The Role of Church Leadership In Promoting Sustainable Development In Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The Church’s obligation to proclaim *liberty, peace and justice* for the good of the people complements the triple concepts of *globalisation, good governance* and *democracy* which have dominated current international discourse. However, the church has been widely recognised as just an institution championing the spiritual growth and little is documented on its role in sustainable development. A study was conducted to investigate initiatives by church leaders in Zimbabwe to attain *sustainable development* in line with Agenda 21 which is meant to be a road map to sustainable development. A qualitative design was used in this study using questionnaires, interviews and secondary data from church archives as research instruments. To analyse the collected data, philosophical analytical models based on new hermeneutics were employed. The study revealed that the church’s participation in developmental projects is tremendous. The mainline and Pentecostal churches are the leaders ahead of white garment churches in terms of supporting objectives of sustainable development. There has been the establishment of educational institutions, vocational training centres and old age people’s homes in many areas around the country. Key challenges identified that militate against the church’s efforts to contribute to sustainable development were the varying church doctrines, conservative behaviour of churches and gender imbalances as well as church politics in terms of vision to follow. Thus, the church therefore cannot afford to be indifferent and isolated in the face of glaring socio-political and economic challenges enveloping Zimbabwe. This paper has given an insight of how the progressive Zimbabwean *Church leadership* has been deploying all its resources in order to effectively and efficiently contributes to the attainment of sustainable development. Thus, there should be a refocus on the undermined role of the clergy in influencing sustainable development.

**Keywords:** liberty, peace and justice, good governance, democracy, church leadership, sustainable development.

Introduction

Sustainable development has become a topical discourse especially around the mid 1970s and governments in both the developing world and the developed world are attempting to integrate it into their national developments plans. However, the variation in the socio-economic, political and environmental backgrounds has presented a challenge in the attainment of sustainable development. Any social and economic change expected in a nation is always driven by strong and committed leadership which is often not present. The situation in the developing world has shown that the political administrative systems and structures alone cannot bring the idea of sustainable development into fruition. As such, these gaps can be filled if churches play a role through their values.
systems which incorporates principles of sustainable development.

The preoccupation of the churches has, since time immemorial been associated with issues of justice and currently there has been a shift towards championing of development which is married to sustainability. Moreover, literature seems to suggest that development has been measured in economic terms yet the term itself is a complex one with many facets including the deliberately ignored spiritual dimension (Adam and Jeanrenaud; 2000). The spiritual dimension could not be overlooked as it is instrumental in shaping and reshaping actor’s behaviour. The incorporation of the church seems to offer potential initial advantages which can serve as a road map to the attainment of sustainable development in many ways. The World Council of Churches has added “sustainable” to its slogan, which now calls for a “just, participatory, and sustainable society,” (Best, 1990). This coming together of church leaders offers possible opportunities for countries to share experiences on the implementation of sustainable development strategies.

It has been observed that the church is often located in areas where there is a high concentration of vulnerable people, where there is the most physical, psychological and spiritual needs (Hauck, 2010). In speaking of the church’s organizational capacity, Raistrick (2006) notes that in addition to its ability to gather people together for a common purpose and initiate joint action, in many communities, the church is possibly the only reliable institution there is. Furthermore, church leaders also enjoy levels of trust and legitimacy that no other civil society actors have achieved (Dickson-Waiko, 1999 and Nichols, 2003). The church leaders are revered clergy who are believed to have received definite calls from God to address spiritual and physical needs of congregates therefore, this set up is crucial as it can be a strategic platform for stakeholder participation in all sustainable projects formulation and implementation. Thus, the church is possibly a driver of social change as it instills societal values which can counter poor governance associated with problems such as rampant corruption especially in African countries (Gibbs and Ajulu, 1998). Blame has been alleged on political leadership who fail to deal with the problems for their own corrupt gains (Essential Action and Global Exchange, January 25, 2000).

In the past the role of the church in sustainable development was undermined. A number of scholars also influenced this conception or misconception. For instance, Karl Marx argued that, “religion is the opium of the oppressed mass”. In other words, the church was considered as a drug to cure those who were languishing in poverty. Resultantly, the church was considered as a rehabilitation center for those who had failed to make it in life and was now living in the future promise of heaven. Thus, many church members who, by implication are poor were left out of national economic development (Rostow, 1960). The human power element is often left out yet development is the process through which people participate in planning and implementation of activities which are designed to improve their standards and contribute to the betterment of their area. It involves the improvement of the standard of living of the majority of the people with as much relevance as possible upon their own initiatives, effort and resources (UNDP Report, 1997). The Church’s resources are people and its message therefore, it is important also to analyse the message that the church is preaching as a way of empowering its members (Sisay, 2005).

Even though the role of the church in development has been given little attention in many countries especially in the developing world, over the past decade there has emerged the need for broader involvement of all kinds of major groups into the effective implementation of principles and objectives of sustainable development (Votrin, 2005). There is therefore always a need for involving the civil society in development of which
the church leaders can spearhead. Hauck (2010) argues that despite all of its flaws and, at times, its perceived irrelevance, the church is one of the most resilient, as well as one of the most ubiquitous social institutions there is. A Christian approach to sustainable development is anchored on the two cardinal principles of responsibility and accountability towards how we use the earth’s resources and the resulting impacts.

This research is going to focus on the initiatives by Zimbabwean church leadership in promoting sustainable development and identify challenges in achieving it. The study also seeks to design a framework for an inclusion of church leadership in promoting sustainable development.

Literature review

The word “sustainable” is not a new term in English language and it means that an activity should be conducted in such a way that the resource is not exhausted and its use can continue indefinitely. However, the word did not become famous in the literature until 1975. Sustainable development was first put on the agenda by the church at the World Council of Churches Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 (Best, 1990).

According to the Brundtlandt commission (1987) sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It contains within it two key concepts: firstly, is the concept of ‘needs’, in particular the essential needs of the world’s poor, to which overriding priority should be given; and secondly, is the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment’s ability to meet present and future needs. As such sustainable development requires the promotion of values that encourage consumption standards (no overconsumption) that are within the bounds of the ecologically possible and to which all could reasonably aspire” (WCED, 1987). An understanding of sustainable development, therefore involves disciplines such as ecology, biology, ethics, economics, chemistry, physics, statistics, and engineering among other subjects.

According to Burrow (2006), the major question in Sustainable Development is whether it is going to act just as a guiding principle or whether it can generate practical workable strategies. The attainment of sustainable development includes the need for individuals, groups and organisations to participate in environmental impact assessment procedures and to know about and participate in decisions, particularly those which potentially affect the communities in which they live and work (Agenda 21, 1992). The Agenda 21 process has stimulated this activity, with churches offering their experience in approaching issues of the relationship between humanity and the Earth and putting them into practice, particular emphasis being placed on the social dimension in response to the calling of the church to be advocates for the weak, the dispossessed and the poor (CEC, 2002).

A number of Western churches have expressed their concern about climate change and destructive living patterns, stressing the need for human beings to exercise the care for all creation based on a life of sharing and sacrifice (Votrin, 2005). The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) for the first time declared the urge to actively participate in the process of environmental decision-making (Votrin, 2005). In Russia, Monastery/church forests are indicators of species to be chosen for afforestation programmes in their specific localities and sources of knowledge on biodiversity that could serve as models of sustainable forest management (Taye et al., 2001).

Some scholars argue that Africans are very religious people. According to Mbiti (1961),
“It is religion, more than anything else, which colours their understanding of the universe and their empirical participation in that universe, making life a profoundly religious phenomenon. To be is to be religious in a religious universe. That is the philosophical understanding behind African myths, customs, traditions, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationships.”

From Mbiti’s statement it can be deduced that Africans are very religious. However it has remained unanswered whether their religiosity can translate to them playing a positive role in sustainable development or not as results have been varied across the continent. In other countries the church leaders have been instrumental in influencing positive change especially in situation where political institutions have been considered weak and where they are breaking down.

A good example of where the role of the church has been magnificent is in Ethiopia. Aware of the countrywide danger of further loss of forests, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (EOC) has been involved in forestry campaigns since 1986 (Binggeli, 2001). Thus, the church is playing a fundamental role in environmental advocacy which is a critical tool for raising awareness in environmental management. The EOC is making a sustained effort to teach and advise the clergy and the people living in the community; highlight the need to protect existing trees; induce the desire to plant and look after newly planted trees, and in particular take care of indigenous trees and plants (Melakeselam, 2001). In light of the above, it is understood that God’s people have a vicarious responsibility to offer back to God a renewed creation (Votrin, 2005).

Some are beginning to recognise that the church can be a key to change at the level needed for real progress’ (CTBI, 2002). The church could help in expediting social change but she needs to modernise her doctrine first to be part of a collectively planned and declared war against backwardness and poverty (Asghedom, 2003). The idea that man is central of all God’s creatures had largely determined the idea that nature should be preserved and used in such a way that it will enhance man’s welfare (Votrin, 2005). Jerie (2010) has noted that in Zimbabwe, the Roman Catholic Church has thus lived up to the church doctrine of keeping the Lord’s Earth’s habitable today and for future generations as he concluded that there are advantages in undertaking environmental management projects with a faith based commitment and hence feeling responsible to God in the efforts to achieve sustainable development.

The church therefore has excellent opportunity to reach the most marginalised communities with a wide range of development activities (Votrin, 2005). The EOC, through her Development and Inter-Church Aid Commission (DICAC), has been long involved in
assistance to the disadvantaged communities to tackle the root causes and effects of poverty, drought, conflict and HIV/AIDS pandemic by promoting sustainable development programmes through parish and diocesan-centred approaches (CWS, 2002).

Many churches in Europe are involved in the formation and implementation of the Local Agenda 21 policies, which they interweave with their ethical reasoning and community mission and which their individual members seek to respect in their personal lifestyle (Votrin, 2005). As the church is gradually moving towards the demands of the modern society it should continue to advocate and implement the care for creation and share their experience for the formulation and implementation of local Agendas 21 with other congregations and secular groups. Their willingness to approach the issues of sustainable community development should be distinctly articulated to make a contribution to the common goal of protecting and improving the quality of life through the priests and pastors who are revered by the ordinary members who fears that ‘God is watching through the priest’s eyes’ (Votrin, 2005).

The church’s primary objective to enlighten people should take shape of including environmental education and sustainable development principles into academic curricula of Sunday schools and Orthodox universities (Votrin, 2005). The church can be, and in many places is a positive influence for change as it is often well respected and listened to within communities. The church can be a catalyst for change in the local community, transforming lives, attitudes and behaviour. In Zimbabwe, Christian Aids Task (CAT) emphasised changing the values of a local community, as there was evidence that community norms determine individuals’ behaviour (Marshal and Taylor, 2006). In the African American community, the church is a trusted organization and many African Americans look to church leaders for not only spiritual guidance but for counselling and direction in other areas of life that include social and civic engagement, financial, educational, health or other personal needs (Asante and Asante 1985; Lincoln and Mamiya 2001).

On the organizational level, the pastor’s leadership is vital as he/she is in a position to help promote health issues within the church (and the community). Finally, on the environment and policy level, African American churches have historically taken a role that has shaped its immediate surroundings. Here, the focus is on the organizational level where the pastor’s communication can impact the other levels (intrapersonal, interpersonal, community, policy) and becomes a part of the prevention program aimed to address health disparities within the African American community (Watson et al., 2006). The communication of the pastor is influential to members of the church because of his or her leadership role and what it represents. This leadership role of the pastor often extends beyond spiritual and religious communication and includes health advice (Aholou et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2006).

Currently, the mainstream’ sustainable development typically urges the following objectives:

- maintenance of ecological integrity
- integration of environmental care and development
- adoption of an internationalist stance
- satisfaction of, at least basic human needs for all
- utilitarian conservation
- concern for intergenerational, intergroup and interspecies equity
- application of science, technology and environmental knowledge to world development.
- acceptance of some economic growth (somehow without exceeding environmental limits).
- Adoption of a long term view.

Harris (2000) conceptualised the term sustainable development as composed of three elements which constitute the major objectives and these are; the economic,
environmental and the social objectives. He argued that an economically sustainable system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debt, and to avoid extreme sectoral imbalances which damage agricultural or industrial production and an environmentally sustainable system must maintain a stable resource base, avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resource systems or environmental sink functions, and depleting non-renewable resources only to the extent that investment is made in adequate substitutes. This includes maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability, and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classed as economic resources. Lastly, is the socially sustainable system which must achieve distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, and political accountability and participation. A critical analysis of Harris’ conceptualisation of sustainable development proves that he ignored the other dimension of religion under the social dimension. To group the church only under social services is not enough.

Methodology

Study area

This study was conducted in all 10 provinces in Zimbabwe. Since this study sought to collect data for the whole country there was need to collect data from all the provinces in Zimbabwe in order to have an overview over the whole country.

Research design

The study employed a qualitative design and qualitative research instruments such as questionnaires, interviews and secondary data from church archives. The use of different tools to collect the same data ensured verification of the results.

Data collection

Questionnaires were distributed to church elders in each province. In each of the 10 provinces, 15 questionnaires were personally administered to the elders of each of the three classes of churches (mainline churches, Pentecostal churches and white garment churches) to make a total of 150 questionnaires. Interviews were also conducted with church leaders (pastors) from 3 classes of churches in Zimbabwe. Five pastors were randomly selected from each identified classes of churches for interview. Data was gathered in order to establish their common faith and doctrine that distinguish them from other churches including their stance on promoting sustainable development and the challenges they face in attempting to achieve objectives of sustainable development. In addition to the information from the church leaders from various churches, church members were also interviewed to further investigate on the strategies church leaders are using in motivating their congregations to contribute to sustainable development.

Data analysis

To analyse the collected data, philosophical analytical models based on new hermeneutics were employed to analyse some texts. The collected data was analysed based on the three identified groups of churches in Zimbabwe namely: the mainline churches such as Anglican which rely on donor funds; the Pentecostal churches which are self sustaining and the indigenous white garment churches which normally conduct their services outdoors.

Results

The church has been engaged in a number of initiatives which are key to sustainable
development. These can be classified into environmental, social and economic initiatives. Figures 4.1 below shows how the three main classes of churches are contributing to sustainable development’s three pillars.

**Church initiatives to promote sustainable development**

Figure 4.1 below shows efforts by the church in Zimbabwe to promote sustainable development. The churches have been subdivided into three broad classes namely the mainline churches such as Anglican which rely on donor funds; the Pentecostal churches which are self sustaining and the indigenous white garment churches which normally conduct their services outdoors. Figure 4.1 show that mainline churches and Pentecostal ones play a significant role in sustainable development than the white garment churches. Based on questionnaire responses main line churches lead in terms of environmental programmes such as tree planting and promoting the establishment of nutritional gardens whilst Pentecostal churches are very active when it comes to clean up campaigns. Mainline churches are also active in establishing children’s homes, in peace building processes and also in the construction of schools and tertiary institutions whilst Pentecostal churches lead in establishing old people’s homes, in counseling services and in capacitating entrepreneurs through educational seminars.

**Challenges faced by the church in the attainment of sustainable development**

The three classes of churches identified share a set of problems which hinder them from participating in efforts to achieve sustainable development. The study (Figure 4.2) however has revealed that white garment churches are the most affected.

The study revealed that Pentecostal
churches face a few of the identified challenges followed by the mainline churches (see Figure 4.2). These identified challenges supports figure 4.1 where it can also be noted that the contribution of white garment churches is minimal.

The study also sought to develop a framework for inclusion of the church in sustainable development. The framework (Figure 4.3) was developed as a proposal to facilitate the inclusion of the church in national development.

**Proposed framework for inclusion of the church in sustainable development**

**Discussion**

![Figure 4.2: Framework for inclusion of church leadership in sustainable development](image)
Church initiatives in achieving sustainable development

This research has observed that Pentecostals churches such as, Zimbabwe Assemblies Of God Africa (ZAOGA), Apostolic Faith Mission church (AFM), Zion Christian Church (ZCC) and the mainstream churches such as the Anglican, Roman Catholic and the Methodists to mention just a few are contributing immensely towards sustainable development. Different religious interpretations of the Bible have been a factor in the level, intensity and nature of engagement in governance processes. The bridging of boundaries through the engagement in policy dialogue, peace building and governance at different levels and with different groups in society is possible once a denomination has a shared internal understanding of the conceptual base and the faith-based mandate (Hauck, 2010).

The Pentecostal churches have been associated with preaching a gospel of prosperity basing possibly on certain scriptures such as: 3 John 2-4 that says, “beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth”. The idea of sustainable development and what it advocates for is deeply engrossed in this scripture. The above quoted verse to them mean that religion and prosperity are inseparable as it is part of God’s plan for his children to enjoy life on earth whilst they are on their way to heaven. This background is an important one especially when assessing the strategies by church leaders in complimenting efforts of the government and political leadership in championing the goals of sustainable development.

A typical example in Zimbabwe is ZAOGA whose founding leader Professor E. H. Guti instructed his church to work what are called talents after receiving a message from God (Guti, 1984). In ZAOGA talents is a program whereby church members are engaged in income generating activities in order to raise money to finance church projects for a particular period. Thereafter, the members will continue with the projects to sustain themselves. The talents would have capacitated them by imparting skills which make them self reliant. These skills have prolonged effect as they are passed on from one generation to the other. This fulfils the objective of sustainable development of poverty eradication; greater equity in income distribution which remains major challenges everywhere (Agenda 21). This is also a long-term strategy aimed at establishing the best possible conditions for sustainable local, regional and national development that would reduce the inequalities between various population groups.

These talents have resulted in a number of institutions being put in place and have been recorded in Zaoga literature. Examples of such institutions are Mbuya Dorcas hospital in Harare, Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University (ZEGU), vocational centres, high schools, children’s homes, old people’s homes and crèches. Churches like Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe, Zion Christian church and mainline churches such as Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Seventh Day Adventist and Reformed Church in Zimbabwe have also managed to build Universities, Hospitals, schools, hotels and conference centres. Some managed to also build teacher training institutions. An estimated 90% of boarding schools in rural areas of Zimbabwe belong to Churches and about 20% of boarding schools in Towns belong to them as well. This shows that the churches channel their resources to remote parts of the country more than the government thereby promoting sustainable development in those areas. The churches have also more health institutions in rural areas than the government. All the government hospitals are located in towns. However, despite this achievement other church members of the indigenous churches in Zimbabwe seem to be satisfied with a low lifestyle. They seem to have accepted the fate that life on planet earth is temporary hence there is no
need to improve it hence emphasis of development to improve their standard of living is contrary to their belief about how they should worship God. Observations have shown that even where they conduct services there are no buildings and proper sanitary conditions. They conduct their services under a tree or in mountains. An interview with one of the believers revealed that their founder received a definite call from God that they should worship him under a tree in the jungle or wilderness. These churches to some extent saw the building of temples as sheer wasting of time as they long to go to heaven. Most of them also conduct services in undesignated places under a tree.

On the other hand, some churches are conservative churches whose values are a product of the missionaries who introduced them during the colonial period. Their way of worship is procedural and formalized to some extent and most of them do not believe in charismatic and Pentecostalism. Since their introduction in Zimbabwe they have been relying on donor funds via the hands of missionaries. The main line churches have contributed to the social objectives of sustainable development in the health, welfare and education sector by construction of hospitals, schools and provision of basic social services to the disadvantaged such as the aged and the orphans. For example, we have the Catholic Relief Services run as an NGO that has embarked on a number of sustainable development projects such as borehole drilling, drought relief aid, scholarships for orphans, destitute and the waif. This has however, to some extent created a donor syndrome. This is probably why some of their old church building lacks of maintenance. The reason could be that they have been accustomed to donation.

The Zimbabwe Council of churches normally gives its views on governance issues. For instance, in 2001 the council released a statement on land reform reaffirming the need for correcting colonial imbalances in the ownership of land. It also advocated for resettlement of landless people in order for them to lead economically productive lives and also the support of the newly resettled farmers with the vital social, physical, and economic infrastructure (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, 2000). They commission also called for a legal framework sensitive to human needs.

The church leaders are also involved in peace building initiatives. A good example is the Roman Catholic Church through the Catholic Commission for justice and peace. The commission publishes information related to violence and raises awareness on human rights. As a follow up to this, other church leaders have also participated in healing the nation programme initiated by the government after the 2007-2008 political crisis characterized by political violence and intolerance among members from different political parties. The president and the Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe are on record calling upon church leaders to unite members through their teaching emphasising on love peace and solidarity (The Sunday mail, 9 June, 2013). This concurs with Stiftung (1998)’s assertion that a democratic state always encourages the work of churches and other value oriented communities because its liberal order cannot be preserved without an adequate number of citizens.

A number of Zimbabwean churches have also complimented the efforts by the state in participating in national environmental programmes such as the clean up campaigns. This is linked to the objectives of sustainable development that there is a need to develop strategies to mitigate both the adverse impact on the environment of human activities and the adverse impact of environmental change on human populations. The church is a neutral platform since it encompasses various groups of people from different backgrounds. The church leader is therefore influential in that he/she brings conflicting groups together to preach the gospel of peace.
Challenges in achieving sustainable development

Despite the enormous potential which the church has in promoting sustainable development, the church leadership in Zimbabwe faces challenges in its effort to promote it. The church leadership especially the white garment churches lack the technical knowledge regarding sustainable development. Most church leaders interviewed from different churches were never taught either formally or informally on most of the issues pertaining to sustainable development.

Some churches are unwilling or unable to balance sustainable development work with the tasks of communicating the faith and discipleship, while others have ‘mixed motives’ for becoming involved in sustainable development or have a sense of disunity with other churches in the area. Some Pastors and other church leaders interviewed indicated that they are involved in so many areas of church life and they lack the energy to add sustainable development component to their ministry.

The church’s version of sustainable development involves some of the things that cannot be measured such as hope, love, and self-esteem. As a result some church leaders interviewed feel it is difficult to determine the extent to which the church meets these needs.

Another challenge highlighted by leaders of white garment churches is their conservative nature. Their gospel is appealing to the lowly in society who think that to have money is a sin. They seem to preach the gospel centered on the doctrine of “the love of money as the root of all evil.” As such the church has remained poor and they still conduct services in open spaces which are often illegal.

Mainline churches revealed that one of the challenges they face is failure to identify church initiatives to pursue which would result in sustainable development. This can be traced back to its history as its members are used to the welfare mentality within a community. These churches do not really empower its people as what Pentecostals like ZAOGA FIF do. This has created an unhealthy dependence on the church while simultaneously disempowering the greater community.

Some churches do not involve certain church members especially women in decision making. The decision-making often rests in the hands of the pastor and a few key members, giving little regard to the rest of the church and community. The challenge cited by most church leaders was that of competition and tensions among members of the same church or different denominations. These divisions limit the church members’ or churches’ ability to act as a united coalition in order to achieve the common purpose of sustainable development.

Framework for inclusion of church leadership in sustainable development

The proposed framework (Figure 4.3) reflects that there is need for the government to include the church in its effort to achieve sustainable development for its people. The church would be a mediator between the government and the public. There are many reasons for including the church. Firstly the church has excellent opportunity to reach the most marginalised communities (Votrin, 2005). The second reason is that the church leader (pastor) has influence on members of the church. This influence usually goes beyond spiritual and religious communication (Aholou et al. 2009; Watson et al. 2006) and also includes guidance on other areas of life that include social and civic engagement, financial, educational, health or other personal needs (Asante and Asante 1985; Lincoln and Mamiya 2001). The third reason is that church leaders are revered by their members who fear that ‘God is watching through the priest’s eyes’ (Votrin, 2005). Therefore, church members tend to listen and act on what church leaders say without too much
questioning. Lastly the church is a trusted organization (Asante and Asante 1985; Lincoln and Mamiya 2001) unlike political parties where the leaders are listened to with suspicion.

One of the possible roots for effective collaboration is through the Zimbabwe Council of Churches or through the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) which are local initiatives to engage local churches in sharing common values which will see the nation developing along the trajectory of sustainability in all spheres of life. It can be seen that the churches that churches have a vital role as a partner in dialogue with politicians on the key issues of our times of which sustainable development is one. It can be seen that the churches thus have a vital role as a partner in dialogue with politicians on the key issues of our times.

The government is supposed to come up with the sustainable development for Zimbabwe so as to highlight the priority areas for the country. It is also supposed to provide the enabling environment for the pursuance of sustainable development. The government therefore need to sell its sustainable development agenda through the church.

Conclusion

The church has a great potential to make a meaningful contribution to sustainable development as reflected by this study. Faith-based organisations need to be seen as potentially relevant actors to help stabilise Zimbabwe’s socio-political and economic problems, and to contribute in creating the conditions for sustainable development. Critical area where the church has been highly active has been noted in the education sector. This has been shown in the increase in the number of mission schools and other educational establishments. There are also key challenges identified that militate against the church’s efforts to contribute to sustainable development such as lack of knowledge about sustainable development, varying church doctrines, conservative behaviour of churches and others. This study also concludes that there should be a framework for inclusion of the church which incorporates the government as the policy formulator, then the public as actors and beneficiaries and the church itself as a funding agent. This is crucial for an effective participation of the church in promoting sustainable development. The study has also shown that the church is able to come up with an economic system that is able to generate surpluses and technical knowledge on a self-reliant and sustained basis.

Recommendations for achieving sustainable development

The following measures should be adopted in order to realise sustainable development in Zimbabwe:

- There must be technical education for church leaders on issues concerning sustainable development. This technical education refers to organized efforts to teach about how natural environments function and, particularly, how human beings can manage their behaviour and ecosystems in order to live sustainably. One cannot manage behaviour without the influence of the church and religion.
- Though controversial among Christians and church leaders, it is vital for the success of a church-led sustainable development project to inform and invite or engage everyone who has influence within the community, such as witchdoctors, spiritual healers and leaders of other faiths. If these other authority figures within the community are not co-opted into the church-led project, their
lack of support could negatively influence others within the community, thus damaging the prospect of positive change.

- The government should incorporate the church leadership who have the potential to advocate and engage in dialogue on policy making regarding sustainable development, thereby contributing to governance at the national level.
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