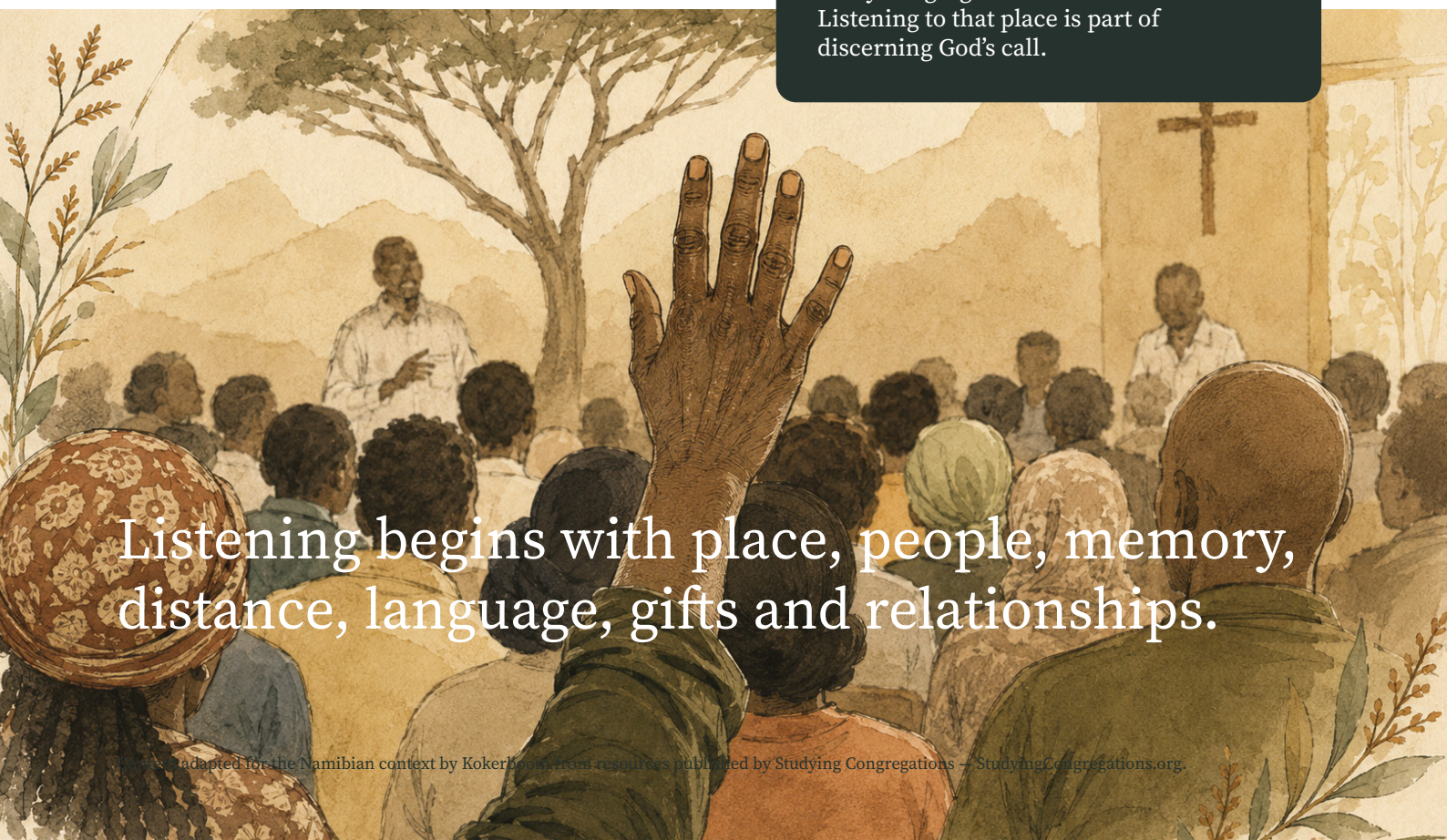




Who is Around Us?

Understanding the people, places and patterns that shape a congregation's context.

Every congregation lives somewhere.
Listening to that place is part of
discerning God's call.



Listening begins with place, people, memory,
distance, language, gifts and relationships.



About This Resource

Listening to context as a practice of discernment

Every congregation lives somewhere. It worships in a particular neighbourhood, suburb, town, village, farming district or settlement. That place is not merely a location on a map. It carries memory, relationships, languages, histories, pressures, gifts and possibilities.

This toolkit helps pastors, elders, church councils and congregations listen more carefully to the people and places around them. Demographic information can reveal patterns that are not immediately visible. Observation and conversation help a congregation understand what those patterns mean in daily life.

The purpose is not to identify a target market or to pursue growth for its own sake. The purpose is to become more attentive to the context in which God has placed the congregation, to notice where God may already be at work, and to discern how the church may participate faithfully in the Missio Dei.

A congregation does not study its community from a distance. It listens as a neighbour, learns as a servant and discerns as a community called by God.

Data can reveal patterns. Relationships help congregations understand people. The two belong together.

About the original resource

This Namibian adaptation is based on Who's Out There? - The Studying Congregations Tool Kit, written by Nancy T. Ammerman, PhD, and Ellen Childs, PhD, with original design and layout by Timothy K. Snyder. The original resource was developed for the study of congregations in the United States. Kokerboom has retained its central method while rewriting the language, examples and theological framing for congregations in Namibia.



Which Community Are We Listening To?

Formal boundaries are useful, but relationships tell a fuller story.

Before gathering information, decide which community you are trying to understand. Is it the immediate neighbourhood around the church, a suburb, township or informal settlement? Is it a village, farming district, constituency, town, municipality or wider region?

A congregation's real community may not follow official boundaries. It may be shaped by schools, transport routes, employment, family networks, language, migration and the long distances people travel. Defining the area is therefore not only a technical decision. It is part of missional discernment.

Map the congregation first

Place a large map on a table or wall. Use coloured dots or pins to notice the congregation's current patterns. Map:

- Where members live
- Which areas are becoming more or less connected
- How far they travel
- Where trusted relationships already exist

- How long they have belonged
- Which parts of the community remain unknown
- Which communities and language groups are represented
- Where schools, clinics, workplaces and transport routes connect people

Privacy matters. Use the map for shared reflection, not public display. Do not publish personal addresses, household names or other identifying information.



Getting the Data

Statistics are a starting point, not the whole story.

The Namibia Statistics Agency provides the country's most authoritative population and housing information. The 2023 Population and Housing Census can help a congregation explore population size, age, household composition, language, education, employment, migration, urbanisation, housing, access to services, transport, digital connectivity and distance between communities.

Begin with national information, then move closer to the congregation's actual setting through regional profiles, constituency information and municipal or local development plans. Always record the source and year of the figures you use.

Sources to consult

- Namibia Statistics Agency
- 2023 Population and Housing Census
- Regional census profiles
- Constituency and municipal information
- School enrolment and education data
- Clinic and public-health information
- Housing and settlement reports
- Denominational and congregational records

Namibia at a glance

2023 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

Measure	National figure
● Total population	3,022,401
● Number of households	756,339
● Average household size	3.8 persons
● Urban population	49.5%
● Rural population	50.5%
● Population density	3.7 persons / km ²
● Children aged 0-14	37.0%
● Working age 15-59	56.1%
● People aged 60+	6.8%

Source: Namibia Statistics Agency, 2023 Population and Housing Census Main Report.

Read the numbers as questions. What is changing? Who is arriving or leaving? Which generations are most visible? What pressures are households carrying? What gifts, skills and relationships are already present? National figures can orient the conversation, but local listening is essential.



Beyond the Census

A community is known through presence, conversation and shared attention.

Demographic information is valuable, but it cannot tell the whole story of a place. Congregations should combine statistics with local knowledge, careful observation and respectful conversation.

Other voices to consult

- Regional councils and constituency offices
- Municipalities and traditional authorities
- Schools, clinics and social workers
- Community organisations and development committees
- Chambers of commerce and local businesses
- Denominational offices and congregational archives

Ways of listening

- Walking tours and community observation
- Conversations with residents
- Interviews with local leaders
- Historical photographs and maps
- Listening sessions and congregational records
- Community asset mapping

Reporting what you find

Begin by writing the story you believe the information is telling. Then identify a small number of statistics, patterns and observations that carry the essence of that story. Present them clearly, return them to the congregation for prayerful reflection, and ask what further listening is needed before deciding how to respond.

Statistics help a congregation notice patterns. Listening helps it understand people. Discernment asks how God may be calling the congregation to respond.

The aim is not to know everything about a community. The aim is to become a more attentive, faithful and loving presence within it.

Source and acknowledgement

This Kokerboom resource has been adapted for the Namibian congregational context from Who's Out There? - The Studying Congregations Tool Kit, written by Nancy T. Ammerman, PhD, and Ellen Childs, PhD. Original design and layout by Timothy K. Snyder. Copyright © 2015 Studying Congregations. The original resource grants permission for reproduction for educational purposes. Further resources are available from StudyingCongregations.org.

The Namibian contextual material, theological framing and new visual design have been developed by Kokerboom, a service of the Dutch Reformed Church in Namibia. This adaptation does not imply endorsement of the revised material by the original authors.