

# **FAITH BASED DIALOGUE REPORT**

**DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO**



# FAITH BASED- DIALOGUE REPORT- DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

## 1. Introduction

Faith communities hold an exceptional position within the social and cultural fabric of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Churches and religious institutions are among the most trusted and accessible structures in both urban centres and remote rural areas. They are present where state services are weak, humanitarian access is limited, and populations are repeatedly displaced. Religious leaders are therefore not only spiritual figures but also key actors in community mobilisation, crisis response, peacebuilding, and behaviour change

As part of the national Nutrition Dialogues initiative led by World Vision International and the 4SD Foundation, dedicated **Faith Dialogues** were conducted in **Goma, Beni, and Kananga** in 2025. These dialogues sit within the broader global Nutrition Dialogues process, which uses structured multi-stakeholder conversations to surface the experiences, priorities, and ideas of people most affected by malnutrition and food insecurity.

These specific Faith Dialogues sought to understand:

- How religious leaders perceive the nutrition challenges affecting their communities
- Their views on root causes of malnutrition
- Their reflections on the intersection of faith, food security, and social responsibility
- Their proposed solutions and areas where churches can support collective action
- Key advocacy messages emerging from faith leaders themselves, for use at local, national and global levels

Across all dialogues, faith actors expressed a strong desire to be **active, frontline contributors to nutrition resilience**. Their reflections reveal a nuanced understanding of socioeconomic hardship, conflict dynamics, spiritual wellbeing, and social inequality—all of which shape malnutrition in DRC.

This report synthesises their perspectives into a detailed narrative, highlighting key challenges, community insights, proposed solutions, and direct quotes suitable for advocacy, policy engagement, and strategic communication.

### 1.1 Scope of the Report

This synthesis focuses specifically on:

- The **Faith Community Nutrition Dialogues** with religious leaders in **Goma, Beni, and Kananga**
- The content of their discussions, as captured in the official feedback forms submitted to the Nutrition Dialogues portal
- Practical implications for programme design, faith partnerships, and policy advocacy in DRC

It is not an exhaustive account of all Nutrition Dialogues in DRC, but a focused reflection on **faith-led perspectives and commitments**.

### 1.2 Methodology of the Faith Dialogues

The Faith Dialogues followed the standard Nutrition Dialogues methodology, tailored to religious leaders:

- **Opening and framing**
  - Each dialogue opened with a **prayer** and participant introductions, recognising the spiritual nature of the gathering and the moral weight of discussing hunger and malnutrition.
    - Facilitators then presented **basic concepts of nutrition and malnutrition**, and, where available, local or national data on child malnutrition and food insecurity.
- **Guided group discussions**

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- o Participants were divided into **small groups** (often “crossroads work”) to discuss:
    - Local nutrition challenges
    - Populations most affected
    - Current responses and gaps
    - The specific role of churches and faith communities
  - o Groups reported back in plenary, and common themes were synthesised.
  - **Commitments and next steps**
    - o Dialogues concluded with a focus on **solutions and commitments**, inviting religious leaders to articulate concrete actions they could take and how they wished to collaborate with government and humanitarian actors.
- The information in this report is drawn from these feedback forms, complemented by the global framework for Faith Community Nutrition Dialogues.

## 2. Context: Why Faith Dialogues Matter in DRC

The DRC is one of the world’s most complex humanitarian and food-security landscapes. Protracted conflict, mass displacement, recurrent disease outbreaks, market disruptions, poverty, land pressure, and weak institutional support converge to create widespread malnutrition, especially among women and children. Recent humanitarian reports highlight millions of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity, with conflict-affected provinces such as North Kivu, Ituri, and Kasai particularly impacted.

In many affected areas:

- **Churches remain open when public systems collapse** – they host displaced families, coordinate basic relief, and provide psychosocial and spiritual support.
- **Religious leaders are among the first responders when families flee violence**, often mobilising congregations to share food or shelter.
- **Faith networks provide psychosocial support, safety, and community cohesion** in settings marked by deep trauma and fear.
- **Congregations serve as trusted communication channels** for awareness-raising on health, nutrition, and protection.
- **Religious identity often cuts across ethnic or political divides**, enabling faith leaders to convene diverse groups in dialogue even when tensions are high.

Engaging faith leaders in nutrition dialogues is therefore both **strategic and necessary**. They reach mothers, fathers, youth, widows, farmers, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and vulnerable urban households. They speak into cultural norms, dietary habits, caregiving practices, and community solidarity—areas that are critical for sustained behaviour change.

In Goma, Beni, and Kananga, religious leaders described malnutrition not only as a **health crisis**, but as a **moral, spiritual, and social justice issue**, affecting dignity, peace, and the sanctity of life. They positioned themselves as stewards tasked with **protecting creation, caring for the vulnerable, and supporting community resilience**.

These dialogues thus serve a dual purpose:

1. **Listening** to local faith actors to understand their lived realities and priorities; and
2. **Equipping and connecting** them so they can be more effective partners in addressing hunger and malnutrition, both in practice and advocacy.

## 3. Findings from the Faith Dialogues

### 3.1 Goma: Malnutrition Amid Inequality and Insecurity

Goma’s faith dialogue convened 13 religious leaders from various denominations, including Protestant, Catholic and Revivalist churches. Their reflections centred on the intense

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socioeconomic disparities and chronic insecurity surrounding the city, which sits at the heart of long-running armed conflicts in eastern DRC.

### 3.1.1 Key Challenges Identified

Faith leaders highlighted several interlinked challenges:

- **Economic inaccessibility**  
Many families simply cannot afford diverse, nutritious foods. Even when markets are stocked, low and unstable incomes mean that nutritious foods remain out of reach for poor households, particularly those headed by women.
- **High food prices and market instability**  
Urban residents in Goma are especially vulnerable to price shocks, which are driven by insecurity, roadblocks, fuel costs, and seasonal variations. Faith leaders underlined that a large share of the city's population struggles to secure adequate food: "Half of the city's population does not eat in sufficient quantity and quality."
- **Nutrition information gaps and constrained choices**  
Facilitators presented basic nutrition concepts, and many leaders recognised that some community members do not understand what healthy diets should look like. However, they stressed that **poverty and insecurity often override knowledge**, forcing families to prioritise quantity over quality or to rely on cheaper, less nutritious foods.
- **Unequal access to nutrition programmes**  
Existing nutrition services and projects do not reach all neighbourhoods. Peri-urban and informal settlements often receive less support, and information does not always filter through to the poorest families.

Collectively, faith leaders emphasised that malnutrition in Goma is **not simply the result of lack of information**, but arises from **structural inequality, displacement, violence, and daily economic uncertainty**.

### 3.1.2 Vision and Proposed Actions from Goma Leaders

Faith actors in Goma set out a clear vision of how churches can contribute:

- **Integrating nutrition into spiritual life**  
They proposed **integrating nutrition messages into sermons, Bible studies and faith teachings**, framing good nutrition as part of God's care for the body and a response to the call to love one's neighbour.
- **Organising practical demonstrations**  
Leaders suggested **cooking demonstrations using local foods**, especially targeting mothers, youth groups, and church fellowships. These would show how affordable, locally available ingredients can be combined to improve dietary diversity.
- **Creating parish and community gardens**  
Establishing **parish gardens** was discussed as a tangible way to promote dietary diversity, teach gardening techniques, and provide some vegetables to vulnerable families. Churches could also support households to start small backyard gardens.
- **Using churches as community hubs**  
Churches were identified as potential **community hubs for nutrition screening and awareness**, working in partnership with health centres. Leaders expressed willingness to host community sessions or facilitate referrals for children identified with malnutrition.
- **Partnering with NGOs and local authorities**  
The dialogue emphasised the importance of **deeper collaboration between churches, health authorities, and humanitarian agencies**, including shared planning of activities,

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joint targeting of vulnerable households, and better information sharing. In summary, religious leaders in Goma framed nutrition work as an **act of Christian compassion and leadership**, grounded in both spiritual mandate and practical solidarity.

### 3.2 Beni: A Silent Emergency Shaped by Conflict

Beni's faith dialogue took place in a context of sustained violence by armed groups (including the ADF), which has devastated livelihoods, access to farmland, and the social fabric of communities.

#### 3.2.1 Key Challenges Identified

Faith leaders in Beni described the nutrition situation as a **"silent emergency"**:

- **Insecurity blocking agricultural livelihoods**  
Farmers cannot safely access their fields due to armed attacks, landmines, and fear, leading to abandoned crops and sharp reductions in local food production.
- **Disrupted food supply chains**  
Transportation of goods is hampered by insecurity on key roads. This drives up prices, reduces availability of fresh produce, and creates frequent shortages in local markets.
- **Overwhelmed and under-resourced health services**  
Health facilities are overstretched, particularly in urban and peri-urban zones where IDPs and host communities converge. Nutrition care for children and pregnant women was described as **insufficient and uneven**, with stock-outs and limited staff.
- **High vulnerability of displaced populations**  
Persistent and repeated displacement puts enormous pressure on host communities, churches, and basic services. Shelters are overcrowded; families have lost assets, savings, and social networks.
- **Funding gaps and misaligned support**  
Leaders flagged that nutrition financing and humanitarian support can be **inconsistent, short-term, or not fully aligned with local priorities**, leaving important gaps in prevention and long-term resilience.

They stressed that the nutrition crisis in Beni is **multidimensional**, driven by conflict, displacement, poverty, and weak systems, and cannot be solved by isolated interventions.

#### 3.2.2 Proposed Solutions by Beni Faith Leaders

In response, faith leaders called for:

- **Urgent, coordinated humanitarian and nutrition response**  
They emphasised the need to **"act urgently without waiting for an irreversible deterioration of the nutritional situation."**
- **Strong multi-sectoral collaboration**  
Leaders repeatedly called for stronger coordination between **health, agriculture, protection, education, and faith actors**, highlighting that nutrition cannot be improved without addressing violence, livelihoods, and basic services together.
- **Enhanced community-based nutrition services through churches**  
They proposed using churches as points of **community screening, referral and follow-up**, particularly in neighbourhoods where formal services are scarce or distrusted.
- **Support for psychosocial and spiritual care**  
Recognising the deep trauma in Beni, religious leaders underlined the need for combined **psychosocial and spiritual support** for conflict-affected families, especially caregivers and children, as part of a holistic approach to nutrition.

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- **Stressing the need for rebuilding and resilience messaging, conflict transformation and rebuilding social cohesion**, which are foundational for long-term food security.

Their reflections demonstrate that faith communities view themselves as **essential responders** in a region where trust in institutions is low and insecurity is high.

### 3.3 Kananga: Hunger Rooted in Conflict and Rural Exodus

The Kananga dialogue took place at the **Pro-Cathedral of Saint Clement** in Kasai Central, bringing together Catholic, Protestant, and Revivalist leaders. Discussions focused on the long-term impacts of the **Kamuina Nsapu conflict** and related crises.

#### 3.3.1 Key Challenges Identified

Participants drew a direct line between conflict and malnutrition:

- **Conflict-driven food scarcity**  
Violence since 2016 forced many families to flee their villages and abandon fields and livestock. Large swathes of farmland lay idle during the height of the conflict.
- **Rural exodus and weakened agricultural base**  
People moved from rural areas to towns like Kananga in search of safety and services, reducing agricultural output and increasing dependence on purchased food.
- **Limited state investment in agriculture and infrastructure**  
Leaders highlighted poor rural roads, limited access to agricultural inputs, and minimal presence of extension services, all of which constrain local production and marketing.
- **Generalised famine conditions at the peak of the war**  
The dialogue recalled times when many parts of Kasai experienced **severe hunger**, with families surviving on minimal or low-quality food.

They emphasised that malnutrition cannot be sustainably addressed without rebuilding the **agricultural backbone** of the region and restoring rural livelihoods.

#### 3.3.2 Proposed Solutions and Faith Roles

Faith leaders in Kananga suggested a range of responses:

- **Mobilising communities to revive agriculture**  
Churches can encourage congregations to **reactivate rural fields**, reclaim abandoned land where possible, and support community farming initiatives.
- **Advocating for state support to local farmers**  
Leaders highlighted the need to **advocate with authorities** for better roads, access to seeds and tools, and policies that protect smallholder farmers.
- **Training churches in livelihoods and self-reliance projects**  
They expressed interest in receiving training on **small-scale agriculture, savings groups, and income-generating activities**, so churches can model self-reliance and support vulnerable families.
- **Strengthening inter-faith efforts for community healing and unity**  
Given the deep wounds left by conflict, religious leaders see inter-faith collaboration as crucial for **social healing, reconciliation, and cooperative action** for food security.

They also expressed a desire for **longer, regular dialogues on nutrition**, indicating strong motivation for continued engagement and learning.

## 4. Cross-Cutting Themes Across All Faith Dialogues

From Goma to Beni to Kananga, several powerful themes emerged.

### 4.1 Malnutrition as a Moral and Spiritual Issue

Faith leaders see malnutrition as an affront to human dignity and contrary to spiritual values of care, justice, stewardship, and solidarity. They view involvement in nutrition efforts as a

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**religious obligation**, not an optional add-on to church life. This framing gives nutrition work **moral urgency and legitimacy** within congregations.

## 4.2 Churches as Frontline Actors

Religious institutions are trusted, permanent, and present in communities where state and NGO presence is inconsistent. Churches can:

- Host nutrition awareness sessions before or after worship services
- Support community or parish gardens as living demonstrations of healthy food production
- Provide referrals to health centres and coordinate with community health workers
- Mobilise volunteers and women's groups to assist with cooking demonstrations, child feeding support, and home visits
- Build solidarity among IDPs and vulnerable households, including through food sharing and mutual support mechanisms

## 4.3 Strong Appetite for Collaboration

All dialogue sites emphasised the need for:

- Joint planning with health services and nutrition projects
- Partnerships with NGOs and UN agencies
- Clear roles and communication within multisectoral nutrition interventions

Faith actors clearly **do not want parallel or fragmented efforts**; they want to be integrated into wider strategies and respected as full partners.

## 4.4 Desire for Training and Capacity Building

Religious leaders asked for training on:

- Basic nutrition principles and key nutrition indicators
- Infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices
- WASH and hygiene promotion
- Cooking demonstrations and use of local, nutrient-dense foods
- Livelihoods, food security initiatives, and savings groups

Their willingness to learn is a major opportunity for programmes that seek to **scale up nutrition messaging and community-level action**.

## 4.5 Recognition of Structural Challenges

Across all three cities, faith leaders demonstrated sophisticated understanding of:

- Inflation and market barriers
- Land access issues, including the impact of conflict and land-grabbing
- The effects of insecurity and displacement on agriculture and food supply
- The consequences of under-resourced health systems

This positions them as credible **community advocates** on both local and policy levels, able to connect technical issues with everyday realities.

## 5. Selected Direct Quotes from Faith Dialogues

These quotes are verbatim extracts from the official feedback forms for Goma, Beni, and Kananga. They can be used in advocacy briefs, speeches, proposals, and donor reports.

### Quotes from Goma

#### On the scale of deprivation

"Half of the city's population does not eat in sufficient quantity and quality."

#### On faith leaders' engagement

"Religious leaders expressed their willingness to actively engage as community relays."

### Quotes from Beni

#### On the emergency in Beni

"Beni is a silent emergency that requires a strategic, multi-sectoral and coordinated response."

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## On urgency

“Act urgently without waiting for an irreversible deterioration of the nutritional situation.”

Quotes from Kananga

## On conflict as a root cause

“The war due to the customary conflict is a causal agent of hunger and malnutrition

## On strengthening community dialogue

“We can have a great time for exchanges.”

## 6. Implications for Programming and Advocacy

### 6.1 Faith Leaders as Multipliers

Because churches serve broad, diverse populations, faith leaders can:

- Spread accurate nutrition messages quickly through sermons, prayer meetings, youth groups, and women’s fellowships
- Counter misinformation and harmful practices by rooting messages in scripture, ethics, and local culture
- Influence dietary and caregiving behaviours, particularly regarding child feeding, use of local nutritious foods, and hygiene
- Support household coping strategies during shocks by promoting solidarity, savings groups, and shared gardens

Investing in faith-leader training and simple, context-appropriate tools (sermon guides, posters, radio spots, small-group curricula) can multiply the reach of nutrition programmes.

### 6.2 Faith Communities as Accountability Actors

Religious leaders can:

- Advocate for **fair food prices**, especially where inflation and speculation undermine access for the poor
- Demand **equitable aid distribution** and transparency in humanitarian assistance
- Hold local authorities accountable for **supporting smallholder farmers**, maintaining roads, and ensuring basic services
- Encourage communities to participate in **social accountability mechanisms**, including dialogue with local government and service providers

Partnering with faith leaders on **budget advocacy, citizen voice and action, or social accountability** initiatives can therefore help bridge the gap between communities and decision-makers.

### 6.3 Faith Networks as Safe Spaces for Women and Families

Church women’s groups, youth groups, and mothers’ unions can help deliver:

- Nutrition education tailored to women’s and caregivers’ realities
- Cooking demonstrations and food preparation classes
- Savings groups and livelihood activities that strengthen food security and economic resilience
- Psychosocial and spiritual support for conflict-affected families, including widows, orphans and survivors of gender-based violence

These groups often have regular, predictable meeting rhythms, making them ideal platforms for **sustained, repeated engagement** rather than one-off sessions.

### 6.4 Potential Areas for Partnership

Programming and advocacy initiatives can:

- **Co-develop nutrition messaging** for sermons, Sunday school, and small groups, aligned with national nutrition guidelines
- **Support parish/community gardens** using local seeds and climate-smart techniques, linked to nutrition education



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- **Integrate churches into early warning and community referral systems** for malnutrition and food insecurity
- **Train faith leaders in IYCF, WASH, and basic nutrition indicators** so they can identify risk and encourage early care-seeking
- **Create interfaith coalitions** for policy advocacy on food systems, social protection, and peacebuilding, amplifying a common moral voice

These partnerships can be built into existing programmes on child sponsorship, livelihoods, peacebuilding, and humanitarian response, rather than standing alone.

### 7. Conclusion

The Faith Dialogues in Goma, Beni, and Kananga reveal a powerful truth: **faith actors in the DRC are not passive observers of the nutrition crisis**—they are eager, capable, and motivated partners in addressing hunger and malnutrition.

Their insights reflect lived realities shaped by violence, displacement, poverty, and systemic neglect. Yet their responses show profound **hope, resilience, and a commitment to caring for those most affected**.

Religious leaders consistently articulated that tackling malnutrition is not only a public-health priority but also a **moral responsibility**, rooted in compassion, justice, stewardship, and community solidarity. They see themselves as catalysts for change capable of mobilising thousands of families across urban, peri-urban, and rural areas.

Investing in faith-community partnerships—through training, resources, and structured collaboration—can significantly strengthen nutrition outcomes in the DRC. Their voices, perspectives, and direct quotes provide compelling narrative evidence that can:

- Inform **national nutrition strategies** and local action plans
- Influence **donor priorities and funding decisions**
- Enrich **advocacy campaigns**, including those linked to global platforms such as Nutrition for Growth
- Enhance the **effectiveness and sustainability** of programmes aimed at ending hunger and malnutrition



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