church planting, it will be difficult for the church to do much; the Pastor must take the lead. He must be interested and fully sold out on the vision. Only then will the council and the congregation follow." (Omitoyin, n.d., p. 20).

Omitoyi's position on leadership factors aligns with the need to plant church missions to develop God's mission in CBCA. Leadership is crucial for shaping the vision, direction, and health of church-planting efforts. Malphurs (Malphurs 2004, 32–33) states that effective church planters demonstrate spiritual maturity, adaptability, and strategic insight. Strong leadership is essential for navigating challenges and effectively mobilising both people and resources. In Africa, church leadership often faces inadequate training, a lack of accountability, and centralised decision-making processes. For CBCA, leadership quality significantly affects how church-planting strategies are conceived, implemented, and sustained. Effective leadership is a cornerstone of successful church planting. Ott and Wilson emphasise the need for trained indigenous leaders who can navigate local cultural and spiritual dynamics. They argue that leadership development programs must combine formal theological education with practical on-the-job training to equip church planters (Ott and Wilson 2010, 132–34). In the DRC, the CBCA prioritises leadership development and theological education to prepare pastors for mission and church planting in a war-affected environment. Nevertheless, insufficient resources and persistent insecurity remain major challenges to implementing these mission initiatives.

Congregational Factor in Church Planting

Oyedepo states that the Congregational factor encompasses united, supportive, sacrificial, and submissive fellowship (Oyedepo 2018, 39–42). This factor is essential for successful church planting in both urban and rural contexts. There is power in unity; nothing is impossible for a united team. Therefore, the pastoral leadership needs to share the church-planting vision, which should not be undertaken until the Pastor helps the congregation own it and accept it as a mission to be accomplished.

God's Factor for Church Planting

Regarding God's Factor, we can admit that such a mission will never lack resources, for any mission of God done in God's way under his divine leadership. Adelek says that we have achieved so much in our church-planting stride only because the eternal God was at work in us as a church, both to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). The God factor in our

mission is the principal secret to our success story. Oyedepo testified to God's Factor in Church planting, pointing to the factor that, in their church planting ministry, God usually took the lead and initiative through his divine direction (Psalm 32:8). Through his divine backing (Mk16:20), divine protection (Isaiah 54:17) divine favour, divine provision, where there is goldy vision there will be a goldy provision (Phil 4:9) divine mercy. Therefore, since it is through God that we have mercy, we have this ministry, and we do not lose heart (2 Cor 4:1) (Oyedepo 2018, p. 40).

Financial and Material Resource Factors

Resources are essential factors that significantly impact the success of church planting. Churches with insufficient finances or logistical support struggle to initiate and sustain new churches or to grow them successfully. Ott and Wilson explain more and say that:

"Outside resources can help, but are not antithetical to church planting. After all, in the pioneering stage, there is no church, and all human, strategic, technological, and financial resources must come from the outside. However, they should be handled with wisdom so that those resources do not stand in the way of multiplying healthy, self-supporting, reproducible congregations." (Ott & Wilson 2010, 388).

Ott and Wilson emphasise the need for sustainable models that account for local economic realities. In the DRC, based on CBCA experience, financial hardship and intercultural barriers hinder church-planting efforts. Dependency on external donors can create long-term vulnerabilities. CBCA must develop localised strategies for financial stewardship and community support.

Socio-Economic and Political Context Factors

The DRC's socio-political and security context presents significant challenges for church planting efforts, including violence, political instability, and economic hardship. The situation is particularly terrible in the eastern provinces, where decades of conflict and militia activity have displaced millions. The Church in the Congo, including the CBCA, is actively seeking peace and advocating for the needs of the people, as well as for the implementation of sustainable development and humanitarian responses. The DRC has experienced political instability and armed conflict, directly impacting church planting on the one hand. Security concerns often limit movement, outreach, and community trust. According to Walls (2002), the socio-political dynamics in African countries significantly influence missionary strategies and ecclesial expansion. CBCA's effort in Church planting involves ministering in unstable regions, which requires a balance between evangelism and community development, including trauma integration, healing, and peacebuilding. From this perspective, Kighoma explains:

"The completion of the church's missiological task during war depends on how Christian leaders contextualize the transmission of the Christian message, discipleship, and strategically organize the routine of church life. The church's response to the war in Eastern Congo is in action, both in ministry and mission, undergirded by theology. The latter is shaped in and by war, as sharing the Gospel was confined to the church's pulpit and, as a result of war, the church shifted from being a mission force in the mission field to a force in contextual discipleship that needed to address growth, hope, and social concerns, including poverty and peaceful coexistence." (Kighoma 2021, xvii).

In Congo's situation, the church needs to learn to contextualise the message to fulfil the Great Commission amid war and insecurity. In a context of war, the church can fulfil the Great Commission by prioritising prayer, serving the vulnerable, and sharing the Gospel with those affected by conflict and with those who may be resistant to the message. This involves serving, spreading the Gospel, and seeking peace and reconciliation amid conflict. The war can also be an opportunity for the church to do more than it could because those armed groups needed to be saved. If not preached, they will remain obstacles to the Gospel. And if the church does not engage in evangelisation, the country will never be saved, and those who hold weapons will continue to kill, and the Gospel will not reach all Congolese. The DRC's socio-economic and political environment, characterised by poverty, conflict, and political instability, significantly impacts church planting. Kighoma details how two decades of war in Eastern Congo forced the CBCA to adapt its church-planting strategies, focusing on community development and peacebuilding to sustain congregations (Kighoma, 2021). Poverty limits resources for church infrastructure and pastoral support in CBCA, compelling churches to rely on local contributions. Additionally, government policies and extremist persecutions in certain regions pose external threats to church-planting efforts.

Cultural Factors

According to Kim, culture is the style of human existence, surrounded by natural, supernatural, and social environments (Kim 2019, 43). Culture refers to the social norms that guide learned patterns of living, shaping daily interactions and knowledge, influencing how individuals perceive, interpret, express, and respond to social realities (Bwire 2017, 7). According to Kraft, culture is a people's total way of life; the social legacy the individual acquires from their group is a person's design for living (Kraft 1996, 38). For Hiebert, culture refers to the more or less integrated systems of ideas, feelings, and values, along with their associated patterns of behaviour and products, shared by a group of people who organise and regulate what they think, feel, and do (Hiebert 1994, 30). In short, Oseje defines culture as a people's way of life (Odhiambo 2009, 63). Sometimes a church itself can become a hindrance to effective communication of the Gospel. Warner singles out the problem as follows:

"The plain truth is that most of the local population remained entirely indifferent to the churches, untouched by their lives, unmoved by their message. For insiders, these churches were good places to belong. For the outsiders, they might just as well have existed on another planet." (WARNER 1994, 15).

For an effective evangelical strategy, we need to find common ground with people so that they will let us share the Gospel with them and they will be saved (1 Cor. 9:22). If you want to effectively advertise your church to the unchurched, you must learn to think and speak as they do. It is a matter of cultural Relevance. This meant the church should have a strong dynamic relationship with the cultural context in which it is placed. Each new generation and culture must create an appropriate church vehicle to convey God's message in its own cultural forms. From this, the church should contextualise the Gospel to meet the diverse needs of people found in a given setting. For instance, the culture gospel can easily stimulate seekers, yet it can also meet the needs of new and old believers. The new church needs to adapt to the culture and context, as contemporary men and women are seeking a church that resonates with their specific context. The church needs to become more dynamic, distinctive, and alive to lead

modern society effectively. A new initiative in the cross-cultural mission is essential to reach the contemporary world with the unchanging Gospel of Christ (Ahn 2014, p. 28).

Cultural adaptation is crucial for church planting in diverse settings, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), where kinship networks and traditional beliefs significantly influence community life. Communicating the Gospel within cultural structures, such as African kinship systems, without compromising biblical principles, is essential. This involves understanding local relationship networks and adapting church practices to resonate with community values. For the CBCA, contextualisation involves integrating local languages and practices into worship while maintaining theological fidelity, a balance that has strengthened its growth in Katanga and Kivu. However, syncretism remains a risk, which warns against blending Christian teachings with indigenous religions.

2.2 Church Planting Models and Strategies

Despite numerous church-planting methods and strategies, many church-planting ministries prove unfruitful because they rely on a trial-and-error approach to starting churches. With that approach, they could not accomplish the missionary task. Therefore, a church planter must seek strategies to plant and sustain the church; once that is achieved, an excellent strategy in one community might not be relevant in another. Several methods and strategies have been used for ages; Greenway, Wagner, and Kiamu suggested several of such cited from the work of Saoshiro, who categorises models of church planting thus:

The Propagation Model

The propagation model is compared to cell division in a living organism, in which a cell produces a new cell when it divides. Using this method, a mother church that plants daughter churches develops a cell group within the church, which grows to become a new church, but not in a planned fashion (Kiamu 2005, 11–12).

The Mother-Daughter Church Model

The Mather Daughter church model is a Church-planting method called the branching model. It differs from the propagation model because it involves a deliberate, planned birth of a baby, where a mother church intentionally initiates the establishment of a daughter church by sending a core group (Kiamu, 2005, pp. 11–12). According to John, churches multiply daughter churches through nine sequential steps in this model. These nine steps are as follows: first, select a church mission committee committed to preparing for the church-planting task under the mother church or sponsoring churches. Not only that, but also launching the new mission and following up on the needs and problems of the new congregations as they grow. The second task of the committee is to identify areas for new work, considering factors such as church-planting locations, needs, growth potential, population data, and other relevant criteria. Third, to prepare the sponsoring churches, which will be able to cover the costs of education, training, and meeting the specific congregation's needs. Fourth, the mission field must be cultivated by identifying community needs and interests, thereby enabling them to engage in mission work effectively. Fifth, we must foster mission fellowship by gathering people into small groups of core workers who will participate in evangelism, convert new Christians, and help them develop into effective Christians who serve in their roles. Sixth, mission chapels are to be under the mother or sponsoring church to initiate worship services for their congregations. By ensuring spiritual leadership is appointed among the congregants after being matured as the

Bible suggests (1 Tim 5:22). Seventh, during the early stage, the mother or sponsoring churches are responsible for determining financial needs, studying the resources available, and managing the money as a medium of financial decisions, at the same time planning for the future and sovereignty. Eighth, community church-building facilities should be contextualised according to the communities. However, it is necessary to avoid building churches rather than shrines. Ninth, establishing the new church will be the last step of church planting after ensuring the new church attained spiritual maturing and actual stability to self-government" (ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies, n.d., 61–62).

Scholars support the mother-daughter church model, also known as the traditional model, by arguing that it typically helps the young church grow under the mother church until it matures and can reproduce its own churches. This model will help to gauge the progress of church planting in the case of the CBCA. Considering these nine steps, the church will identify which stage failed and which succeeded.

The Team Ministry Model

The team ministry model, in some cases, involves church planting accomplished through a cooperative venture among several church denominations or para-church organisations. Greenway called this model the team ministry model. Saoshiro called it the solidarity model. This model compares a team with diverse talents aiming for a single goal (Saoshiro 1997, 154). The mission's primary goal in church planting is to plant a church. In this model, the team must be well prepared to achieve the goal.

The Seedling Model

The seedling model is another method: the movement of key laypeople from existing churches results in the development of new churches. This is called the seedling model. Some churches begin from nothing through the efforts of a dedicated church planter with a clear call from God to this ministry; this is what is often referred to as the Pioneer Model. Other churches start where there is a social need. A local church provides aid to a community of suffering people, and the activity results in a church known as the Helping First Model (Saoshiro 1997, 157). One major problem with church planting is the planter's ability to understand the context and adopt appropriate strategies or methods that will ultimately lead to success. Once a church planter follows the right strategy, the results will be fruitful. If they work hard, the ministry grows. The ministry plateaus if they take it easy (Malphurs 2004, 21).

The Launch Big Model

According to John, the launch of a big model is where church planters usually begin, with a core launch team under staff members responsible for organising it. Their team may consist of 30–60 people, or more, sent by the mother church to plant a church somewhere. Before planting a church, they start practising a "soft launch" by cooperating with gatherings or extensive Bible studies to build their launch team. Weeks or months before reaching the targeted location for church planting, they send out a few members to conduct a survey or to pre-prepare the group that will participate in church planting, taking their budget into account. However, to reduce running costs, all members are expected to volunteer for different roles on launch day. According to Stetzer, as cited by John, this model originates in Acts 2, as many scholars agree that the church in Jerusalem employed a large-scale church-planting model, with a launch of over 3,000 people and continued growth. Stetzer notes that many scholars agree that this model

is the most effective for witnessing many people in a short time compared to other models. Even though it is a contextual element within an event-based culture that uses door-to-door evangelism, conferences, and seminars, it remains a significant aspect of the culture. Due to cultural shifts, this model has lost popularity over the past two decades. However, the downsides of this model include the need for high-end funding for rental equipment, staff, community events, and marketing tools. These can be very costly. This model requires more people to participate, a longer campaign time, and additional funding to encourage others to participate. It usually begins with more people joining the church. However, they ultimately end up with a few people who will remain active members of the church (John, 2023, p. 63).

Missional Incarnational Model

According to John (John 2023, 64), because of what God did for humanity through His only Son (John 3:16), all churches should be missional, and believers should represent Jesus Christ in incarnational ways. The primary element of missional, incarnational church plants is the desire to incarnate in the community as Jesus Christ did (John 1:14; Acts 2:47). They seek to build a bridge to the community by engaging in a holistic mission, serving as a blessing to the city or community in which they are planted. Through the incarnation, God became human to be with us, meet us right where we are, and identify with our needs. Thus, missionaries must stay within the community to be active with those around them, as God was through His only Son (John 1:1-14). In this model, the church, through organisation, discipleship, and structured church governance, focuses on missional ministry done in incarnational ways. A relational and authentic approach, with both internal and external community orientations, characterises missional, incarnational church planting. Embracing a holistic mission through love enables them to build a strong relationship with the community while also staying biblical, as Paul did in his missions (1 Cor 9:20).

The Organic House Church Model (Cell Church Model)

First-century Christians met in houses as a starting point for church planting in various places (Acts 2:46-47; 5:42). In the New Testament, the term "church" refers to the gathering or assembling of believers and is never used to describe a building until the third century (Carry, 2008, p. 35). Additionally, Jesus spent much of His ministry in people's homes. The infant church gathered in the upper room to pray, worship, study, and break bread. Peter did the same in the house of Cornelius (Acts 10). The strength of this model lies in its focus on the simple elements of discipleship, engaging believers in leadership and service at a higher rate than other models. Its weakness is that it limits singing to excellence, teaching and preaching to proficiency, and the children's and youth programs to safety, security, and engagement. Besides, some organic churches lack elements that could attract many Christians to join. It will be remarked that in this model, "they do life, which is good, but they do not do church, which is more than just being in the community. Doing church, as practised by those first-century organic churches, included things like covenant community, biblical teaching, baptism, and more." ("ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies," n.d., 64-65).

The Multi-Site / Satellite Model

This is the way of planting churches without considering the campus or its location. In other words, they are a multi-site church that plants separate churches. However, some churches are part of a denomination that networks for the same purposes as a church-planting network to fulfill the Great Commission. This model enables local churches to saturate their communities

with God-honouring congregations and to reach out locally, nationally, and internationally. It grows the home church through multi-sites before sending it out to create other churches. The key aspects of this model include that the main campus has more resources, and most church plants are linked to the primary or mother campus through a shared mission, vision, structure, strategy, and budget. The satellite campuses may contain many, if not all, of the same elements as the main campus, hence the tagline, "One Church in multiple locations." In this concept, church plants would do far better if churches were as interested and devoted to their church plants as they are to their campuses. Churches may use this model to expand their reach (mission and vision) within a specific geographical area. It has been observed that the days of building large worship centres that can accommodate all attendees in a single service have ended due to various changes in society. The connection of the new satellite church to the well-resourced, organised, structurally sound, and professional main campus strengthens the main campus's foundation. It becomes an incubator for developing new and young leaders ("ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies," n.d., 65-66).

3. Methodology

The chapter outlines a qualitative research methodology to understand the factors influencing church planting within CBCA in the DRC. It adopts a case study research design, using interviews and observations to explore participants' experiences in a real-life context. The target population comprises 40 participants, including church leaders, pastors, missionaries, and congregants, selected using purposive sampling. Data collection is primarily conducted through semi-structured interviews, which provide in-depth insights into the social and human aspects of church planting.

To ensure the credibility and reliability of findings, the study incorporates strategies such as triangulation, expert validation, pilot testing, and thematic analysis. Data is analysed qualitatively by identifying patterns and themes from transcribed interviews. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, are strictly observed throughout the research process. Overall, the methodology is designed to provide a comprehensive and trustworthy understanding of church planting dynamics within the CBCA context.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Factors Affecting CBCA Church Planting in the DRC

This section presents the findings related to the factors affecting church planting within the Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique (CBCA) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The data reveal that church planting within CBCA is shaped by complex interactions among institutional, cultural, economic, and operational dynamics. These factors influence not only missionaries' ability to initiate new congregations but also the sustainability and expansion of the churches once established.

The findings show that the effectiveness of church planting depends on several interconnected dimensions. These include the challenges missionaries face in the field, the broader factors influencing church establishment, the operational realities within the CBCA church-planting context, and the tools, personnel, and resources used to support missionary work.

Challenges Faced by Missionaries

The study revealed that missionaries involved in CBCA church planting encounter numerous challenges in their work. These challenges range from institutional limitations and financial constraints to cultural, linguistic, and environmental barriers. Participants' responses suggest that these difficulties significantly affect the pace, effectiveness, and sustainability of church-planting initiatives across different regions of the DRC.

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges relates to the lack of consistent support from local or "mother" churches once missionaries are deployed. Participants noted that while missionaries are often sent out to establish new congregations, the sending churches sometimes fail to remain actively engaged in supporting the mission. As a result, missionaries frequently operate with limited institutional backing.

The Head of the Church Life Department of the CBCA explained this challenge in the following terms:

"There are no friends to support the missionary; the mother church does not engage in the mission; the places where there is a church planting want to remain detached."

Similarly, a church planter working in Kinshasa emphasised that the absence of financial and logistical support creates significant difficulties at the early stages of church planting:

"The two main initial challenges faced by CBCA missionaries are the means of missionary support and the complete independence of the local community."

These responses suggest that missionaries often bear the primary responsibility for initiating and sustaining new congregations, despite insufficient institutional support.

Another major challenge highlighted by respondents is the lack of adequate training for missionaries, particularly in theology, missiology, and intercultural engagement. Effective church planting requires missionaries to navigate complex social and cultural environments, yet participants indicated that many missionaries are deployed without adequate preparation.

One missionary observed:

"The challenges faced by missionaries when planting churches in the field include the lack of missiological and theological preparation of missionaries regarding church planting and mission. Intercultural challenges limit personal growth. The texts of the CBCA pose a challenge because they are not open to mission. Pastors' misunderstanding of mission."

Similarly, a pastor and church planter in Lualaba Province highlighted the absence of strategic training:

"Some challenges worth mentioning: CBCA missionaries lack missionary training, have no vision or method for mission work and church planting, and are sometimes not supported as they should be for the mission to advance."

The findings also reveal that limited resources represent a major barrier to church-planting efforts. Respondents reported that missionaries frequently encounter financial difficulties, logistical constraints, and infrastructural shortages when attempting to establish new congregations.

One church member described the situation in detail:

"Missionaries face multiple challenges, including financial difficulties (insufficient material resources), logistical difficulties (limited access, impassable roads), socio-cultural tensions (resistance to the Gospel, religious plurality), insecurity in certain areas, missionary fatigue related to isolation, and sometimes a lack of administrative support and ongoing training adapted to new contexts. Lack of sufficient support when starting a church in terms of human resources and finances."

Another respondent pointed out that the absence of a physical gathering space can hinder the development of a new congregation:

"The main challenges often include the absence of a place for members to gather, especially in a wide area, and dealing with weather conditions, i.e., missionaries do not have insurance for proper care."

Similarly, an evangelist working in Bunia emphasised that financial constraints often discourage community participation:

"Lack of financial means; they only expect the local members to manage on their own to move forward. Lack of a place to hold worship, consequently leading to reluctance among the locals."

Missionaries also face challenges related to environmental adaptation when they are deployed to unfamiliar regions. A church planter in Lubumbashi described the situation as follows:

"The CBCA missionary faces the challenge of adapting due to the change in environment. He does not progress quickly because he is sent and then left to manage on his own without effective help. The faithful, or those already won souls, probe the church due to the difficult conditions of church life... The CBCA is capable of assigning a missionary to a mission field without any land or adequate living conditions."

In addition, respondents emphasised that language barriers pose a significant challenge in the DRC's multicultural context. A church planter in Kinshasa explained:

"The DRC has many cultures, which means that when a pastor is sent on a mission, he faces a cultural and linguistic challenge."

Factors Influencing the Establishment of Churches within the CBCA

Beyond the challenges faced by missionaries, the data reveal several broader factors that influence the establishment of churches within the CBCA. These factors include leadership dynamics, financial resources, institutional vision, migration patterns, cultural identity, and church growth.

Leadership emerged as one of the most significant determinants of successful church planting. Respondents emphasised that visionary leadership, organisational capacity, and cooperation among church structures are crucial to enabling missionary work.

A worker in the Christian Education Department explained:

"The most decisive factors in the church planting process within the CBCA are as follows: local leadership vision, organisational capacity, member mobilisation, the political

and security situation, funding for missionary activities, availability of trained missionaries, and cooperation between mother and daughter parishes."

Similarly, another respondent observed that poor leadership and lack of vision can hinder church-planting efforts:

"Lack of good leadership in church planting, lack of vision, culture, politics in the church, lack of discipleship."

Financial and socio-economic conditions also play an important role in shaping the establishment of churches. Respondents noted that both resource availability and the economic realities faced by communities influence the viability of new congregations.

A mission department leader stated:

"The factors that influence the establishment of churches within the CBCA are numerous. Among them are the supervision of members in areas where the CBCA is not yet present, the growth of the church at the branch level, as well as the lack of financial resources at the General Secretariat."

Another church planter emphasised the importance of structural support:

"Socio-economic factors, unemployment, seeking financial aid, spiritual factors, and organisational structural factors such as support from existing churches are crucial for the first years of a new church."

Respondents also noted that the CBCA's mission and vision guide church planting activities. A female evangelist working in Lubumbashi explained:

"The factors that influence the mission and church planting in the CBCA are leadership, culture, and vision for developing missionary strategies."

In addition, migration and relocation of members contribute significantly to church expansion. When CBCA members move to new areas where the denomination is not present, they often initiate the formation of new congregations.

A pastor and church planter in Lualaba Province stated:

"Movement of certain CBCA faithful into areas where the CBCA does not exist."

Respondents also noted that church planting is influenced by a spiritual response to God's command to spread the Gospel. One church member explained:

"If members of the CBCA community are located in a particular place, that will be the first factor influencing the church plant in CBCA. Additionally, the response to God's mission also influences church plants in CBCA."

Cultural identity also emerged as an important factor influencing church expansion. One respondent stated:

"The culture of the CBCA, which is linked to the Nande ethnic group, is the main factor in the establishment of CBCA churches in other provinces of the DRC."

Finally, growth in membership and evangelistic activity also contributes to the church's establishment. A CBCA pastor explained:

"The establishment of churches within the CBCA is influenced by several factors: evangelism and the testimony of members who proclaim the Gospel in new regions... the presence of trained and committed local leaders... and the social works of the CBCA such as schools, hospitals, and development projects."

Occurrences within the CBCA Church Planting Context

The findings also reveal several operational realities that characterise church planting within the CBCA.

One notable development is the disruption of traditional missionary procedures. According to a mission department leader:

"Previously, we had the procedure, but today we do not have the missionary church-planting procedure, which would normally be characterised by prospecting, establishment, evangelisation, discipleship training, and the creation of new chapels."

Despite this, CBCA continues to rely heavily on community-based and collaborative approaches to church planting.

The Head of the Christian Education Department explained:

"Traditionally, the CBCA has favoured a church-planting model based on community and collaboration. New churches often emerge from spontaneous movements of believers."

Another significant occurrence is the transition from foreign missionary leadership to indigenous leadership within the CBCA.

The Evangelism Service leader stated:

"What happens at CBCA in the context of church planting is a story of transition from foreign missionary control to Congolese leadership, followed by rapid multiplication of congregations rooted in both evangelism and community service."

Respondents also noted that church planting within the CBCA is often locally initiated. One Pastor explained:

"When 4 or 10 families come from North Kivu, they meet... they decide to start. After one or two months, they call the general secretariat to send them a pastor."

However, participants also noted certain limitations, particularly the lack of structured planning. A CBCA pastor remarked:

"The procedures that CBCA uses in the context of church planting are flawed. One cannot plant a church without a plan and a planting strategy."

Tools, Equipment, and Personnel Used in Church Planting

The final set of findings concerns the tools, equipment, and personnel utilised by the CBCA to facilitate church planting.

Human resources play a central role in missionary work. The Head of the Christian Education Department explained:

"The tools include trained evangelists, missionary pastors, music and communication teams, evangelism materials (Bibles, brochures, community radios), means of transportation

(motorcycles, vehicles), aid funds for temporary and permanent constructions, and sometimes social programs (schools, health centres) serving as a missionary entry point."

Another pastor emphasised the role of spiritual and educational resources:

"At the CBCA, church planting is carried out through various tools, equipment, and personnel: missionaries and pastors use preaching, biblical teaching, catechism, and singing as spiritual means, while social works such as schools, hospitals, and development projects serve as entry points."

Teaching materials also play an important role in discipleship and church development. One respondent stated:

"The Bible, hymnbook, procedure manual, and discipleship guide are given."

Finally, land and infrastructure remain essential for establishing churches. A church planter explained:

"The tools are numerous; for us, they are lands where temples, schools, posts, and health centres are built."

These findings demonstrate that CBCA church planting relies on a combination of human resources, spiritual materials, social development initiatives, and physical infrastructure to establish and sustain new congregations.

4.2 Missiological strategies used within the CBCA to accomplish God's mission

This section presents the findings on the missiological strategies through which the Communauté Baptiste au Centre de l'Afrique (CBCA) seeks to accomplish God's mission across the provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo and in regions beyond its borders. The responses from participants reveal that CBCA's mission approach is shaped by a combination of theological convictions, practical evangelistic engagement, emerging intercultural strategies, and growing awareness of technological opportunities for mission expansion.

From the analysis, the data converge around four major areas that define the denomination's missiological orientation: the theological foundations guiding CBCA's understanding of God's mission, the practical strategies currently used in evangelism and church planting within the DRC, the intercultural and diaspora-oriented approaches that may extend CBCA's mission beyond national borders, and the integration of innovative tools and training systems to sustain mission in a rapidly changing world.

Theological and missiological foundations

Participants consistently emphasised that the CBCA's understanding of mission is rooted in biblical teaching, particularly the Great Commission mandate. The church understands its missionary responsibility as arising from the command to proclaim the Gospel and make disciples of all nations. Several respondents explained that this theological foundation frames the church's sense of responsibility to reach communities that are spiritually, socially, and materially marginalised.

According to participants, the theological vision of CBCA's mission is not limited to evangelistic proclamation but also encompasses engagement with the realities of suffering, conflict, and poverty that characterise many communities within the DRC. The mission of the

church is therefore understood as responding to both spiritual and social needs within the nation's context. One respondent described the biblical inspiration for this understanding by citing passages that encourage believers to proclaim the Gospel even in difficult circumstances and to serve communities experiencing hunger, insecurity, and despair. In this perspective, the church is called not only to preach but also to embody God's compassion within fragile social contexts.

A second element of CBCA's theological understanding of mission relates to the concept of holistic ministry. Participants frequently described the church's mission as an integral engagement with society, including evangelism, discipleship, and social transformation. In this understanding, the church participates in God's work of reconciliation by addressing spiritual, social, and economic challenges within communities. One church leader explained that the CBCA increasingly frames its mission in terms of integral mission, integrating the proclamation of the Gospel with development initiatives that promote human dignity and community well-being.

Respondents also noted that Baptist principles strongly influence CBCA's theology of mission. These principles emphasise the authority of Scripture, the importance of discipleship, the participation of the entire Christian community in mission, and the need for contextual engagement with society. Within the Congolese context, this theological orientation encourages the church to address realities such as poverty, ethnic diversity, conflict, and political instability while maintaining fidelity to biblical teaching. Participants emphasised that the CBCA seeks to combine spiritual transformation with social engagement so that the Gospel becomes visible in everyday community life.

Another important dimension of the theological foundation concerns the church's role as a prophetic and social witness within society. Participants described the church's mission as reflecting the broader ministry of Christ, encompassing pastoral care, prophetic engagement, and leadership in promoting justice and peace. Within the DRC, this mission involves addressing social injustice, encouraging reconciliation among communities, and advocating for human dignity. Respondents indicated that this prophetic dimension reinforces the church's responsibility to engage actively with social issues rather than remaining confined to internal religious activities.

These findings indicate that a combination of biblical mandate, Baptist theological tradition, and contextual engagement with Congolese realities shapes CBCA's theological understanding of mission. This theological framework provides the foundation for the church's evangelistic and missiological strategies.

Evangelism, discipleship, and church planting strategies across the DRC

Participants described a variety of practical strategies through which CBCA currently carries out evangelism, discipleship, and church planting across the provinces of the DRC. These strategies combine traditional forms of evangelistic outreach with structured training programs, community-based ministries, and periodic denominational mobilisation initiatives.

One of the key approaches involves the use of media and organised outreach campaigns. Respondents explained that CBCA uses radio broadcasting and other local communication platforms to disseminate Christian teachings and reach wider audiences. Evangelistic campaigns are often organised at specific times of the year, particularly around baptismal

seasons, when churches intensify outreach efforts within surrounding communities. In addition, the church has developed educational and discipleship programs within school contexts, recognising the strategic importance of engaging younger generations.

Another significant strategy concerns the training and deployment of pastors, evangelists, and ministry leaders. Participants emphasised that the development of trained personnel is central to the sustainability of church planting across the country. The CBCA invests in theological education and leadership development through biblical institutes and ministry training programs. These programs prepare individuals for pastoral leadership, evangelistic outreach, and community service, enabling the church to expand its presence into new regions. Respondents noted that this training also fosters intercultural engagement, as pastoral candidates are drawn from multiple ethnic groups and are prepared to minister across diverse cultural contexts.

Participants also highlighted the role of structured missionary sending. According to respondents, the CBCA mobilises and deploys missionaries annually to establish new churches and support emerging congregations. This systematic approach reflects the denomination's commitment to expanding its missionary presence in different regions of the country.

Another dimension of CBCA's evangelistic strategy involves social engagement and community development initiatives. Participants emphasised that evangelism is frequently accompanied by social projects such as schools, hospitals, and development programs. These initiatives provide tangible expressions of Christian compassion and create opportunities for building trust within communities. By addressing social needs alongside spiritual ministry, the church strengthens its relationship with local communities and creates an environment where the message of the Gospel can be received more openly.

In addition to these strategies, the denomination organises a dedicated period each year known as Mission Month. During this period, congregations across the CBCA network participate collectively in evangelistic outreach and missionary support activities. Respondents indicated that this initiative helps mobilise church members, raise awareness of missionary responsibilities, and encourage grassroots participation in mission work.

Discipleship was also identified as a central component of CBCA's mission strategy. Participants explained that discipleship programs exist in many churches and chapels, focusing on teaching new believers and nurturing spiritual maturity. However, responses also revealed mixed perceptions regarding the effectiveness of these programs. Some respondents expressed concern that discipleship efforts remain largely theoretical and have not always produced measurable outcomes. Others suggested that discipleship initiatives require stronger implementation and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that believers are adequately equipped for Christian life and mission.

Overall, the findings indicate that CBCA's evangelistic and church planting strategies combine multiple approaches, including media outreach, pastoral training, missionary deployment, community service initiatives, and organised denominational mobilisation. These strategies reflect an attempt to integrate evangelism with broader social engagement while expanding the church's presence throughout the country.

Intercultural and diaspora-oriented strategies for expanding mission beyond the DRC

Participants also reflected on strategies through which CBCA could extend its missionary engagement beyond the borders of the DRC, particularly through intercultural and diaspora-based initiatives. These discussions highlighted the importance of leadership development, partnerships, cultural adaptation, and strategic planning for cross-border mission expansion.

One of the most frequently mentioned strategies involves empowering church leaders through specialised mission training. Respondents emphasised that leaders must develop a clear vision for the mission and acquire the skills necessary to guide church-planting activities across diverse cultural contexts. This includes training in evangelism, missionary leadership, intercultural communication, and community development. Participants suggested that such training would enable leaders to better prepare congregations for engagement with new cultural environments and emerging mission opportunities.

Diaspora communities were also identified as an important resource for expanding CBCA's missionary reach. Respondents noted that Congolese Christians living in neighbouring countries can serve as strategic contact points for establishing new congregations and facilitating cross-border mission work. These diaspora communities provide cultural familiarity and relational networks that can help the church adapt more easily to new environments. Some participants suggested that diaspora professionals and intellectuals could also contribute to mission work through "tent-making" initiatives that combine professional employment with missionary engagement.

Partnerships with churches and organisations in neighbouring countries were identified as another important strategy. Participants explained that collaborative initiatives such as joint evangelistic campaigns, regional leadership exchanges, and reconciliation ministries could strengthen CBCA's missionary presence across national boundaries. Through such partnerships, the church could develop a more integrated regional mission strategy that reflects the interconnected realities of Central and East Africa.

Respondents also emphasised the importance of cultural and linguistic adaptation in cross-border mission work. According to participants, successful missionary engagement requires an understanding of local languages, customs, and social norms. Training local leaders and incorporating indigenous cultural expressions into church life were identified as effective ways to facilitate this adaptation. Participants suggested that children and youth could also play an important role in future missionary expansion, as younger generations often adapt more readily to intercultural environments and new communication technologies.

Another recommendation emerging from the data involves the development of a clear strategic framework for mission expansion. Some respondents suggested that the church should establish a formal vision and planning structure to guide church planting not only within the DRC but also across the African continent. Such strategic planning would enable the denomination to coordinate missionary activities more effectively and align them with broader regional opportunities.

Integrating digital innovation and leadership development for a sustainable mission

The final area emerging from the data concerns the integration of innovative tools and leadership development initiatives to sustain CBCA's mission. Participants emphasised that the rapid transformation of communication technologies presents both challenges and opportunities for the church's evangelistic work.

One area of focus involves the review and adaptation of training curricula for pastors and church leaders. Respondents suggested that theological education programs should incorporate contemporary mission strategies, leadership development, and practical ministry skills that reflect current social realities. Updating these curricula would enable future church leaders to engage more effectively with evolving cultural and technological contexts.

Participants also highlighted the growing importance of digital communication platforms for evangelism and discipleship. Respondents noted that some CBCA churches have begun using social media platforms, online seminars, and virtual communication tools to facilitate teaching and ministry activities. These platforms allow the church to reach audiences beyond physical congregations and to maintain connections with diaspora communities and remote mission fields.

Digital technologies also offer opportunities for developing online discipleship programs and leadership training initiatives. Participants suggested that virtual Bible study groups, mentoring platforms, and online theological courses could strengthen discipleship while overcoming geographical barriers. Such digital initiatives would allow pastors, catechists, and lay leaders to receive training even when they are located far from formal training institutions.

Another area emphasised by respondents involves practical leadership training through workshops and field-based learning. Participants indicated that mission training should combine theoretical instruction with practical experience in evangelism, church planting, and community engagement. Learning from successful mission initiatives in other contexts was also suggested as a way of strengthening the church's missionary capacity.

Finally, respondents highlighted the importance of involving younger generations in the church's technological and missionary initiatives. Youth were seen as particularly well-positioned to engage with emerging digital tools, such as internet-based communication and artificial intelligence. By incorporating young people into mission strategies and technological development initiatives, the church could ensure the sustainability of its missionary vision in the coming decades.

These findings indicate that CBCA's missiological strategies are evolving in response to both internal and external factors. While the church continues to rely on traditional forms of evangelism and church planting, there is growing recognition of the need to integrate intercultural engagement, diaspora partnerships, and digital innovation in order to sustain mission in a rapidly changing world.

4.3 Discussion

Leadership is the critical mediator of mission effectiveness

The study demonstrates that leadership plays a decisive role in shaping church planting outcomes within CBCA. The hierarchical yet participatory structure theoretically enables both centralised vision and decentralised execution. This reflects Lesslie Newbigin's understanding of the church as a missionary community that must embody the Gospel within specific cultural contexts.

However, the findings indicate that leadership limitations, particularly a lack of vision, weak follow-up, and insufficient training, undermine mission effectiveness. This supports Darrell Guder's argument that the church must be intentionally formed as a "missional community," where leadership is not merely administrative but fundamentally oriented toward participation in God's mission.

The absence of a clear missionary policy and strategic planning within CBCA suggests a structural weakness in translating vision into practice. Leadership appears reactive rather than strategic, limiting the scalability and sustainability of church-planting efforts. This confirms Guder's assertion that without intentional formation and equipping, churches tend to revert to maintenance rather than mission.

Contextual challenges and the problem of indigenisation

The findings highlight significant contextual challenges, including language barriers, cultural resistance, ethnic identity (particularly the association of CBCA with the Nande community), and socio-economic constraints. These challenges underscore the importance of contextual theology and indigenisation in mission practice.

Stephen B. Bevans argues that all theology is contextual and must engage local cultures critically and constructively. In the case of CBCA, while there is some degree of contextual engagement, the persistence of ethnic labelling suggests that the church has not fully achieved cultural transcendence. Instead of becoming a genuinely inclusive ecclesial community, CBCA risks being perceived as ethnically bounded.

Furthermore, Andrew F. Walls emphasises the need for the Gospel to be both "indigenising" and "pilgrim." The CBCA appears strong in the indigenising principle within certain communities but weaker in the pilgrim principle that allows the Gospel to transcend ethnic and cultural boundaries.

This limitation has practical implications for church planting, particularly in regions where CBCA is perceived as culturally exclusive. Effective mission in such contexts requires deliberate strategies of cultural adaptation, language acquisition, and inclusive leadership development.

Discipleship as the missing link in church planting

One of the most striking findings of the study is the inconsistency and perceived failure of discipleship within CBCA. While church planting and evangelism are actively pursued, discipleship is often described as theoretical, underdeveloped, or ineffective.

This observation aligns with Dallas Willard's critique that many churches prioritise conversion over discipleship, resulting in shallow spiritual formation. Willard argues that discipleship is

central to the mission of the church and must involve intentional processes of spiritual formation.

Similarly, Alan Hirsch emphasises that movements that sustain growth prioritise disciple-making over institutional expansion. The CBCA's emphasis on church multiplication without corresponding investment in discipleship risks producing numerical growth without spiritual depth.

The findings suggest that CBCA's mission strategy would benefit from a reorientation toward discipleship as the core of church planting, rather than as a secondary activity.

Toward a missional and innovative future

The study also reveals emerging awareness within CBCA of the need to adopt innovative and intercultural approaches to mission. The use of media, digital platforms, diaspora engagement, and youth involvement reflects a shift toward more adaptive mission strategies.

This aligns with Manuel Castells's concept of the network society, where communication technologies reshape social and organisational dynamics. For CBCA, digital tools offer opportunities to overcome geographical barriers and extend the mission beyond traditional boundaries.

At the same time, Samuel Escobar emphasises that mission in the Global South must integrate evangelism with social transformation and contextual engagement. CBCA's holistic approach provides a strong foundation for this, but its effectiveness depends on strategic integration and leadership capacity.

5. Conclusion

This study was guided by two key objectives: to identify the factors affecting church-planting initiatives within the CBCA in the DRC, and to formulate missiological strategies to advance God's mission across all provinces and beyond. Regarding the first objective, the findings reveal that church planting within CBCA is influenced by leadership limitations, inadequate training, weak discipleship structures, and various contextual challenges. These factors contribute to a disconnect between the church's strong theological understanding of mission and its practical implementation, thereby constraining the effectiveness and sustainability of church planting efforts.

Concerning the second objective, the study proposes that CBCA can enhance its missional impact by adopting more intentional, discipleship-centered, and contextually adaptive strategies. This includes strengthening leadership development, investing in structured training programs, and aligning operational practices with its theological foundations. Moving from a predominantly expansion-oriented approach to a more strategic, holistic missional model will enable CBCA to achieve greater coherence, effectiveness, and long-term sustainability in fulfilling God's mission within the DRC and beyond.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. CBCA should invest in structured leadership development programs focusing on missiology, strategic planning, and intercultural competence to address leadership gaps and enhance effective church planting.

2. The church should prioritise discipleship by developing structured, measurable, and contextually relevant programs that ensure sustainability and bridge the gap between theology and practice.
3. CBCA should address cultural and ethnic barriers through inclusive leadership, language integration, and context-sensitive mission approaches to improve acceptance and effectiveness across diverse communities.
4. CBCA should establish a formal missionary policy that outlines church-planting procedures, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms to ensure consistency and long-term sustainability.
5. The church should adopt digital evangelism, online discipleship platforms, and technology-driven training to expand outreach, especially to youth and diaspora populations.
6. CBCA should develop sustainable financial and logistical support structures for missionaries to ensure long-term mission viability and reduce over-dependence on newly established churches.

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