

# Living the Theology of Development through Integral Mission in Zimbabwe

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## ABSTRACT

The theology of development has been theorised in many ways across the world, though, apparently, its praxis has not received much research attention in Zimbabwe. This study employed a qualitative case study of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), with data gathered through observant participation and a literature review, to appraise the praxis of development in Zimbabwe's evangelical churches. It explored the EFZ's employment of an integral mission to demonstrate the theology of development. Findings reveal that the EFZ has an advanced, integral mission and facilitates partnerships with theological institutions. The Church and grassroots community leaders are expected to live out the theology of development and optimise holistic transformation in a collaborative way. In conclusion, the EFZ, as the head of these processes, portrays the theology of development and integral mission as the hand that enacts sustainable wellbeing in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this paper contributes to practical reflections on the theology of development.

*Keywords: Church, Mission, Community, Praxis, Development.*

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## INTRODUCTION

All over the world, the theology of development has been theorised in various ways. Scholars such as Arévalo, Klaasen, Hiagbe, Kroeck and Masengwe interface Christian faith with theology and development in Africa.<sup>1</sup> A book edited by Ezra Chitando, titled *The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Development in Zimbabwe* (2020),<sup>2</sup> contextualises, conceptualises, historicises and reviews religion, theology and development in Zimbabwean mainline ecclesiologies. Tagwirei has explored ecclesiology, leadership and integral mission within Pentecostal and evangelical contexts in Zimbabwe and the wider Southern Africa.<sup>3</sup> Although the above-mentioned and related scholars showcase the influences of the theology of development on the holistic mission of the Church, in Zimbabwe, records of praxis remain fragmented. This paper fills part of the gap. It starts by reviewing the theology of development, and then appraises integral mission and interlinks it with the theology of development in the Zimbabwean evangelical

<sup>1</sup> C. G. Arévalo, 'Notes for a Theology of Development', *Philippine Studies* 19, no. 1 (1971): 65–91; John Klaasen, 'The Interplay between Theology and Development: How Theology Can Be Related to Development in Post-Modern Society', *Missionalia* 41, no. 2 (2013): 182–94; Komi Ahiatrogba Hiagbe, 'The Church and Sustainable Development in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 41, no. 2 (2015): 2, <https://doi.org/10.25159/2412-4265/257>; Thomas Kroeck, 'Theological Perspectives on Development: Comparing Roman Catholic, Ecumenical and Evangelical Positions', *Acta Theologica* 41 (2021): 249–69, <https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.sup31.15>; Gift Masengwe, 'De Gruchy and His Holistic Model of Theology and Development in South Africa and Beyond', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 46, no. 3 (2025): 3, N/A, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v46i3.3393>.

<sup>2</sup> Ezra Chitando, 'Introduction: The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Development in Zimbabwe', in *The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Development in Zimbabwe*, ed. Ezra Chitando (Springer, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41603-4>.

<sup>3</sup> Kimion Tagwirei, 'Doing the Word: Reawakening the Church to Save Society in Southern Africa', *Religions* 15, no. 5 (2024): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15050608>.

context. In pursuit of praxis, the next subsection overviews the demonstration of the theology of development through integral mission. The paper concludes that integral mission is the hand of the theology of development, and is applicable beyond Zimbabwean borders.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative literature review methodology. Generally, a literature review is a survey and analysis of published literature that is related to a chosen topic or research question. A literature review engages with academic and non-academic articles, books and related publications, and can be broadly described as a systematic way of collecting and synthesizing previous research;<sup>4</sup> it is ‘a compilation of published and unpublished works which include facts and figures, concepts, and perceptions’.<sup>5</sup> Essentially, a literature review scrutinises past and present publications that are related to a study topic. It explores what has, and what has not been covered by other researchers, writers and reporters in order to situate present research in relation to identified gaps.

In search of how the theology of development is lived out in the Zimbabwean context of political, ecological and socio-economic underdevelopment, this paper surveyed literature about the theology of development, integral mission and related publications related to lived theologies of development. This researcher considered a literature review because, by integrating findings and perspectives from many empirical studies, a literature review can address research questions with a power that no single study has.<sup>6</sup> This literature review discovered that much of what has been published by academic researchers about Zimbabwe is theoretical. Thus, this paper sought to fill the gap of praxis. This literature review encountered non-academic reports and similar publications, such as confessional ecumenical writings that reflect that the theology of development has been lived out in Zimbabwe through integral mission. Interfacing engaged non-academic with related academic literature review enriched this paper.

## DISCUSSION

### Contemplating the Zimbabwean Context

Zimbabwe gained its independence on 18 April 1980, after a bloody war of liberation. Before independence, the country was known as Southern Rhodesia, named after Cecil John Rhodes, who had been the inspiration for Britain’s colonising Pioneer Column engaging in territories now known as Zimbabwe. In 1965, White Rhodesians issued a Unilateral Declaration of Independence from Britain. The war of independence was fought against White Rhodesians by various nationalist groups, and it eventually resulted in a peace settlement being signed at the Lancaster House Conference in London in 1979. The conference led to elections in 1980, which were won by the Robert Mugabe-led Zanu party; Mugabe was eventually removed from power by a military-assisted coup in November 2017<sup>7</sup> after he had been in power for 37 years.

This context is pivotal for the location of the significance of living out the theology of development. It forms the foundation for a review of the Zimbabwean situation, which is done to demonstrate the necessity of reviving the Church, transformational leadership and followership, and to transform Zimbabwe. The country faced an unsettling political and socio-economic catastrophe during the long reign of Mugabe, and throughout the militarised rise of incumbent President Emerson Mnangagwa, who took power in November 2017, this catastrophe continues today.<sup>8</sup> Zimbabwe remains riddled with political conflict and violence.<sup>9</sup> President Mnangagwa, when he gained power, promised

<sup>4</sup> David Tranfield et al., ‘Towards a Methodology for Developing Evidence-informed Management Knowledge by Means of Systematic Review’, *British Journal of Management* 14, no. 3 (2023): 207–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.00375>.

<sup>5</sup> Adetayo O. Adeniran and Oluwadamisi T. Tayo-Ladega, ‘Understanding Literature Review as a Research Method’, *American International Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 6, no. 1 (2024): 26–35, <https://doi.org/10.46545/aijhass.v6i1.333>.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Snyder, ‘Literature Review as a Research Methodology: An Overview and Guidelines’, *Journal of Business Research* 104 (November 2019): 333–39, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.07.039>.

<sup>7</sup> Legend LE Asuelime, ‘A Coup or Not a Coup: That Is the Question in Zimbabwe’, *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* 5, no. 1 (2018): 5–24, <https://doi.org/10.31920/2056-5658/2018/v5n1a1>.

<sup>8</sup> Kimion Tagwirei, ‘Rebuilding the Broken Walls of Zimbabwe with the Church, Leadership and Followership’, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45, no. 1 (2024): 1, African, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.3054>.

<sup>9</sup> Privilege Musvanhiri, ‘Is Zimbabwe’s Political Crisis Likely to Escalate? – DW – 04/02/2025’, *Dw.Com*, 2 April 2025, <https://www.dw.com/en/is-zimbabwes-political-crisis-likely-to-escalate/a-72119034>.

reformist governance, but has yet to fulfil this promise.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the cost of living has risen and is stimulating a massive exodus of millions of people, and depriving the economy of the highly skilled workers who are needed for industrial growth.<sup>11</sup>

It is glaring that the crises of Zimbabwe are a manifestation of poor political leadership, past and present, systematic corruption and economic mismanagement. National leaders have failed to reform their governance and transform the nation. Therefore, national transformation cannot be expected from the ruling leadership. Considering that the Church is the prophetic voice of the voiceless and God's agent of transformation, rethinking the praxis of the theology of development matters. Zimbabwe's context, which is characterised by multiple political, ecological and socio-economic crises, demands practical embodiment of development theories. Reminding each other that Christians are the salt and light of the world (Matt 5:13–16) sounds good, yet it only becomes life-bearing when it is lived out – the theology of development cannot provide for people's needs if it remains a theory. This is why Muzambi says that theology bakes no bread;<sup>12</sup> it means that theology makes an impact when it is applied in particular contexts. While conceptualisation has been done many times, the praxis of the theology of development in Zimbabwe has not been studied much. Yet, reviewing how Christians demonstrate their theology of development can yield progressive lessons that can attract private and public support, improvement and application, in and beyond Zimbabwe. Before exploring the praxis, there is a need to discuss the theology of development.

### Overview of the Theology of Development

This submission takes the theology of development to refer to the predominant concern, inspiration, involvement and basis of faith, God and the Church, as it relates to the sustainability and wellbeing of humanity in today's interconnected society. The theology of development engages the Christian faith in holistic political, environmental and socio-economic development. Arévalo defines the theology of development as Christological attention to the social and political needs of humanity and liberation of mankind from injustice.<sup>13</sup> Just as Tillich asserts that God answers questions of humanity and theology formulates divine engagements with human experiences,<sup>14</sup> the theology of development explores the involvement of God in the life-bearing affairs of humankind on earth. According to Verghese, the theology of development refers to the divine inspiration and facilitation of human achievements of their full potential of love, power and wisdom in freedom and community without secularising the gospel.<sup>15</sup>

*This means both joy and love. Nothing less can be the ultimate objective of development The mountains and hills (economic and social) have to be brought low, and the valleys have to be filled. The crooked and the corrupt have to be made straight. The rough ways of human dealings with each other have to be made smooth. And then all flesh (all humanity) shall see the salvation of the Lord.*<sup>16</sup>

This study agrees with Verghese that the theology of development concerns the engagement of God with and His use of the Church as His agent of holistic transformation. Such transformation refers to the holistic improvement of lives and livelihoods as 'a complete change in the appearance or character of something or someone, especially so that that thing or person is improved'.<sup>17</sup> According to Pillay, the

<sup>10</sup> Michael Bratton and Eldred V Masunungure, *Heal the Beloved Country: Zimbabwe's Polarized Electorate*, Policy Paper No. 49 (Afrobarometer, 2018), [https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ab\\_r7\\_policypaperno49\\_heal\\_the\\_beloved\\_country\\_zimbabwes\\_polarized\\_electorate.pdf](https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ab_r7_policypaperno49_heal_the_beloved_country_zimbabwes_polarized_electorate.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Abel Ndooka, 'Cost of Living Soars in January According to Zimstat', *Herald*, 31 January 2025, <https://www.heraldonline.co.zw/cost-of-living-soars-in-january-according-to-zimstat/>.

<sup>12</sup> Prosper Muzambi, 'Theology Bakes No Bread!: An Analysis of the Impact of Theology in the Pre and Post Independent Zimbabwe', *Journal of International Academic Research for Multidisciplinary* 5, no. 9 (2019), [https://www.academia.edu/38930461/THEOLOGY\\_BAKES\\_NO\\_BREAD\\_AN\\_ANALYSIS\\_OF\\_THE\\_IMPACT\\_OF\\_THEOLOGY\\_IN\\_THE\\_PRE\\_AND\\_POST\\_INDEPENDENT\\_ZIMBABWE](https://www.academia.edu/38930461/THEOLOGY_BAKES_NO_BREAD_AN_ANALYSIS_OF_THE_IMPACT_OF_THEOLOGY_IN_THE_PRE_AND_POST_INDEPENDENT_ZIMBABWE).

<sup>13</sup> Arévalo, 'Notes for a Theology of Development'.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Tillich, 'Reason and Revelation, Being and God', in *Systematic Theology*, ed. Paul Tillich, vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1973).

<sup>15</sup> Paul Verghese, 'The Theology of Development: Can It Lead Us Astray?', *Indian Journal of Theology* 19, nos 3–4 (1970): 99–110.

<sup>16</sup> Verghese, 'The Theology of Development: Can It Lead Us Astray?'

<sup>17</sup> Cambridge Dictionary, *Transformation*, 2024, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/transformation>.

Church is God's agent of transformation in society; therefore, 'it is not so much about what the Church believes, but in what it does that matters most in this day and age'.<sup>18</sup> While Christianity in Zimbabwe is diverse,<sup>19</sup> this study agrees with Chitando that the different strands have contributed to development. 'The mainline churches (Catholics and Protestants), African Independent/Indigenous/Initiated/Instituted Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal churches have all contributed to development in Zimbabwe'.<sup>20</sup> Bearing in mind that *missio ecclesiae* is born by *missio dei*, doing the word of God, as James 1:22–24 orders, fulfils the will of God on earth;<sup>21</sup> we agree that applying integral mission will save society, and the following subsection conceptualises integral mission.

### **Reviewing the Integral Mission**

The integral mission of the Church predominantly involves the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel in all spiritual, political, environmental and socio-economic areas of life. It is the inclusive and compound *missio dei* to address the welfare of mankind. Tearfund explains that the Church sometimes divides mission into preaching and social action, which triggers debates about which of the two is more important than the other.

*We believe the Bible shows us that the mission Jesus gives us cannot be divided like this. Instead, we are called to show the love of God and the good news that Jesus promised through every aspect of our lives.*<sup>22</sup>

Tearfund adds that integral mission is the embodiment of God's inclusive love and care, 'the Church is called to be a caring, inclusive community (see, for example, Acts 4:32–35). We are to show people God's love and to share the good news of Jesus with them (e.g. Luke 10: 25–37)'.<sup>23</sup>

For Waweru, integral mission 'is a dynamic, multifaceted approach to evangelism and development'.<sup>24</sup> This study confirms the view that integral mission describes the Church's mission to meet people's needs in a multidimensional way. The integral mission proposes that man is a whole person with holistic needs and meeting either need without taking care of needs in other spheres does not cater for the whole person. Kuhn explains that 'holistic development is necessary to carry the gospel of God in the wisdom and strength of the Spirit and in the love and grace of Jesus Christ'.<sup>25</sup> Chng continues:

*Caring for people's needs are found throughout the Bible with examples including the Prophet Micah presenting God's requirement to His people to practice justice and loving mercy while being committed to God (Micah 6:8). Jesus himself, declared that His mission included preaching the good news and pardoning prisoners, restoring the sight of the blind, and setting the burdened free (Luke 4:18–19). Both examples demonstrate the holistic nature of God's mission.*<sup>26</sup>

In view of these explanations, integral mission enacts the gospel and enhances total transformation. That is why Woolnough defines the integral mission as a mission that addresses the body, mind, and spirit in human beings.<sup>27</sup> According to Franklin, the integral mission proclaims and demonstrates God's love.<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, the integral mission focuses on wholeness, completeness, well-being, and the comprehensive salvation of all people and relationships. For Kopiec, an integral mission can be best

<sup>18</sup> Jerry Pillay, 'The Church as a Transformation and Change Agent', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4352>.

<sup>19</sup> FJ Verstraelen, *Zimbabwean Realities and Christian Responses* (Mambo Press, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> Chitando, 'Introduction: The Zimbabwe Council of Churches and Development in Zimbabwe'.

<sup>21</sup> Tagwirei, 'Doing the Word'.

<sup>22</sup> 'Tools and Guides: Envisioning for Integral Mission', Tearfund Learn, accessed 25 July 2025, <https://learn.tearfund.org/en/resources/tools-and-guides/envisioning-for-integral-mission>.

<sup>23</sup> Tearfund Learn, 'Tools and Guides'.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Waweru, *Integral Mission: An Overview of Four Models and Its Role in Development*, 2, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>25</sup> Wagner Kuhn, 'The Need for a Biblical Theology of Holistic Mission', *Andrews University Mission Studies* 12 (2005): 100–113.

<sup>26</sup> Eu-Lee Chng, 'Integral Mission: Two Wings of the Same Bird', *World Vision*, n.d., <https://www.wvi.org/opinion/view/integral-mission-two-wings-same-bird>.

<sup>27</sup> Brian Woolnough, 'Good News for the Poor—Setting the Scene', in *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People*, ed. Brian Woolnough and M Wonsuk, Centenary Series 9 (Regnum Books International, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> Kirk J Franklin, 'Searching for Shalom: Transformation in the Mission of God and the Bible Translation Movement', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76 (2020): a5879, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i4.5879>.

described as the universalism of mission. The mission of the Church is universal by its nature and in every aspect of its meaning. There is no sphere of human life, nor is there any field of human cognition that is excluded from the missionary task.<sup>29</sup> Thus, integral mission exhibits the application of God's word in the spiritual, social, economic, and political wellbeing of humanity. This is reminiscent of the view of Padilla that there is no biblical dichotomy between the Word spoken and the Word made flesh in the lives of God's people.<sup>30</sup> Padilla explains that integral mission ministers the gospel fully in evangelism, discipleship, and inclusive sustainability. His conception is that integral mission applies the scriptures to the lives, situations, and communities of recipients. The Christian gospel and faith are given meaning and understood when contextualised to address prevailing issues in society.<sup>31</sup> In the Zimbabwean context, that of tragic political and socio-economic crises,<sup>32</sup> the meaning, relevance and significance of the Christian gospel and faith can be best demonstrated by transforming vulnerable lives and escaping from poverty, oppression, disease, corruption, despair, and other dehumanising problems. According to Sider, salvation is not just about redemption from sins, but the demonstration of the message and life of Jesus Christ.<sup>33</sup> The message of John 10:10, that Jesus Christ brought abundant life, should be discerned as totally transformative. With this in mind, the following section reviews the developmental and integral missionary works of the EFZ.

### ***Living out the Theology of Development with the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe***

In the Bible, James 1:22–25 teaches believers to be doers of the word of God; he buttresses his teaching in James 2:14–20 by stating that faith without works is dead. James meant that hearing and proclaiming, while not living out the word of God, is useless and helpless. This is why Tagwirei claims that 'proclaiming the gospel in word is good; however, without demonstrating the gospel with transformational deeds, the Church remains Salvationist and partially missionary'.<sup>34</sup> Applying the word of God for collective transformation is the essence of the theology of development. By considering the integral mission of the Church to be the proclamation and demonstration of the gospel in all areas of life, this subsection explores the EFZ's demonstration of the theology of development through its integral mission. The EFZ was considered a case study because it accommodates evangelical and Pentecostal churches, which make up the majority of Christians in Zimbabwe.

This researcher is one of the members and leaders of a denomination that subscribes to the EFZ. Thus, he is strategically positioned to effectively engage with leaders and members of the EFZ. Furthermore, the EFZ is the oldest ecumenical body in Zimbabwe. It was founded in 1962 by evangelical and Pentecostal Church leaders in Harare. It is led by an elected presidency and a full-time administrative secretariat. Hence, the researcher believes that studying such an esteemed body could lead to enlightening insights on the matter under study.

By operating with a vision to mobilise, empower and network evangelicals, the EFZ started advancing integral mission at its inception. Later, in 2012, the EFZ partnered with Tearfund and started facilitating integral mission through various projects, such as conducting seminars codenamed envisioning meetings. The seminars enlightened, empowered and inspired leaders of denominations, theological institutions and communities to demonstrate the gospel in all social, political, ecological and socio-economic aspects of their lives. By doing this, the EFZ demonstrated the theology of development by fostering the demonstration of the gospel for the sustainability and well-being of society.

In partnership with Tearfund, the EFZ developed a tool to advance integral mission, which it calls the Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP). Through the Commission for Ministry Development, the EFZ has, since 2012, been working towards the transformation of people and

<sup>29</sup> Piotr Kopiec, 'The Concept of an Integral Mission as the Evangelical Proposal of a Systematic Social Teaching', *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 80, no. 1 (2024): 1, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9500>.

<sup>30</sup> C René Padilla, *Holistic Mission*, Occasional Paper (2004 Forum for World Evangelization hosted by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Tagwirei, 'Rebuilding the Broken Walls of Zimbabwe with the Church, Leadership and Followership'.

<sup>32</sup> Charles A Ray, 'Navigating Turbulent Waters: Does Zimbabwe Have a Future?', *Analysis, Foreign Policy Research Institute*, 8 May 2025, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2025/05/navigating-turbulent-waters-does-zimbabwe-have-a-future/>.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald J Sider, 'What If We Defined the Gospel the Way That Jesus Did?', in *Holistic Mission: God's Plan for God's People*, ed. Brian Woolnough and Wonsuk Ma, vol. 5, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Tagwirei, 'Doing the Word'.

communities through the CCMP.<sup>35</sup> In order to discern the theology of development through the integral mission of the EFZ, the following subsection provides an overview of the CCMP.

### ***The Church and Community Mobilisation Process***

The CCMP advocates for and mobilises communities to achieve sustainable development and reduce poverty. Through the CCMP, the EFZ mobilises, empowers and transforms communities in the 10 provinces of Zimbabwe. Tagwirei records that:

*Since 2012, the EFZ has professed and propelled integral mission, employing the Church and Community Mobilization Process (CCMP), which engaged denominations to engage their community, examine their situations, observe problems and, together, work out contextually relevant ways to address identified challenges.<sup>36</sup>*

Most Zimbabweans believe that the Church is silent about national crises because it is not confrontational in criticising political and socio-economic evils; however, the EFZ, together with other ecumenical bodies, facilitate intercession for progressive governance, democratisation and the transformation of Zimbabwe;<sup>37</sup> by living out the prophetic mission of the Church:

*When it [the EFZ] realised that the majority of Christian young people neglected secular politics, the EFZ conducted devolution and citizenship campaigns, as well as drama, poetry, anti-drug abuse and sports activities to foster social cohesion and tolerance, and to curb politically motivated violence.<sup>38</sup>*

While Zanu-PFism continues to ravage the national economy, lives and livelihoods, the EFZ and other ecclesial bodies, such as the Zimbabwe Church Council and Zimbabwe Christian Alliance, mobilised their resources and financed and facilitated economic empowerment projects in rural and peri-urban areas around Zimbabwe.<sup>39</sup> Upon noticing that the system of the incumbent governance scares the Church away from national politics, the EFZ has been driving a three-year (2020–2023) experimental devolution awareness project in partnership with the ZHOCD.<sup>40</sup> The devolution programme fosters social cohesion, peace, civic participation in devolution and other national activities, which contribute towards development. The programmes ‘created spaces for church and state authorities to withstand Zanu-PFism through dialogue on issues of concern, such as state capture, constitutional awareness, political violence, voter education and public service delivery.’<sup>41</sup>

By engaging in developmental action, the EFZ mobilised and facilitated communities through CCMP and constructed a bridge and a secondary school in Irisvale. The EFZ built staff houses at Espezini clinic in Matabeleland South province, a nursery school in Jambezi area under Matabeleland North, and a church edifice for Revival Ministries in Chinhoyi, Mashonaland West. Moreover, the EFZ trained CCMP facilitators in more than 50 communities, who are spearheading transformative development in their communities. All these projects promote communal development and wellbeing. The EFZ, furthermore, joined hands with the Zimbabwe Heads of Christian Denominations and registered companies for young people from different churches to capacitate them to engage with devolution programmes in their constituencies.<sup>42</sup> The EFZ ran empowerment projects to encourage entrepreneurship skills, resilience and innovation for all-encompassing nation-building drives. Such stories of change have been recorded in all aspects of life and communities testify about economic, spiritual, social, emotional and physical changes taking place in the lives of the people. The EFZ reports that, through seminars and

<sup>35</sup> ‘Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe Church and Community Transformation Journey’, Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, n.d., <https://efzimbabwe.org/2024/06/efz-church-and-community-transformation-journey/>.

<sup>36</sup> Kimion Tagwirei, ‘EFZ’s CCMP Highly Commendable’, *Ecclesia Today (Unpublished Church Magazine)*, 1 September 2022.

<sup>37</sup> Kimion Tagwirei, ‘Hearing the Loud Voices of the Silent Church in Zimbabwe’, in *Regime, Religion and the Consolidation of Zanu-PFism in Zimbabwe: When Religion Becomes a Threat to Democracy*, ed. Bekithemba Dube (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46084-5\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-46084-5_6).

<sup>38</sup> Tagwirei, ‘Hearing the Loud Voices of the Silent Church in Zimbabwe’.

<sup>39</sup> Tagwirei, ‘Hearing the Loud Voices of the Silent Church in Zimbabwe’.

<sup>40</sup> E Makwinda, ‘EFZ and ZHOCD’s Devolution Awareness Impactful in Masvingo’, *Ecclesia Today (Unpublished Church Magazine)* 1 July-30 September (2022).

<sup>41</sup> Tagwirei, ‘Hearing the Loud Voices of the Silent Church in Zimbabwe’.

<sup>42</sup> Makwinda, ‘EFZ and ZHOCD’s Devolution Awareness Impactful in Masvingo’.

workshops, it has inspired and transformed leaders' mind-sets; where people suffered from dependency syndrome, they are now proactive and work together to identify and address problems that people face in their communities.<sup>43</sup> In addition to facilitating development projects with Church and community leaders, the EFZ also facilitates self-help groups, which involve members of churches and communities forming small groups, combining resources, loaning out money and operating various income-generating projects. Additionally, the EFZ facilitated seminars on inclusivity, to withstand disunity in churches and communities and to promote collective development. By understanding that envisioned leaders take time to process transformation, the EFZ continues facilitating partnerships between churches and communities to enhance integral mission across the country.<sup>44</sup>

All these works of integral mission of the EFZ live out the theology of development in Zimbabwe. The EFZ's partnership with Tearfund, and its development, envisioning and facilitation of integral mission and CCMP demonstrate the sustaining gospel through action.

### ***Facilitating Collective Development: Envisioning Church Leaders***

In the first quarter of 2025, the researcher attended EFZ's envisioning seminars in Bulawayo, at which the EFZ enlightened the gathered church leaders about the transformative potential of integral mission and equipped them to mobilise their churches and communities to apply the gospel by identifying and addressing their problems collectively. The meetings were facilitated by the EFZ's national integral mission officer, Pastor Joshua Masumbukera, and a consultant from Bulawayo, Pastor Mkhululi Sihlola. The facilitators explained the meaning of integral mission as proclamation and demonstration of the gospel in all spiritual, social, political, economic and environmental aspects of life. They explained to Church leaders that the gospel is transformational, but will not change lives unless they apply it to address the problems in their churches and communities. In this way, integral mission was integrated with the theology of development. This study agrees with Fosu that churches and Christians who wish to have a relationship with God and be relevant to God's people and creation should understand that making disciples does not only involve converting people to Christ, but it entails incarnating and enabling them to meet their social, spiritual and physical needs.<sup>45</sup> The way the EFZ's CCMP integrates the Church with communities and mobilises their human, material and financial resources to address their problems demonstrates the theology of development. As Pastor Masumbukera explained in one of the EFZ's envisioning meetings, the CCMP changes the mind-sets of Church and community leaders and their followers, to grow their relationships, collaborate, share resources, optimise communal capacities and work out their development. Such initiatives live out what Motte means by saying that the Church must be recognisable as God's residential address in this world, through demonstrating God's love, care and intervention. Theologians believe it is integral that the church be a second home for people, a place where they can join in, give assistance, and support each other.<sup>46</sup>

### ***Envisioning Community Leaders***

Besides Church leaders, the EFZ has also, since 2012, been mobilising community leaders for grassroots-based community development in needy communities of rural and peri-urban areas. As Kelly and Caputo argue, community development can be best achieved when grassroots leaders are capacitated to initiate and manage transformation in a way that sustains the needs of their members.<sup>47</sup> They believe that community development is a result of collective capacity building:

*For community development to occur, a community has to have the capacity to mobilize the resources required to identify and respond to its own needs. Recognition of the importance of*

<sup>43</sup> Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, 'Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe Church and Community Transformation Journey'.

<sup>44</sup> Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, 'Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe Church and Community Transformation Journey'.

<sup>45</sup> John Kwasi Fosu, 'Biblical Approach to Development: A Theological Reflection from the Perspective of Burkan Pentadic Criticism - Noyam Journals', *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 3, no. 4 (2022): 148–59.

<sup>46</sup> J Motte, 'Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Inclusive Communities and the Churches', in *Inclusive Communities and the Churches – Realities, Challenges and Visions*, ed. J Motte and T Rathgeber (United Evangelical Mission, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Katharine Kelly and Tullio Caputo, 'Case Study of Grassroots Community Development: Sustainable, Flexible and Cost-Effective Responses to Local Needs', *Community Development Journal* 41, no. 2 (2006): 234–45, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsi052>.

*community capacity has led many working in this field to focus on community capacity building in order to enhance the ability of communities to develop.*<sup>48</sup>

This is what the EFZ has been and continues doing by facilitating seminars, teaching integral mission and using CCMP to enlighten and empower local leaders to identify and utilise their potential and transform their communities. The EFZ has taught and empowered kings, headmen and village heads to identify community problems, mobilise resources, and undertake peace, conflict and conflict management, so that they facilitate collaborative engagements for collective development. This is reminiscent of the perspective of the United Nations Development Programme, that grassroots innovations are ‘home-grown inventions created by everyday people and used to address challenges that directly or indirectly influence their lives.’<sup>49</sup> In living out the theology of development, EFZ communities teach community leaders that they should not wait for the government or external helpers to address all their problems. Instead, the EFZ informed them that God blessed them with varying gifts and resources that complement each other, and that they should mobilise themselves and exert efforts to develop their communities. The EFZ professes mind-set-changing teachings centred on contextualised development. The EFZ teaches that, if Church and community leaders collaborate, unite their followers and consolidate their resources, they will realise that they have the capacity to tackle their problems and can transform their communities faster and better than waiting for external aid would do.

Besides teaching, the EFZ demonstrates the theology of development by supporting grassroots development. For example, the EFZ coordinated Church and community leaders to mobilise their churches and communities to lay bricks, provide builders and contribute money towards building facilities that were needed in particular areas. The EFZ then solicited funds from donors and supported the completion of the community projects. These projects exemplify the importance of harnessing internal resources. While external support is needed for some projects and areas, internal collaborative capital remains integral. Donors decide to help as a result of different factors that may be needs or taste-based; in contrast, I argue that demonstrating grassroots commitment to addressing community problems by using locally available resources can attract much more sustainable help than doing nothing and waiting for external help. The EFZ’s CCMP, the resulting inspiration and facilitation of grassroots-based community development, portray an integral mission as the fruitful hand of the theology of development.

### ***Envisioning Theology Training Institutions***

As a further bolstering act of the theology of development, the EFZ negotiated with theology colleges, Bible schools and seminaries to incorporate integral mission in their curricula from 2019. Musasiwa and Matsapa report that there was a growing feeling that the success of the CCMP would be enhanced if theological colleges incorporated integral mission in their curriculum.<sup>50</sup> They explain that the EFZ believed that pastors graduating from theological training institutions would be inspired and prepared with knowledge to facilitate integral mission in their pastoral deployments. Historically, theological colleges in Zimbabwe have been run on curricula that are mostly alien and eccentric to the socio-economic and political circumstances of the country.<sup>51</sup> The curricula that are in use at most local theological institutions were designed from either European or American settings under the guidance of missionaries who founded or sponsored the institutions in Zimbabwe.<sup>52</sup> Such curricula promote foreign theological philosophies that are not relevant to the Zimbabwean context. It should be appreciated that some Zimbabwean ecumenical bodies, Church leaders and scholars of theology and religious studies have contextualised their offerings

<sup>48</sup> Kelly and Caputo, ‘Case Study of Grassroots Community Development’.

<sup>49</sup> UNDP Accelerator Labs and LSE, *Grassroots Innovation: An Inclusive Path to Development*, MPA Programme 2020/2021 LSE Capstone Report (2021), <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/acceleratorlabs/Grassroots-Innovation---An-Inclusive-Path-to-Development.pdf>.

<sup>50</sup> Roy Musasiwa and Caroline Matsapa, *A Suggested Framework for the Inclusion of Integral Mission in the Curriculum of Theological Colleges in Zimbabwe* (Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, n.d.).

<sup>51</sup> Lovejoy Chabata, ‘Theological Education and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: Towards a Transformative Praxis in Doing Theology’, in *A Critical Engagement with Theological Education in Africa: A South African Perspective*, ed. Johannes J Knoetze and Alfred R Brunson, Reformed Theology in Africa Series 7 (AOSIS, 2021).

<sup>52</sup> Chabata, ‘Theological Education and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: Towards a Transformative Praxis in Doing Theology’.

to mitigate the Zimbabwean crises, as documented by Bushu and Kufakurinani, Chitando et al. and Paradza.<sup>53</sup>

However, the voices of almost all evangelical, Pentecostal and Apostolic churches have been weakened by factionalism, political (ab)use and other factors.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Zimbabwe is still in serious need of theological education that enlightens, challenges and empowers upcoming theologians, Church leaders and followers to apply the gospel to tackle the prevailing political, ecological and socio-economic problems that bedevil Zimbabwe. This view concurs with the findings of Chabata, that few theology colleges in Zimbabwe exhibit transformative praxis, hence,

*If theological education in Zimbabwe is to contribute towards meaningful change for the betterment of the lives of ordinary Zimbabweans, there is a dire need for theological institutions to design a curriculum that responds to the social realities of the country.*<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Chitando et al. argue that, if Zimbabwean theological and religious studies could be contextualised, it would enhance national transformation, healing and reconciliation.<sup>56</sup> This study agrees with Chabata that theology education in Zimbabwe can only be relevant if it produces students who can confront national crises and facilitate holistic transformation.<sup>57</sup> In this milieu, the EFZ reports that it recommended that theological institutions mainstream integral mission, to build pastors who not only know how to meet people's spiritual needs but can deploy the gospel to solve physical, material, economic and other human needs.

*If Integral Mission is adopted in theological institutions across the country, holistic development will be emphasized right from the classroom before pastors are deployed to local assemblies so that they are knowledgeable in how they can and should impact their communities for greater transformation.*<sup>58</sup>

In September 2019, the EFZ partnered with the Association of Colleges for Theological Education in Zimbabwe to spearhead integral mission. This was intended to achieve holistic, progressive and responsive theological training. By mobilising theological educators, Church and grassroots community leaders to embrace and promote integral mission, the EFZ not only lives out the theology of development, but also optimise it. The study agrees with Mackay et al. that collectivism attracts buy-in from the broader community, and promotes cohesion, shared goals, collaboration, the sharing of resources and maximised development.<sup>59</sup> Thus, by engaging theological institutions, Church and community leaders, the EFZ reinvigorated them, their followers and many other institutions in their spheres of influence to rise as the salt and light of the world and to save Zimbabwe from further destruction. By rethinking the theology of development, it is clear that the EFZ has promoted and continues advancing comprehensive sustainability and wellbeing through integral mission in Zimbabwe.

## CONCLUSION

This paper concludes that the EFZ demonstrates the love, grace, care and inspiration of God in sustaining humanity through integral mission. By identifying and addressing spiritual, political, environmental and socio-economic problems, the EFZ showcases that the theology of development is the head that processes,

<sup>53</sup> Nyasha Blessed Bushu and Ushehweu Kufakurinani, 'The Zimbabwean Economic Crisis', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History*, 17 July 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.1242>; Ezra Chitando et al., 'Zimbabwean Theology and Religious Studies during the Crisis Years (2000-2008): A Preliminary Study', *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40, no. 1 (2014): 173-89; Kudakwashe Paradza, 'Kairos Consciousness and the Zimbabwean Ecclesiology's Response to Crisis', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 75, no. 3 (2019): 3, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5621>.

<sup>54</sup> Lovemore Togarasei, 'History and Characteristics of Pentecostal Christianity in Zimbabwe', in *Aspects of Pentecostal Christianity in Zimbabwe*, ed. Lovemore Togarasei (Springer International Publishing, 2018).

<sup>55</sup> Chabata, 'Theological Education and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: Towards a Transformative Praxis in Doing Theology'.

<sup>56</sup> Chitando et al., 'Zimbabwean Theology and Religious Studies during the Crisis Years (2000-2008)'.

<sup>57</sup> Chabata, 'Theological Education and Sustainable Development in Zimbabwe: Towards a Transformative Praxis in Doing Theology'.

<sup>58</sup> 'Mainstreaming Integral Mission in Theological Education and the Church – Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe', *Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe*, 1 May 2020, <https://efzimbabwe.org/2020/05/mainstreaming-integral-mission-in-theological-education-and-the-church/>.

<sup>59</sup> Tanya Mackay et al., *Rethinking Community Development: What Does Collective Impact Offer?*, TAASE Report 2-4/2020 (The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise, University of South Australia, n.d.).

and integral mission is the hand that enacts holistic transformation, sustainability and wellbeing in Zimbabwe. This case study bears lessons that can be applied beyond Zimbabwe. Integral mission can demonstrate the theology of development in any related context. In light of prevailing socio-economic, political, and environmental challenges that are plaguing nations in and outside Africa, this study implies that integral mission matters across the world. Thus, it is recommendable for the Church, Para-Church organizations and all Christians to attend to the work of integral mission. Bearing in mind that the integral mission of the Church is more than social action, it involves proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel in all aspects of life. Hence, it can contribute to national, continental and global socio-economic, political, and environmental life.

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