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Church Leadership Capacity-building for Rural Community Development: Reflections from the AOG in Zimbabwe

Kimion Tagwirei

The Unit for Reformational Theology and the Development of the South African Society, Faculty of Theology, North-West University, South Africa
kimion22tc@gmail.com

Abstract

The church has been lauded as an able vehicle for community development and inclusive transformation in and beyond Africa. In attending to the need for integral mission, most urban church leaders in Zimbabwe have demonstrated an enabling capacity to identify and address the socioeconomic, political and environmental issues that bedevil their communities. Challenges remain in rural congregations and communities that are still hard-pressed by a series of political, socioeconomic and environmental crises. Although some urban-based denominational and ecumenical leaders have contributed to development in various outlands, rural clerical leadership capacity is low and in serious need of attention. Many related publications have covered the role and contributions of the church to community development in Zimbabwe, especially in urban settings. There is a large gap regarding rural, pastoral capacity-building for inclusive sustainability. This paper applied a qualitative case study of the Assemblies of God, a literature review and participant observation in theoretical view of Hoeft, Jung and Marshall's *Practicing Care in Rural Congregations and Communities* (2013). It identified rural Zimbabwe's community needs and suggested pastoral capacity building strategies to enhance desired development.

Introduction

It is fitting that the church has been commended globally as an able vehicle for community development and inclusive transformation. Researchers have discussed the contributions of churches towards community development in and outside Zimbabwe, such as providing education and health services, promoting citizenship and enacting economic empowerment and national healing (Chitando 2020; Magezi and Nanthambwe 2022; Moyo 2024; Msebi 2022; Nanthambwe 2023; Tagwirei 2024a). Zimbabwe is distressed by a multiplicity of political and socioeconomic crises (Dendere 2025; Agrawal 2023; Vambe 2023). Bearing in mind that the mission of the church is holistic, the ability to identify and address issues that affect communities is golden. The challenge is that Zimbabwe's rural congregations and communities remain unstable, even though some churches have been assisted by external aid to enhance their contributions to community development. For example, churches in the Bikita rural community of Masvingo were funded by a Christian non-governmental organisation from abroad to conduct empowerment training to identify and address their community needs (Magezi 2017). Similarly, the majority of faith-based and faith-owned development projects in Zimbabwe's rural areas, such as schools and clinics, were established by missionaries with foreign aid (Kanyongo 2005; Ngundu 2021). While acknowledging various development initiatives that have been facilitated by Zimbabwean ecumenical and denominational leaders, this paper explores rural pastoral capacity building for sustainable development. It starts by overviewing the research methodology, reviewing the Zimbabwean rural context as well as church and Community development in Zimbabwe and the history of the Assemblies of God (AOG) church, which is used as a case study. The paper ends with strategies to rebuild pastoral capacity for countryside community development. While acknowledging various development initiatives that have been facilitated by Zimbabwean ecumenical and denominational leaders, this paper explores rural pastoral capacity building for sustainable development. It starts by overviewing the research methodology, reviewing the Zimbabwean rural context as well as Church and Community development in Zimbabwe and the history of the Assemblies of God (AOG) which is used as a case study. Towards ending, strategies to rebuild pastoral capacity for countryside community development are considered.

Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative case study of the AOG in Zimbabwe. A case study was considered suitable because it explores issues from the specific context in a detailed way (Barbour 2014; Flick 2018). A qualitative case study generates rich data, descriptions and examples, and exposes the concerns of participants that arise from their lived experiences and contexts. By observing the model of Hoeft et al. (2013). This study engaged with AOG materials, such as its constitution, procedure manual and related literature. Complementarily, the author – one of the pastors – applied participative observations. In observing that rural congregations and communities are largely marginalised by cosmopolitan centres of power, Hoeft et al. (2013) question and explore answers to what can be done to meet pastoral, congregational, and community needs in rural contexts in the United States of America. They diagnose unique challenges facing rural pastors, congregations and communities. Their considerations of rural marginalisation, neglect and incapacitation relate closely to problems that rural pastors, congregations, and communities face in Zimbabwean rural environments. This study draws lessons from the call of Hoeft et al. (2013) for ecclesiological and pastoral attention to identify and address problems of the countryside that hinder pastoral ministers from attending to their work in various contexts. Hoeft et al. (2013) explore how pastors can advance holistic ministry in marginalised places – which are similar to the Zimbabwean countryside. In discussing the significance of understanding rural contexts, engaging with communities, intersecting with local leadership and embracing diversity for holistic transformation, their observations and suggestions are highly informative for a contextual study such as this. Therefore, the following section overviews the Zimbabwean rural context.

Overview of the Zimbabwean Rural Context

The Republic of Zimbabwe is a landlocked country in southern Africa, located between the Zambezi and Limpopo perennial rivers. It is bordered by South Africa to the south, Botswana to the west and southwest, Zambia to the northwest, and Mozambique to the east and northeast. Zimbabwe was born on 17 April 1980 after a protracted war of independence.

According to Countrymeters (2025), as of 1 January 2025, the population of Zimbabwe was estimated to be 16,454,043 people', of whom about 68% reside in rural areas (Sibanda 2019:7). Nationally, the country faces disturbing levels of poverty, unemployment, underemployment, food insecurity and gender inequality, as well as vulnerability to climate change and unsustainable use of natural resources (Sibanda 2019). I previously clarified that Zimbabwe faced an unsettling political and socioeconomic catastrophe throughout the rule of the late former President Robert Mugabe, which has continued to the present time and the incumbent president Emerson Mnangagwa's administration (Tagwirei 2024b). The countryside of Zimbabwe is characterised by political, socioeconomic and environmental volatility (Bone 2025; Ncube et al. 2018; Nyathi 2024). According to the Zimbabwe Livelihoods Assessment Committee, 'prolonged mid-season dry spells, unemployment and lack of income generating projects were the most reported community development challenges' (ECHO 2024:254). Though the government is expected to facilitate the necessary community development, much of its recent and present interventions has been selfishly politicised and denies recipients their right to participants in their own development processes (Tagarirofa and Chazovachii 2013). Researchers confirm that governmental support is given on partisan grounds, which exclude citizens deemed to be supporting or belonging to opposition political parties (Langa 2024; Mukubwa 2024). Some places served by pastors are reeling in abject poverty. For example, the experiences of a pastor who planted a rural church in Chitakai in January 2024 are explained as follows:

The living conditions in the rugged and mountainous Chitakai area are exceptionally harsh. Locals can barely make ends meet. They engage in subsistence farming to survive and depend heavily on the weather. 'Sadly, they did not receive rain this year' (de Vreugd 2024)

While keeping this in mind, the next section reviews church and community development in Zimbabwe.

Reviewing Church and Community Development in Zimbabwe

Despite all its challenges, the church has been involved in community development in Zimbabwe since the nation gained its independence from colonial rule in 1980. From the time Christianity was introduced by missionaries, the church contributed to the education, health, and economies of communities through establishing schools, hospitals, clinics, road networks, farms, and related developments. According to Ruzivo (2008), the first prime minister of Zimbabwe at independence called on churches to partner with the government in development. The prime minister requested the church to rebuild schools that had been vandalised during the war of liberation, provide safe drinking water for growing communities throughout Zimbabwe and to construct roads as well as medical facilities in both urban and rural areas.

Eventually, the church contributed a great deal to agricultural development through farming and creating employment, thereby broadening food reserves for the nation. It is also publicly known in Zimbabwe that the former president of Zimbabwe, Canaan Banana, encouraged churches to work closely with the government and the Zimbabwe Council of Churches to uphold African values and play a prophetic role. Consequently, Zimbabwean churches value missionary work and play their diaconal roles. Marimbe and Ndawonde (2024) studied the contributions of new neo-Pentecostal prophetic movements whose founders and leaders are known for self-serving commercialisation of the gospel in Zimbabwe. These scholars submit that churches have contributed much to the educational, medical, and economic development of Zimbabwean communities. Similarly, most evangelical and mainline churches have facilitated public medical outreach activities with medical doctors across the country to give citizens access to medical consultations and prescriptions, free of charge. Musoni (2013) chronicled the contributions of Pentecostal churches to community development in Zimbabwe, such as the establishment of orphanages, scholarship funding for disadvantaged children, establishing a rehabilitation centre for people living with disabilities, and empowerment projects for vulnerable women and widows by Zimbabwe AOG in Africa. Evangelical, Pentecostal and African independent ecumenical bodies such as the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Zimbabwe Christian Alliance facilitated transformational evangelism,

discipleship, constitutional and citizenship awareness campaigns (Tagwirei 2023b).

Considering that Zimbabwe has been hard pressed with human rights abuses (Muzambi 2017), church-led constitutional and citizenship awareness campaigns have been very relevant. Since the year 2012, the EFZ has advanced integral mission and has engaged churches and communities to identify and address their problems (Tagwirei 2024). Through such efforts, the EFZ recorded various infrastructural developments in rural areas across Zimbabwe. Similarly, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches ran empowerment projects that imparted entrepreneurship skills and resilience, as well as citizenship-awareness campaigns for inclusive nation-building purposes. The researcher witnessed some of the developmental projects facilitated by ecumenical bodies and some denominations, which are transforming lives in towns and peri-urban areas in Zimbabwe.

In spite of these commendable contributions, some remote areas of the country are yet to receive tangible developmental initiatives. I agree with Guzura and Tshuma (2016) that the majority of developmental projects extended to rural areas have been mainstream, top-down and envisioned, funded, managed and operationalised by urban-based organisations, churches, or individuals. Consequently, such initiatives have remained foreign and less effective than they could have been if they had been owned and run by locals. Bearing in mind that approximately 80% of rural Zimbabwe's population are the poorest and most vulnerable and needy in Zimbabwe (Juel 2023; Tom 2024), church leadership capacity building is crucial to enhance the holistic mission of the church. When pastors, elders and their subordinate pastoral leaders are capacitated, they can lead the church to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel in all spiritual, social, political, economic, and environmental areas of life – which collectively yield community development. As this study is based on the case of AOG, it is important to give a historical account of the denomination.

Historicising the AOG in Zimbabwe

Reference to history is pivotal for contextual understanding, hence the engagement with AOG for a case study. The AOG is a classic Pentecostal

denomination that was planted by white missionaries a few undocumented years before 1959 and officially launched and led by the black apostle Nicholas Hepworth Bhengkosi Bhengu in 1959 in Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Bhengu was a South African crusader who had been born on 5 September 1909 at a Lutheran mission in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa (Chibango 2021). He established a massive missionary movement called Back to God (BTG) in the 1950s, institutionalising and operationalising it, and planting churches in and outside South Africa (Chibango 2021). Though the AOG had been planted in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and other southern African countries by missionaries (Lephoko 2010; 2018). Bhengu is unanimously regarded by Zimbabwean AOG leaders and members as the founder of their church in Zimbabwe, because he officially opened it, raised leaders, structured and provided oversight in Zimbabwe until he died. Chibango (2021:74) reports that ‘Nicholas Bhengu later passed on 07 October 1985 at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town, Western Cape, South Africa’. Bhengu established structures in the same way that he did for the AOG BTG work in South Africa, such as having regular elective national conferences followed by regional councils (Tagwirei 2022). Since then, the church has grown beyond the urban sphere to some rural areas, such as Gokwe, Mhondoro, Nemamwa and Bikita (Tagwirei 2022). Therefore, the church can advance an integral mission that fosters holistic congregational and community development. Unfortunately, as a result of a national economic meltdown, it has been reported that the AOG, like most churches that depend mainly on traditional sources of income such as tithes, freewill offerings and donations, became incapacitated and failed to advance holistic gospel in urban and rural areas (Tagwirei 2022). Considering this situation, it is imperative to review the capacity of AOG rural church leaders in Zimbabwe.

Reviewing the Capacity of AOG Rural Church Leaders in Zimbabwe

While ecclesial leaders include deacons and others, this review focuses on pastors and elders because they are the senior leaders of their local assemblies. Rural AOG pastors and elders in Zimbabwe are a diverse group. A few of them have been theologically trained and are culturally, economically and developmentally sustainable, while numerous others are untrained and culturally, economically and developmentally vulnerable and unsustainable. It

should be noted that theological training is not mandatory for pastoral leaders in the AOG. The old AOG constitution, section 42:f, states that

every minister is advised to take an approved course in Bible school training, but academic accomplishments shall not always be a condition affecting the recognition of applicants for ministerial credentials (Assemblies of God, n.d).

Similarly, the draft AOG constitution of 2014, section 6.7.7, states that

every minister may take an approved course in Bible training but academic accomplishments shall not always be a condition affecting the recognition of applicants for ministerial credentials (Assemblies of God, n.d)

Thus, for the AOG, training is an issue of personal choice. Consequently, some pastoral leaders have pursued theological training, and others have not. Because theological training offers knowledge on hermeneutics and biblical, Christian, political, economic, liberation and integral missionary theologies, pastoral leaders who lack training tend to struggle to meet the demands of ministry, especially in economically volatile rural contexts. Since the political and socioeconomic situation is less favourable in rural areas than in urban centres, the church allocates its trained pastors to towns where living and working conditions are better. From participant observations, the researcher, as an AOG pastor in Zimbabwe, found pastoral deployments to rural areas to be highly selective. Usually members of the AOG District Council

leaders predominantly transfer junior pastors, while most seniors usually object and only move in circumstances beyond their powers, such as when ill or dead (Tagwirei 2023a:1).

These allocations are based on economic insecurity, as the rural economy is worse than in urban areas of the country; this is a predicament faced by most churches Zimbabwe. Chengeta (2023:n.p) reports that, 'in my observation, there are more sound urban churches preaching the gospel and being planted than rural ones'.

The researcher is aware of churches that support pastoral leaders who have been deployed to rural areas, such as the United Methodist Church, which gave their rural pastors motorbikes and facilitated seminars on income-generating ideas and projects such as poultry farming (Ashdown 2022; Chingwe 2018). Sadly, the majority of churches do not support rural pastoral leaders. Therefore, these pastors struggle to make ends meet in the absence of the resources they need. Most clerics in Zimbabwe churches do not receive formal salaries. They get by on the generosity of congregations, because there is a societal attitude in the country that being a pastor is a 'calling' and not a salaried profession. Mwareya (2023) reports that for the few pastors who receive formal salaries in elite churches in cities, wages are as pitiful as US\$300 a month. In rural areas, pastors live in even more precarious situations and are paid not in cash but by gifts such as live chickens.

It is also common for rural pastors to lack cars for transportation; they are required to walk long distances to attend to their pastoral work (Kumuterera 2021). Most of them also lack financial and material resources to develop themselves, their churches and their communities. Out of desperation, some Zimbabwean rural pastors are engaging in unconventional methods of survival, such as bootleg brewing and gold panning (Kugwa 2021; Simango 2022). According to Simango (2022:n.p), 'City pastors are buffeted with tithes, better wages, allowances and gifts from city congregants who're usually professionals: nurses, accountants, dentists ... So even if church wages are sporadic and unreliable in Zimbabwe, the gifts city pastors receive shield them from destitution'; yet, 'Zimbabwe's rural districts are hotspots of entrenched household poverty ... So, rural church ministers, because they are stationed in districts buffeted by poverty, share the hellish experience of one of the world's most troubled economies'. In such contexts (Simango 2022:n.p), 'dozens of other unpaid rural Pentecostals, evangelical or Adventist pastors in his Chimanimani district dabble in artisanal gold mining too to keep afloat'. Other pastors who failed to overcome poverty in rural areas have migrated to towns or have left Zimbabwe in search of greener pastures (Mwareya 2023). The same has been the case with the AOG; some of its rural pastors gave up their work of ministry and took up other occupations elsewhere in or beyond Zimbabwe.

Thus, church leadership capacity building is important for the pastors who have remained and who continue to minister in distressed rural areas, so that they can develop themselves, their churches, and communities effectively. If capacity is not built, the rural church and rural communities will continue suffering and waiting for outside support that can make substantial development possible. It is believed that, once pastors and elders are capacitated, they would be able to capacitate their subordinate leaders and followers and, thereby, ensure sustainable and inclusive grassroots community development under local leadership and participation.

Rebuilding Church Leadership Capacity to enhance Rural Community Development

As explained above, church leadership capacity building is integral for inclusive sustainability in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. Taking into account what Hoeft et al (2013). observed in American rural contexts, and reflections from the Zimbabwean countryside, community engagement, public leadership and the embrace and enabling of diversity can enhance community development. By considering contextual observations based on the AOG, other local churches and rural situations, theological training, mind-set transformation, communal economics, and partnerships could be attended to. Considering that capacity building is a broad and complex issue, the following suggestions are not comprehensive but can contribute much towards enhancing pastoral capabilities in inclusive rural community development.

Contextualising Pastoral Capacity Building

This study uncovered that the majority of rural AOG pastors lack theological training. Without theological training, leaders cannot manage their lives and execute their leadership roles effectively. The researcher concurs with Ncube and Kgatla's (2021) findings from Epworth Farm Mission Station that some pastoral leaders inherited and have failed to manage enterprising and developmental initiatives that were established by missionaries. Nevertheless, the church carries the diaconal mission of God to care for the needy, everyone, and everything, and should thus enable inclusive development. So, it is recommended that mother churches facilitate or support theological training for pastors, elders and their subordinate leaders on hermeneutics and the theologies of and entrepreneurship for personal, collective, family, ecclesial,

and community development. In the absence of knowledge of hermeneutics and theologies of development, ecclesiastic leaders could misunderstand community development as being secular and thus fail to contribute to it. Pastoral leaders should be trained to understand and live out biblical concepts of community development such as fruitfulness, peacefulness, progressiveness and blessedness (Nanthambwe 2023).

Most importantly, the mission of the church is integral. As I explain elsewhere (Tagwirei 2024a), the church is mandated to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel in all socioeconomic, political and environmental areas of life. The correct hermeneutics of James 1:22 could inspire the church to live out the word of God, be the salt and light of the world (Matthew 5:13–16) and believe and share the totality of God-given transformation (John 10:10) in all communities. Once ecclesial leaders and members are trained, they can be inclusive and transformational in their contexts.

Considering the poor governance, corruption, inconsistent policies, worsening economic crises, and deterioration of healthcare, education, infrastructure and the supply of basic needs such as water and electricity in urban areas (Ansari 2024; Bushu and Kufakurinani 2024; Denya 2025; Kawadza 2025), the administration of incumbent President Mnangagwa is failing to maintain and develop the nation. Therefore, it is useless to expect this government to facilitate sustainable development in rural communities. While some parachurch, ecumenical and other non-governmental organisations have been facilitating development projects in certain rural areas, they cannot offer everything that is needed. Additionally, whatever they offer remains foreign and unsustainable unless and until local members of communities participate, own and become capacitated to initiate and sustain their own community developments. Accordingly, the AOG (and other churches) should consider developing pastors' knowledge of hermeneutics and theologies of development, and should ignite, enlighten and empower them to manage sustainable development in their respective areas.

Engaging Community, Exemplifying and Advancing Development

As Hoeft et al. argue,

there is a sense of interdependence in rural communities that pushes care beyond a particular congregational membership to being offered by and for the whole community (Hoeft et al 2013:14).

Hoeft et al. explain that pastoral leadership should engage with community leaders or representatives and become informed about and collectively strategise to address issues that are identified. The review of the Zimbabwean context in this paper uncovered that the economy of Zimbabwe is unstable, basic needs are costly and livelihoods are pathetic. Engaging with poverty-stricken contexts demands sustainable economics.

It is recommended that AOG pastoral leaders consider tent-making to sustain and capacitate themselves and to exemplify and advance development. As exemplified by Paul in Acts 18:1–4, if pastors build up their economies through undertaking part-time jobs or establishing businesses, they can raise funds to initiate and sustain development projects. Tent-making can sustain pastoral welfare and ministry, inspire followers and support them and their communities to develop themselves (Ndelwa 2003). Doing so is imperative, because traditional sources of church income, such as tithes, freewill offerings, donations and related collections, are inconsistent and contingent on fluctuating economic situations, capacity, understanding and the willingness of believers (Tagwirei 2022) and, thus unreliable. Like most other church pastors, AOG pastoral leaders in Zimbabwean rural areas cannot exemplify tangible personal, family, ecclesial and community development with traditional church economies. It is prudent for them to revolutionise their ecclesiological economics by becoming more enterprising. Although doing business as a church or as a gospel minister is problematic because it risks the commercialisation of the gospel and stimulates negative impressions by diverting from free service provision to profit-making and corruption, this submission concurs with my previous conclusion (Tagwirei 2022) that pastoral leadership can missionise business by applying biblical principles, remaining honest, consistent and faithful and utilising the proceeds for advancing all-inclusive missionary work for the betterment of communities. In that way, tent-making can emancipate clerics from being burdens to being blessings for their congregations and communities. This is reminiscent of the message of Paul to the Corinthians, namely that he was not a burden to anybody during

his missionary journeys because he was involved tent-making (2 Corinthians 12:13–16).

Given the fact that, nationally, Zimbabwe is undergoing disturbing economic hardships and that congregations have been correspondingly constrained, tent-making is contextually strategic for pastors and elders to generate their own incomes to complement what their assemblies provide, thereby exemplify self-sustainability and initiating development for their churches and communities instead of being burdens. Because not all pastors and leaders are business-minded and knowledgeable, it is recommended that entrepreneurship seminars and related training is provided for them and their subordinates, congregations and communities, to enlighten and empower them to identify business ideas and to start up, manage, sustain and utilise businesses that are run for purposes other than selfish goals, such as to achieve inclusive community development.

Transforming Community Culture and Mindset Towards Sustainable Development

Drawing from the recommendation of Hoeft et al. (2013), that community pastoral care should offer public leadership and embrace and promote diversity, there is a need to transform the culture and mind-set of villagers to appreciate and participate, with their diverse resources and abilities, in developmental initiatives. Traditionally, Zimbabweans, like most Africans, have superstitious beliefs about wealth and poverty. We are in agreement with Rwanda's President Kagame:

Everything starts with a clear and even very simple vision for the future that everyone understands and agrees on. We all want a prosperous, stable, and equitable Africa. And we want it as soon as possible. ... One, let's change how people think. Two, shape how resources are allocated and later on utilised. [...] transformational change happens at the level of mind-sets. ...

A mind-set of urgency, ownership, responsibility, and service as well as quite frankly the mind-set of money-making and long-term investing (Princewell 2017:n.p)

If we accept that vision means ‘the act or power of seeing’, thinking, or imagining (Merriam-Webster n.d; see also Patton 2017), pastoral leaders could engage with their community to determine their needs and draw and direct ecclesial and community attention towards collective development. Public engagements, empowerment and leadership determine development, as exemplified by Nehemiah (Tagwirei 2024a, 2024b). Pastors, elders and their supporting leaders can, then, transform community mind-sets. Mind-sets should be transformed to enable people to come to terms with the need for development, to mobilise human, financial, material and immaterial resources from among themselves, and participate in programmes that are meant for them (Deo 2022). In the absence of mind-set change, developmental initiatives for communities will not be sustainable. This is why some Zimbabwean ecumenical bodies, such as the EFZ, have been facilitating envisioning seminars about integral mission across the nation, in an attempt to enlighten citizens and encourage them to take responsibility and initiate and collaborate in identifying and seeking solutions and mobilising resources for their own transformational development (Tagwirei 2023a).

Such capacity-development strategies have brought about change, but there is still much room for rural citizens to improve their mind-sets in relation to sustainable development. Bearing in mind that the AOG and various other churches in Zimbabwe have been dependent mainly on traditional sources of income, such as tithes, freewill offerings, donations and related collections (Tagwirei 2022), pastoral leaders should teach their rural congregations and communities to think ‘outside the box’ and revolutionise their economics in order to transform themselves. If pastoral leadership and communities start believing that they have solutions for their challenges, they can utilise what they have and develop and sustain themselves. As faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17), it has been shown that, when pastors and elders provide teachings regarding community development, villagers’ mind-sets can be changed and they can start believing and taking part and, eventually, leading their development

from the recommendation of Hoeft, Jung, and Marshall (2013) that community pastoral care should offer public leadership and embrace and promote diversity, there is a need to transform the culture and mindset of villagers to appreciate and participate, with their diverse resources and

abilities, in developmental initiatives. Traditionally, Zimbabweans, like most Africans, have superstitious beliefs about wealth and poverty (Princewill 2017). We are in agreement with Rwanda's President Kagame:

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A mindset of urgency, ownership, responsibility, and service as well as quite frankly the mindset of money-making and long-term investing.

[...] In the African context, however, we can grow very old waiting for the invisible hand of the market to work its magic. (Kagame 2016:n.p)

Developing Communal Economics

The inclusive, other-centred, collective, and complementary communal economics of the early church can also be transformational for Zimbabwean rural communities. Communal economics refers to mobilising, combining and sharing possessions to meet needs of everyone in a community. By interfacing ecclesiology with economics from the book of Acts 4:32–33, Augustine (2016:219) explains communal economics as sharing and managing people's resources together, which is in contrast to individualism and capitalism. By drawing from communalism, pastoral leaders in rural areas can teach and facilitate mobilisation, combination, sharing and investment of the human, material, nonmaterial and financial resources that villagers own, to achieve the goal of collective sustainability. While rural areas may have limited financial and material resources, they have retired or currently employed people who possess skills that they can contribute. If pastoral leaders facilitate processes of searching, identifying, mobilising, combining and utilising available resources to achieve community development, the necessary developments can be accomplished.

Considering the interconnected nature of rural and urban communities, collective efforts can be strategised beyond communities to share resources from the children, relatives and well-wishers of community members in other rural and urban areas. Communal life enhances group cooperation and support and is inspired by love and concern for one another, for the common good (Hombana 2023). Just as members of the early church sold their possessions, including land, to meet the needs of the needy from within the church, local communities and advanced holistic mission, integral mission and inclusive transformation can be realised if today's pastoral leaders apply the same approach to underdeveloped rural areas. Selflessness, cooperation, complementarity and generosity can transform rural lives, livelihoods, and communities.

Conclusion

This paper explored and addressed church leadership capacity building in distressed rural Zimbabwean contexts. While the church should be appreciated for contributing to various developments, especially in urban settings, it should be reawakened to fill the gap of rural ecclesial leadership potential and to sustain existing and initiate contextually needed transformational developments. Without capacitated clerical leadership, church-driven community development in Zimbabwe's rural areas may remain minimal, foreign and unsustainable. In light of this scenario, this submission applied the approach of Hoeft et al. and contextual observations from the AOG. It argued that it is pivotal to contextualise church leadership capacity building and to identify and tackle pastoral and community needs collectively. The paper concludes that pastors and elders should exemplify development by establishing sustainable individual, family, church and community projects. Eventually, pastoral leadership ought to facilitate the cultural, mind-set and communal economics of their communities by presenting theologically sound, contextually relevant, consistent, and transformational teachings.

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