

Facilitators' Handbook

Maize Plant Discipleship
MPD-HB (Version 0.1.11 – Author's draft)

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Maize Plant Discipleship Facilitators' Handbook
A Series of Discipleship Manuals Designed for Use in African Contexts

I tell you that unless a grain of wheat that falls to the ground
dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest
– John 12:24

In this Handbook

This *Facilitators' Handbook* provides guidelines for people facilitating group exploration, study and discussion, using *Maize Plant Discipleship* resources.

- **Discipleship** (chapter 2) explores biblical and missional perspectives of Christian discipleship.
- **Africa and MPD** (chapter 3) explains the background to the development of Maize Plant Discipleship as a resource for use in African contexts.
- **MPD Syllabus** (chapter 4) introduces the metaphor of the maize plant and the sixteen modules of the *MPD Syllabus*.
- **Facilitating MPD** (chapter 5) provides practical insights and suggestions for facilitating group learning.
- **Publishing MPD** (chapter 6) examines practical issues relating to publication, including: licensing, translation, printing, distribution and economics.

CHAPTER 2

Discipleship

Go and make people from all nations into disciples, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you—*Jesus, Matthew 28:19-20*

Discipleship is the process of making disciples who themselves will also make other disciples. In a family where there is no birth there will be no continuity, so a church without disciples will not live for a long time. However, all church members are not disciples, yet the very objective is to make every believer a disciple. A mere believer is far from a disciple—*Burkinabé Pastor D. Ayoro, 2010, cited in Clements, 2013*

2.1 What is discipleship?

What is the primary principle of messianic discipleship? I believe it is set forth most clearly by the missionary apostle, Paul, when he writes these words in his second letter addressed to his own disciple, Timothy. Words containing clear echoes of Jesus' words, in Matthew 28:

Keep safe the great treasure that has been entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us... and the things you heard from me, which were supported by many witnesses, these commit to faithful people, such as will be competent to teach others—2 *Timothy* 1.14 and 2.2

Here we encounter two vital aspects of messianic discipleship. Firstly, the knowledge of the Messiah is not a matter of human knowledge or philosophy: it is a spiritual reality, a divine relationship, mediated by the Holy Spirit. Secondly, this spiritual treasure has been entrusted to us and must be kept safe with the help of the Holy Spirit—by entrusting it to other, faithful followers.

Safe-keeping

This safekeeping does not imply trying to preserve our treasure by hiding it away. Rather, this treasure—of intimate, personal knowledge of and relationship with the Messiah—is to be kept safe by *carefully committing it to the stewardship and safekeeping of other faithful people*. Paradoxically, it is this committal of our treasure to others that keeps it safe, that keeps it from becoming unproductive.

Let us seek to understand this more deeply.

Seed and harvest

The metaphor of seed, and the harvest that comes from seed sown into the ground, is central to *Maize Plant Discipleship* (section 4.1). In agricultural contexts, seeds are a form of wealth, a type of treasure. Yet seed is generally stored only for a short time before being used. Whatever is not used for food—for *daily bread*—must soon be sown to produce another harvest.

In the same way, we discover that God is able to supply spiritual life to us: the *treasure* of experientially knowing the Messiah, in our daily living. This experience of being alive to God, experiencing the grace of the Messiah and the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control of the Holy Spirit, is the spiritual equivalent of *daily bread*.

Merely enjoying God's life for ourselves is, however, not the whole purpose of our relationship with him. In fact, as we will explore in this resource, the Messianic, New Covenant Community (the whole body of

the Messiah's people) has been called to know God in order to become his *Servant Community*. This means that we are called to give ourselves, our lives *to serve his purposes*. This requires discipline and sacrifice. That is what it means to be a *disciple*.

And this sacrificial, disciplined giving of ourselves in service to God is the equivalent of taking precious seed that could be used for food, for ourselves, and sowing it into the ground in order to produce another harvest.

Sharing treasure

This is one of the secrets to living a truly *Messianic* life, alive to God, which many people seem never to properly discover or experience. It is not in hoarding the treasure of our knowledge, relationship and communion with God, but in sowing and sharing it with others, both within and beyond our own communities, that we encounter our vocation and authentic being.

Yet, while a farmer recognises that some seed may fall onto rocky or difficult ground, it is never his intention to sow the seed wastefully. In the same way, our spiritual treasure is not to be wasted or cast away carelessly. It is too precious to be squandered upon those who do not appreciate its value and will not use it wisely.

What is received must be shared with other people who are beginning to recognise its worth and value: its transformative power. This is what the parable calls good soil. People who will themselves be transformed through a personal knowledge and experience of the Messiah and who will continue to keep this treasure safe, by sowing it into more good soil: sharing it with other faithful people, who in turn, share it with other faithful people and so on and so on. *In this simple, straightforward way, a missional, discipleship movement begins to take place.*

2.2 Discipleship movements

The formation of faithful disciples was at the heart of the Messiah Jesus' life and work. The whole Christian movement, which today is spreading significantly throughout the whole world, began with one small, core group of disciples, formed around Jesus.

Discipling movements have the potential to change the world. Leaders, money, books and power all have their places within radical, popular

movements. But, in a world in which people are continually effected by corporate experiences that are larger than the individual, it is people-movements that are most capable of producing deep, wide, enduring change.

Two things are essential to transformative people movements: *vision* and *the formation of disciples*. Visionary leaders must impart a hope that is powerful, challenging and instrumental. A vision capable of gripping the hearts of others and forming them into faithful, active disciples.

- Disciples committed to significant transformation.
- Disciples willing to work endlessly to turn vision into reality.
- Disciples who pursue their work as *co-workers*, rather than selfishly-ambitious *individuals*.
- Disciples who reproduce other faithful, active disciples, continually sharing the work, values and hopes of the vision.

In this way a visionary, discipling movement is developed. A movement of focussed, visionary, dynamic people. People deeply and profoundly allied to a vision, a cause and a purpose that is larger than themselves.

Transforming nations

During the past two-thousand years, the messianic, new-covenant community has grown and developed through precisely this sort of dynamism. From its origins as an obscure, tiny, Jewish sect it has grown into an international, intercultural, multi-ethnic community, now existing, in some way or another, in practically every nation of the world.

As this community has spread out, it has significantly transformed the history of many of those nations and will transform many more in the days and years that are ahead. This dynamism can be traced to the Christian community operating as a movement of disciples, continually spreading out across geographical, social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural boundaries.

Cessation of movement

Nevertheless, in certain seasons, in certain places, this dynamism has ceased to exist. A church planted within a nation or culture, in a former season, is no longer growing and multiplying.

Inevitably, behind its religious facades, such a church is marked by a lack of vision, a loss of communal vitality and a spirituality that has lost touch with its holy roots. Traditions, which may not be bad in themselves, have replaced the vitality of a living, reproducing body of people. Even though its religious institutions may remain dogmatic towards their creeds, the Christian community itself no longer exhibits authentic, biblical zeal for its vocation: its call to serve God's purpose amongst the nations.

In practice, such a church or community has become un-critical in its engagement with the societies and cultures in which it lives. Its testimony is compromised by idolatrous values. Its lifestyle is accommodated to ungodly influences. It has ceased to be different, ceased to be transformative, ceased making a significant, discernible impact upon its social, material, political and cultural environments.

In this case, the church has ceased to be a *movement*. Invariably, it has ceased making disciples. It lacks the confidence to persuade either itself or others to forsake human idols and to wholehearted ally itself and themselves to the Messiah.

Renewal

By contrast, whenever a messianic community—be it a national or regional church, local congregation—seeks for spiritual renewal, reformation or revival, messianic, visionary discipleship must be at the core of its activity and spirituality.

Disciples must be invited, formed and sent forth as part of a *world-facing* movement. The goal is much more than the maintenance of the church-as-an-organisation, greater even than serving-one-another, as part of messianic community. The goal is to be part of a movement of people *serving God's purposes within the world* and its societies.

At its core, the messianic, new-covenant community is a movement of disciples called to serve God's eternal purpose, amongst

a world of lost, hurting, confused, oppressed, fear-filled, idol-bound populations.

- *Out there*, beyond congregational gatherings, among the corruption of society, among its filthy gutters, behind its social, political and religious walls, the Messiah is at work by his Spirit.
- *Out there* he is calling co-workers to come alongside him in his work of redemption and transformation: of individuals, families, marriages, partnerships, communities, organisations, structures, workplaces and working practices.
- *Out there* is where Christian disciples need to bring the light of Christ. Out there, amongst the people of the world, Christ's disciples are the light of the world.

Anointed community

To make possible such an otherwise impossibly-high calling, messianic discipleship provides a unique ingredient that no other philosophy, ideology and faith can provide: the dynamic of the indwelling Spirit of the Messiah.

Through the Spirit, the new-covenant community is transformed into a charismatic community. A group of people endowed with spiritual gifts that are profoundly shaped to liberate human beings from idolatry and every other allegiance and falsehood that competes and sets itself against God and the knowledge of him.

Charismatic derives from a Greek word, *charism*, meaning *gift of the Spirit*. Biblically speaking, the *charisma* of the Christian community comes from its anointing. Messiah, or Christ, essentially means *Anointed One*. The One Anointed with the Spirit.

Thus, the Messianic Community is a body of people anointed with the fragrant oil, or presence, of the Holy Spirit, having been brought under God's authority, through baptism into the Messiah. It is a body learning to walk in the footsteps of Jesus: learning to exercise its God-appointed mediatory, intercessory role, under the direction of the Spirit of God.

This community of disciples is a messianic, charismatic people called into covenant relationship with the Father, through the Son and sent into the world to bless the nations in the power of the Spirit!

Life... through death

God's intention is that this messianic, charismatic, covenant community co-works in partnership with him, using the strength, the power, the spiritual life, the anointing that he provides.

Too often though, that power, that anointed-life-of-Christ-within-us, seems to elude us. It seems out of our reach. Beyond our grasp.

Indeed, it is not something that can be *grasped*, as Jesus himself demonstrated. Instead, the pathway to life is through dying. That is the message of the cross. Only to the extent that we *die to ourselves*, do we truly become *alive to God*.

Thus we end where we began, with the foundational principle of transformative discipleship: the seed sown into the ground, in order to produce a harvest.

I tell you that unless a grain of wheat that falls to the ground dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest—John 12.24

This life-giving spiritual reality is at the heart of Jesus' own life, mission, ministry and pain-filled death. And this same principle forms the foundation and wellspring of Maize Plant Discipleship: as we embrace a practical form of discipleship, incorporating a daily dying-to-self, we learn how to truly become alive-to-God.

That is the heart of Maize Plant Discipleship.

CHAPTER 3

Africa and MPD

...Africanness and correctness should not be measured in either dissimilarity or similarity to the West. The way forward is to measure the Africanness of any theology purporting to be African by the degree to which it speaks to the needs of African's in their total context. Quite naturally the needs of African Christians should be taken seriously when determining these needs – *Tite Tienou, The Uphill Road: Indigenous African Christian Theologies, 1990*

With this program (of Maize Plant Discipleship)... from what we see, people who offered their reaction, in my culture there is a saying that goes like this:

*When the sauce is tasty, you draw closer your stool,
nearer to the table, to eat!!*

So, from the teaching we have received from you, it just gives us a flavour! – *Pastor Samuel Yaldia, cited in: Facilitating A Renewal of Discipleship Praxis Amongst Burkinabé Leaders and Learners, Clements, 2013*

3.1 Introduction

Maize Plant Discipleship is a training and learning resource that has been authored, written, taught, researched, formulated, revised and published with African leaders and learners in heart, mind and prayer at each point of it's development.

It originated as a *Mobile Academy of Mission*, taught itinerantly in Kenya and Burkina Faso.¹ As author and teacher, my goal was to emulate the apostolic model of mission by

Taking the teacher to the leaders, rather than bringing the leaders to the teacher, saving the precious resources of those least able to spare them.

Recently, the resource has been developed as the subject of doctoral missiological research, in conjunction with Fuller School of Intercultural Studies, following which it has been reformulated, in order to better serve the needs of missional leaders and learners within Burkina Faso, West Africa.

Beginnings

The origins of Maize Plant Discipleship are rooted in my own, personal experiences, which began amongst an international, Pentecostal missional community and network, in 1988. In that context, a personal calling to invest time seeking God in prayer led to involvement with a team of people who met regularly to intercede for God's purposes amongst the nations of the world.

What took place amongst us may be described an intense, Spirit-led intercession that continued, in that way, for over a decade. Throughout, I exhaustively journaled words, shared between the group, of scripture, prayer, prophecy, inspiration, exhortation, encouragement and wisdom, many of which informed or inspired insights now incorporated within the Maize Plant Discipleship syllabus.

The Africa factor

Over time, a steady stream of African leaders, training or studying in the UK, joined with our prayer fellowship, almost invariably reporting how

¹As well as being trialled in Texas, USA and Wales, UK.

spiritually *at home* they felt with us. Later, back in Africa, memories of our shared experiences in prayer prompted them to invite me to visit and teach in their contexts.

The first opportunity to do so came in 2000, through a former prayer team member working in Nakuru, Kenya. There, I presented five days of seminars on prayer, intercession and mission, which were received with considerable enthusiasm and appreciation. Afterwards, participants remarked not only upon a uniqueness of insight, but also the spirit of love, in which it was delivered.

Burkina Faso

The next stage of development came through a series of visits to Burkina Faso, between 2003 and 2008, during which I taught various conferences of leaders and learners:

- In Léo: bible school students, pastors, church-planters and trainees, many of whom were living in missionary contexts, within Muslim-dominant villages.
- In Ouagadougou: associates of a national youth movement, incorporating university students, graduates, post-graduates, office workers and other young people.

Having established that a genuine spiritual dynamic was taking place, in 2008, I asked Burkinabé associates how I might make the resource more accessible and useful. They requested that I institute a regular training program *and* make my teaching notes available in textbooks.

3.2 Doctoral research

Between 2009 and 2013, I undertook doctoral research, guided by *Fuller School of Intercultural Studies*, with a view to analysing the practicality, relevance and accessibility of my discipleship training resource from an intercultural and scriptural perspective.

My field research involved collecting data through a series of survey questionnaires, group interviews (discussion forums) and individual, in-depth interviews. In total, over seventy Burkinabé participants were consulted, a significant number of whom were national and, or denominational leaders, with significant experience of and responsibility for Burkinabé leadership training and development.

Findings

The application of qualitative data analysis methods, to my collected data, revealed a number of significant findings or themes.

1. Participants identified strongly with the concept of discipleship and a need to freshly embrace *holistic, disciple-forming practices*.²
2. Participants consistently validated the theological content of my prototype training resource as *appropriate to Burkinabé contexts*, highlighting its biblical content, practical focus and cultural sensitivity.
3. Participants identified that contextually-appropriate teaching needed to incorporate: consistent use of graphical and analogical illustration; adequate time for reflection; discussion-based learning modes.
4. Participants expressed a hunger for appropriate literature to enhance biblical, Christian understanding. Textbooks are viewed as a much-needed accompaniment to leadership training, ideally tailored to facilitate (literate) leaders who work in oral contexts.
5. Participants identified a potential for translating appropriate textbooks into minority African languages, but highlighted significant logistical issues (printing, promoting, distributing) involved in making text-books practical and accessible.

These data analysis findings were combined with contextual missiological study to define the attributes of a training resource appropriate to Burkinabé leaders and learners.³ These attributes were then used to form the Maize Plant Discipleship syllabus and resource handbooks, in order to ensure that it is *practical, relevant and accessible*.

²In the Burkinabé context, discipleship seems to be appreciated as a concept imbued with dynamism. A dynamism driven by a sense of inward, personal responsibility, combined with a sense of outward, shared, communal responsibility. A responsibility to pass on the spiritual and practical disciplines of vitality, such as grace, knowledge, wisdom and maturity. Discipleship also helpfully blurs hard edges between formally-trained leadership and informally-trained workers.

³Visit: <http://jbclements.wordpress.com/missiology> for further details of my doctoral research, including access to the entire dissertation.

Practical

Being practical means encouraging and facilitating a focus upon purposeful actions—rather than classroom theorising.

1. Encouraging contextual insiders' ownership of the responsibility to serve God's eternal purpose, amongst their generation.
2. Promoting lifelong commitment to missional discipline and action.
3. Envisioning personal, communal, cultural transformation.
4. Emphasising the necessity of continuous, generational formation of disciples.

Relevant

Being relevance requires an incorporation of qualities and characteristics appropriate to contextual culture.

1. Providing a biblically faithful, missional theology, integrated with Pentecostal spirituality.
2. Employing short, topical, illustrative, pictorial, *handbook* publishing format.
3. Facilitating group discussion and reflective learning.
4. Facilitating contextual adaption, especially for oral contexts.

Accessible

Being accessible requires lowering or removing barriers that could hinder access to the curriculum.

1. Sensitive to the linguistic and conceptual comprehension of African readers, for whom French and English may not be their mother-tongue languages.
2. Facilitating translation into vernacular languages.
3. Distributing with a free-at-source license, which licences publication and reproduction of MPD handbooks.

4. Discriminating, where possible and appropriate, in favour of the economically poor.

Continuous improvement

If, after you have examined and used MPD resources, you think we can improve upon these attributes, or our application of them, please contact us, via the MPD website:

- <http://maizeplantdiscipleship.wordpress.com/contact>⁴
-

⁴<http://maizeplantdiscipleship.wordpress.com/contact>

4

CHAPTER

MPD Syllabus

John 12:24 I tell you that unless a grain of wheat that falls to the ground dies, it stays just a grain; but if it dies, it produces a big harvest – Jesus

Paul, 2 Corinthians 9:10 May he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness

4.1 Maize Plant Metaphor

In the gospel of John, Jesus refers to his own mission using the metaphor of a seed that enters the ground and dies, in order to produce a large harvest. Grown throughout sub-Saharan Africa, the maize plant provides a similar, highly recognisable metaphor.

Maize represents the “daily bread” of millions of African people. The messianic community is called, like the Messiah, to become a kind of “life-giving bread” to the peoples of the world—see John 6 & 20:21.

The Maize Plant Discipleship Syllabus is structured to symbolically reflect the metaphor of a maize plant. There are three main components to the metaphor.

1. Soil and roots (section 4.1)

representing the biblical, covenantal community, context and vocation of Israel, from which emerges...

2. Maize plant (section 4.1)

representing the dynamic spiritual growth and multiplication of messianic community, which is fuelled by...

3. Sunlight and rainfall (section 4.1)

representing essential spiritual disciplines, which stimulate and sustain the growth of messianic community.

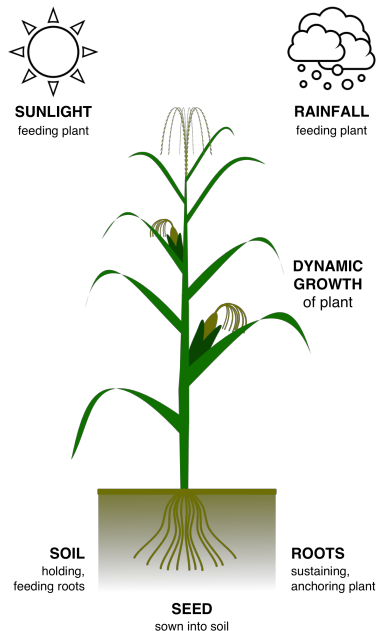


Figure 4.1: Maize Plant Metaphor

Soil and roots

Only seed sown into good soil produces a good harvest. Discipleship communities also need to be rooted in good soil. This allows us to draw on essential, spiritual nutrients and the living water of the Messiah's Spirit, anchoring us against winds of false teaching and sustaining us amidst the heat of trials, temptations and vocational responsibility.

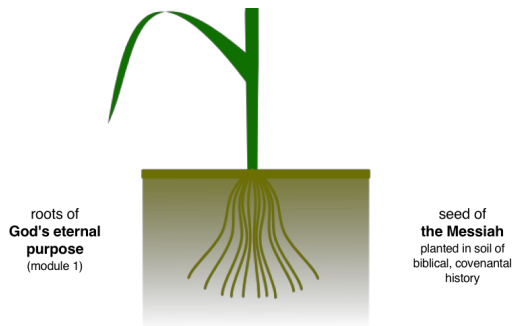


Figure 4.2: Roots

MPD-M1 – Eternal Purpose

Module 1 of Maize Plant Discipleship–MPD-M1¹–provides a study of the biblical, Hebraic soil and messianic roots of new-covenant faith.

It does this by gradually unfolding a panoramic overview of the whole story of scripture, representing God's unchanging, eternal purpose.

Within this foundational illustration, the Messiah represent *the Seed* which enters the soil (of the biblical, covenantal history of the people of Israel) in order to die and to ultimately produce a rich harvest of people—a messianic covenant community, from amongst all the peoples of the earth.

¹MPD-Mn refers to *Maize Plant Discipleship–Module n*, where n = module number.

Maize plant

The maize plant represents the central component of the MPD metaphor. The MPD Syllabus uses the word *dynamic* to refer to the unique processes that stimulate the growth and multiplication of the messianic community.

The word *dynamic* comes from a Greek word, *dunamis*, meaning power. It refers to a force that stimulates change or progress within a system or process.

The *dynamics* of a maize plant refer to the unique forces stimulating its characteristic development, growth, structure, shape and fruit.

Thus, the *dynamics of messianic community* refer to the unique characteristics that stimulate its characteristic development, growth, structure, shape and fruit.

MPD-M2 to MPD-M9 explore eight characteristic *dynamics* of messianic, covenant community.

MPD-M2 – Dynamics of Vocation – Nations

MPD-M2 examines the historical development the Messianic Community's vocational mission to bless the nations of the world.

MPD-M3 – Dynamics of Vocation – Jews

MPD-M3 examines biblical Israel, in order to demonstrate the significant responsibilities of the Messianic Community with regard to the Jewish people.

MPD-M4 – Dynamics of Commissioning

MPD-M4 explores the dynamic of messianic commissioning, including a focus upon strategy, structures and modes of expansion.

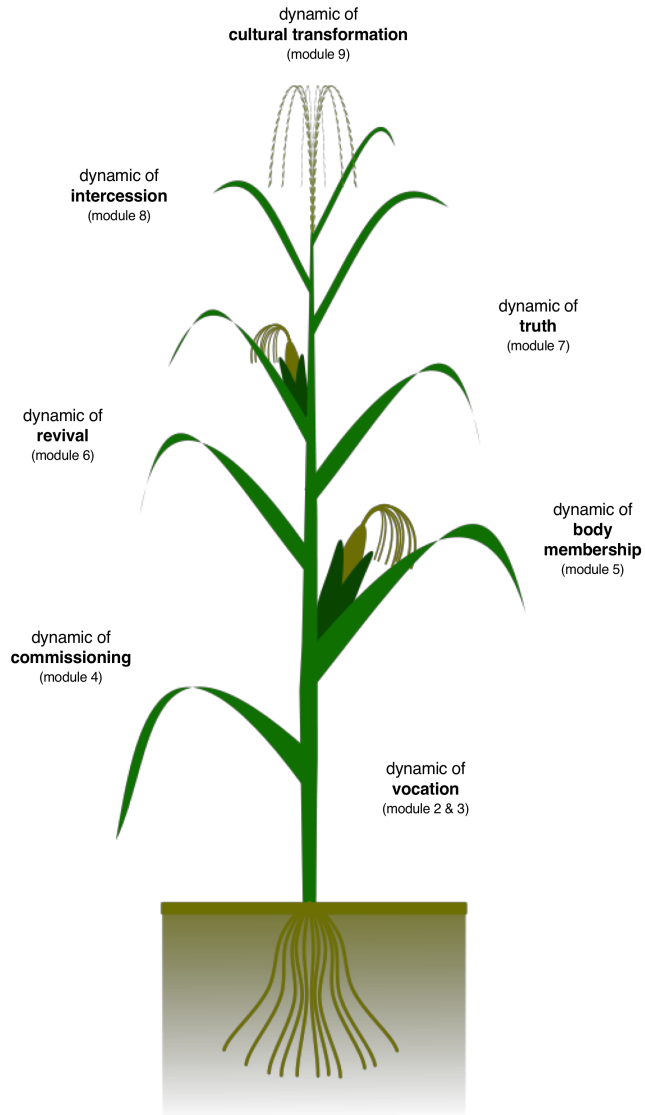


Figure 4.3: Maize plant dynamics

MPD-M5 – Dynamics of Body Membership

MPD-M5 explores basic patterns of membership, commitment and spiritual maturity within the body of the Messiah.

MPD-M6 – Dynamics of Revival

MPD-M6 reveals a cycle of spiritual activities representing the dynamics of revival, which lead to a spiritual harvest.

MPD-M7 – Dynamics of Truth

MPD-M7 explores our encounter with truth, as we learn to walk in practical, covenantal faithfulness towards God's revelation and wisdom.

MPD-M8 – Dynamics of Intercession

MPD-M8 explores the priestly vocation of the Messianic Community as *a house of prayer for all nations*.

MPD-M9 – Dynamics of Cultural Transformation

MPD-M9 examines our call to work towards cultural transformations that signal the presence of God's kingdom, as we live amongst and on behalf of the nations.

Sunlight and rainfall

Sunlight and rainfall represent essential spiritual *disciplines* that fuel the growth of messianic community.

Continuing the metaphor of the maize plant: *sunlight* and *rainfall* represent *messianic disciplines* capable of opening us to the revelatory light and living water of God's Spirit, by which the Messianic Community is sustained—and without which we become spiritually weak and unable to produce good fruit or a plentiful harvest.

- MPD-M10 to MPD-M16 examine seven characteristic *disciplines* of messianic community.

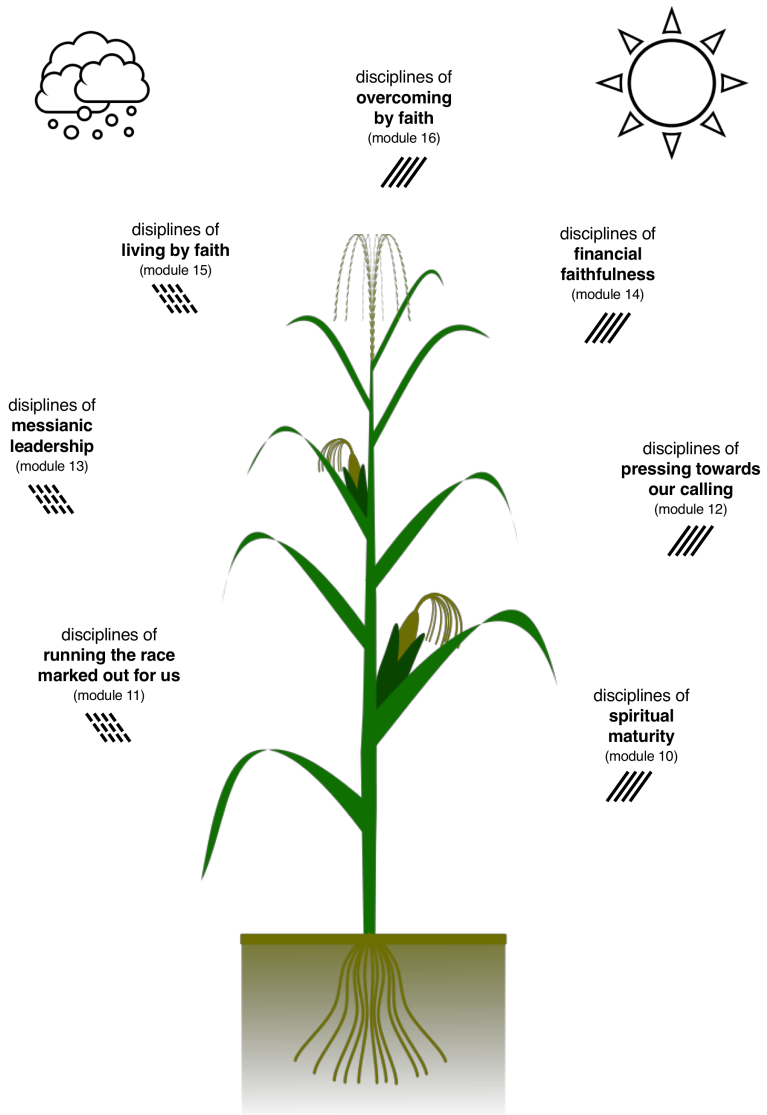


Figure 4.4: Sunlight and rainfall

MPD-M10 – Disciplines of Spiritual Maturity

MPD-M10 explores three stages of encounter, discovery and growth in spiritual maturity and vocational equipping: the pastoral, devotional stage; the missional, vocational stage and the apostolic, intercessory stage.

MPD-M11 – Disciplines of Running the Race

MPD-M11 uses the metaphor of an athlete to examine the qualifications, disciplines and inner motivations necessary for living an enduring life of service and completing *the race marked out for us*.

MPD-M12 – Disciplines of Pressing Toward Our Vocation

MPD-M12 explores how we can be sustained in our personal vocations through a deepening of our relationship with the Messiah and a lifestyle of *prayer without ceasing*.

MPD-M13 – Disciplines of Financial Faithfulness

MPD-M13 study explores financial faithfulness, in the context of covenant relationship and messianic community, highlighting biblical perspectives of wealth and poverty that are radically different to those of the world.

MPD-M14 – Disciplines of Messianic Leadership

MPD-M14 examines the qualifications, motivations and characteristics that represent the true marks of faithful messianic leadership and explores a model of leadership that balances achieving missional tasks, building missional teams and developing missional individuals.

MPD-M15 – Disciplines of Living by Faith

MPD-M15 explores how messianic faith is tested and purified through trials, until we learn to see with eyes of faith, so that major challenges no longer represent threats from which to retreat, but instead represent opportunities to experience God's covenant faithfulness.

MPD-M16 – Disciplines of Overcoming

MPD-M16 employs the analogy of a sporting arena to represent the reality of spiritual confrontation and conflict with cultural idols and strongholds, in response to which we need to discern fresh, strategic direction, in order to make room for a transformative encounter with God's overcoming power!

4.2 MPD Handbooks

Maize Plant Discipleship handbooks are principally designed to facilitate group learning and discussion, based upon a series of scripture readings and topical studies.

- Each Handbook, or Module, incorporates 4 interrelated *Studies*.
- Each Study incorporates a *précis*, scripture readings, three to five topical sections and a summary.
- Each Study has a corresponding set of questions to facilitate group discussions, either topic-by-topic (section-by-section), or upon completion of the entire study (chapter).

Accordingly, the use of Maize Plant Discipleship resources do not rely upon the presence of a qualified leader, teacher, or theologian, only upon *facilitators* willing to co-ordinate study groups and discussions – see *Facilitating MPD* (chapter 5).

CHAPTER 5

Facilitating MPD

...the word of God increased; and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith—Acts 1.6–7

I have received a valuable teaching which I would like to use to impact the life of people in my neighbourhood and in my church. I would like to see this teaching be the flame of the Spirit of God which will help the ministry to grow more—Pastor Benao, 2010

5.1 Discipleship groups

Maize Plant Discipleship is designed to facilitate the self-learning of self-reproducing discipleship groups.

This doesn't mean these studies can't be used for congregational teaching, or devotional study, or within theological and leadership training centres. If you're using the MPD textbooks in these contexts, why not think about how you could incorporate discipleship and discussion groups?

Freedom to multiply

Why focus upon discipleship groups, rather than church growth strategy? Let's remind ourselves of the foundational principle of biblical discipleship:

Keep safe the great treasure entrusted to us by sharing it with others who will be faithful to the teaching and in sharing it with others.

For discipleship to fulfil its potential, it is essential that disciples find effective ways to be involved in the formation of other disciples. One straightforward way is to encourage discipleship groups to multiply.

When authentic, biblical discipleship takes place in a particular context, the enthusiasm generated creates pressure to move outwards into other contexts, to share experiences, insights and invite others to become disciples.

- For some people, this pressure is released as they share the fruit of their discipleship within their homes, communities and workplaces. Environments in which they can begin influencing others towards being authentic disciples of the Messiah, through existing bonds of friendship, family or working relationships, without forming a discipleship group.
- For others, the pressure they feel will only be released as they step out and themselves facilitate fresh discipleship groups. It is important to encourage and not discourage those who feel called to this. This is how multiplication takes place.

Failure to multiply

If multiplication isn't allowed to happen, two things happen. Firstly, the enthusiasm and fresh experiences of discipleship fails to be converted into fruitful, practical expressions of love and faithfulness. If freshly-disciplined people are not encouraged and facilitated to move outwards and make disciples, what they have learned becomes theoretical and the generated momentum is easily wasted.

It also risks inflaming selfish ambition. This happens when disciples aspiring to positions of leadership and prominence begin to compete against each other to demonstrate whom is the more committed (see,

for example, Mark 10:26–45). If they are able to move outwards, into new contexts, this energy is dissipated more beneficially.

Multiplication within Acts

The scripture citations below, from the book of Acts, demonstrate a pattern. Examine the context of these verses in your own Bibles and try to discern how each statement represents a conclusion to a significant period of church expansion.

- Acts 2:46–47
- Acts 6:7
- Acts 9.31
- Acts 12.24
- Acts 16.5
- Acts 19.20

We see from this pattern and the history that has flowed from this tiny beginning, that the whole expansive movement of Christianity begins with the multiplication of disciples.

The discipleship movement spreads out geographically and, more importantly, across ethnic and cultural boundaries. From its beginnings in Jerusalem, the movement expands throughout Palestine, Asia Minor, Greece and, finally, to Rome—the very centre and seat of worldly power, at that time.

Sh'aul remained two whole years in a place he rented for himself and continued receiving all who came to see him, openly and without hindrance proclaiming the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Yeshua the Messiah—Acts 28.30–31

The power of multiplication

The potential of a freely-multiplying discipleship movement can also be illustrated numerically. A group of ten disciples who each faithfully disciple another ten... who each disciple another ten will produce... not one hundred disciples, but one thousand disciples.

That's right: after two *generations* of faithful discipleship one thousand disciples can be made. Five discipleship-generations of faithful multiplication are potentially capable of developing a million disciples!

If it's that powerful, why don't we see it happening more often?

Old wineskins

In actual fact, rapidly-multiplying discipleship movement are being established in many places around the world, using models similar to this. However, most churches simply don't make discipleship a priority. They either fail to address the forming of disciples altogether, or they limit its impact, by fitting programs awkwardly into existing congregational structures.

This is similar to the problem Jesus' described in Luke 5:36–38. Like new wine in an old wineskin, discipleship is a disruptive reality. It disrupts the status quo, the normal, natural flow of things. It challenges lukewarm allegiances to Christ. It disrupts predictable, cyclical patterns of development.

By contrast, church congregations tend to reproduce and multiply only when numbers are large enough to plant another congregation, or when there is sufficient budget for a church building to be constructed. New congregations are often required to be a certain distance away from the first. This kind of growth may be more stable, but is generally less dynamic, with much slower multiplication.

See *MPD Module 4 – Dynamics of Commissioning*, for an exploration of various dynamics of expansion

Out there

Discipleship doesn't need to take place in church buildings. And, in reality, it can at best only *start* to be catalysed within discipleship and discussion groups. We are only truly formed into disciples when our faith, our convictions, our encounters with God and the challenge to follow the Messiah wholeheartedly, begin to transform the way we live.

Thus discipleship must be lived and worked out practically: in our homes and our workplaces, amongst the families and communities with whom

we live and work and share our lives. There, a disciple of Christ can influence tens, maybe hundreds of people who may never visit or join a congregation.

5.2 Facilitating Discipleship Groups

1. Facilitating role (section 5.2)
2. Discipleship group format (section 5.2)
3. Practical considerations (section 5.2)

Facilitating role

Facilitating Maize Plant Discipleship differs from many, possibly most, traditional teaching, training and leadership roles, because it is an intentionally open, reflective group-orientated learning process, in which learners are invited to participate fully.

Who can facilitate?

A facilitator needs to be someone with a passion and sense of calling to help others become faithful Christian disciples. This passion must motivate them to be humble, flexible, warm, open and secure enough to allow others to explore personal boundaries of vocational understanding, experience and creativity.

A facilitator, or mentor, does not hold a position of authority over people. They simply facilitate the gathering of people into groups, for learning and discussion. Thus:

- A facilitator may be a lay-leader...
- They may be relatively young...
- They may be a woman.
- They need not have gone to bible college...
- Nor be an established church leader...
- Or an experienced mentor.

Equally, MPD can be facilitated by established leaders, mentors or disciples—as long as they are willing and comfortable to facilitate group discussions that are genuinely reflective and exploratory.

These issues will not cause us to stumble if we humbly embrace the reality that the Spirit of Jesus is the real discipler of us all.

Below, I've suggested four aspects of facilitating MPD that facilitators should look for and aspire to:

1. Facilitating Spirit-led discipleship (section 5.2)
2. Facilitating openness (section 5.2)
3. Facilitating learning (section 5.2)
4. Facilitating unity (section 5.2).

Facilitating Spirit-led discipleship

Discipleship is never a matter of pouring out information from a teacher or from text books (including MPD handbooks), in order to fill others with the same knowledge. This may be how we learned in school, but Spirit-led discipleship is different.

- Holy Spirit-led discipleship is about participating in a process whereby the Spirit of Christ is able to lead, warn, direct, encourage, teach and exhort us all, individually and corporately.
- The purpose of facilitating MPD is to allow it to be a vehicle for God's Spirit to disciple people—recognising that MPD itself represents just one part of a whole process through which the Messiah is discipling us.
- Everyone has different gifts and personality and are at different stages of development, so group members need to be empowered to learn in their own particular way and at their own pace.
- The goal of discipleship is not to establish shared dogmatic belief or conformity to the convictions of a leader, mentor or facilitator, nor to church traditions—and certainly not to every aspect of MPD.
- The goal is conformity to the Spirit of the Messiah, Jesus, and obedience to the will of the Father.

Facilitating openness

When meeting together for MPD the aim is to foster an environment of learning and discovery, where debate and discussion is lively, yet relaxed and uncompetitive. An environment in which all members, even the youngest and least experienced, are comfortable to openly contribute their views, burdens and questions. These are some practical suggestions to help establish this.

- A facilitator should contribute to discussions as a regular group member. They must never abuse their position by belittling the views of others or dominating a discussion.
- If someone introduces a note of disagreement, or bitterness, a facilitator—rather than risking confrontation by stating their own views directly—should consider inviting other group members to give a view of the issue.
- A facilitator should normally resist the temptation to rehearse teaching, affirm particular views or summarise discussions. Doing these things can undermine discovery and learning processes taking place.

Particularly where a facilitator or presenter is an established leader, these practical expressions of humility and openness set an important example, providing a practical reminder that we are all equally disciples of the Messiah.

Openness can be particularly challenging to foster in cultures where where conformity is highly valued and where traditional authority flows downwards from the top. However, by encouraging this kind of debate, it is possible for members to express strong and diverse views, without creating conflict or forcing conformity.

Openness, frankness and diversity will not stifle the true unity of the Spirit, which is based on love and mutual respect and does not depend upon a consensus of opinion. By contrast, forced conformity generally erupts, sooner or later, into divisiveness, simply because people have a need to be heard and listened to—especially when they have a different perspective.

Facilitating learning

Ultimately, discipleship represents a form of learning that is *called out* of students or disciples, under the guidance and direction of a facilitator, mentor, educator or teacher. People in these roles come alongside motivated learners, not to direct them forcefully, but to assist, encourage, facilitate and draw out the *learning-through-living* that is continuously taking place within those being discipled.

A shared journey of discipleship must therefore incorporate time for simple companionship and friendship, in which we encounter together both the painful realities stretching, or testing our faith and the hopes and dreams sustaining us during periods of trial and difficulty.

Regular discipleship groups are a good way to begin fermenting interpersonal interaction, but they need to be supplemented by informal exchanges that allow personal encounter and mutual listening—or learning groups may risk feeling too impersonal, theoretical or disjointed from daily life.

Unlike formal, classroom learning, this sort of practical, interpersonal, *open-to-the-other* kind of learning is rarely neat and tidy and may even seem chaotic at times. However, it is potentially highly effective at enabling practice to inform theory and theory to inform practice.

Facilitating unity

Facilitators need to be sensitive to expectations that may be raised by their actions and take appropriate responsibility for their impact.

- If you are a committed member of an existing movement, be respectful of its traditions and work to maintain good working relationships with members of the leadership. Honour the unity of the Spirit and the body of Christ.
- Maize Plant Discipleship does not represent a threat to surrounding congregations and church groups; it should seek to complement and where appropriate serve them, in the spirit of the Messiah.

Discipleship group format

They continued faithfully in the teaching of the apostles, in fellowship, in breaking bread and in prayer—Acts 2.42

The experience of the followers of Jesus, described in the book of Acts, chapter 2, verse 42 provides us with a simple pattern that I believe can be applied to MPD groups. A pattern of:

1. Teaching (section 5.2)
2. Fellowship (section 5.2)
3. Breaking bread (section 5.2) and
4. Prayer (section 5.2).

The first two are incorporated within MPD handbooks, by design. The second two aspects represent important forms of empowerment for disciples and should be incorporated by facilitators as they are lead by the Holy Spirit.

Teaching

As explained, MPD Handbooks (section 4.2) are intentionally formulated to facilitate and stimulate group learning and discussion, based upon topical studies.

- In advance of gathering a discipleship group, facilitators responsible for presenting the topical study should go through it carefully: absorbing, familiarising and reflecting upon the teaching and its lessons.
- As a facilitator: if there are areas of the study that are unfamiliar or unclear, it's important not to ignore them. Instead, be prepared to invite the group to discuss these areas. This will help to produce a lively discussion about that area of the study, encouraging others to bring forward their interpretation of the topic. *Be humble; we are all always learning.*

Fellowship

I mentioned in the previous section the importance of building relationship between group members and other, outside of group gatherings. That is an essential aspect of fellowship. Within meetings, group discussion represents another, important form of fellowship.

The following are suggestions to may help group discussions to be lively, invigorating and spiritually satisfying. Facilitators are invited to develop their own ideas.

1. Invite and allow free-moving general discussion.

It may take a few sessions for the group to get used to the freedom of this format; give it time. Make sure younger people and women are included. (See also: Facilitating openness (section 5.2)).

2. Discuss traditional proverbs that may speak to areas of discipleship being discussed.

Use of the *sweet talk* of proverbs may open up fresh insights. It can also provide an unexpected, yet invariably welcome way to discuss what you are learning with elders and others, outside of the gathered group, including non-believers.

3. Discuss practical, vocational applications of the area of discipleship being discussed.

Vocation is more than our employment: it is the whole of our responsibilities towards which God has called or is calling us. Including workplaces and practices, families, communities and networks, as well as our personal vision and ministry.

4. Allow discussion to ebb and flow.

Give time for people to consider their responses and return to earlier parts of the debate, where appropriate.

Breaking bread

The celebratory breaking of bread, in order to remember the Lord Jesus and his sacrificial obedience, is a sign and symbol of the new covenant and a profound way for discipleship groups to visibly proclaim their shared devotion to the Messiah.

Breaking bread was originally fashioned, by the early church, upon the weekly *Sh'bat* (Sabbath) meal of the Jews. This was a time of thanksgiving for God's deliverance of Israel from the oppression of Egypt.

-
- Although breaking bread has typically become a ceremony in today's churches, it is sometimes possible to incorporate a simple meal into the routines of meeting together and to recognise this as a practical form of breaking bread. Sharing food together is a vital part of human fellowship and a practical way of sharing God's daily provision to us.
 - Where sharing a whole meal is not practical or possible, consider breaking a small amount of bread together, in a symbolic act of shared hospitality and commitment to membership of the body of the Messiah.

Prayer

Intercessory prayer directs our vision and our compassion beyond ourselves and our own needs. Discipleship groups should incorporate intercessory prayers on behalf of neighbours, networks and communities, as well as local and national rulers and governors.

- Pray for the gospel to deeply impact and transform individuals, communities, cultures and societies throughout your nation, all of Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas. If any member of the group has access to information about unreached peoples, incorporate it appropriately.
- Please consider praying for this Maize Plant Discipleship Resource. Pray that it will be used by God to edify and strengthen and bless the Messianic Community, within Africa ... and beyond!

Finally, those who have gathered for discipleship should send one another forth in prayer and the power of God's blessing.

- Encourage disciples to use that day's teaching to infuse prayer with fresh confidence concerning God's will. Include personal and vocational concerns and specific challenges faced by members of the group.
- Bless one another, by speaking a blessing, either from Scripture, or as led by the Holy Spirit, over a person or a community or a specific problem, expecting that the power of God's word and the blessing of his life in us will overcome all opposition!

Practical considerations

Facilitating a discipleship group will be most effective when practicalities are considered and appropriate planning takes place. This should be done in advance, in order to gain the most from the group interaction.

Getting started

Maize Plant Discipleship is ideal for discipleship groups of between eight to twelve people. This group size is small enough to allow members to grow together with a degree of intimacy and large enough to allow members space to explore discipleship commitments at their own pace.

If you begin with a group of more than twelve people committed to participating in discipleship training, consider how you could facilitate more multiple groups. Begin the process of making disciples right away, delegating and sharing responsibility for the facilitating process.

Involving others

Whilst a Facilitator will usually be responsible for convening gatherings, wherever possible, other people should be invited to host and, where appropriate, to moderate gatherings. Likewise, different people can be made responsible for presenting the teaching and moderating group discussions.

Sharing these responsibilities avoids one person dominating proceedings. If that happens, it can tend to stifle creativity and freedom of thought. Ideally, as many group members as possible should be employed, over time, in sharing responsibilities. This is a form of discipleship in practice.

Timetable

Facilitators need to plan a suitable timetable for undertaking the whole course of studies, taking into account the nature of the group and availability of time.

- Is a group affected mainly by the farming cycle?
- Is it based around school terms?
- What other factors need to be considered?

The MPD Syllabus (chapter 4) currently comprises sixteen modules. Within each book, depending upon the topic, there are typically four or five studies, each of which can be used for one session.

Location

Meeting together can take place in any appropriate location that can reasonably comfortably accommodate the group. A large room in someone's home, or a community hall is ideal.

A church building might be unhelpful if it causes people to have a *church-meeting mentality*. However, if one must be used, think about re-arranging some of the seating, in order to change the way that the space is typically used. It is important that people are able to see one another, in order to provide a practical forum for discussions and a more intimate space in general.

Think about changing the location occasionally. Sometimes outside environments may be helpful in producing a liberating interaction. Experiment to find out what works well for your group.

Adaption

Facilitators: Be prepared to adapt both the teaching and the method of presentation, in order to properly facilitate a helpful and culturally-appropriate learning environment. Take into account the abilities and capacities of each particular discipleship group.

Here are some ideas to think about; you may have others:

1. Consider oral learners – it is part of a teacher or facilitator's responsibility to ensure literature is a tool, a servant and not a task-master.
2. Allow creative people to contribute by interpreting or celebrating the message of the teaching using drama, art or song.
3. What other ways might it be appropriate to organise the time and the group in order to ensure the learning is culturally appropriate, relevant and practical?

Think about these things as you progress throughout this discipleship experience.

CHAPTER 6

Publishing MPD

I think you are touching something that is not already existing... For example, if we talk about evangelism, it may well be a new way of approaching evangelism, but we already have many methods of evangelism. But discipleship is something that is really (an) innovative thing!– Burkinabé theological educator, 2010

Freely you have received, therefore freely give– Jesus, Matthew 10.8

6.1 Books for African contexts

Over the past several decades, the African Christian community has multiplied and expanded significantly. So much so that the global Christian community's statistical centre of gravity is now located in Africa.

While this extraordinary numerical growth has taken place there has been a relative shortage of book publishing within Africa. Resources serving to edify, disciple and inspire Christian communities have been especially sparse in Francophone Africa.

Furthermore, many books are imports or translations of books written for Christians in different—generally Western—cultural contexts, where quite different questions, cultural values and theological imperatives are

considered significant. In short, many Christian textbooks used in leadership training are contextually inappropriate.

Added to this is the economic costs of books published and distributed in a way that is primarily designed to protect the commercial interests of authors, book publishers, distributors and retailers. This results in many books being practically unattainable to those who are economically poor—including many pastors who are hungry for resources to enrich their vocational work of forming disciples.

These pastors mediate between two cultural worlds: orality cultures and literacy cultures. They need textbooks that will facilitate, rather than hinder this mediation. Textbooks that can be readily translated, where appropriate, into ethnic, mother-tongue languages. Textbooks that can be reproduced and distributed using a low-cost licensing system that facilitate and energises, rather than enervates, missional activity.

6.2 A new publishing philosophy

Maize Plant Discipleship is published with a missional philosophy at its heart, intended to practical fostering and facilitate a widespread adoption of Christian discipleship praxis. Accordingly:

- **It does not represent a commercial publishing venture.**

Rather, MPD content is made available with a free-at-source license, which allows books to be reproduced, published and distributed without breaching copyright.

- The *Creative Commons* licence (section 6.5) stipulates that any reproduction must identify the original author and translators and must retain the original licence as an integral part of the publication.
- In this way the license respects and maintains the personal copyright of the author, yet it also releases the traditionally tight, commercial grip of copyright owners and publishers, upon reproduction and printing.

The goal of this licensing arrangement is to enable African leaders to decide how the MPD resource is employed, fa-

cilitating forms of discipleship training that are most appropriate to African contexts.

6.3 Publishing and distribution examples

Under this licensing arrangement, any missional group, denomination or agency wishing to publish MPD handbooks is permitted to, without any licensing cost, providing they keep to the terms of the licence.

Accordingly, the principal costs for publishing agencies will be related to translation, printing and distribution, with each group free to determine how many handbooks they want to print and distribute, according to their own training purposes and budgetary constraints.

The licence allows textbooks printed under the licence to be sold commercially. Thus, agencies that organise translation, printing and distribution are permitted to sell the handbooks as they see fit, for example, in order to raise funds for further text books.

This allows for a variety of methods by which the text books could be distributed. Four examples are set out below.

- Example A : Training Seminars (section 6.3)
- Example B : Denominational Bible School (section 6.3)
- Example C : Interdenominational NGO (section 6.3)
- Example D : Commercial Enterprise (section 6.3)

The examples are based on text books of approximately 25 number, A4-sized pages, printed double-sided, folded to A5-size, stapled and trimmed, with a single-colour printed cover. In the first examples, a cost price of 1000 CFA per text book is assumed (approximately \$2, or £1.33). In the last three examples, based on a larger volume of printing, a cost price of 800 CFA has been used.

Example A : Training Seminars

In this example, a church, or denomination organises printing of 50 copies, of two text books, at a total cost of 100,000 CFA. They are distributed at cost-price, 1,000 CFA each.

Ex-ample	No of modules	No of copies	Cost /book	Total cost	Sale price
A	2	50	1000	100,000	Cost: 2000 per 2 books
B	17	25	800	340,000	Subsidised: 7000 /set
C	17	50	800	680,000	Cost price to organisation
D	17	50	800	680,000	Commercial prices

- Income provides funds for another 2 x 50 books.
- If seminars took place 4 times a year, the entire MPD syllabus of 17 textbooks could be distributed over the course of two years, at a cost per trainee of 8000 CFA per year. (Alternatively, if seminars took place twice a year, four books would need to be printed each time, to complete cycle in two years.)

Advantages

- Comparatively low start up costs.
- Comparatively low cost per trainee per year
- Steady progress through curriculum

Disadvantages

- 2 years to publish whole syllabus
- Requires frequent seminars, or other method of distribution

Example B : Denominational Bible School

In this example, a denomination organises printing of 25 sets of whole curriculum (17 books per set), at total cost of 340,000 CFA. These sets are distributed to bible school students at a *subsidised* price per set of 17 textbooks, of 7000 CFA. This raises funds from sales of 175,000 CFA (50% of cost), to be used towards repayment of up-front costs, or future printing

Advantages

- Whole curriculum available at one time
- Subsidised cost to students
- Provides profit for future printing

Disadvantages

- Requires large up-front payment
- Considerable logistical organisation of printing

Example C : Interdenominational NGO

In this example, an Interdenominational NGO organises printing, on behalf of a number of churches and agencies, distributing copies at cost price.

- 50 sets of whole curriculum (17 books), at total cost of 680,000 CFA
- 25 sets are distributed, at cost price, to organisation A, for 340,000 CFA
- 15 sets are distributed, at cost price, to organisation B, for 204,000 CFA
- 10 sets are distributed, at cost price, to libraries, translation agencies and other groups and individuals, for a total income of 136,000 CFA

Advantages

- Whole curriculum available at one time
- Costs spread across several groups

Disadvantages

- Requires up-front payments from groups
- Considerable organisation of printing
- No profit for future printing

Example D : Commercial Enterprise

In this example a business entrepreneur or social agency prints a stock of 50 sets of the whole MPD curriculum, costing 680,000 CFA (13,600 CFA per set)

- 25 sets are sold to a bible school at 20,000 CFA each, income: 500,000 CFA
- 250 books (various modules) sold to individuals and agencies at 1500 CFA each, income: 375,000 CFA
- Total sales 875,000 CFA – Gross profit 195,000 CFA
- Remaining Stock 175 books, cost value 140,000 CFA

Advantages

- Commercially profitable
- Helps churches and Christians

Disadvantages

- Large start-up costs
- Relies upon good sales
- Needs commercial experience

6.4 Translation

The text books of the Maize Plant Discipleship Curriculum have been intentionally formulated to be readily translatable.

If you would like to discuss translating MPD resources, for printing and distribution in another language, please get in touch: <http://maizeplantdiscipleship.worldcontact.org>

6.5 Licensing

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Further information

Additional information about *Maize Plant Discipleship* is available via the following websites:

- **Resources**—<http://maizeplantdiscipleship.wordpress.com/>
- **Author**—<http://jbclements.wordpress.com/>