

## **FROM STATE TO MORE CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL PROTECTION: THE CASE OF INCREASING ROLE OF CHURCHES IN WELFARE PROVISION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper acknowledges the existence of two main drivers of poverty in Zimbabwe, namely co-variant or structural and idiosyncratic drivers. These two combined, have been greatly fueled by Zimbabwe's precarious financial position, which has resulted in a complex landscape of social challenges. The contemporary social problems faced by the country border on destitution and deprivation. Zimbabwe has a sound Social Protection framework outline in place which is closely monitored by the Department of Social Welfare which unfortunately has been weakened by the financial crisis the country is experiencing. In Zimbabwe social welfare provision is a shared obligation by various entities which include Government, NGOs, FBOs, Council Authorities and other stakeholders including corporate and individuals. Zimbabwe, due to the economic meltdown is experiencing a shift in social service provision with civil society (churches for the purposes of this study stand in for civil society) playing a much bigger role than expected. Most churches are registered bodies under the council of churches and some have registered charity activities and programmes. The paper focuses on social protection activities carried by churches at a local level, outside the formal and professional setup and so this can be mainly categorized as informal help or service. Informal care has widely surpassed formal care in Zimbabwe due to a plethora of factors, including the economic downturn which has grabbed the formal sector among others. This has left a gap in social service provision as the formal arrangements seem to be overwhelmed with challenges and so appear as if they have abdicated their obligation, with churches and other organizations feeling the gap in both formal and informal ways. Data has been gathered and analyzed in a qualitative way and a total of 100 respondents, 25 drawn from each of the 4 churches in Norton, which are the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (SDA), Anglican Church, Roman Catholic Church and ZAOGA.

**Key Words:** Social Protection, Churches and Religion, alternative care and State Financial Challenges.

## **Introduction**

In Zimbabwe social protection mechanisms take two forms, formal and informal. The informal type of social provision, according to Olivier and Dekker (2003) takes two forms namely the Private Household-based or Kinship-based. The second one is the Member Organisation-based or Non-kinship-based, informal, coping strategies, all these strive to provide safety nets. Public nets are created with many objectives but the main one is to help people avoid falling into destitution and serious deprivation. This is done through provision and raising of consumption of the poor through publicly-provided services and interventions.

Social security coverage in Sub-Saharan Africa according to Mpedi et al (2013) is limited. The social security provision/assistance is means-tested and benefits only the selected group of persons. Usually these are the needy, young, widowed, orphaned, those too old to work, the disabled and other categories deemed vulnerable. In critiquing this means-testing approach to social assistance, he points out that it excludes others such as the unemployed persons who do not fit into one of the categories or those who never contributed to the unemployment insurance scheme or have exhausted their benefits and are wallowing in poverty. The limited nature of social security provision in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular has seen the deepening of poverty and deterioration of well-being amongst its communities and hence the rise of informal social service provision mainly by churches.

Community and Government have in place safety nets that also function in a complementary manner to help adverse situation of its members who would be in shock. This intervention strategy is clearly spelt in the Government's Social Services provision framework in the Social Welfare Act (17:06). Social Service provision in Zimbabwe according to Kaseke, Gumbo and Dhemba (1998) is a shared responsibility and the department of Social Welfare supervises it. However the department is yet to develop a very reliable mechanism to capture and supervise informal forms of intervention.

The contemporary social delivery situation in Zimbabwe has taken a nose dive and the formal safety nets have been overwhelmed. The financial situation has made the government fail to own up to some of its obligations and constitutional mandate to protect its vulnerable citizens. The burden has heavily weighed on the shoulders of informal players. The informal care providers themselves have been incapacitated by the economic melt-down but due to their proximity to the challenges and moral values and obligation, they are in a way, directly and indirectly compelled to assist.

Zimbabwe is a religious country and the government upholds the freedom of worship. A lot of churches have been registered and some are not registered. Their main objective is captured in their teaching and enshrined in Mathew 28 verse 19 and 20 (*19...Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the son, and of the Holy Ghost 20...Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo,...*) [King James Version]. This seems to be the core-business of the church, making disciples and teaching them the commandments of the Father. The scripture here is silent on extending a helping hand. The church's mission however is centered on works of compassion and it is this compassion that has greatly increased philanthropy in Zimbabwe and given the government breathing space to at least worry about other pressing demands such as growing the nation's economy, taking care of its workforce/civil service among other production-related issues.

### **Non-Material Social Protection**

Churches provide both material and non-material social protection and support. The non-material support is the most dominant, constantly and routinely carried out. Although both forms of support are supposed to be carried out concurrently, material support is demand-driven and requires proper planning and coordination. Non- material support comes in the form of moral teachings and counseling the churches give weekly and during life times of their members. This has gone a long way in equipping societies and communities with self-confidence and resilience in face of vulnerabilities. The church's teachings though not quite legally binding, have a morally binding aspect which can protect and discourage potential adversaries from committing moral injustices against their neighbors, strangers, kith and kin among other individuals.

### **Protection against committing injustice**

Social Protection, as noted above includes material provision and non-material services and in this context becomes the strengthening or maintenance of the social fabric. The church, according to Ndlovu (2013) plays a pertinent role in strengthening the social fabric which he defines as the force that brings the society together so that there is social cohesion and stability. Breton (2004) conceptualizes social fabric as the force that drives the members of the society to do what objectively is necessary for them to do. Horton and Hunt (1984) concur with Breton by defining social fabric as the power that ensures that the society operates on the principles of orderliness, where each person accepts certain duties towards others and claim certain rights from others. They further argue that in the absence of a strong social fabric, individualism and anarchy takes over the society and it becomes very difficult for any society to develop and improve its societal living standards.

The church and various religions, through their moral teachings are playing a vital role in combating moral decadence and injustice against the weak of the society. It discourages picking on those who are small or weaker in society and proclaims God to be their redeemer. In a religious country like Zimbabwe any action contradicting God's commandment is a dangerous minefield to trespass. (Deuteronomy 27 verse 19...*Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow...* , Psalms 12 verse5...*For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.*) [King James Version] such teachings has in a great way reduced the injustice in society and also gave counseling to those unfairly treated by giving them assurance that God was their own protector and will in some point attend to their mistreatment. This teaching has protected the poor, widows, disabled and orphans among others.

Poverty in Zimbabwe can also be as a result of property grabbing and unlawful usurping of other people's means of livelihood. This can be at a personal level (idiosyncratic) or at a national level (covariant or structural) for instance estate grabbing of the deceased and unfair or racist regulation (colonialism where the black majority in the case of were kicked out of their prime lands and the land reform in which targeted predominantly whites in order to redress the colonial imbalances.) These types of injustices create social problems and render community members vulnerable. Real estate has been stolen from widows, orphans, disabled

and other vulnerable categories. Properties have been usurped, boundaries aggressively altered and orphans' fields and properties used without their permission and direct benefitting. All these are avenues that provide social security against vulnerabilities and if tempered with or violated usher in vulnerabilities and poverty. The churches are playing a crucial role in attacking such moral decadence and proving to be an alternative source of protection apart from the legal framework/front.

Izumi (2007) postulates that property grabbing threatens the social security of women across Southern and East Africa. Forced evictions and other violent abuses of women, widows, orphans, the old, the disabled among others, particularly makes them vulnerable and further worsen their conditions in an environment with a weakened customary practice and social safety nets which used to protect them. Some women, according to Izumi lost shelter and source of livelihoods, and have become destitute. These women have found their way in some instances in the philanthropic arms of the church in terms of psycho-social support to recover from the shocks. Almost every church amongst its congregants has dealt with a case that involved property grabbing and members greatly traumatized as a result of the loss of possessions. Churches have established counseling programmes and forums where those with similar challenges meet and share ideas.

Churches have provided platforms that connect people of different backgrounds and suffering from different and similar challenges. These forums help the concerned categories in dealing with their challenges. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church has a department that deals with widowed women where they gather and share information and so do other churches, Anglican, ZAOGA and Roman Catholic Church. This has created a fountain of hope and pool of knowledge on how churches and individual can deal with any challenges affecting any vulnerable group or individuals amidst it. Membership to a church in some instances has been taken as a social security measure where one can attain assistance in times of difficulties. Churches are a form of a social capital. Cook and Whitmeyer (1992), in explaining such social networking look at the importance of exchanges. They present a basic image of social structure in terms of configurations of social relations which involves among other issues exchange of information and valued items in any form they come. Churches, as exhibited are institutions composed of actors who are active agents and very conscious of the choices that they make. Besides eternal salvation they also seek social security, a service the church offers

through its network of actors and exchanges. All these exchanges have in a way helped the social situations of their communities.

Mararike (1999) points out that poverty and other ill conditions can be caused by lack of material possessions and property in form of assets. Its loss again, be it under human dispossession or through destruction by nature, exposes families or individuals to vulnerabilities. To protect its members against social problems churches play a vital role in upholding good morals and values. Stealing, killing, adultery and all other ill behavior is discouraged. Similarly the society and government are involved in a social contract where tradition and values are sets that guides the social engagements by all citizens. Any breach of contract by any part calls for reprimands from other parties. When any component of society for instance economic order, a political system, education, cultural etc debases human dignity by violating basic human rights and social provisions the church acts as a flag bearer and becomes involved in upholding the full truth of the moral order. Churches have contributed immensely in protecting the social dignity of its members and society at large. The Roman Catholic Church, Anglican and ZAOGA directly participate in the politics of the day confronting all social injustices. During food shortages and volatile political situations in Zimbabwe around 2007-2009 when commodities were bought at controlled outlets and some free handouts being dished, challenges and political affiliations took center stage with some accused of being politically wrong and could be denied opportunity to buy and to be given. Churches spoke strongly against such partisan distribution of commodities. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church discouraged their members from directly participating in the politics of the day but non-engagement in the politics of the country would indirectly spare their convents in the case of politically-premised misunderstandings and hence indirectly shielding them from social injustices that come with political affiliations.

Churches have also embarked on an informal, small scale skills and entrepreneurial skills training to empower its members and cushion them in moments of challenges. Most churches have clubs in place that teach various skills to its members and society. The Roman Catholic Church has sewing clubs that empower women on basic sewing techniques which they use to earn a living. The Anglican Church periodically arranges training workshops for its members and the community training them on a variety of skills including brick molding, poultry, small livestock breeding. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church also carries out health and

nutritional seminars encouraging communities to live a healthy life. They are in agreement with the findings of ILO (2010) when they posit that poverty in the community can be as a result of lack of productivity due to illness. They have discovered ill health as a cause that makes communities susceptible to social problems as the community will be affected by outbreaks and even isolated sicknesses in families. They advocate for a healthy living and consumption style that does not expose communities to illness. They point out that their seminars are pro-active in nature and constitute a very appropriate social protection mechanism as compared to the remedial intervention of drug and nutrition supplies which according to them treats symptoms instead of nipping the problem in the bud.

### **Material Social Services**

Social Protection is a component that also informs the development of a nation, community, family and even an institution. Development involves a profound transformation of the entire economic and social structure by fighting against the chief social evils like malnutrition, diseases, illiteracy, inequalities, unemployment and slums etc. Churches are currently involved in fighting the same. Niebur (1996) notes that the core business of the church is to preach the word of God in order to win souls for heaven. This cannot however be carried out in isolation but through the love of the neighbor and community. Social Protection in the entire universe in general and Zimbabwe in particular has immensely benefitted from the church and religion's philanthropic work. Most churches and religions hinge the salvation of their followers on faith and good works. It is the call and desire to be served that has seen most churches increasing their community deeds that directly and indirectly feed into social protection in Zimbabwe and all over the globe. The Christian world is commissioned into civic work by their desire to make their worship complete and be proper candidates for eternal salvation and hence a combination of faith and good works of charity positions them in a cordial disposition with their savior. ( James 2 verse 26...*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without work is dead also...*James 2 verse 14...*what doth it profit, my brethren though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?....*James 2 verse 18...*show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works.[King James Version]*. Almost all churches agree on these verses and use their hand for community assistance.

Most churches concur on their moral obligation on being their brothers' keepers. The church, besides preaching, is supposed to expediently respond to the problems of believers and community. One example noted in the early church well coordinated response to covariant poverty is captured in Acts Chapter 21 regarding Agabus' prophecy where the early church efficiently organized itself and sent assistance to their brothers in faith who were experiencing a drought. Cormack 1983 in Chirisa 2013 acknowledges that one of major roles played by church is helping the needy members of society. There is a lot of assistance the churches are providing at a small scale.

### **Extreme poverty and hunger alleviation**

Financial difficulties at global level such as recession, depressed commodity prices e.g. tobacco, cotton, minerals among others, debt crisis and stagnation in foreign investment and aid inflows placed a heavy toll on developing countries and their citizens. Chambers (1989) point out that economic growth has been negligible if not negative especially in Sub-Sahara Africa. The situation heavily deteriorated in Zimbabwe where household food security and welfare became severe. The poor communities have been hardly hit by the situation coupled by weakened government intervention capacity. People have created informal networks for survival some of which is membership in churches.

Churches have penned programmes at the local level aiming at circumventing the ills of extreme poverty and hunger in their midst. The Roman Catholic, ZAOGA, Anglican and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church have programmes or activities in place to assist their members and community. The Dorcas department which is mainly led by women in most churches and Ruwadzano collect food stuffs from church members and other corporate donations and distribute them to vulnerable groups in society and their church. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church has a community need assessment programme at local church where they identify the community needs first and try to address them at the same time teaching their word. They term this the 'Jesus Method' where they say upon preaching Jesus fulfilled the social needs of the concerned audience for instance healing the crippled, the sick, raising the dead among others. This concurs with the exchange theories which among them Homans (1964) who emphasized primary purposes of sub-institutions of 'elementary' forms of behavior. According to him social structure emerges from elementary form of behavior and changes over time to respond to changes in the behavior of its aggregates.



This conceptualization by Homans (1964) of the changing behavior of aggregates also helps in understanding the widespread increase and strengthening of informal care in Zimbabwe. The church growth through conventions especially of those converts converted as a result of works of faith or those who benefited from the church's assistance and empowerment creates a reservoir or ready assistance. Most churches concur that love should be extended to everyone just as their God has shown their love by giving them His only begotten son. So to them love is best manifested through giving. This ethic is to be adopted by all those after salvation and their assistance extends to everyone in need no matter his or her affiliations or disposition to the church.

*“Just as God provides rain in the fields of witches, sorcerers, thieves and even those who do not believe in him and despise Him. We should also not discriminate....” remarked a deacon from Seventh-Day Adventist Church.*

Poverty and hunger are a social evil that may end up decimating the community's population and chiefly social fabrics of societies as community members in face of such ill conditions will resort to unorthodox means of survival which will later defeat God's salvation plan. Muzvidziwa (1998) identifies prostitution as part of informal survival strategies that some people resort to. Most churches do have in place pro-active mechanisms that they employ to avoid the occurrence of poverty or hunger amidst their vulnerable groups. Urban subsistence farming although at times is on loggerheads with Council Authority is one of resources that people use to provide food security. Churches give assistance in terms of money, seeds and other provisions to help cultivate urban fields of the old, widowed and other vulnerable children. Also upon harvesting, some church members also may give some of their harvests to these families or individuals, some families provide labor to help these vulnerable groups where as a family they devote a day or week where they go and help working in the field for free. It is this social capital created out of church affiliation that has given alternative of social protection to the vulnerable.

### **Health and Sanitary provision**

The churches also play a prominent role in ensuring the good health of their congregates. Apart from the spiritual aspect of praying for the sick the churches also at times or quite often foot hospital bills for their indignant members. The four churches ZAOGA, Roman Catholic, Anglican and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church although they believe in miracle healing

they seem not to put much emphasis on them as the norm in Pentecostal churches. They encourage their members to seek professional assistance in cases of sickness. Usually these vulnerable groups fail to raise enough for their medical assistance. Concurring with other modernization scholars like Smelser (1964) who insinuate that lack of development in developing countries is a structural problem which is the chief architect of poverty, hunger and ill health. Ill health affects productivity and self-reliance and hence churches are more interested in people being self-reliant than to survive on alms.

Churches, in order to combat the outbreak of diseases are engaged in community work that aims at sensitizing communities and their members to live in a hygienic environment. They engage in cleaning campaigns where they pick up litter in congested areas and places such as bus terminuses, busy places like shopping centers, hospitals and other public places to avoid outbreaks of deadly diseases associated with lack of hygiene such as cholera, typhoid, bilharzias, dysentery and others. Some churches procure water treatment drugs and distribute them to their members in times of cholera or typhoid outbreaks.

Sanitary provision is one of the activities in combating outbreaks of diseases amongst their vulnerable groups. They provide detergents such as soap for bathing and washing, dish washers, toiletries and other health-ensuring commodities such as toothpaste and brushes. Churches constantly give donations to clinics and hospitals. The Seventh-Day Adventist in Norton has adopted the pediatric wing at Norton Hospital where they provide beddings, detergents and other utensils. They frequently visit the ward and hold prayer sessions and distribute fruits and sometimes clothing to them. These social gestures have vastly improved the security of vulnerable groups in communities. Cook and Whitmeyer (1992) further broaden the understanding of the subject where they present a basic image of a health society and social structure in terms of configurations of social relations which involves exchange of valued items in form of material, information and symbolic. From the symbolic interactions perspectives such as the social gestures shown by churches in visiting an ill person and those incarcerated depict importance and worth of those visited so much so that they mentally stabilize, knowing there are some people who are concerned with their plight and gives them the impetus to recover and also make a difference in society for those in her or his predicament.

## **Education**

Education is viewed as one of enabling conditions that can be also treated as an asset to fight against vulnerability. Zvobgo (1994) postulates that education system plays two main functions that include imparting skills, training and habits needed in economy for the production of goods and services. The other function being, a configuration of cultural, moral and behavioral values of the society, notably appropriate attitudes of respect for the rulers, their institutions and their agents. Churches and missionaries have provided educational facilities during colonial era and post colonial era in most developing countries. The aim besides perennial accusations of indoctrinating communities with biblical values also served as a way of empowering people to be self-productive and thus improving their social security. Currently churches in addition to running mission schools also help children in difficult circumstances by paying their fees at their local church level. The four churches selected have a considerable number of children they are assisting with educational related issues. At times the churches through their local church treasury give out the money but the most common among all churches are individual and family pledges where they annually pay for kids without making it known to the church members or society.

Inequalities are viewed to be at the epicenter of vulnerabilities. Bettile captured this when he postulated that unequal placements generate unequal opportunities. The school system gives pretence of equal opportunity. Zvobgo (1994) points out that it allows some individuals to climb the social ladder. He points out that education can also be a way of exerting control over the other as those who fail and remain in poverty are taken to be their own nemesis and not the result of an unequal and exploitative system. Bowls and Gintis weigh in by noting that, if the ruled are made to accept their position as normal, inevitable and fail to realize the true nature of their positions they cannot challenge their situations. Churches have capacitated communities by affording the less privileged the chance to go to school in a period of financial austerity and hence playing the greater part in ensuring social protection against vulnerabilities by providing resources such as uniforms, books, and other accessories conducive for proper learning.

African scholars like Adjibolosoo and Mararike among others share the same objective with the church in as far as issues to do with social morality and fabric is concerned but differ on the institution to carry out the social fabric strengthening for their front traditional values to

shape their education system. African scholarship view ‘proper education’ as that which works to improve the human factor content of the people. To them the most delicate part in development of a people has to do with their anthropic space. Education should resonate with the anthropic space of a given individual so that the values of ubuntu will be well inculcated in society. This is also in line with churches although having a different premise or foundation with the traditional values they aim at equipping society with equal opportunities to work and produce. This ultimately empowers society to help itself, kith and kin and consequently help social security.

## **Conclusion**

The economic melt-down in Zimbabwe has jeopardized a lot of social security mechanisms from formal to informal. The formal mechanisms in form of government interventions, NGOs, Local Authority and others have been rendered redundant and informal systems also have felt the economic pinch with kinship-ties based social security systems weakened. People have resorted to churches which are acting as safety nets. The paper’s findings do agree with literature in a great way. Social networks act as a form of social capital, an avenue that people exploit to create new forms of safety nets. According to the paper’s findings almost everyone belongs to a church though for different motives which include, need for salvation, protection, care and affection among others. The church in turn according to findings although facing challenges of the economic nature of the country has not disappointed. It has stood up to the expectation of its congregates. The church has played a vital role in the provision of social services to its community members, it has provided food, shelter, accommodation, affection, counseling, burial services and assistance and other amenities.

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