Micah Challenge Zambia
Mobilising Christians Against Poverty

Micah Challenge is a global campaign to empower and resource Christians to deepen their engagement in poverty reduction and help achieve the Millennium Development Goals

“…what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” Micah 6:8

The Millennium Development Goals and the Fifth National Development Plan in Zambia

INTRODUCTION
On February 10 2007 Micah Challenge Zambia hosted a conference at the Theological College of Central Africa (TICCA) in Ndola. The aim of the conference was to bring Pastors and Christian leaders together in order to enlighten them on issues pertaining to the progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the newly launched 5th National Development Plan. The objectives of the workshop included the following:

1. To get an update on the Micah Challenge Campaign
2. To get a Christian perspective on the Fifth National Development Plan and come up with relevant advocacy action
3. To evaluate Fifth National Development Plan with special focus on the Millennium Development Goals
4. To have time for relevant input regarding the meaning of a citizenship model that will motivate Christian leaders to participate in national development.
5. To spend time with other Christians and get an insight into their situations, challenges and their responses.

The workshop attracted a number of Christian leaders representing different churches from the Copperbelt. The host facilitator was Pastor Lawrence Temfwe, Executive Director Jubilee Centre and National Facilitator of Micah Challenge in Zambia, while the guest facilitator was Mwiya Mwandawande, Advocacy Program Officer from the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia.

DELIBERATIONS
The workshop started at 09:00hrs with Pastor Stanley Bwalya giving the opening prayer. Thereafter Pastor Lawrence Temfwe gave an update on how Micah Challenge was birthed.

UPDATE ON MICAH CHALLENGE CAMPAIGN
Pastor Temfwe explained to the participants that Micah Challenge is a global movement of Christian agencies, churches, groups and individuals which aims to deepen people’s engagement with the poor and to help reduce poverty as an integral part of the Christian faith. Pastor Temfwe added that Micah Challenge takes its name from the prophet Micah, who wrote, “What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” Micah 6:8.

He explained further that the Micah Challenge was formed in order to encourage churches not only to preach the gospel but also to engage them in developmental issues. The network also wanted to commission a movement that would focus on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by way of advocating and holding Government leaders accountable to honour their promise by 2015.
Pastor Temfwe shared with the Christian leaders how Micah Challenge has selected Jubilee Centre to spearhead its mission in Zambia. He also shared with the Christian leaders a testimony of how the Micah Challenge principles were already working in Zambia. He revealed to them how Christian leaders in Mapalo (a township in the outskirts of Ndola) mobilised their community members to come together to discuss the challenges they were experiencing. During the meeting the community realized that their previous political representatives had a tendency of shunning their responsibilities once put in office. The church leaders approached Jubilee Centre to help them develop a framework of a social contract which aspiring candidates would sign before an election. This contract would hold their Member of Parliament and Councillors accountable to honour the promises they make before being voted into their offices. This commitment by the community has brought about a transformation in Mapalo community and political representatives are slowly honouring most of their promises.

Pastor Temfwe showed the church leaders a Micah Challenge video produced by JC. The video highlights the MDGs relating them to our Zambian situation. It shows how some Christian leaders are working with the community in trying to attain some of the MDGs, namely poverty and HIV/AIDS. He shared that Micah Zambia has been picked to host the next Micah Challenge international meeting.

**EVALUATION OF THE FNDP AND MDGS**

Mr. Mwandawande gave an overview of the MDGs and the Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP). He said that it was very important for issues stated in the FNDP to correspond with the MDGs. He referred to the pledge made by the Government leaders of attaining the MDGs by 2015 of which include:

1. To end poverty and hunger
2. Education for all
3. Equality for women
4. Save children’s lives
5. Make motherhood safe
6. Stop HIV/aids and malaria and other deadly diseases
7. Protect the environment
8. Build a global partnership for development

This he noted was a great challenge that our leaders had set for themselves. And in order to attain these goals, Mr. Mwandawande said it is essential for our leaders to demonstrate good governance and a high level of commitment. He brought to the attention the fact that Zambia is almost half way to the year 2015, and from the look of things, little achievement has been made by our leaders in attaining any of the goals. Leaders are not committed, and this can be seen in the way they are doing things, he cited an example of one story that has been in our daily papers for the past weeks where billions of money intended for teachers’ housing allowances had disappeared without a trace. The Government has failed to account for the missing money or even to trace it. This, according to Mr. Mwandawande, raises doubts and questions in the minds of many Zambians. The Zambian people will start to question whether or not we have responsible and capable leaders to take up this big responsibility of ensuring the Zambian people attain the MDGs by 2015. Mr. Mwandawande noted that the poverty levels have continued to go up despite the country having attained the Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) completion point. With the country attaining the completion point, it means that most of the funds meant for debt serving would be reinvested into our economy, therefore resulting in improved standards of living which benefits everyone; but at present the poverty levels keep on increasing. As this is not supposed
to be the case, our political leaders should be questioned. It is therefore up to the Christian leaders to make sure that the politicians are answerable and explain to us where the HIPIC funds are. Mr. Mwandawande urged the church leaders to make sure that these political leaders live up to their pledge of attaining the MDGs.

CHALLENGES
One participant moved by Pastor Temfwe’s testimony and video presentation was demonstrative of the potential the church has in bringing about positive results. She said more could be done if the churches would unite. However; she said that most Christian leaders were busy fighting amongst themselves and ignoring the needs of the communities that they serve. These fights posed as a challenge. Other participants also highlighted a number of other challenges that the Christian community is experiencing, and feared that if these were not dealt with they would continue to hinder the goal of attaining the MDGs and holding the political leaders accountable. The following were some of the challenges identified:

a. Lack of unity among the Christian leaders
It was noted that the wider body of the Evangelical Christian Community was not playing its role in ensuring the success of efforts towards achieving the MDGs. The participants suggested that the Church needs to do a lot of in-house cleaning. This is important because of the personal differences that Christian leaders harbour towards each other. These differences within the church are resulting in church splits and fragmentation, and therefore the mushrooming of many churches.

b. Lack of Information
Despite Government developing the FNDP, one of challenges revealed is that there is lack of information on this document among the church leaders. The Christian leaders complained that most of them were very ignorant on issues affecting the country. They are not equipped with information on current affairs. But also Christian leaders themselves are to blame – one participant said that some leaders are too ‘spiritual’ and do not create time to read newspapers or watch television in order to be abreast with current affairs.

c. Lack of Integrity by some Christian Leaders
Participants noted the need of seriously scrutinizing some Christian leaders. This is because some people are starting up churches in order to make ends meet. Such people are swindling people of their money. It is feared that such people are denting the image of genuine servants of God.

e. The Church, Stigma and Discrimination
There is a need to change the mindset of Pastors and church leaders through training them on issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS. This will help the Christian leaders to recognize problems of HIV/AIDS amongst their members and realize the need for compassionate preaching. As it is at the moment, there is so much stigma going on in the church; the church has demonised the disease and perceives those infected by the virus as sinful, especially the single people. Instead of carrying on with this attitude, Church leaders need to recognise the problems of HIV/AIDS in their churches and realise the need for compassionate preaching on the disease. Stigma and discrimination are powerful forces that have the double effect of demeaning individuals infected by HIV/AIDS. The evangelical family should formally elaborate a joint statement of the underlying Christian Principles that guide responses to stigma and discrimination that is ongoing in the church.
RESOLUTIONS
In order to address the identified challenges, the participants came up with the following resolutions:

- EFZ could develop the habit of consulting its members on national issues, and the best way of doing this is by forming think-tanks comprising economists, pastors, theologians, and business people. This should be done in order to provide a solid proactive evangelical response to national issues such as the FNDP.

- Having briefly reviewed the FNDP, participants urged Micah Challenge members to participate in all development issues at all levels in their District. They asked for the FNDP and 2007/8 national budget documents to be made available to all church members, especially those members participating in the Micah Challenge Campaign. Also Micah Challenge Campaign members should avail themselves and join District Development Coordinating committees, District Aids Task force, and the Residence Development Committees and come up with a theme on MDGS on which churches must focus this year.

- CHURCH STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION
In order to combat stigma and discrimination, Pastors and Church leaders should go for VCT and come out in the open about their status. Church leaders should also mobilise preaching on stigma as this will help church members open up and share their experiences. The church should demonstrate practical love for people living with HIV/AIDS through home bases care. One participant shared how she demonstrated love to some church members whom she suspected to be HIV positive. She explained how she approached them and counselled them. She encouraged them to go for VCT, and when they tested positive she continued to counsel them. She shared how she has been helping these individuals come to terms with the status, and whenever she can helps them out with food supplements. This was a touching story of how Christians can help one another instead of discriminating amongst themselves. One participant, visibly disappointed with the way Christians were contributing to the spread of stigma, said instead of being “the salt of the earth and light of the world,” we as Christians are behaving like the “vinegar” of the earth. The participant then suggested that the church should come up with a joint and comprehensive policy frame to fight the pandemic.

Conclusion
The workshop was successful in that it facilitated a forum for Christian leaders and Pastors to identify issues affecting them as a Christian community. They discussed the challenges that the evangelical community were experiencing and discovered that the church was not doing much in addressing HIV/AIDS issues, national programmes, and failing in their duties of holding the political leaders accountable. The workshop helped them realize that all hope was not lost, and it was now up to the church to sit in the driver’s seat and ensure that the political leaders honoured their promises.

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