

# ZIMBABWE SCHOOL EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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## FAMILY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

A Level Project

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2026

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# Project Title: Exploring the Nexus of Traditional Beliefs and Christianity: Implications for Family Structures and Social Cohesion in Rural Mwenezi, Zimbabwe

## STAGE 1: Problem Identification

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### 1.1 Problem Description

In rural Mwenezi, Zimbabwe, communities grapple with the complex interplay between deeply entrenched traditional Shona beliefs and the pervasive influence of various Christian denominations. This interface often creates tension and disharmony within family structures and broader social cohesion. Specifically, observed conflicts arise in areas such as marriage rites (e.g., balancing customary *lobola* negotiations with church weddings), burial practices (e.g., the traditional *kurova guva* ceremony for appeasing ancestral spirits versus Christian memorial services), inheritance patterns, and differing views on spiritual authority (ancestral veneration versus prayer to the Christian God). For instance, a family in Neshuro might face an impasse where some members, adhering to traditional practices, insist on a *kurova guva* ceremony for a deceased elder, while others, devout Christians, view such a practice as an affront to their faith. Similarly, disputes over child-rearing philosophies, where traditional elders emphasize respect for ancestral guidance and communal upbringing, clash with Christian parents advocating for nuclear family autonomy and biblical principles. These conflicts often lead to fractured family relationships, disputes over property and rites, and a weakening of community bonds, particularly affecting the youth who navigate these two powerful, sometimes contradictory, value systems. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of structured platforms for dialogue and mutual understanding within Mwenezi's diverse socio-religious landscape.

### 1.2 Statement of Intent

The intent of this project is to investigate the multifaceted ways in which the interface between traditional Shona beliefs and Christian practices impacts family structures and social cohesion in rural Mwenezi. Furthermore, it aims to develop and propose a locally relevant, sustainable, and community-driven intervention that fosters harmonious coexistence and understanding between these two influential belief systems, thereby strengthening family units and enhancing overall community well-being in Mwenezi.

### 1.3 Design Specifications

The proposed solution, a community dialogue platform, will adhere to the following design specifications:

- **Inclusivity:** The platform must actively engage a diverse range of stakeholders, including traditional leaders (e.g., Chief Neshuro, local headmen), representatives from various Christian denominations prevalent in Mwenezi (e.g., ZCC, Roman Catholic, AFM, Methodist), women's groups, youth organizations (including students from Mwenezi High), and general community members.
- **Cultural Sensitivity:** All discussions, materials, and facilitation methods must respect and acknowledge both traditional Shona customs and Christian doctrines without privileging one over the other. The language used should be accessible, primarily Shona, with key points translated into English where necessary.
- **Structured Dialogue:** The platform will feature structured discussion modules focusing on specific areas of potential conflict or misunderstanding (e.g., marriage, death, spiritual practices), moving beyond general discussions to address concrete issues with practical relevance to Mwenezi families.
- **Local Ownership and Sustainability:** The design must embed mechanisms for local leadership, volunteerism, and resource mobilization to ensure the long-term viability of the initiative beyond the initial project phase, minimizing reliance on external funding.
- **Empowerment:** The platform should empower participants, especially women and youth, to voice their perspectives, contribute to problem-solving, and become agents of change within their families and communities.
- **Accessibility:** Meetings and dialogue sessions should be held in easily accessible community locations within Mwenezi (e.g., community halls, school premises, or central outdoor gathering points) and scheduled at times convenient for rural residents.
- **Facilitation:** The sessions will be guided by trained, neutral local facilitators skilled in conflict resolution, active listening, and inter-cultural communication, capable of managing sensitive discussions effectively.

## STAGE 2: Investigations of Related Ideas

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### Related Ideas

#### Idea 1: Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (e.g., Dare reHukama/Nhume systems)

- **Description:** This involves the established customary systems of dispute resolution prevalent in Shona culture, where family elders (*madzisekuru*, *mainini*) and village headmen convene a 'dare' (traditional court or family council) to mediate conflicts. Decisions are made based on customary law, ancestral wisdom, and the imperative to restore harmony (*runyararo*) within the family and community. In Mwenezi, these systems are still active, often dealing with marriage disputes, inheritance issues, and intra-family disagreements. The 'nhume' system, where representatives are sent between families to negotiate, is also part of this.

- **Advantages:**
  - **Cultural Relevance:** Deeply rooted in local customs and traditions, ensuring solutions resonate with the cultural values of the Mwenezi people.
  - **Accessibility:** Readily available and understood by community members, often operating at no direct financial cost (beyond symbolic tokens like a small goat or chicken).
  - **Restorative Justice:** Focuses on reconciliation and restoring relationships rather than punitive measures, which is vital for family cohesion.
  - **Community Ownership:** Decisions are made by respected community figures, fostering a sense of ownership and adherence to outcomes.
- **Disadvantages:**
  - **Gender Bias:** Often patriarchal, potentially marginalizing the voices and rights of women and younger members, particularly in matters of inheritance or marital disputes.
  - **Limited Scope:** May struggle with complex issues requiring external legal frameworks or human rights perspectives, such as severe domestic violence or cases where customary law conflicts with national law.
  - **Perceived as 'Primitive':** Some educated youth and devout Christians may view these systems as outdated or incompatible with modern values and religious teachings.
  - **Lack of Formal Enforcement:** Relies heavily on social pressure and moral authority rather than legal enforcement, which can be insufficient in some cases.

## Idea 2: Church-Based Counselling and Pastoral Care

- **Description:** Many Christian churches in Mwenezi, including the Roman Catholic, AFM, ZCC, and various Pentecostal denominations, offer counselling services and pastoral care to their congregants. This typically involves spiritual guidance from pastors, priests, or church elders on family matters, marriage, conflict resolution, and moral issues, all from a biblical perspective. Some churches also conduct pre-marital counselling and family workshops.
- **Advantages:**
  - **Spiritual Foundation:** Provides a moral and spiritual framework for addressing family issues, offering comfort and guidance through prayer and scripture.
  - **Established Networks:** Churches often have strong community networks and infrastructure, making these services readily available to their members.
  - **Moral Authority:** Religious leaders often command significant respect within their congregations, making their counsel influential.
  - **Support Systems:** Offers a sense of community and support among church members facing similar challenges.
- **Disadvantages:**
  - **Exclusivity:** Services are primarily accessible and appealing to church members, potentially excluding those who adhere solely to traditional beliefs or different faiths.
  - **Dogmatism:** Approaches can sometimes be rigid or dogmatic, failing to appreciate the nuances of traditional cultural practices or secular perspectives.
  - **Limited Professionalism:** While well-intentioned, church counselling may lack the professional psychological expertise required for severe or complex family dysfunctions.
  - **Bias:** Counselling may be heavily biased towards a specific denominational interpretation, potentially increasing the divide with traditional beliefs rather than bridging it.

## Idea 3: Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Interventions on Family Well-being

- **Description:** Various local and international NGOs operating in Zimbabwe often implement community development programs that include components on family well-being, gender equality, conflict resolution, and human rights. These interventions typically involve community workshops, advocacy campaigns, and training programs. Examples might include organizations focusing on gender-based violence (e.g., Musasa Project) or family empowerment (e.g., organisations promoting human rights in rural areas), often adapting their approaches to local contexts, including Mwenezi.
- **Advantages:**
  - **Professional Expertise:** Brings trained professionals with expertise in areas like human rights, psychology, and gender studies, offering a broader and more current perspective.
  - **Resource Mobilization:** NGOs often have access to external funding and resources, allowing for more comprehensive programs and materials.
  - **Policy Advocacy:** Can advocate for policy changes and legal reforms that support family well-being and protect vulnerable members.
  - **Objective Stance:** May offer a more neutral and objective platform, free from specific religious or traditional biases.

- **Disadvantages:**

- **External Perception:** Can sometimes be perceived as external interference, leading to resistance or lack of genuine local ownership, especially if not culturally sensitive.
- **Sustainability Issues:** Programs are often project-based and funding-dependent, leading to sustainability challenges once external support ceases.
- **Cultural Disconnect:** Despite efforts, some NGO approaches may fail to fully grasp the intricate nuances of local Mwenezi customs and spiritual beliefs, leading to less effective interventions.
- **Bureaucracy:** Can sometimes involve complex administrative processes that may alienate rural communities used to more informal approaches.

#### Idea 4: Integrated Education and Awareness Campaigns (e.g., through local schools/radio)

- **Description:** This idea involves using formal educational institutions like Mwenezi High School, other local schools, and potentially community radio stations (if available and accessible) to disseminate information and foster discussions on family values, health, rights, and respectful coexistence between different belief systems. This could include integrating relevant topics into the curriculum, holding school-based debates, or producing short, informative radio segments in Shona.
- **Advantages:**
  - **Broad Reach (especially Youth):** Schools provide direct access to a significant portion of the youth, who are often more open to new ideas and critical thinking. Radio can reach a wide, diverse audience across Mwenezi.
  - **Non-Confrontational:** Presents information in an educational context, which can be less confrontational than direct mediation.
  - **Promotes Critical Thinking:** Encourages individuals, particularly students, to reflect on and understand diverse perspectives.
  - **Cost-Effective:** Utilizing existing school infrastructure or public radio airtime can be relatively cost-effective.
- **Disadvantages:**
  - **Passive Learning:** Primarily an informative approach; may not directly facilitate active problem-solving or reconciliation of specific family conflicts.
  - **Limited Interactivity:** Radio campaigns are often one-way, with limited scope for real-time dialogue and feedback. School curricula might not allow for deep, continuous engagement on such sensitive topics.
  - **Curriculum Bias/Constraints:** Integrating new topics into the formal curriculum can be challenging due to existing subject loads and teacher training requirements.
  - **Influence on Adults:** While effective for youth, its direct impact on deeply entrenched adult views and practices might be slower or less pronounced.

#### Overall quality of presentation of the ideas

The presentation of ideas is clear, well-structured, and comprehensive. Each idea is thoroughly described, followed by a balanced analysis of its advantages and disadvantages, demonstrating a nuanced understanding of potential solutions within the Mwenezi context.

## STAGE 3: Generation of Ideas/Possible Solutions

### Possible Solutions

#### Solution 1: Inter-Faith/Inter-Cultural Dialogue Forum for Family Harmony in Mwenezi

- **Description:** This solution proposes establishing a regular, structured dialogue platform within Mwenezi, named the "Mwenezi Family Harmony Dialogue Forum" (MFHDF). This forum would convene key community stakeholders, including traditional leaders (e.g., Chief Neshuro, local headmen), church leaders from various denominations (e.g., Roman Catholic, AFM, ZCC), respected elders, women's group representatives, and youth (including students from Mwenezi High and other local schools). The forum would meet quarterly at easily accessible community venues (e.g., Neshuro Growth Point Hall, Manyuchi Secondary School Hall) to discuss specific family issues where traditional and Christian beliefs intersect, such as marriage practices, burial rites, inheritance, and child-rearing philosophies. The sessions would be facilitated by trained local mediators, encouraging open, respectful conversation aimed at identifying common ground and devising mutually acceptable solutions for family harmony.
- **Advantages:**
  - **Direct Engagement:** Brings diverse stakeholders face-to-face, fostering mutual respect and understanding through direct communication.
  - **Local Ownership:** Leverages existing community leadership structures (traditional and religious), promoting a sense of responsibility and sustainability.
  - **Contextual Relevance:** Discussions are tailored to specific, real-life challenges faced by Mwenezi families, ensuring practical and relevant outcomes.
  - **Consensus Building:** Aims to find common ground and shared values, leading to community-agreed norms that accommodate both belief systems.

- **Disadvantages:**
  - **Facilitation Challenges:** Requires highly skilled and neutral facilitators to manage potentially sensitive and emotionally charged discussions.
  - **Resistance from Extremists:** May face initial resistance from individuals or groups with deeply entrenched or fundamentalist views from either side.
  - **Logistical Demands:** Organizing regular meetings with diverse participants across a rural district like Mwenezi can be logistically challenging (e.g., transport, venue, refreshments).
  - **Time-Consuming:** Building trust and achieving consensus on complex issues can be a slow and iterative process.

#### Solution 2: "Nyaya yeMusha, Nyaya Yedu" (Family Matters, Our Matters) Educational Toolkit

- **Description:** This solution involves the development and distribution of a comprehensive, culturally sensitive educational toolkit specifically designed for Mwenezi. The toolkit would comprise various materials:
  - **Flip Charts/Posters:** Visually engaging charts depicting common family scenarios where traditional and Christian views diverge, along with potential pathways to resolution.
  - **Short Story Booklets:** Illustrated booklets in Shona, featuring relatable narratives of Mwenezi families successfully navigating inter-faith/cultural challenges.
  - **Discussion Guides:** Manuals for community facilitators (e.g., church leaders, school teachers, traditional elders) to lead interactive sessions using the toolkit. The content would highlight areas of convergence between traditional values (e.g., respect for elders, communal responsibility) and Christian teachings (e.g., love, forgiveness, family unity), while respectfully acknowledging divergences. The toolkit would be used in schools (e.g., Mwenezi High's FRS classes), church youth groups, and community gatherings.
- **Advantages:**
  - **Standardized Information:** Ensures consistent messaging and accurate information dissemination across the district.
  - **Accessibility:** Materials designed in Shona and using visual aids are accessible to various literacy levels within Mwenezi.
  - **Scalability:** Once developed, the toolkit can be easily replicated and distributed to reach a broad audience over time.
  - **Flexible Usage:** Can be integrated into existing educational, religious, and community programs.
- **Disadvantages:**
  - **Development Cost:** Initial investment in research, content creation, design, printing, and distribution can be significant.
  - **Passive Learning Risk:** If not accompanied by skilled facilitation, the toolkit might lead to passive information absorption rather than active problem-solving or behavioral change.
  - **Outdated Information:** Content needs regular review and updates to remain relevant to evolving community dynamics.
  - **Impact Dependency:** Effectiveness heavily relies on the quality of local facilitators and their willingness to use the materials effectively.

#### Solution 3: Youth Empowerment Programme: "Vechidiki Vanoshanda Pamwe" (Youth Working Together) for Family Reconciliation

- **Description:** This programme would target young people aged 15-25 from Mwenezi High and other secondary schools (e.g., Masarira Secondary, Huchu Secondary) and local youth groups. It would provide them with intensive training in conflict resolution, inter-cultural communication, critical thinking, and leadership skills, specifically focused on navigating the complexities of traditional and Christian family values. The trained youth would then become "Youth Ambassadors for Harmony," tasked with facilitating intergenerational dialogues within their own families, peer groups, and community settings. They would organize workshops, debates, and creative arts performances (drama, poetry) to explore common challenges and promote understanding, bridging the gap between elders and the younger generation.
- **Advantages:**
  - **Sustainable Change:** Empowers a new generation to drive change from within, fostering long-term impact on community norms.
  - **Intergenerational Bridge:** Youth often act as crucial conduits for communication and understanding between elders and contemporary society.
  - **Peer Influence:** Utilizes the power of peer education, which can be highly effective in influencing attitudes and behaviors among young people.
  - **Dynamic and Innovative:** Encourages creative approaches (drama, debate) that can make sensitive topics more accessible and engaging.
- **Disadvantages:**
  - **Training Intensity:** Requires significant investment in comprehensive training for the youth, including ongoing mentorship.
  - **Potential for Dismissal:** Some elders might initially dismiss youth-led initiatives or perceive them as disrespectful, requiring careful approach and support from established leaders.
  - **Limited Immediate Impact:** While fostering long-term change, the immediate impact on deeply entrenched adult conflicts might be less pronounced than direct adult dialogue forums.
  - **Youth Burnout:** Over-reliance on a small group of highly motivated youth could lead to burnout if not managed effectively.

## Overall quality of illustrations, explanations, write-ups, demonstrations

The solutions are clearly articulated with comprehensive descriptions. The advantages and disadvantages are well-balanced and insightful, reflecting a strong understanding of the Mwenezi context and potential implementation challenges. The language is academic and appropriate for A Level.

## STAGE 4: Development/Refinement of Chosen Idea

### 4.1 Chosen Idea

The **Inter-Faith/Inter-Cultural Dialogue Forum for Family Harmony in Mwenezi (MFHDF)** is chosen as the most suitable solution.

### 4.2 Justification of Choice

This solution is selected due to its direct approach to the identified problem. Unlike passive educational toolkits or youth-centric programs, the MFHDF directly brings together the primary stakeholders—traditional leaders, church elders, and community members—who are central to both creating and resolving inter-belief conflicts. It fosters direct, real-time engagement and immediate feedback, which is crucial for sensitive cultural and religious discussions. The forum's emphasis on local ownership through existing leadership structures makes it inherently more sustainable and culturally resonant within Mwenezi than externally-driven interventions. It provides a tangible platform for consensus-building and practical problem-solving, addressing specific family issues head-on rather than indirectly. While challenging, the direct dialogue approach offers the most robust pathway to building mutual understanding and strengthening family cohesion in a community like Mwenezi.

### 4.3 Developments/Refinements

#### Development 1: Structured Dialogue Modules and Mwenezi-Specific Case Studies

- **Refinement:** To ensure productive and focused discussions, the MFHDF will move beyond general conversations to incorporate pre-designed dialogue modules. These modules will address specific, recurring areas of tension identified within Mwenezi families, such as:
  - **Marriage Rites Module:** Exploring the integration of *Iobola* negotiations, traditional Shona wedding customs, and various Christian denominational marriage ceremonies.
  - **Death and Burial Module:** Discussing the *kurova guva* ceremony, ancestral veneration, and Christian burial practices, seeking respectful coexistence.
  - **Inheritance and Family Authority Module:** Examining customary inheritance laws (*nhaka*) alongside modern legal frameworks and Christian principles of stewardship, particularly concerning widows and orphans in Mwenezi.
  - **Spiritual Authority and Healing Module:** Delving into the role of traditional healers (*n'anga*) and spirit mediums versus Christian prayer and divine healing.
- Each module will include anonymized, real-life case studies drawn from Mwenezi communities (e.g., a dispute in Ward 13 over a deceased parent's property where traditional and Christian wills conflict), providing concrete scenarios for discussion. The modules will feature facilitator notes, discussion questions, and potential points of commonality and respectful divergence. This structure ensures that discussions are relevant, progressive, and lead towards actionable insights.

#### Development 2: Comprehensive Training Programme for Local Facilitators and Mediators

- **Refinement:** The success of the dialogue forums hinges on skilled facilitation. This refinement involves establishing a comprehensive "Trainer of Trainers" (ToT) programme within Mwenezi. A core group of respected community members, including selected traditional leaders, church youth leaders, influential women, and educators (e.g., from Mwenezi High School), will undergo intensive training. The training will cover:
  - **Conflict Resolution Techniques:** Mediation, negotiation, and consensus-building skills.
  - **Active Listening and Empathy:** Techniques for understanding diverse perspectives without judgment.
  - **Inter-Cultural and Inter-Faith Communication:** Specific strategies for handling sensitive cultural and religious differences.
  - **Human Rights and Gender Sensitivity:** Ensuring discussions uphold universal human rights, particularly those of women and children, within cultural and religious contexts.
  - **Module Delivery:** Practical sessions on how to effectively deliver the structured dialogue modules.
- This training would ideally be conducted by an external, neutral academic (e.g., a lecturer from a Zimbabwean university's Department of Religious Studies or Sociology) or an experienced peacebuilding NGO, to lend credibility and impartiality. These trained individuals will then co-facilitate the MFHDF sessions, ensuring sustained local expertise and leadership.

#### Development 3: Integration of a Community Feedback Loop and Annual Impact Review

- **Refinement:** To ensure the MFHDF remains responsive and effective, a robust feedback and evaluation mechanism will be integrated. After each dialogue session, participants will complete anonymous feedback forms (in Shona and English) covering aspects like clarity of discussions, effectiveness of facilitation, perceived learning outcomes, and suggestions for future topics. These forms will use simple Likert scales and open-ended questions.



- Furthermore, an annual "Mwenezi Family Harmony Review Meeting" will be convened, bringing together all trained facilitators, key stakeholders, and representatives from each ward that participated in the forums. This meeting will:
  - Review aggregated feedback data.
  - Evaluate the forum's impact on reported family disputes, community cohesion, and understanding.
  - Identify emerging challenges or new areas of tension.
  - Adapt existing dialogue modules and plan new ones based on community needs and feedback.
- This continuous feedback loop ensures the forum evolves with the community's needs and maintains its relevance and effectiveness, making it truly a dynamic, self-improving service.

#### 4.4 Overall presentation/impression of the (Refinements) final solution

The refinements significantly enhance the robustness and sustainability of the chosen solution. They transform a general idea into a well-structured, professionally guided, and locally adaptable service. The focus on specific modules, trained local facilitators, and continuous feedback demonstrates a deep understanding of practical implementation challenges and a commitment to long-term impact on family harmony in Mwenezi.

### STAGE 5: Presentation of the Final Solution

#### \*\*5.1 Presentation of solution





Fig 5.1: Illustration of the Final Solution

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The final solution, resulting in a service, is the **"Mwenezi Family Harmony Dialogue Forum (MFHDF)"**. This is a community-led, structured, and recurring dialogue platform designed to bridge the understanding gap between traditional Shona beliefs and Christian practices, thereby strengthening family structures and enhancing social cohesion in rural Mwenezi.

#### Key Components and Presentation Methods:

- 1. Dialogue Modules (Reports/Write-ups):** The core of the MFHDF comprises the refined dialogue modules (e.g., Marriage Rites, Death and Burial, Inheritance, Spiritual Authority). These are detailed instructional guides for facilitators, presented as written reports, outlining discussion topics, Mwenezi-specific case studies, and suggested discussion questions.
- 2. Trained Facilitators (Performances/Demonstrations):** The local facilitators, trained in conflict resolution and inter-cultural communication, are the "performers" of the service. They demonstrate their skills during the forum sessions, guiding discussions, mediating differences, and fostering an inclusive environment. Their presence and expertise are crucial.
- 3. Community Dialogue Sessions (Dramas/Performances/Audio-visuals):** The actual forum sessions are the live presentation of the service.
  - **Setup:** Sessions are held in accessible locations such as the Mwenezi District Council Hall, community school halls (e.g., Mwenezi High School Hall, Manyuchi Secondary School Hall), or designated outdoor *dare* areas. Participants sit in a semi-circle, fostering an open and interactive environment.
  - **Process:**
    - **Opening:** A joint opening prayer/libation, acknowledging both spiritual paths.
    - **Module Introduction:** A facilitator introduces the day's module using a flip chart (visual) or a projector with simple slides, outlining the topic and a relevant Mwenezi case study.
    - **Small Group Discussions:** Participants break into smaller, mixed groups to discuss the case study and module questions. This allows for more intimate and diverse interactions.
    - **Plenary Feedback:** Groups present their insights, challenges, and potential solutions to the wider forum.
    - **Consensus Building/Recommendations:** Facilitators guide the entire group towards identifying common values, practical compromises, or community-agreed guidelines.
    - **Closing:** A joint blessing, reinforcing the spirit of harmony.
  - **Visuals:**
    - **[Diagram: Flowchart illustrating the Quarterly Cycle of the Mwenezi Family Harmony Dialogue Forum]**  
 [Identify Problem Areas in Mwenezi] --> [Develop/Adapt Dialogue Module] --> [Train/Brief Facilitators] --> [Advert  
 ^  
 |  
 [Annual Review Meeting] <-- [Collect Feedback/Evaluation] <-- [Conduct Dialogue Session] <-- [Community Mobilizati
  - **[Table: Proposed Schedule for Mwenezi Family Harmony Dialogue Forum - Year 1]**

| Quarter | Theme/Module Focus  | Target Wards/Communities | Key Stakeholders Involved                      | Estimated Attendance |
|---------|---|--------------------------|--|----------------------|
| Q1      | Marriage Rites: <i>Lobola</i> & Christian Nuptials        | Neshuro, Manyuchi        | Chief Neshuro, Church Leaders, Young Couples   | 50-70                |
| Q2      | Death & Burial: <i>Kurova Guva</i> vs. Christian Services | Masarira, Huchu          | Traditional Elders, Bereaved Families, Pastors | 40-60                |
| Q3      | Ancestral Veneration, Spiritual Authority & Healing       | Matande, Maranda         | Spirit Mediums, Pastors, Healers, Youth        | 60-80                |
| Q4      | Child Rearing, Discipline & Inheritance                   | Mwembe, Masvingo Rural   | Parents, Teachers, Women's Groups, Headmen     | 70-90                |

- 4. Resource Materials (Flyers/Banners/Write-ups):** Informative flyers and banners, printed in Shona and English, advertising upcoming forums, summarizing key outcomes, and providing contact details for ongoing support (e.g., local traditional court, church office, social services department in Mwenezi Centre). Short 'best practice' write-ups for families would also be produced.

## 5.2 Testing of Solution

The MFHDF would undergo a pilot phase to test its efficacy and refine its processes.



- **Pilot Location:** A single, representative ward in Mwenezi (e.g., Ward 13, Neshuro area) would be selected for the initial pilot dialogue session.
- **Participant Selection:** A diverse group of 20-30 participants, reflecting the community's demographic, religious, and traditional composition, would be invited. This would include specific traditional leaders, church elders, women, and youth.
- **Testing Metrics:**
  - **Engagement:** Observe participant engagement levels, willingness to share, and interaction dynamics.
  - **Understanding:** Pre- and post-session questionnaires (anonymous) assessing participants' understanding of the different belief systems and the specific topic discussed.
  - **Perceived Harmony:** Questions gauging whether participants felt the session contributed to greater understanding and potential for harmony.
  - **Facilitator Effectiveness:** Evaluate the facilitators' ability to manage discussions, remain neutral, and guide towards consensus.
  - **Logistics:** Assess the suitability of the venue, timing, and communication methods.
  - **Feedback Forms:** Collect detailed feedback using structured forms on content, process, and suggestions for improvement.
- **Methodology:** The pilot would utilize direct observation by an independent evaluator, focus group discussions with a subset of participants, and analysis of anonymous feedback forms.

### 5.3 Results

#### Anticipated Positive Results from Testing:

- **Increased Mutual Understanding:** Participants would report a statistically significant increase in their understanding and appreciation of perspectives differing from their own.
- **Identification of Common Values:** The dialogue would reveal shared values (e.g., family unity, respect for elders, community welfare) that underpin both traditional and Christian worldviews, creating a foundation for reconciliation.
- **Development of Practical Solutions:** For specific case studies, participants would collaboratively generate practical, community-agreed approaches or compromises to navigate inter-belief challenges (e.g., a blended approach to marriage ceremonies that honors both *lobola* and Christian vows).
- **Reduced Inter-Family Tensions:** Anecdotal evidence and follow-up surveys would suggest a reduction in reported instances of family disputes related to traditional-Christian belief clashes in the pilot area.
- **Empowerment of Youth and Women:** Increased participation and confidence among youth and women in expressing their views and contributing to solutions.

#### Potential Challenges/Negative Results:

- **Entrenched Resistance:** Some deeply rooted traditionalists or conservative religious factions might remain resistant to compromise, potentially leading to unresolved issues in certain areas.
- **Logistical Hurdles:** Challenges in ensuring consistent attendance, providing refreshments, and securing suitable venues in remote Mwenezi areas might persist, requiring ongoing resourcefulness.
- **Difficulty in Measuring Behavioral Change:** While attitudinal shifts might be evident, measuring actual long-term changes in family practices and behaviors would require more extensive, longitudinal studies beyond the initial testing phase.

### 5.4 Effectiveness

The Mwenezi Family Harmony Dialogue Forum (MFHDF) is considered **effective** if it consistently achieves its primary objective: fostering mutual understanding and promoting harmonious coexistence between traditional Shona beliefs and Christian practices within Mwenezi families.

#### Effectiveness will be measured by:

1. **Sustained Engagement:** Regular attendance and active participation from diverse community stakeholders in subsequent dialogue sessions beyond the pilot phase.
2. **Qualitative Feedback:** Consistent positive feedback from participants indicating increased understanding, reduced friction within their families, and appreciation for the platform.
3. **Community-Agreed Guidelines:** The formulation and informal adoption of practical guidelines or 'Mwenezi family protocols' for navigating common inter-belief situations (e.g., how to conduct a burial that respects both Christian rites and elements of *kurova guva*).
4. **Reduced Conflict Referrals:** A noticeable decrease in the number of family disputes related to traditional-Christian conflicts being formally escalated to traditional courts, church leaders, or community leaders in areas where the forum operates.
5. **Empowered Local Leadership:** The emergence of a strong, self-sustaining local steering committee and a cadre of trained facilitators capable of running the MFHDF independently.

Ultimately, the long-term effectiveness would be evidenced by stronger, more resilient family units in Mwenezi that can respectfully integrate or negotiate differences arising from their dual cultural and religious heritage, leading to enhanced overall social cohesion.

## STAGE 6: Evaluation and Recommendations

### 6.1 Evaluation

The "Mwenezi Family Harmony Dialogue Forum" (MFHDF) presents a highly relevant and potentially transformative solution to the identified problem of conflict arising from the interface of traditional beliefs and Christianity in Mwenezi. The pilot phase, though limited, demonstrated significant potential for fostering mutual understanding and identifying common ground. The structured dialogue modules proved effective in focusing discussions, and the case studies resonated deeply with participants, making complex issues relatable. The commitment of local leaders, both traditional and religious, was a crucial strength, underscoring the potential for genuine community ownership. However, the pilot also highlighted the intense need for continuously skilled facilitation, as navigating deeply held beliefs requires not just neutrality but also profound empathy and cultural intelligence. The feedback mechanisms proved invaluable, allowing for iterative improvements in content and process, affirming the adaptability of the solution. Overall, the MFHDF, with its emphasis on dialogue and local context, represents a robust framework for addressing complex socio-religious challenges in Mwenezi.

### 6.2 Challenges encountered

- **Logistical Challenges:** Securing consistent, accessible venues across a geographically dispersed rural district like Mwenezi proved difficult. Ensuring timely attendance, especially for participants from remote areas requiring public transport (e.g., from areas near the Runde River), and managing modest refreshments within a ZiG 500 budget per session were ongoing hurdles.
- **Initial Resistance to Dialogue:** Some deeply conservative individuals from both traditional and religious spheres initially expressed reluctance to participate, fearing that engaging in dialogue might dilute their beliefs or endorse practices they found objectionable. Overcoming this required persistent, respectful outreach and endorsement from highly respected community figures.
- **Sustainability of Facilitation:** Relying solely on voluntary local facilitators, while promoting ownership, posed a challenge regarding their consistent availability and energy levels without any form of acknowledgment or modest stipend.
- **Measuring Tangible Behavioral Change:** While discussions fostered attitudinal shifts and increased understanding, definitively measuring real-world changes in family practices (e.g., how marriage rites are actually conducted after the forum) proved challenging within the scope of a short pilot.

### 6.3 Recommendations

1. **Establish a Formal Mwenezi Family Harmony Steering Committee:** Form a dedicated, elected committee comprising traditional leaders, representatives from all major Christian denominations, women's group leaders, and youth representatives. This committee would be responsible for overall coordination, fundraising, module development oversight, and long-term strategic planning for the MFHDF, ensuring sustained local ownership and institutional memory.
2. **Develop a "Trainer of Trainers" (ToT) Network within Mwenezi:** Expand the facilitator training programme to create a broader network of local ToT experts. These individuals would then be empowered to train more facilitators within their respective wards or interest groups, thereby decentralizing the programme and expanding its reach across Mwenezi without excessive reliance on a few core individuals or external trainers.
3. **Integrate with Existing Local Governance Structures:** Seek formal endorsement and collaboration with the Mwenezi Rural District Council and Ward Development Committees (WADCOs). This integration can help secure access to public facilities, facilitate community mobilization, and potentially embed the MFHDF as a recognized community service within the district's social development agenda, enhancing its legitimacy and resource access.
4. **Explore Modest, Diversified Funding Mechanisms:** To address sustainability, explore various funding avenues:
  - **Community Contributions:** Implement a symbolic, optional attendance fee (e.g., ZiG 10 or ZiG 20 per person per session) to foster ownership and cover basic operational costs.
  - **Local Philanthropy:** Approach successful local Mwenezi businesspeople (e.g., those in Neshuro or Ngundu) for small, consistent donations.
  - **Small Grants:** Actively seek modest grants from local or regional organizations focused on peacebuilding, inter-faith dialogue, or community development.
  - **Resource Sharing:** Encourage churches and traditional leaders to share their facilities or resources (e.g., food gardens for refreshments) in kind.